



## CHAPTER 4

# Weathering the Storm

## *An Indigenous Knowledge Framework of Yup'ik Youth Well-Being and Resilience in Alaska*

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The Yup'ik Alaska Native world has always been a changing one, but the past century has seen not only accelerated change but an imposition of new forces transforming Indigenous landscapes and lifeways (Burch 2005; Fienup-Riordan 2000; Chance 1990; Napoleon 1996; Oswalt 2011). The swiftness and severity of the intruding colonial forces disrupted societal and relational systems and fissured people from the protective factors that once kept families and communities safe, well and strong (Berry 1985). Problems emerged that have never before been encountered. By the 1950s, family groups that once moved freely across a region the size of the state of Nevada in the lower-48 states were forced to settle into one of fifty-six village communities so that children could attend Euro-American schools (Fienup-Riordan 2000). Technologies, economies and social systems began to shift rapidly to accommodate and incorporate Western influences. Some adaptations were advantageous, such as the introduction of vaccines and Western medicines (Ayunerak et al. 2014), and others involved agency and syncretism by Yup'ik communities to incorporate elements of the new and incoming technologies and socio-cultural systems into traditional practices and belief systems (Fienup-Riordan 1991). Ultimately though, this marks a period of colonial transition where families were forced to live in settlements, children were sent out to boarding schools, and new social, economic,

political and religious systems were imposed (Fienup-Riordan 2000; Rasmus, Allen and Ford 2014).

By the 1960s, young Alaska Native people began dying by suicide (Kettl and Bixler 1991), and rates have continued to increase, producing one of Alaska's most urgent public health crises. Suicide among children, adolescents and young adults in Yup'ik communities was nearly unheard of up until the establishment of statehood in 1959 (Ayunerak et al. 2014), but in the 1970s, Alaska Native suicide rates began to double every five years, with most of the increase among fifteen to twenty-five-year-olds (Allen, Levintova and Mohatt 2011). From 1960 to 1995, the suicide rate increased by approximately 500% (Shain 2016). The colonial disruptions during this time period increased conditions associated with suicide risk (e.g. substance abuse, disrupted social roles), and challenged the community-level social safety net of youth protective factors that might have moderated the effects of the traumas associated with an externally imposed, colonial change (Chandler and Proulx 2006; Chandler and LaLonde 1998; Kvernmo and Heyerdahl 2003; Wexler 2009). This cultural disruption in Alaska and across the Arctic is also associated with acculturation stress and identity struggles in young Indigenous people (Berry 1985; Kvernmo and Heyerdahl 2004; Phinney 2000) with the dislodging of age-old cultural practices, impinging on youth perceptions of Indigenous values. These imposed conditions cut youth off from traditional resilience processes (Alia 2007; Kirmayer et al. 2011; Ulturgasheva et al. 2011, 2014) with real health consequences (Bjerregaard 2001; Chandler, LaLonde and Sokol 2003; Kirmayer, Fletcher and Boothroyd 1998; O'Neil 1986).

Growing up in the Arctic and Subarctic has always come with risk and required the development of resilience and adaptative capacity building to gain the knowledge and tools for survival (Ayunerak et al. 2014; Condon 1988). The same is true today, but the terms of survival have changed. The tools and teachings once vital for livelihood, safety and well-being are falling into disuse and neglect by many of the younger generations whose daily lives have shifted focus from being out on the land, water and ice to being indoors (Oswalt 2011; Rasmus, Allen and Ford 2004). For the Elders survival meant learning to weather a storm in a *qayaq* (kayak) or boat on the sea; and teachings to 'be as a piece of wood' in the water could save a life by turning panic into calming meditation in rough waters to prevent tipping over (Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2015). These teachings today are not finding a receptive ear in young people who do not experience the pressure to subsist as a daily requirement for survival, and instead

may engage in subsistence more occasionally rather than as a daily necessity (Rasmus, Allen and Ford 2014). Yup'ik Elder Joe Phillip, interviewed by Fienup-Riordan (2020: 22), warns though that if young people 'do not hear the *qanruyun* (teachings) they will be like someone lost in a storm, like ones who don't know their whereabouts'. It is true too today that young people need to learn to weather storms, but these may not necessarily be the ones causing waves and whiteouts outside on the water and land; instead, it may be the swirling swells of emotion or freezing pangs of lonesomeness one feels on the inside that needs instruction and tools for coping and finding safe harbour.

