

“ *A congress like I have never experienced it in my whole career. It's an outstanding arrangement with a lot of interesting people, and it would be a pity if it could not be continued in the future. It is the only chance to present certain things on an international level* ”

Gerhard Treutlein, Professor, Germany

Prevents the young from suicide

Sport prevents young Aborigines from killing themselves

By Karen Balling Radmer

Until 1960, suicides among aborigines were unknown. It did not exist in the culture or tradition, and they did not even have a word for it in their native tongue. Today the Aborigines have the highest rate of children committing suicide in the world. Colin Tatz, professor at the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Australia, has studied the phenomena and points out three risk factors: Sexual abuse, high obsession with cannabis and the absence of sport.

»Sport means more to Aborigines than to other parts of the population,« he says.

»Suicides are measured per 100.000 in the population. If you take New Zealand that has the highest rate, it is 19-20 for men and 7-8 for women per 100.000. But among Aborigines it is 128-148. That is off the charts,« Colin Tatz says.

From 1996 to 1999 he went on several field studies exploring the connection between sport and juvenile delinquency and suicides in Aboriginal communities.

He found that the Aboriginal culture and society has been almost destroyed leaving behind a gap in rituals, beliefs and values. Life expectancy is very short, around 50 years. This means that

there are no elders in the society to pass on traditions.

»I found that among children below the age of 14 the suicide rate was 130 per 100.000. A terrible rate. There were kids as young as 8. I do not know how these children form the idea of self-destruction. Some of them simply said that they could not handle this life and would take their chances "on the other side". But I also found that in areas with a high promotion of sport the suicide rates and the juvenile delinquency rate went down,« he says.

»Sport means more to the Aborigines than to other parts of the population, because much of the Aboriginal society is fatherless. There are no elders, very few Christian marriages, no beliefs and far too many funerals. Rituals have simply disappeared. But the ritual of belonging in sport is unchanged. The sense of belonging, the rituals of brotherhood, loyalty and discipline is still in sport,« argues Colin Tatz.

If an Aboriginal child is expelled from the football team, for that child it means the end of the world.

»I investigated many cases of kids who at one time had a football career. Suicide tended to occur outside the football season, or when they were expelled

from that sporting group. I'm not claiming that sport prevents suicide, but where there is a high level of sport, there is a reduction in suicide and delinquency,« Colin Tatz says.

But is sport then the magic spell you might ask.

»There are proofs pointing in that direction. When children belong to a team as a player, coach, fan, water carrier, anything, then they do not try to kill themselves. The problem is that many Aboriginal teams are expelled from competition, allegedly for violence or bad language from their fans. Here it should be noted that the Aboriginal teams almost always win,« Colin Tatz explains.

He believes that more government funding should be used on sport.

»I recommend sport. Especially the girls, who get a raw deal. For every 1000 dollars spent on sport, only 100 goes to the girls, and the suicide rate for girls is increasing. They used to take tablets, but now they hang themselves. Hanging is confronting – it is right in your face and they do it in public. Hanging is associated with white colonial oppression. Therefore, much Aboriginal art contains scenes of hanging now.«

Sport seems to give young Aborigines new faith in life, but public support is scarce

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