

Maintaining balance through dancing: perceptions and practices of health among young adult Yup'ik women

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Abstract

Ten years ago CANHR (Center for Alaska Native Health Research) asked Yup'ik men and women of all ages how they would define health and wellness; what it means to be well and happy. The answers were largely centered on living a subsistence lifestyle, eating subsistence foods and respecting spirits and lands. Today a new generation of young Yup'ik women has emerged. A generation that has grown up in villages and cities with store-bought food available next to subsistence food, TV, and Internet. In this study young adult Yup'ik women's perceptions of health and their use of dancing as a practice of health are investigated. This study looks at how this new generation of young adult Yup'ik women understands health. Young adult Yup'ik women's perceptions and practices of health such as dancing are examined in order to understand what they consider important to stay healthy and how the notion of health itself can be understood.

Ideas of what it means to be healthy are crucial to understand before conducting any kind of health research. How people interpret, navigate and understand the very notion of health must be uncovered in order to work with them on any and all health issues. Health is not merely the presence or absence of disease but includes a wide network of social, spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional factors. This study approaches health from a holistic perspective, implementing a wide network of factors in the investigation of young, adult Yup'ik women's perceptions and practices of health.