The suicide data in Alaska makes it clear that some young people have become lost in the storm. Fortunately, there is another emerging narrative of Alaska Native strengths and resilience (Allen et al. 2014; Allen et al. 2018; Mohatt et al. 2004; Ulturgasheva, Rasmus and Morrow 2015; Wexler et al. 2014). This movement has grown stronger through a long-term research effort (Rasmus et al. 2019a) led by Yup'ik communities, and the Elders within them (Ayunerak et al. 2014), to develop solutions to end suicide and promote youth well-being through Indigenous knowledge, teachings, language and lifeways (Rasmus, Charles and Mohatt 2014; Rasmus et al. 2019b). While progress is being made to reduce disparities, there is still more research that is needed to understand newly emerging challenges, such as climate change, and to promote Indigenous knowledge frameworks and definitions of youth and community well-being.

The Yup'ik notion of 'weathering the storm' is central to this discussion as it eloquently captures the scale and dynamic of the challenges that Yupiit (pl. Yup'ik), from Elders to children, are confronted with today. It is getting stormier every year, and each new storm requires a specific set of skills and knowledge adapted in accordance with Yup'ik ways of living (*yuu'yaraq*) and teachings (*qanruyutet*). This chapter examines youth resilience and community adaptations in an era of climate change from a Yup'ik Indigenous knowledge framework that views and places these dynamic social processes within a complex universe of interlocking systems and overlapping worlds.

The first part of this chapter examines youth well-being in a Yup'ik universe, drawing from interviews and narratives with Yup'ik Elders and knowledge bearers. Well-being and resilience in a Yup'ik perspective is defined and understood within a holistic ecological worldview that interconnects humans to the environment and animals in relational and mutualistic ways. The understanding of youth well-being and resilience in a Yup'ik Indigenous framework represents an important reframing of suicide not as an individual action but as an

event within systems that have become unbalanced. The second part of the chapter presents a Yup'ik Indigenous knowledge framework of youth well-being and resilience in an era of climate change and community adaptation where tides are bucked and storms are weathered in life as they are out on the land and water. This Indigenous knowledge framework is juxtaposed to an emerging One Health paradigm that advances a monolithic definition of well-being that, on the surface, appears to reflect Indigenous epistemologies that emphasize the interrelationships among human, animal and environmental welfare in the production of health. The emergence and advancement of the One Health framework on an international Arctic policy level comes at a time when Indigenous leaders and communities are calling for Indigenous-led and Indigenous knowledge-based research initiatives. The chapter concludes with an argument for the recognition and valuing of Indigenous knowledge frameworks that capture the complexity of a sentient and changeable Yup'ik universe, and explain youth well-being and resilience as arising within a cosmic harmonizing of systems and worlds constantly in flux: never quiet but always listening. Thinking with and through Indigenous knowledge frameworks can reveal more fully and meaningfully the ways in which young people are weathering storms in their lives on the lands that generations of their ancestors have walked and continue to walk in spirit behind them.

## **Youth Well-Being in a Yup'ik Universe**

In a Yup'ik universe and epistemology (Kawagley 2000), where everything in the environment has personhood and sentience, including living beings and objects as small as a single discarded fish bone (Fienup-Riordan 2020: xxxvi), and all forms are interconnected, solutions to perturbations, such as storms, in one system (i.e. weather, social, psychological) must inherently involve all systems coming into balance and harmonizing. The balance of systems and relationships within and between systems as being the core determinant of health and well-being provides the ideological foundation for an intertidal ecological framework of youth resilience. The well-being of a Yup'ik individual is contingent on the well-being of the Yup'ik world. Any one part of this sentient and changeable universe then, such as tides on an ocean, can be observed and provides indicators into the status of human lives and social systems. As the Yup'ik universe is impacted by climate change, globalization and other economic and

