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# Addiction in Alaska: How Alcohol Abuse is Impacting Community Members in Native Villages throughout Rural Alaska

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**Addiction in Alaska: How Alcohol Abuse is Impacting  
Community Members in Native Villages throughout Rural Alaska**

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A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Social Justice in Intercultural Relations at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

May 2012

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## **ABSTRACT**

Across rural Alaska are over 200 Alaska Native villages so isolated, they are only accessible by airplane, boat, and snowmachine. These villages strive to keep their Native culture alive and rich, but continue to struggle against Western influences. Introduced to Alaska Natives by European and Russian explorers in the 1700s, this paper examines how alcohol addiction is affecting community members throughout villages in rural Alaska. The research was conducted in two Iñupiaq Eskimo villages, Point Hope and Selawik, both located above the Arctic Circle in rural Alaska. Drawing from three years of personal observations and a series of interviews, this study addresses makes clear connections between how the history of alcohol in Alaska continues to impact villages today. Even though it is clear alcohol addiction is rooted from Western explorers introducing alcohol to Alaska Natives, the United States government refuses to accept responsibility for this issue and does little to provide services to alleviate this problem to Alaska Natives throughout rural Alaska. This created culture of persistent binge drinking combined with the high monetary and emotional cost of drinking alcohol continues to have a negative impact on all people's lives throughout the village, ultimately destroying a small piece of their Alaska Native way of life everyday.

## INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of Alaska, they often think of striking mountains, pristine glaciers, and the sight of grizzly bears catching salmon from a crystal clear stream. They think of untouched land, the prospect of gold, and the longest stretching oil pipeline in the world. Very rarely do they think of just how large it is, stretching at over 375 million acres (Department of Natural Resources, 2012), a state so large that the state of Texas could nestle cozily in it twice, with room for Oklahoma as well to stretch its legs. When they think of Alaska, they think of scenic roads, salmon, halibut, and puffins. Yes, Alaska is full of these things, but this, this is not the Alaska I think of.

When I think of Alaska, I think of the flat, barren tundra and my back aching slightly from bending over all afternoon picking the fresh blueberries that grow from it. I think of walking into a house after a cold snowmachine ride through the village and the overwhelming smell of caribou stew that greets my nose. I think of dark, fierce winters, celebrating spring at 0 degrees Fahrenheit, and waking up periodically throughout the night to check on the Northern Lights that hover above. I think of the vast stretches of land far from the road system, so desolate, so barren, so isolated. I think of all 231 Alaska Native villages that are scattered throughout it, and the indigenous people who live there (Jaeger, 2004).

## RESEARCH QUESTION

This research paper explores how alcohol addiction is affecting members of Native communities throughout the state of Alaska, specifically two Iñupiaq Eskimo villages located in the Northwest portion of the state. It examines the history of alcohol in Alaska and the negative impact it is having on rural villages throughout the state today. It looks closely at the rise of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders throughout Alaska and the effect alcohol is having on the children

impacted by the disorders while taking an in-depth look at what life is like in an insolated village today. Lastly, it seeks answers on how to best prepare incoming non-native teachers how to effectively teach each student in the arctic. The following questions are addressed in this research paper:

Primary:

- How is alcohol addiction affecting village life throughout rural Alaska?

Secondary:

- How has the past contributed to the high alcohol addiction rates throughout rural Alaska?
- What factors contribute to the high percentage of alcohol addiction among Native Alaskans?
- How can non-Native teachers be better prepared to teach in rural Alaska?
- How are Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders affecting Native children and families throughout Alaska?

## BACKGROUND

Alcohol is an addiction known way to well to many Alaska Natives. In 2001 the number of alcohol-related deaths among Alaska Natives was almost nine times higher than the national average in the United States (Seale, Shellenberger, & Spence, 2006). Almost 7% of all Alaska Native deaths involve alcohol and in 2005, research shows 1 in 13 deaths among Alaska Natives was alcohol induced (Seale et al, 2006; Allen, J., Levintova, M., Mohatt, G., 2011). The abuse of alcohol has been labeled as the main health issue among Alaska Natives and is now considered an ‘epidemic’(Seale et al., 2006).

Binge drinking, which is now considered consuming five or more alcoholic beverages for males or four or more for females in two hours, is common throughout Alaska Native villages

(Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2011). This type of drinking has led to an increase of domestic and sexual violence, accidental injuries and deaths, and high suicide rates. The suicide rate among Alaska Natives is four times higher than the national average while accidental injuries from alcohol has soared to more than three times the national average (Seale et al., 2006).

Alcohol use, along with drug use, is causing societal strains throughout Alaska. Alcohol usage and abuse among Alaska Natives is resulting in an increase of the number of people homeless, child and elder neglect, individuals with disability needs from fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), and imprisonment (Seale et al., 2006). All of these factors not only affect the village communities, but also raise the cost of living for all of the residents of Alaska.

## TOPIC CHOICE

I have spent the last three years living and teaching in rural Alaska. My first two years were spent teaching third grade at Davis-Ramoth School, a Title I 'No Child Left Behind' labeled Crisis School with 100 percent free breakfast and lunch, in Selawik, Alaska. When I first arrived in Selawik, a village of 900 people located a few miles above the Arctic Circle, I immediately realized that a high percentage of my students' reading and math skills were at a first grade level. The first day of school my students went through everything in my desk. Many refused to sit in their assigned seats and would jump from desk to desk seeking immediate attention. Their low assessment scores and the behavior in my classroom led me to want to find the root of the problem to better meet my students' needs.

