

Atuat Shouldice here. I wanted to tell you about a theory I have about suicide in Nunavut and maybe it could help. I am a Single Father of two amazing future men, Akkiutak and Kusugak. I'm a hunter, a guide, a certified mechanic and a Resource Management Officer for the Federal Government doing Environmental compliance inspections. I grew up in a wonderful home with active and loving parents. Often out on the land practicing our culture and learning our values. I've lived a pretty amazing life so far.

A good friend of mine shot himself in the head and survived seven years ago, causing a flood of memories to come back, I didn't realize I had. Memories of my Angnaqtik on the floor surrounded with his own blood, blood still so bright, indicating that I must have got there moments before it happened to not have oxidized yet and turn dark.

My children were small when these memories flooded back, I knew I needed to deal with these memories to be a good father, I was struggling. My boss helped me start counseling through a program at work offered as part of our benefits. Learning to communicate wasn't easy. Day one didn't really go anywhere in counseling but Irene asked me at the time to do some homework, to write down the names of people I have lost in my life for future appointments. I went home and wrote down 54 names, people close to me, people I worked with, people I admired in passing. I read these names to Irene, and told her which ones were the cause of suicide, drowning, and natural causes. The majority of them were from Suicide. She apologize to me because she was crying well I went through the list of names scattered on a piece of paper I held.

Irene "Atuat in my career, no one so young has ever come to me with so much loss in their life"

I was thirty years old at the time. Telling her, it's wasn't just me who has these experiences, it was everyone in my community. I still regularly see a counselor today. My children are honor roll students and often I'm complimented on how capable and respectful they are. This spring and summer, Kusugak often went out on the land by himself or with friends to hunt geese and pick eggs, coming home with meat and eggs for his mother and grandmother regularly. This year Kusugak started the eighth grade in the same high school I went too. Causing anxiety in me because that grade was one of the roughest years of my life. Causing me to grow up sooner than I should have.

Sorry for the long background coming to the theory I have. In this journey of healing a couple years ago, I went to the hospital to see Greg an NP nurse. I was then diagnosed with anxiety and started Siv-Citalopram. I laughed at myself for taking these meds, I didn't think I had anxiety but sure enough that feeling in my chest went away after a few weeks, that I remember having since I was at least ten years old. But I knew something was still off. Social media is pretty interesting in the way people like to share about themselves. This year I noticed a lot of people referencing their ADHD, and I would ask how was it to be diagnosed? Most just assume they have ADHD and were never professionally diagnosed. So I went to Greg again and took another test to see if I had ADHD. Because we don't have a physiologist here regularly I couldn't take the traditional steps to being diagnosed. But with my history working with the NP and his high level of medical training and experience. He thought it was a good idea to start me on a low dose of Vyvanse. A medication used to help treat people with ADHD. Instantly I noticed the improvements, I wasn't so distracted at work, I didn't have to reread legislation so many times just to comprehend what I read. We then regularly seen each other to adjust my dose. I cried at work, my mind went quiet! "Is this what normal people feel like?" Not thinking about a million things at once? I didn't change at all, other than my brain being able to prioritize tasks better, being able to understand and rationalize my emotions better and started getting sleep, which I have struggled with since I could remember.

The definition of ADHD from Google says:

"ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It is a medical condition. A person with ADHD has differences in brain development and brain activity that affect attention, the ability to sit still, and self-control. ADHD can affect a child at school, at home, and in friendships."

Naturally as a child of two educators. I wanted to know what was wrong with my brain and why. I knew I was intelligent and for sure struggled in High School, but only knew of ADHD in some kids when I was in school and they were medicated to the point of being Zombies. So I started researching, looking for medical journals or books about ADHD. I came across a book called (ADHD a hunter in a farmer's world) by Thom Hartmann foreword by Michael Popkin Ph.D.. Hartmann wrote this book for his Son who had ADHD. Expressing how ADHD shouldn't be described as a disorder because of his research and studies, he found Children diagnosed with ADHD taught in the proper environment had equivalent intelligence and higher. Often children with ADHD not being diagnosed because they were so intelligent they wouldn't meet the criteria of ADHD because they noticed people coming into the classroom and did not want to be categorized with the ADHD children. But later in life struggling once organization and demands increased in higher levels of education. Hartmann then says his theory with ADHD is that it could be passed down through genetics and was confirmed later. Following this he started studying cultures and societies where hunting was a prevalent way of life. Noticing ADHD diagnosis going from one in ten children in larger city classroom to three in ten in classroom where the children came from a society of Hunters. He realized individuals in a hunters society had developed ADHD because it was an evolutionary advantage to be hypersensitive to one's environment where predators and quickly changing conditions were all threats and this trait allowed one to thrive.