societal pressures, people living in traditional places and engaging in Indigenous spaces are feeling these impacts and outcomes are being reflected in human behaviours that mirror the environmental disruptions. It is a frequent saying among Yup'ik Elders today in reflections on climate change that the 'world is changing along with the people' (Fienup-Riordan 2010). The health status of Yup'ik communities today reflects how people are changing in sometimes harmful and destructive ways.

Other systems within the Yup'ik universe are also in flux and changing in ways that are potentially damaging, with melting permafrost, erosion of coastal banks, unsteady ice with less snow, and through declines in keystone species such as king salmon (Moerlein and Carothers 2012). A Yup'ik Elder interviewed by Fienup-Riordan (2020: xxvii) states, 'The weather they say is becoming a liar'. As all things are connected in a Yup'ik world, the weather system is reflecting the disturbances in the human social systems and psyches where unpredictable and inappropriate actions, such as suicide, are occurring. But these individual actions, from a Yup'ik perspective, must be considered within the historical moment and context surrounding the individual. As Fienup-Riordan (2020: xxii) notes, in a Yup'ik framework, 'Although individuals are responsible for their own actions, they cannot be expected to act appropriately if they are not in control of their land, language, and life. This assessment implies that a sector of the population has lost such a sense of control'. Suicide, in this framework, would be seen as a 'consequence of the conditions existing at the time' (ibid.); not as an individually motivated behaviour. This statement reflects a post-colonial condition when neither land nor language could be controlled and dealt with directly by Yup'ik rightsholders.

Well-being in this framework must also be consequential to existing conditions: a collective and interconnected construct. Human well-being was once more intrinsically linked to the Yup'ik universe (Ellam Yua), and to all the systems therein, particularly the animals (Fienup-Riordan 2020). The human-animal relationship is still central to the Yup'ik way of life, referred to as the *yuu'yaraq* (Ayunerak et al. 2014), but conditions today have imposed regulations and restrictions on the relationship that have strained the fundamental and relational connection (Hensel 1996). Some teachings about the animals have fallen out of everyday use and knowledge, but as Yup'ik Elder John Phillip states, 'You know how they say a person's stomach cannot change, that their efforts at subsisting cannot change' (Fienup-Riordan 2020: 22). As long as the Yup'ik world exists, the Indigenous

people living within it will harvest from it, and health and well-being will always be essentially tied to it; health is in the harvest.

As reported by Fienup-Riordan (2020: xxxvi), even as the people are changing and becoming more ‘Westernized’, in one Yup’ik Elder’s assessment, the animals ‘haven’t become Western, they are aware of things’. This is an essential instruction in seeding the conditions for renewal of more reciprocal relationships between humans and animals once again in the Yup’ik universe. Another Yup’ik Elder, interviewed by this author as part of a long-term research project focused on youth resilience and community adaptations, provided a related teaching that ‘All animals and every game has a spirit. When you give water to that seal, the spirit of the seal will be thankful. He’ll come back to that person again. I think that’s a prayer’ (2017, personal communication). Young people are made stronger, given protection and resilience through these teachings and through the connections they make with the animals. Stronger connections and more secure relationships to the land, animals and ways of living may in turn provide a greater sense of control and agency for young people growing up in Yup’ik communities. This is important not only for youth well-being today, but for community and cultural persistence into the future.