After many discussions, often spent building trust, with village elders and fellow teachers, I was told to learn about their parents and the history of their families. I needed to find out which night was poker night at their house and how many people slept there on a regular



basis. I was told to ask questions about their life and thoroughly listen to the child's response. Lastly, I was told to learn more about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). While none of my students may have had a formal diagnosis, many students were probably affected by it somehow. This qualitative research paper takes an inside look at life in rural Alaska, in particular two villages, one in the Northwest Arctic Borough and the other one on the North Slope, the impact alcohol has in a village, and how the children and families are suffering from this impact.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **HISTORY OF ALASKA**

To understand how alcohol addiction is affecting Native Alaskan villages now, one must first understand the history of Alaska and the indigenous people who live there. It is believed that alcohol was not introduced to Alaska Natives until the arrival of the Russians and Europeans in the 1700s, making their exposure to it a little over 300 years. Three hundred years is a small number when compared to other cultures around the world who have been consuming alcohol for thousands of years.

The arrival of the first people to Alaska continues to be a disputed topic today. According to Eskimo expert Ernest S. Burch, Jr. (1988), people descended into Alaska 50,000 years ago from a land bridge connecting Asia to North America when the ocean levels dropped. Over time, people traveled from Alaska through Canada and into the continental United States until around 20,000 to 15,000 years ago. During that time period, continental glaciers in Canada made migrating impossible. According to Burch (1988), the American Indians of the Lower 48 are the descendents of people who were south of the Canadian ice sheets, while Eskimos are the descendants of the people north of the Canadian ice sheets. Since the land bridge still connected

Asia to Alaska for several thousands more years, biological and cultural influences from Asia remained intact. This is why Eskimos today still have a more Mongoloid look when compared to the North American Indians of the Lower 48 states.

Other historians, like Haycox and Mangusso (1996), who edited *An Alaska Anthology: Interpreting the Past*, a book commonly used in Alaska Studies college courses across the state, believe the first people to arrive in Alaska crossed the Bering Sea Land Bridge 27,000 to 28,000 years ago. They lived in the interior and southeastern parts of the state. According to Haycox and Mangusso (1996), archaeologists and anthropologists have shown that people have inhabited the northern and western parts of Alaska for at least 8,000 years. Undisputed evidence shows that Eskimos have been living continuously throughout Alaska, Canada, and Greenland for at least 4,000 years (Burch, 1998; Haycox & Mangusso, 1996).

In these 4,000 years Eskimos learned how to survive in some of the harshest climates in the world. The Alaska Natives were less nomadic than Eskimos in other parts of the Arctic since their land had an abundance of natural resources. The tundra landscape has practically no trees and little vegetation, so Alaska Native Eskimos subsisted on a diet mainly of fish, game, and berries. Polar bears, seals, grizzly bears, caribou, fish, and whale are just a few of the animals that provided food and survival for the Eskimos. Every part of a hunted animal was used, either for food, clothing, tools, or shelter. Contrary to popular belief, Alaskan Eskimos only built igloos when needed for survival. They dwelled in sod homes, built about three feet into the ground, and supported by driftwood and whalebones (Burch, 1998). Over time, Eskimos were divided into two groups based on their language: the Yupik Eskimos and the Inuit Eskimos (Burch, 1998). The Yupiks lived throughout southcentral and southwestern Alaska, while the Inuit stretched from the Bering Strait to eastern Greenland. This paper is based on research gathered from the

Iñupiaq Eskimos, which are apart of the Inuit Eskimos. In the Iñupiaq language, Iñupiaq means, “the real people” (Hensley, 2009).

Since most indigenous languages are oral, including Iñupiaq, history has been passed down through traditions and stories. The earliest documented history of Alaska, both written and eyewitness accounts, began in 1741 with the arrival of the Russians (Burch, 1988). When Europeans arrived to the North American Arctic, the population was believed to be around 75,000 people (Burch, 1988). Native Alaskans in Point Hope believe the population to outnumber 300,000. Either way, this population decimated quickly once Eastern Europeans arrived, bringing with them superior weapons, deadly diseases, and destroying a lifestyle of subsistence. According to Thomas (1999), in 1740 the Native Alaskan population was estimated at 62,200. The Russian census of 1839 showed the population had decreased to 39,107, and by 1910, the United States census recorded a population of only 25,331 (Thomas, 1999).

During the summer of 1728, Vitus Bering, a captain in the Russian Imperial Navy, set out on a voyage to ‘find America’ (Haycox & Mangusso, 1996). It was unsuccessful. In the summer of 1741, Bering set out again with cocaptain Alexeii Chirikov, landing in parts the coast of southeastern Alaska, some of its southern coast, and a few of the Aleutian Islands. Alaska had been found.

By 1743 word had spread that Alaska, often referred to then as ‘Russian America,’ had two sea mammals: the sea otter and the fur seal (Haycox & Mangusso, 1996). A fur rush sparked and sea otter fur quickly became the most valuable fur in the world. This was great for the Russians, except they did not know how to hunt maritime animals. Hunting sea otters requires skill, time, and patience; killing them was left to the Alaska Natives. The Russians were now dependent on the Alaska Native’s hunting abilities.

By 1786, fur seals were also in demand. This demand of maritime furs and lack of hunting skills led to the exploitation of Native Alaskans by the Russians. The Aleuts were known as the most skilled at hunting sea otters and were the first to be exploited. They were held captive until payment of furs was made until 1794; after that males from age 15 – 50 were sent away and forced to work for the Russian-American Company. By 1790, only about one-third of the Aleut population was left, the Russians moved to more parts of Alaska, exploiting more indigenous people, in search for furs (Haycox & Mangusso, 1996). The Russians exploited the Alaska Natives for everything from their hunting ability to food, sex, and labor, but they were not the only ones.