This worried me that I had probably passed on ADHD to my children and started reading up on how you can medicate children with ADHD naturally without resorting to drugs right away. I realized I already have been, lots of hands on learning together, high protein diet, lots of water, outside activities. But I am now monitoring to see if it ever becomes a problem when they are older teenagers.

Then I started looking at the characteristics of a person with ADHD and how the brain works for someone with ADHD. Sure enough different events in my life and habits started checking all the boxes. The thalamus is a part of brain, it's your body's information relay station. All information from your body's senses (except smell) must be processed through your thalamus before being sent to your brain's cerebral cortex for interpretation. Your thalamus also plays a role in sleep, wakefulness, consciousness, learning and memory. It is said people with ADHD have a thalamus that has developed in a way affecting these senses. The limbic system in our brain works closely in relation to the thalamus controlling emotions and is responsible for anxiety. With the development of these systems in the brain having had developed in a way often bringing characteristics of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, Frequent mood swings, Poor self-image, suicidal thoughts. And so much more. With this information I wondered who of my friends might have undiagnosed ADHD. Then everyone I lost to suicide checked the boxes. Curious again I looked up what aboriginal and Inuit studies there were on ADHD and what is the suicide rate for people with ADHD.

The national institutes of Health published, In a study Seventy-five Aboriginal children in Grades 1 through 4 were tested on two different reservations. Seventeen of the Seventy-five (22.7%) Aboriginal children demonstrated a match on parent and teacher forms, with T-scores greater than 1.5 standard deviations from the mean on the Conners' ADHD Index, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

The Canadian Institute of Child Health published In 2012, 12% of First Nations and Métis children aged 6 to 11 years were reported to have learning disabilities. Half that proportion (6%) of Inuit children in the same age group had learning disabilities. 9% of First Nations and Métis children age 6 to 11 years were reported to have attention deficit disorder, as did 5% of Inuit children. 13% of First Nations and Métis children were reported to have speech or language difficulties, as did 7% of Inuit children.

The University of Toronto published on January 4th 2021 "Even when we took into account history of mental illness, and the higher levels of poverty and early adversities that adults with ADHD often experience, those with ADHD still had 56% higher odds of having attempted suicide than their peers without ADHD."

Curious again why the percentage of Inuit with these disorders is lower than the other Aboriginal groups. If Hartmann's theory was right, wouldn't we have more cases of ADHD in a culture that is based 100% on a hunting society and colonized last with less genetic mixing? Why wouldn't we score higher on Conners' ADHD Index, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Then I looked at it from how Inuit raised hunters, specifically a seal hunter. When a man stands at a seal hole to Nipaq. he's admired for his patience, focus and how still he can stand not to scare coming seals. All who have learnt this will tell you how exciting and rewarding it is, but takes time to learn. This practice wouldn't check any of the boxes on the ADHD manual. But one thing the documentaries don't tell you is, The hunter's mind is working overtime, it starts when he finds an aglu, picking the location of where he would stand, preparing the spot to stand so he doesn't make a sound, the relation of his shadow forever moving with the sun or moon, to not cast over the aglu. Well standing in that location for hours motionless, his mind's thinking about his extremities making sure they are warm so he can react when it's time to harpoon the seal. All well this is happening he is constantly listening and looking for polar bears that could threaten his life. I believe these studies didn't take into account our cultural practices and the numbers are much higher.

I wanted to make sure when I sent this letter, our government wasn't already looking in to this concept, in the **Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy 2010**, page 10 The effect of risk and protective factors on suicide, touches on it a little, but I wasn't sure where to look up the information from the study and if ADHD was a priority. In the **Nunavut Suicide Prevention Partners final report Action plan 2017-2022**, Commitment 7 We will support early childhood development, I was hoping to see a second screening, similar to the one our children get going in to kindergarten. Mental health was reference 39 times in the document but I didn't notice anything related to physiologist review. **National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy** said in section 4.5. Mental Distress and Suicide Risk -Such studies demonstrate that up to 90 percent of people who die by suicide had been suffering from a mental health disorder. 33 The most common diagnoses are mood disorders, substance abuse disorders, schizophrenia, and personality disorders. In most literature I have read substance abuse was identified as a self-medication practice for people with underlying disorders.

I realize there are a lot of environmental factors when discussing suicide. But with this information I present to you, I believe we can drop the numbers with suicide, by having a secondary review on children done by a physiologist with the understanding these children may not meet the traditional methods of a diagnosis because of the way Inuit traditionally raised their children or the very least inform individuals about ADHD and the steps involved in an assessment. My view with this data is that there could be at least 3 children in every classroom in Nunavut with a 56% chance of committing suicide, pretty well a coin toss. I'm far from a medical professional but I do have first-hand experience. As I wrote this a friend of mine took his life last night.

Thank you for listening to my concerns

Atuat Shouldice