## Systems in Harmony Listen

Current challenges that young people face today in Yup’ik communities, including suicide, can be understood as events within systems where individual actions are reflections of imbalance and perturbations within these systems. Of greatest challenge for young people today is learning how to live in equipoise within systems in flux and between overlapping worlds, where intrusive and pervading Euro-American systems have muted the resonance of Yup’ik teachings. Yup’ik teachings (*ganruyutet*) are mechanisms that contribute to community resilience and adaptive capacity and provide comprehensive instruction for living in harmony within a holistic and interconnected world of systems. These systems integrate across environmental, biological, socio-cultural, spiritual and temporal dimensions. According to Yup’ik teachings, changes observed in one spatial and temporal dimension could be extrapolated to apply meaning in other dimensions and times; this is particularly true for changes observed in the environment and/or among the animals and its meaning for human beings. An excerpt from an interview conducted with a Yup’ik Elder

for a project on community adaptations to climate change provides a clear example of this systems-level translation:

Our own Elders told us when we were growing up that the world was going to change and then go back to the way it was a long time ago before the *kassaq* (Europeans/Euro-Americans) came. They saw the *kassaq* coming and knew our Yup'ik way of life was going to change with it. Then they said, when the animals start to come down to the sea; when animals of the land like the moose and wolf, when they start to move towards the coast like they are now, the world is going to back to the way it was. And when the moose walk into the sea it will return to the way that it was when our ancestors were living their yuu'yaraq (traditional Yup'ik way of life). (2013, personal communication)

A Yup'ik universe is a changing one but its nature is not necessarily accumulative or linear in design; rather, it reflects the cycling of life, death and rebirth that is at the foundations of traditional Yup'ik cosmology (Fienup-Riordan 1995). Human beings are not at the centre of this cycling process but are instead involved in an ongoing constellation of reciprocal exchanges and engagements with animate and inanimate beings and objects that all cycle collectively. In the quote above, a moose walking into the sea is an indication of an end to one collective cycle, and the prospective of a new world beginning. Moose were not traditional inhabitants in a Yup'ik universe, and were rarely seen in the Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) Delta and never as far as the Bering Sea coast. Moose began moving into the YK Delta a few decades ago and their population has grown exponentially over the past decade, coinciding with rapid climate changes and environmental transitions. Moose now run in small groups along the edges of Hooper Bay, Alaska on the Bering Sea coast, bringing prophecies to pass and an even greater urgency in communities racing to adapt and provide young people with the teachings and tools they will need to bridge the worlds turning.

There is also great significance and meaning in the event of terrestrial life returning to the sea as a catalyst for change and for a return to a more balanced Yup'ik universe. Yupiit are the people of the seal, and in Yup'ik oral tradition returning to the sea and travelling to the land of the sea people is regenerative and restorative (Fienup-Riordan 1995). Moose become an intrinsic part of the Yup'ik universe by returning to the sea where terrestrial and oceanic systems interact, communicate and join into interdependent relationship. The Yup'ik universe is relational and systems function like kinship networks, being reciprocal and mutualistic, at times feuding and estranged, and

always growing and changing shape over passages of time. For relationships to remain healthy as for systems to remain harmonious, each within them must be heard.

In a Yup'ik world everything listens (Fienup-Riordan 2020). Seals listen, dogs listen, berries and birds listen, rocks listen; everything from a blade of grass to the wind listens. What though in a contemporary Yup'ik world is being heard? What is the land listening to when many of the people living upon it have been forced to direct their words, thoughts and actions into structures and systems of power outside the Yup'ik world? Do these structures of power listen? Then answer is often, no. Yet, there are positive developments being undertaken to empower and centre Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous people within conversations related to climate change and community health and resilience in the Circumpolar North (Bodenhorn and Ulturgasheva 2017; Marino 2015; Ray and Raymond-Yakoubian 2015; Young 2012). One strategy for opening up the 'ears' of Western world power structures to Indigenous frameworks, epistemologies and pedagogies is to demonstrate the ways in which Indigenous knowledge is foundational to many current and often deemed 'cutting-edge' scientific approaches (Jack et al. 2020).