American whalers had been in Alaska since 1848 when whaling captain Thomas Roys sailed north through the Bering Strait and into the Chuchi Sea, killing 11 bowhead whales and providing over 1600 barrels of train oil (Vaughan, 1994). An oil boom began and lasted until the 1890s, when whale oil was replaced with mineral oil, making it near worthless (Vaughn, 1994). By 1914, commercial whalers had killed an estimated 18,650 bowhead whales, leaving very few for the Natives who relied on the whales for subsistence living (Vaughn, 1994).

In 1867, 124 years after Russia landed in Alaska, exploiting indigenous people for their knowledge, resources, and skills and wiping out entire populations, it was sold to the United States for \$7.2 million, which proceeded to continue this exploitation for its own profit as well (Vaughan, 1994). Bought by Russia mainly for its geographical location, the United States treated the Alaska Natives no better than the Russians before them. According to Article III of the 1867 Treaty of Cession, the ‘uncivilized’ tribes in Alaska must abide by the United States’ rules and regulations (Case & Dorough, 2006). Being purchased practically overnight and with no regard for the people living there, Alaska remained virtually untouched by the United States

for 17 years. Only two legislative acts were passed in Congress concerning Alaska, one being forbidding the sale of alcohol to Natives and the other controlling fur seals (Vaughan, 1994). In 1884, Alaska began being called a district and was given a governor. Exploration of the interior lands began, and once again, exploiting the Natives for their knowledge, resources, and skills resumed. It has continued ever since.

In 1931, over 80 years after being 'bought' by the United States, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was given responsibility of Alaska Native programs (Case & Dorough, 2006). Five years later, the federal Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) was extended by Congress to Alaska (Case & Dorough, 2006). The Bureau of Indian Affairs labeled the Native villages as 'tribes,' to designate land and provisions for each village under the IRA. By the 1940s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had designated 71 villages across Alaska under the IRA (Case & Dorough, 2006). Now there are over 200 recognized villages across Alaska.

On January 3, 1959, Alaska became the forty-ninth state, bringing not much change to the treatment of Alaska Natives until December 18, 1971. This is not only a day to be remembered by all Alaska Natives, but a day many wish could be forgotten. It is the day Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in Washington, D.C. Prompted from the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay, this act extinguished all aboriginal title of the villages, including land in excess of 365 million acres, and hunting and fishing rights (Case, D. & Dorough, D., 2006, Huhndorf, R. & Huhndorf, R. 2011). In return, Natives received 44 million acres, or 1/9<sup>th</sup> of the state, and \$962.5 million dollars (Huhndorf, R. & Huhndorf S., 2011). The money was paid to the 12 newly established for-profit Native-owned corporations. Every Alaska Native born on or before December 18, 1971 with one-quarter or more native blood would be a shareholder, and the corporations were to disperse the profits annually to each

of the shareholders (Case, D. & Dorough, D., 2006). Many corporations across the state today make so little in profit they are unable to pay their shareholders. In short, as Huhndorf & Huhndorf (2011) said, “The settlement aimed to integrate largely rural, subsistence-based communities into the mainstream capitalist system.” The ANCSA has been successful at stripping the rights and lands from the Native people and leaving them with little to nothing. It is still considered to be one of the most highly disputed and controversial policy deals made today.

## HISTORY OF ALCOHOL IN ALASKA

Not only did the Russians and other Europeans exploit Native Alaskans for their hunting skills and knowledge of the land, they also introduced them to alcohol. Brought to them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Russians and Euro-American explorers, the ‘frontier’ drinking style of binge drinking has set the standard for how alcohol is consumed among Natives today (Ehrlander, 2007). While some Alaska Natives may have used fermented berries to produce alcohol, it is believed the Aleuts and Koniag were first Native Alaskans introduced to alcohol by Russian fur traders (Ehrlander, 2007). The Russian fur traders taught them how to make Kvass, a liquor drink composed of apples, roots, or grains with a very low alcohol content. It is believed the Tlingits in the Southeast region were first introduced to alcohol from a French ship in 1790 and from there began trading precious furs for alcohol and firearms with ships from New England (Ehrlander, 2007).

This notion of binge drinking being taught to the Native Alaskans by *iglaaqs*, the Iñupiaq word for people not living in your village, was also confirmed during a focus group conducted in a hub village above the Arctic Circle by researchers Seale, Shallenberger, and Spence (2006). Participants noted that alcohol was not indigenous to their culture and was introduced by “whalers, fur traders, and visitors from Russia, who sporadically brought large quantities of

distilled spirits to the communities” (Seale et al, 2006). The men and women would drink with the traders until intoxicated, and then trade with the Natives. Native women would get taken advantage of sexually, while Native men would be taken advantage of economically (Seale et al, 2006). Traders would wait until the Native men were heavily intoxicated to trade with the Native Alaskans. The Native Alaskan men were intoxicated and rarely knew just how much their furs were worth, often practically giving away their furs for very little in return.

One participant also noted that during one summer traders brought an immense amount of alcohol. The men drank throughout the spring, which is a traditional food gathering time. Spring throughout Alaska is a crucial time for subsistence living. Not only is it whaling season in the North, but a time for ice fishing and seal hunting. Starvation, along with the diseases brought from the whalers, meant the destruction of eight out of the 10 villages (Seale et al, 2008).

The elders here tell a similar story about the abundance of alcohol in the village. Stories are told about how when they were children, stills, buckets used to hold alcohol, sat outside of everyone’s sod homes. People consumed from them throughout the day and night, even if they were pregnant. There was no education back then about the effects of alcohol, so people just drank continuously no matter what the circumstances. Many here will argue there is a high amount of FASDs throughout rural Alaska villages from long ago.

