Indigenous suicide rates double the rest of the Australian population

21 November 2018, by Jess Reid

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A study led by The University of Western Australia that compared suicide rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across the globe has revealed suicide rates are around two times higher in Indigenous populations, with the impact of colonisation a key cause.

The study examined colonised countries including Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, United States of America, Greenland, Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia and found there was a large divide in suicide rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants.

Although Greenland and Northern Canada had the highest rates globally of Indigenous suicide, the rate in Australia is still concerning with approximately 25 suicides per 100,000 people for Indigenous Australians compared to 12 per 100,000 people for non-Indigenous Australians.

The data also revealed that the Kimberley had a high rate of Indigenous suicide with 74 Indigenous deaths by suicide per 100,000 recorded between 2005 and 2014, more than three times the average rate across Australia.

Professor Pat Dudgeon from UWA's School of Indigenous Studies said Indigenous suicide was the fifth leading cause of death for Indigenous Australians compared to thirteenth among non-Indigenous Australians.

"The figures from the report are very concerning, it is evident that far more needs to be done to prevent Indigenous suicide," Professor Dudgeon said.

"Although it's a complex issue and there is no single factor leading to a suicide, it is evident that colonisation has played a key role in negatively affecting the general mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous people, resulting in higher suicide rates in the countries reviewed.

Professor Dudgeon said she hoped the data from the report would help policy makers and health care providers across the globe develop more robust strategies to support the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people.

"The data from the report provides a strong basis to better understand the issues affecting Indigenous populations," she said.

"Governments need to do more to prevent suicide by including Indigenous people in their discussions to identify issues and solutions.

"We also need to consider the social factors leading to these issues and the need for community-led, culturally based solutions. More research that is led by communities needs to be a priority."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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