**Figure 4.1.** *A small herd of moose running on the beach near Hooper Bay, Alaska. © Jan Olsen*



One example of this is seen in the emerging ‘One Health’ scientific paradigm that recognizes the interconnectedness of the health and well-being of people with the animals and environment (Hueffer et al. 2019). While having its origins in veterinary epidemiology and zoonotic disease research (Atlas 2013), the One Health concept has come to have particular significance in the Circumpolar North where Indigenous peoples continue to live in close relationship to the environment and the animals, and communities and traditional lifeways are threatened by rapidly changing climates (Hueffer et al. 2019). The One Health framework has been posited as a viable strategy for understanding resilience and community adaptations to climate change in the Arctic as it brings together human, animal and environmental scientists along with community stakeholders as part of regional networks (Ruscio et al. 2015). One Health research has also recently become an official foundational activity of the Sustainable Development Working Group of the Arctic Council, a seat of significant power in terms of international policy and decision-making (SDWG 2017).

On initial review, the One Health movement appears as a significant step forward in recognizing the holistic and interconnected welfare of social and biological systems in the Arctic. The One Health framework is also arguably intrinsic to Arctic Indigenous knowledge systems, a point that is recognized by those advancing the One Health paradigm (Hueffer et al. 2019; Jack et al. 2020). Yet on closer introspection, its packaging in Western scientific language and advancement by academics situated in Western systems and institutions seems to be what enabled its recent prioritization on an international platform. Those authoring and advancing a One Health framework are primarily natural scientists and medical epidemiologists, and the research agenda is generally driven by an interest in the environmental and climate change processes whereby people and social processes tend to become ancillary or anecdotal to the primary focus on biological systems (Huntington et al. 2019). Gearheard et al. noted this phenomenon when observing discussions led by Arctic Indigenous residents themselves on the meaning of ice (2013). She noted how these conversations tend to contrast with those led by scientists, where residents would prioritize the lived experiences of health and health care, economic viability and the importance of sustaining culture, language and traditional lifeways in discussing the qualities and impacts of climate change on ice.

It could also be argued that the One Health framework, as a ‘constructivist’ approach (Hueffer et al. 2019), may continue to privilege Western scientifically derived knowledge over Indigenous knowledge

and may ultimately mute the diverse, complex and uniquely defining characteristics of Indigenous frameworks of health and resilience. From this more critical perspective, the One Health paradigm continues in a Western tradition to focus on ‘cross-talk’ between disciplines, communities of interest and systems. This is quite contrary to a Yup’ik worldview that listens. In a Yup’ik Indigenous framework, the focus is on listening across systems and hearing between worlds. What follows is an extended narrative from one such moment of listening to what the animals and the ocean tides are telling us, shared by an Elder in a Yup’ik community on the Bering Sea coast where young people are learning how to live in very stormy times. A Yup’ik Indigenous framework of youth well-being and resilience emerges that, on the surface, shares characteristics with the One Health approach, but goes much deeper, capturing the impermanency, complexity and egalitariness of interlocking systems in a language of the people living within them.

### **Weathering Storms: A Yup’ik Indigenous Framework of Youth Well-Being and Resilience**

In the summer of 2016, I sat with a Yup’ik Elder in the late-night twilight on a 25-foot aluminium weld boat that floated silently on the shallow inlet waters just outside of the Bering Sea coastal community that I was visiting for fieldwork. This Elder had invited me to go boating with him to visit an old village site up the ocean coast. We had originally planned to bring a small group of young people from the community with us so that the Elder could provide teachings to the youth about their ancestral homelands and patterns of movement. On the morning of the day of the planned outing, the Elder deemed the wind too high and the waters too rough to take youth with us and so we went out on our own. The Elder had timed our outing with the tides, to leave and return when the tide was high enough to clear the shallow inlet that led from and to the village cut bank where boats can dock securely. When we returned at the scheduled time, the tide was still out and we were forced to anchor and wait for the rising waters. During the three hours that followed, this Elder told stories and reflected deeply upon the changes in the environment, the animals and the people that he was witnessing. About the tides he observed:

It’s kind of depressing, you know, when you can’t count on your friends. The tides use to be our friend. We knew when to expect them. We could

count on them. Now we, it's like we don't know them anymore. They are becoming stranger and that's scary. I don't want to take the kids out.