Since 1867, when Alaska became a US territory, there has been a long history of alcohol laws and regulations throughout Alaska. One of the only laws the United States initially created regarding Alaska was outlawing importing alcohol into Alaska and selling alcohol to Natives. In 1937, alcohol sales became legal through a local option law, giving Native villages the right to choose for themselves (Berman & Hull, 1997). When Alaska became a state in 1959, only cities and local boroughs were recognized as local governments – not village councils – legalizing the

sale of alcohol in Native villages once again. It was not until the 1980s the Alaska state legislature gave control back to the Native villages through the Alaska Local Option Law of 1980. This law gave unincorporated communities the right to vote on prohibiting the sale of alcohol, prohibiting both the sale and importation of alcohol, or allowing alcohol sales at licensed stores (Berman, & Hull, 2001). By 1986, the law was amended to add banning the possession of alcohol and this law still remains in effect today (Berman, & Hull, 2001).

As you can see, alcohol laws have played a large role in Alaska’s history for a very long time.

The chart below, created by the Institute of Social and Economic Research at University of Alaska of Anchorage (1997), shows how alcohol has been regulated in Alaska from 1867 to 1986:

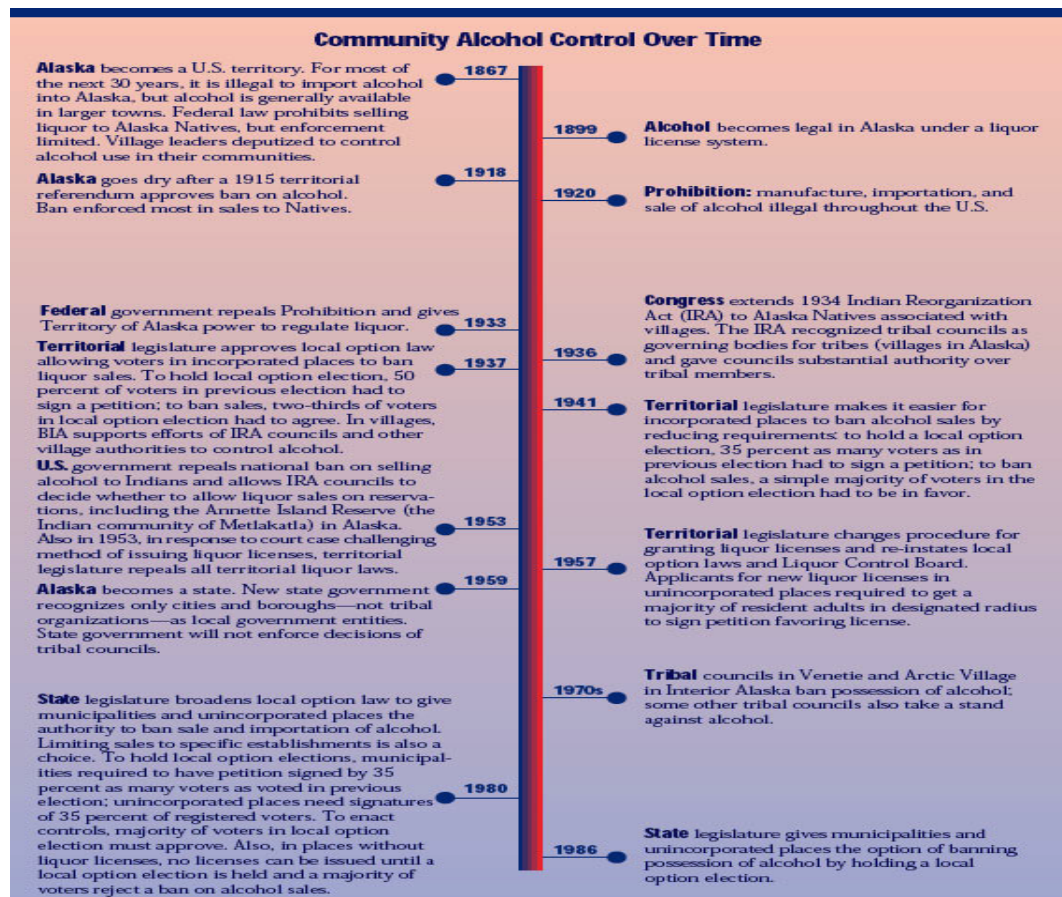
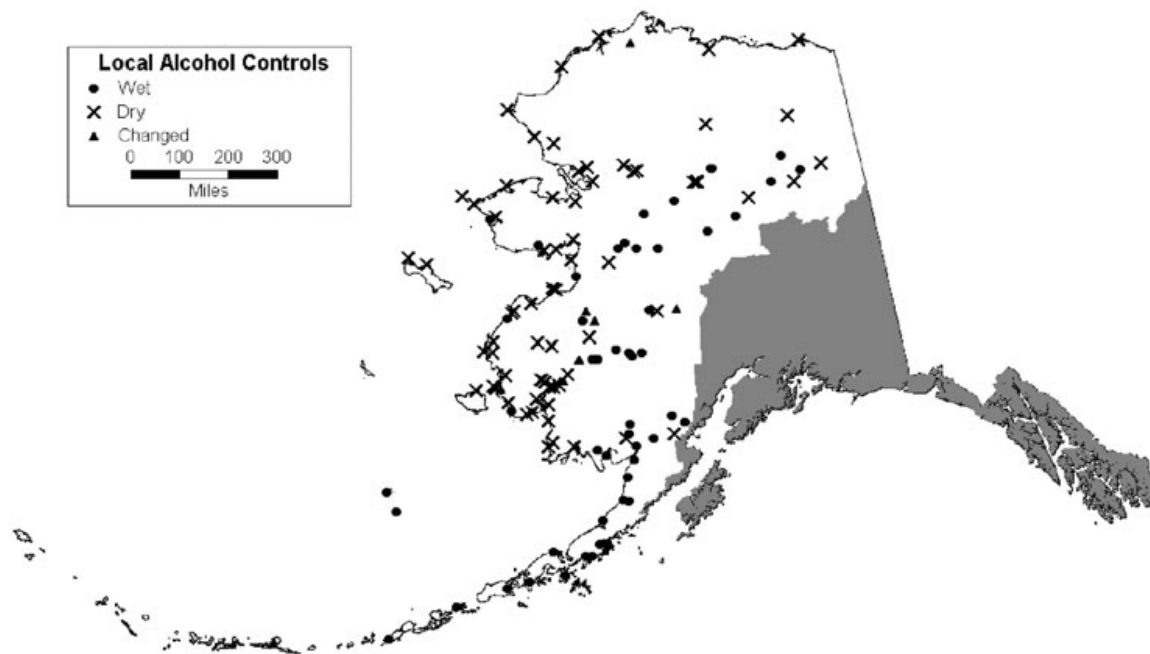


