

Suicide hits Natives hardest

Of all groups of Americans, none are hit harder these days by suicide than are Alaska Natives. David, a Native counselor at the Suicide prevention and crisis center, says the problem is becoming increasingly severe as Western ways and technology move ever more into the traditional lifestyle.

David, who goes by his first name only for confidentiality reasons, is hoping that there will be good Native participation in the annual meeting of the American Association of Suicidology which will be held in Anchorage May 2-5. The deadline for people who wish to present papers, workshops, lectures or to serve on panels is December 1.

Although David says cultural and communication factors make it hard to come up with exact statistics on Native suicide throughout the state, it is clear that the problem has not only gotten serious but is getting worse.

In the 1950's, suicide was very rare among Alaska Natives. As late as the years of 1960 to 1964, there were no

suicides in Northwest Alaska. Yet in an equal time period from 1975 through 1979, the suicide rate in that region climbed to 90.9 per 100,000; seven times the national average.

During the period of 1960 to 1971, Eskimos made up only 2.6 percent of the population, yet Eskimo females comprised 21 percent of all suicidal females. David notes that the suicide rates are heaviest among Natives not living a traditional lifestyle, and in young people from 15 to 34.

The only way to effectively deal with the problem, David feels, is to have more Natives become involved with finding the causes and solutions.

Presentation formats at the annual meeting include round table papers, lecture, "how to" workshops, and critical issues panels.

Submissions can be mailed prior to the deadline to Jan MacClarence, MSW, ACSW; Program Chairperson, AAS, 2459 S. Ash St., Denver, Colo., 80222, telephone 303-692-0985.