In a sentient Yup'ik universe, tides are like people and have moods and can be fickle and unpredictable. People interact with the ocean and the tides as they would with family members and friends. Sometimes being out on the ocean and navigating tides is a loyal and happy experience, bringing good humour and connection with other fond friends such as the seals, whales and walrus. At other times the ocean and tides can become threatening and scary, evoking feelings of fear and anxiousness. In an era of rapid climate change, these times of unpredictability and fear appear to be increasing, causing, in the words of this Elder, 'depressing' feelings, and fewer opportunities for young people to learn how to live on the land and water and develop strong and trusting relationships with the ocean and its tides. The impacts of climate change on Indigenous mental health in the Arctic have until recently (Cunsolo Willox et al. 2015) been a much neglected area of study. It is clear from this Elder's narrative that the relationship between people living in coastal communities and the ocean is critical in a Yup'ik Indigenous framework of well-being and resilience. When I ask what he thinks is causing the changes in the tides, the Elder states:

I think the weather is changing with the people. The people are becoming different and you don't know them like you use to. Like I don't know what my grandchildren do. They are into all kinds of things I never seen before. They are learning to be Yup'ik in a different world than what I grew up in.

The first sentence in the quote above is a common statement among Yup'ik Elders as it was earlier stated. Here the quote is specific to the weather but is also generally applied to all changes taking place in the Yup'ik world and universe. What is important here is the reflection of the tidal shifts that are taking place among the generations of people. This Elder, who lives in a multi-generational household with his grandchildren, can share in a physical space and still very literally not know what his grandchildren do. His grandchildren have been swept up in a tide that has pulled them into virtual spaces and expanded the Yup'ik universe into areas where he has never been, and may not want to go. The cumulative impacts of rapid change on social and environmental systems have resulted in a Yup'ik universe that is expanding in some ways, contracting in others and that needs to find ways to best get along again or adapt to these

changed and changing conditions. While the Yup'ik world is changed and changing, young people still must learn how to live their ancestral life ways, as the Elder reflects:

We need to give young people the *yuu'yaraq* teachings. Even if their minds seem like they are full of other things or we don't understand them; just like how we have to still go out even if we get stuck on a low tide and need to wait a while. We need to keep going and talk to the young ones and be willing to wait a while for their minds to open up and understand what we are trying to tell them. The world is going to go back to the way it was at the beginning and our children have to know how we survived it before there was electricity, boats and snowmachines.

It is in this quote that a Yup'ik Indigenous framework that listens becomes clearly drawn through the three passages together that explain youth resilience and risk through a maritime ecological metaphor of tides and intertidal movement. Tidal movements of the sea are indeed akin to inter-human relations that could switch from friendly and reliable to estranged and unfamiliar suddenly. The weather and tides changed drastically just like the people whom the Elder sometimes feels he cannot recognize or know and predict. Tides can exist on the ocean as they can in the minds of the young people, pulling them out and closing them off or pushing them fast to new places where a *qayaq* seems no longer necessary. There, in these new expanses of a Yup'ik universe, are young people at their greatest risk for getting lost. Swept away on angry tides, young minds are weathering storms in their lives as their ancestors did but with fewer of the teachings and tools needed to survive the rough seas and skies. In a Yup'ik Indigenous framework of youth well-being and resilience, teachings cast out a lifeline for young people lost in storms and provide tools for weathering storms inside as well as outside oneself. A Yup'ik child listens even as their mind appears closed, because everything living in a Yup'ik universe listens.