Figure 1. Community Alcohol Control Over Time. 1867 - 1986



Alcohol today continues to be highly regulated with over 50 percent of the Native population choosing to live in places with restricted alcohol access (Berman, M. & Hull, T, 1997). Local options now allow people in rural Alaska to vote on three different options: Wet, Damp, and Dry. A dry village does not allow the importation, sale, or possession of alcohol. Damp villages allow importation and possession of alcohol, but do not allow the sale of it. Wet villages allow the importation, sale, and possession of alcohol. Below is a map from the Justice Center (2005) in Anchorage, Alaska displaying alcohol controls in Alaska Native villages between 1991 – 2000:



**Figure 2**  
Alaska Native villages by alcohol control policy type, 1991–2000

As you can see from the map, only the hub villages of Kotzebue and Barrow in the Northwest Arctic Borough and North Slope are wet. Since this map is dated (as is most data on alcohol in rural Alaska), only one village in the Northwest Arctic Borough, Kiana, has changed from ‘dry’ to ‘damp.’ Many villages continue to vote annually or every few years to amend the alcohol the laws, but every time the voters continue to vote dry.

## ALASKA NOW: GEOGRAPHY

Alaska is known for its immaculate landscape and vast terrain. The mountain tops are high, the valleys deep, and glaciers can still be seen (and hiked to) from the road today. This is the Alaska people in the ‘Lower 48,’ the term often used by Alaskans to describe people living in the continental United States, think of when they picture Alaska in their minds. If you live in Alaska, or are from Alaska, then you think of a place completely different. When asked, many Alaskans will tell you there are two different Alaska’s: ‘off the road system’ and ‘on the road system.’ Typically called ‘bush’ or rural Alaska, ‘off the road system’ is where most Alaskan Native villages are located. There are some villages scattered along the road system, and a few that are on the road system during the winter and off the road system during the summer.

Villages ‘off the road system’ are almost completely isolated from one another, and are only accessible by airplane, snowmachine in the wintertime, and boat in the summer time. Some of the larger villages located ‘off the road system’ in rural Alaska are Nome, Barrow, and Bethel. Meaning just the opposite, village, towns, and cities ‘on the road system’ are connected by roads. Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks are all cities considered to be ‘on the road system.’

There are no counties in Alaska, and the state is broken up into six different boroughs. Each region has its own borough that manages the land (Jaeger, 2004). Each borough off the road system has one main ‘hub’ village with smaller villages surrounding it. Hub villages range in population from over 1,000 to almost 6,000 people, while the surrounding villages have anywhere from under 100 people to almost 1,000. Alaska Airlines, the only major air carrier to service the state of Alaska, flies directly into hub villages. From there, to get to a smaller village, you must take another airplane serviced by an independent company for that region. Villages

fully rely on these airplanes to provide their mail service, items for the store, and to take people in and out of the village.

These villages are home to many distinct cultures throughout the state. The term Alaska Native is used to describe all people who are indigenous to the state of Alaska, since the indigenous population is comprised of three different cultures: Eskimos, Aleuts, and Indians (MacBeath & Morehouse, 1994). Below you will find a culture map of Alaska from the Alaska Native Heritage Museum (2011) displaying the indigenous people and languages of Alaska:



The largest Native group in Alaska is the Alaska Eskimos, and they live in the coastal and interior villages. As you can see from the map, the Inupiat Eskimos live in the North Slope and Northwest regions of the state, while the Yupik Eskimos live along western Alaska and in parts of the interior. The Aleuts are originally from the Aleutian Chain, but now live in villages all throughout west, southwest, and southcentral Alaska. Indians, including the Athabaskan, Tlingits, Haida, and Tsimshian, live throughout the interior and in southeastern Alaska. The

geography is as diverse as each culture, and completely different from the Lower 48, making it a challenge for many teachers new to teaching in rural Alaska.

