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## **Indigenous suicide rates in remote WA communities among worst in world, report finds**

By Matthew Bamford

ABC News

27 June, 2016

Suicide rates for Aboriginal people in remote Western Australia are among the worst in the world and are set to double by the end of the decade, a report has found.

The report also found instances of self-harm were 10 times higher than levels reported in international studies of hospital presentations of self-harm.

The findings are contained in a damning report on the Kimberley published in the Medical Journal of Australia today.

Report co-author and Kimberley Mental Health and Drug Service director Murray Chapman called for a more innovative approach to the issue.

"Short-term funded projects are not really going to work on their own, it needs to be a sustained effort over many generations," Dr Chapman said.

"It needs to be a solution that is not imposed, it's a solution that's derived out of working with that community."

The research found that 102 of the 125 people who took their life in the region in the past decade were Indigenous.

Of those, 70 per cent had never been referred to the mental health service.

Dr Chapman said the problem was growing, with the number of Indigenous suicides more than doubling over the duration of the study.

Up to 24 Indigenous suicides were reported in 2014 compared to nine in 2005.

"The trend, very sadly, is inexorably to get worse and worse," Dr Chapman said.

"It's going up exponentially. So there's a doubling each decade and our data suggests that we are on track for a further doubling this decade."

Suicide rate the 'tip of a much bigger problem'

Young Indigenous men make up 71 per cent of suicide victims over the past decade in the region.

The majority of those were under 30, with 27 per cent aged in their teens. Report co-author Dr Anita Campbell said those affected were getting younger in a trend shared among **indigenous** communities worldwide.

"We had six suicides under the age of 15," she said. "Research shows that this is happening in other **indigenous** communities around the world."

Incidents of self-harm among **Indigenous** people in the region were also recorded at disproportionately high levels. In 2014, 86 per cent of those who presented with suicidal behaviour identified as **Indigenous**.

Young women aged between 15 and 24 were most likely to self-harm or have suicidal tendencies, at 63 instances for every 1,000 people. "Collective trauma and ongoing socioeconomic deprivation are drivers of escalating self-harm and suicide rates among **Indigenous** Australians," the report found.

Dr Chapman said: "The major driving force, and there are many now, is the transmission between generations of the initial traumas encountered in the initial phase of colonisation."

The study's authors believed the figures were likely to underestimate the scale of the problem, "given the difficulty in accessing health care services in the region".

"The suicide rate, awful and tragic though they are, they are just the tip of a much bigger problem," Dr Chapman said.

"There are no quick fixes, this has been a problem that has been a long time in the creating and it's going to take time to remedy."