In a Yup'ik Indigenous framework learning to weather storms and navigate the tides is a metaphor and practical strategy for resilience. The suicide epidemic is one of the hardest tides that has hit Yup'ik communities, and young people are most vulnerable to being pulled out into the new expanses that have been created over time and through much imposed and ongoing change, with some eventually and tragically lost in the storm. There is hope in that tides can be navigated and storms weathered, sometimes by waiting for them to pass or come in, at other times by being proactive in tending and modifying tools to guide and protect oneself, and finally in being prepared

with a toolkit to make you stronger, more resilient and capable of weathering the next storm to come.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to continue to recognize the plurality of Indigenous frameworks for understanding health, well-being and resilience. One Health, as it is currently being operationalized (Lee and Brumme 2013), is not an Indigenous framework or decolonial approach. This does not mean there is no value in its conceptualization or advancement, particularly in environmental and biological sciences where consideration of social and cultural processes is often marginalized. Indigenous knowledge frameworks capture the complexity of a sentient and changeable Yup'ik universe, and explain youth well-being and resilience as arising within a harmonizing of relational systems that cycle through time and across tipping points or tidal points of strength and vulnerability (e.g. Ulturgasheva et al. 2014). Indigenous frameworks provide models for understanding the deeper complexities of systems and their interactions from the perspectives, and in the languages, of those living through these systems and whose health and resilience is held in balance as worlds collide and change a universe.

The Yup'ik universe, while always changing and adapting, has been weathering an unprecedented onslaught of imposing forces, from colonialism to climate change, the tolls of which are being reflected back to us most powerfully and unacceptably through young lives being lost to suicide. Work is being done and communities are taking action to heal from within and provide the teachings and the tools to young people to weather the storms and navigate the tides to safe harbour at sea as on land and in life. Understanding the suicide disparity within a Yup'ik Indigenous framework of resilience and well-being provides a perspective and a language to use that promotes hope and presents solutions for collective healing from colonial trauma. Suicide among young people may be a new event within systems in a Yup'ik universe today but storms and tides are long-standing perils to the Indigenous people living along the Bering Sea coast, and storms can be weathered and tides navigated successfully with the proper teachings and tools. In an Indigenous framework, prevention of suicide in Yup'ik communities re-engages the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices for survival and prosperity and applies these to contemporary

circumstances requiring navigation through the dangers and the rough waters of life.

Yup'ik communities are applying Indigenous knowledge and developing models of protection from suicide risk that derive from Indigenous theories and traditional values, teachings and ways of life (Rasmus et al. 2019b). While these efforts are growing, and an evidence-base demonstrating their efficacy and effectiveness to engage youth and achieve wellness outcomes is emerging (Allen et al. 2018), Alaska Native communities are still struggling to reduce persistent disparities in suicide and other related diseases of despair (e.g. Copeland et al. 2020). While the atmospheric climate undergoes rapid change in response to global population pressures, the social climate of structural racism and discrimination worldwide is not changing fast enough. Indigenous lives and ways of life continue to be lost and marginalized respectively under the dominant national regimes that are meant to care for all citizens. Standards of best practice for suicide prevention in the USA are not proving to be effective in reducing rates of suicide in Alaska Native communities, as rates have been very high and have continued to rise over the past forty years.

Clinical and mental health best practices for suicide prevention have not proven to be a fully feasible or effective solution for Alaska Native people, particularly for young people living in rural and remote communities. Alaska is a low-resource setting in a high-income country, and Alaska Native people are guaranteed rights to health care based on the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act legislation. Structural barriers and racial inequities impact health care access and service delivery in Alaska, and rural communities are very often cut off from continuity of care and must rely on community-level resources to protect young people and build resilience from within. The limited resources available to provide services that are preventative and strengthening to Alaska Native youth would be better leveraged by providing support to Tribes at the community level to enact strategies that build on Indigenous knowledge and frameworks and promote well-being and resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this point even more clearly as communities have locked down and flight service companies have reduced routing and flights to rural villages. During this time many Yup'ik communities have turned towards traditional subsistence practices as a self-determined measure to ensure food security and promote good health. Some communities have also directed a portion of their US federal COVID-19 relief funds and community grants towards hunting, fishing and gathering activities. In an Indigenous framework,

Yup'ik communities are weathering the storm of the pandemic, drawing from the same community and resilience resources that protect young people from suicide. There is enduring hope and sustainability in an Indigenous resilience framework where the tides will turn, the storms will pass and the people will always remain.

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