## PREPARING NON-NATIVE TEACHERS TO TEACH IN RURAL ALASKA

While most people will agree that the most effective teachers in rural Alaska would be trained Alaska Native teachers teaching in their region, the reality is that most teachers in rural Alaska are non-Native. Many teachers come to rural Alaska for a ‘great adventure’ or ‘the experience of a lifetime.’ What they quickly realize is life and teaching in rural Alaska, while adventurous, is not often what they had in mind. Tumultuous weather, demanding hours and responsibilities, and isolation lead to high turnover rates throughout rural Alaska. When researching studies done on how to best prepare non-Native teachers to teach in rural Alaska, I found the research to be broad and outdated (before 2000). Most of the research focused on why teachers came and left school districts from all over Alaska and did not differentiate between rural and urban school districts. Other research discussed the programs available within Alaska that focus on preparing teachers to teach in rural Alaska. Noordhoff and Kleinfeld (1991) did a case study stressing the importance of creating multicultural classrooms in rural Alaska, but this study mainly focuses on how to enhance the curriculum of the Teachers for Alaska program. Kleinfeld and others (1983) also did a study on the types of teachers that could be most effective teaching in rural Alaska, but this study does not focus on how to prepare teachers to teach effectively in rural Alaska. I could find no research or data specifically addressing rural Alaska teacher retention, why teachers choose to stay or leave in rural Alaska, and how to best prepare incoming non-Native teachers to be effective teachers in rural Alaska from the first day of the school year. One thing is clear though, being non-Native and teaching in rural Alaska, you must

be ready and able to teach everyone in your classroom – including students who may be affected by alcohol related disorders.

## FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME AND FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS: ALASKA

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services reports that Alaska has one of the highest rates of children diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in the country (Rorem, 2007). Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) are the result of exposure to alcohol on a fetus while inside the mother’s womb. Alcohol in the womb affects how the baby’s body develops and can cause the child to suffer from both physical and cognitive deficits (Bertrand, Floyd, & Weber, 2005). There is no cure for FAS; these deficiencies last a lifetime. Even though it is 100% preventable, it is the cause of the highest number of birth defects and developmental disorders in the United States (Warren, Hewitt, & Thomas, 2011). It has now surpassed the number of autism cases and Down syndrome cases reported each year (Paton & Croom, 2010).

Large numbers of cases go unreported, so studies vary in the number of children affected. Some studies show that the number FAS reported in the United States falls between .5 and 2.0 per 1,000 births (Paton & Croom, 2010). Other studies report between 0.5 to 7.0 per 1,000 children are born with FAS in the United States (Warren, Hewitt, & Thomas, 2011). Some researchers believe FAS combined with Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD) is at an astonishing one percent of all births, or 10 per 1,000 births (Jacquier, Kleinfeld, & Gilliam, 2010). In Alaska, recent studies also found that 140 children out of 10,000 were also born with FASD (Rorem, 2007).

Ric Iannolino, the clinical team coordinator for a FAS clinic in Juneau, said that, “An average of 126 children are diagnosed with alcohol-related brain damage in Alaska per year”

(Iannolino & Muench, 2004). According to Dr. George Brown of Glacier Pediatrics in Juneau, many of the children exposed to alcohol while in the womb in Alaska are born from poor Native families with alcoholic mothers (Rorem, 2007). Within the Alaska Native American Indian population, estimates range from 2.9 to 9.8 per 1,000 births of children born affected by FAS/ARBD (Jacquier, Kleinfield, & Gillain, 2010).

While unsure of the exact reasons of such differences in numbers between the Native American rate and general population rate, researchers have numerous theories. One factor may be how ethanol is broken down in various racial group systems. (Jacquier, Kleinfield, & Gillian, 2010). There are studies that show alcohol breaks down in the body differently in indigenous cultures who have been more recently exposed to wheat, but this theory has been widely disputed. Another factor could be that indigenous populations in the United States tend to live together in more isolated parts of the country, making them more identifiable (Jacquier, Kleinfield, & Gillian, 2010). As noted in the history of Alaska section, Native Alaskans also have a background of binge drinking, and this too could lead to an increase of FASD.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a clear understanding of how widespread alcohol addiction in Alaska Native villages in rural Alaska is affecting all community members' lives. All research gathered for this study was examined through the social justice theoretical foundation based on Adams, Bell, and Griffins' (1997) definition which defines social justice as, "the goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure." The case study approach was used to gather data for this study. By using structured interviews,

personal observation, and extensive research, I was able to gain multiple perspectives on how alcohol addiction is affecting village life. All of the data collected was gathered while living in the Iñupiaq Eskimo villages of Selawik, Alaska and Point Hope, Alaska.

As previously noted, I have spent the past three years living and working in two Native Alaskan villages ‘off the road system’ in Northwest Alaska. Both of my villages are located above the Arctic Circle and are home to the Iñupiaq Eskimos. Selawik, located 90 miles inland on the Selawik River just above the Arctic Circle, is known for its rich traditions, Rainbow Bridge, and lack of roads. There are no cars or trucks in Selawik; the entire town is connected through boardwalks and two bridges. Point Hope, located 200 miles above the Arctic Circle on the coast, is one of the oldest established settlements in North America. Its history is rich in whaling, a subsistence living technique still practiced today. Both of these villages have presented me with new opportunities, new challenges, new adventures, and new learnings.

The first two years spent teaching third grade in Selawik at Davis-Ramoth School provided great insight into just how rich and incredible the Iñupiaq culture truly is. Grounded in 11 values, the elders in each village struggle to ensure the children and Iñupiaq people stay true to each one. These values range from ‘Respect Your Elders’ to ‘Hunting Traditions,’ and are instilled in every Iñupiaq Eskimo from a very young age. The values are talked about each day in school, and they provide the foundation for many lessons taught everyday in the classroom.

Selawik also provided me with insight to just how tough living in the village can be. Almost completely isolated from the outside world, alcoholism is a very common and very real problem in Selawik and throughout many villages, including Point Hope. Many villages throughout Alaska, including Selawik and Point Hope, have designated themselves as ‘dry,’ so it

is illegal to import and sell alcohol within the village. Bootlegging is a problem, and a 750mL plastic bottle of alcohol will typically cost you anywhere from \$200 - \$300.

I also conducted four one-on-one, in-depth interviews. Three of the participants live in the Iñupiaq Eskimo village of Point Hope and the other lives in Selawik. All of the interviews took place at Tikigaq School in Point Hope. To gain as much knowledge as possible on each of the interviewees perceptions of how alcohol is affecting village life in rural Alaska, the four participants interviewed all had very different backgrounds and roles throughout the village. Two of the participants, one female and one male, were Iñupiaq Eskimo, and the other two were white females. Their ages ranged from early 30s to late 60s. All participants had lived in rural Alaska for over 20 years of their life. One participant is a teacher, one participant is a school administrator, one participant is a teacher aide, and one participant is a respected member of the community.

Each interview varied from 45 minutes to an hour and a half in length. The questions were mainly open ended and provided the interviewee with the opportunity to really explore and engage in their response (See Appendix A, B). The first series of questions were more general, focusing on understanding how the interviewee perceives life in a village in rural Alaska. The second series of questions examine the role alcohol plays in a village. The final interview questions are more specific to preparing non-native teachers to teach in rural Alaska. Each of the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and by typing detailed notes on the computer. The participant was later given a copy of all of their responses, asked to look over it, and elaborate or clarify any responses if needed.

After each of the interviews, the data was transcribed. It was then line coded. After all of the data was coded, it was grouped into other codes similar to the heading, helping distinguish



the reoccurring themes throughout the data. I took these themes, analyzed them, and created the findings.

The data was analyzed by comparing and contrasting individual responses with my personal experiences and the previous literature read. I reviewed all of the responses given by individuals to see how they are alike and different. I also evaluated how the findings related to the literature reviewed for this study. By choosing to not only compare but also contrast the different perspectives in the study, it provided me with a stronger understanding of the data, strengthening my findings.

### Limitations

This study included several limitations. The most apparent one is the limited geographical location. All of the research was conducted in two villages in the Northwest region of the state. All of the interviews were conducted in rural Eskimo village of Point Hope, Alaska. Both of the Native Alaskans interviewed were Iñupiaq Eskimo, and the researcher's personal interactions and observations were mostly with Iñupiaq Eskimos. Another limitation was the small sample size. Due to the time frame and everyone's commitment to other projects, finding people to interview was difficult. During the whaling season in Point Hope the commitment to subsistence living consumes a lot of time and manpower. In Selawik, spring is from March to June, and people are fishing and hunting for subsistence as well.

Also, some people in Point Hope were hesitant to participate due to the limited area population and confidentiality. Both Point Hope and Selawik are villages where everyone knows everyone, making confidentiality an issue. Also, since the researcher is a Caucasian teacher and new to the village of Point Hope, this could have persuaded the interviewee to answer questions focused more towards what the researcher wants to hear as opposed to how they personally felt.

## **FINDINGS**

### **VILLAGE LIFE**

Alaska Native villages strive to keep their Native culture alive and rich, but Western influences continue to affect their way of life. Very rarely does one see dog sled teams mushing through the tundra, snowmachines and four wheelers are now the common mode of transportation throughout the village and beyond. Subsistence is more of a hobby than a necessary means, and a diet rich in protein and berries is being replaced with processed foods and sugar. English is now the first language spoken in most villages, and for many, alcohol is the drink of choice – if and when – people can afford it.

#### *Differences between life in a village and life on the road system*

The most obvious differences between life in a rural Alaska village and life on the road system are the isolation and the lack of things to do. Rural Alaska is inaccessible by roads; you cannot drive to the villages located throughout it. Cars and trucks (if the village has roads), snowmachines, four wheelers, and boats are the common mode of transportation within the village. People rely on airplanes to take them in and out of the village. Airplanes also bring everything to them, so the United States Postal Service plays a key role to survival in the village.

There are no movie theatres, skating rinks, bowling alleys, salons, or bars, and restaurants are only found in a few select villages. As one interviewee put it, “It is just different – just obvious stuff. Colder, smaller, less things to do. We’re above the Arctic Circle in a village less than 1,000 people that you can’t drive to. Extracurricular activities are at a minimal except for hunting animals like seals, whales, and caribou.” Being so isolated from mainstream America often means that when people go to the city, they appreciate it. They do all of the things people in mainstream America take for granted.

Another difference between life in a village and life on the road system, mentioned by three participants, was how Native villages are often dry, so importation and selling of alcohol is illegal. Within Alaska, each village has the right to vote on if it would like to be wet, damp, or dry. Both Point Hope and Selawik have elected to be dry villages, but alcohol is easily accessible. Unlike the road system, bootlegging is common in the village.

### *Choose to live in village setting*

There are many reasons why people choose to live in a village setting. Each person interviewed commented on how for most people in villages throughout rural Alaska, this is the place where they were born and raised. This is where their family is from and has lived for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Families here are large and the family bonds are close. It is typical for a person to have five or more siblings, 30 plus first cousins, and even more second cousins all living in the same village. This does make the dating scene tricky, but family backgrounds and connections are learned at a very young age. One person noted that it is common to have four generations living in one house from one family. Elders typically move back in with their grown children, so it is not uncommon for a great grandmother, great grandfather and great grandchild to be living in the same house.

Also mentioned was how life in a village is much more intimate compared to life on the road system. Non-hub villages range in size from 50 – 1,000 people, so everyone knows everyone. One interviewee said, “We’re closer, we’re more connected, so you can see the good things and the bad things up close. It’s really hard to keep things secret.”

Participants also felt the arctic is one of the few places where you can still survive from a subsistence lifestyle. As one participant noted, “We can go out and get fish, caribou – I don’t need a lot else. We went out once this year and we get close to 200 fish, but then we give lots of

it away – to elders who don't have snowmachines and are too old to get out and do stuff.” Many people choose not to leave because they enjoy being able to hunt and fish throughout the year.

### *Positive aspects of village life*

Relationships are a fundamental value in Iñupiaq culture, and this is evident throughout the village. In a village – now and traditionally – relationships are the foundation for everything. Names connect people, allowing them to create artificial relationships with one another. If an elder you are related to dies and you are pregnant, you are expected to name your child after that elder. In Selawik, I met my first three year old named Bertha, a name commonly associated with older women. It is common to hear people calling each other *autuk* and *ooma*, names people who have the same name call each other. These relationships help create the bonds so vital to helping make everyone feel connected to one another. As one participant put it, “no one gets a whale without working together.”

All four interviewees discussed how family bonds are close, and how everyone knows everyone in the village. When asked about living in a village, each interviewee talked about how you are destined to know everyone, and everyone fits in somewhere. There's a sense of belonging and people know that if you are need, someone will be there to help you. As one interviewee put it, “In a way, it's nice knowing everybody, saying hi to everyone when you pass them. In the Lower 48 – you can't do that in the Lower 48.”

Participants also mentioned how life in the village is comparable to life in a small town. The pace of life is much slower and there's no congestion. You never have to sit in traffic and can walk everywhere. One participant said, “I grew up here and don't really know much about the city... I don't like to drive that much. I can drive for summers and do fun things, but if I had to drive to work everyday, I probably wouldn't enjoy it.”

Participants also talked about the importance of traditions, community pride, and how easy people are to get a hold of. Two interviewees mentioned how within the village, there's a strong sense of traditions and community, and a commitment to the community. Traditions from long ago are still celebrated, and these celebrations are festive and exciting. Three interviewees talked about how easy it is to get a hold of people in the village. Even though most people have cellular telephones, village members still communicate with each other through the VHF (Very High Frequency radio), and doors are always open.

#### *Negative aspects of village life*

Each participant discussed the high cost of living in village. Simply put, living in a village is expensive. Everything is shipped into and out of the village by airplanes, and this is very expensive. The price of food and gas is high, and villages typically have one store that is stocked with essentials. The cost for shopping at the store is high. A gallon of milk costs almost \$8.00, while 'luxury' items like frozen pizza and ice cream can run as high as \$15.00 or more. Fresh fruit and vegetables are rare in most village stores; and when they do arrive, they are often bruised and battered from the long journey. In Point Hope, a red bell pepper costs around \$6.00 and a bunch of broccoli costs almost \$10.00. The high costs of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with the lack of accessibility at all times of the year, makes eating healthy challenging.

In order to travel from village to village or village to on the road system, you must fly. Since getting to and from rural Alaska is expensive, many people who leave rarely come back and are unable to pursue a subsistence lifestyle. One interviewee, while commenting on how expensive rural Alaska is said, "It's causing a big problem in the breakdown of our villages because people can't come back. They realize they can't make it back for whaling – they can't make it back for their culture."

This is evident when looking at the cost of a plane ticket to rural Alaska. When flying to a village and not a hub city, you must pay airfare to the hub village and then to your village. A roundtrip ticket from Anchorage to Kotzebue ranges in fare from \$400 - \$750. Once in Kotzebue, a ticket to your village will range from \$250 - \$500 roundtrip. A roundtrip ticket from Point Hope to Kotzebue, which is an hour flight, just increased in April of 2012 from \$452 to \$512. This means the total roundtrip cost to get from Anchorage to a rural village outside of Kotzebue can range from \$650 - \$1250 depending on the time of year and the time frame of when the ticket was bought. There are very few places in America where it costs \$700 per person to get somewhere roundtrip flying coach – especially to a place a little over 1,000 miles away. For a family of 5, it can cost as much as \$5,000 to simply get to and from Anchorage. This is evident racial discrimination against the people living in Alaska Native villages, and it makes returning home to the village for cultural events and holidays nearly impossible for Natives who choose to live elsewhere.

Each participant also said that in a small village setting, gossip is a key problem. They often felt there is very little to no privacy. Living in a place where you see the same people everyday means, according to one interviewee, “Everybody has to know, and everybody wants to know your business.” Participants also mentioned the limited outdoor activities available, extracurricular things, weather, and drug and alcohol abuse as negative aspects of living in a village.

## ALCOHOL IN THE VILLAGE

### *Alcohol Consumption is a Problem*

All participants agreed that alcohol consumption within his or her village is a problem. It is not unusual to hear screams, shouts, or fighting outside at 3am on a Tuesday. Every person

talked about how excessive drinking affects not only the person drinking, but all of their family members and their children as well. One interviewee noted how drunks are out at all times of the day and said, “It’s really frustrating to hear people talking about and swearing when kids are out enjoying their weekend.”

Since it is illegal, bootlegging is common and a 750mL plastic bottle of Rich and Rare Whiskey (R&R) or Monarch Vodka typically sells for \$250.00. A trash bag of homebrew – an alcoholic beverage made from sugar, yeast, water, and a sugary juice concentrate – sells for \$50.00 a trashbag. It is not uncommon for people to go through 3-4 bottles of hard alcohol during one drinking session. The high costs people are willing to pay for alcohol mean less money to spend on heating oil, gas, and their children.

One participant discussed how excessive alcohol consumption is a problem not just in Point Hope, but in many rural villages throughout the state. She thinks this could be in part due to the village ban of alcohol. While she believes the village’s intentions were good when deciding to ban alcohol, she feels it could play a “headgame” with people since it takes away their personal responsibility of deciding if they want to drink or not. She believes that when people get a bottle, they feel they must drink it right at that moment. This mentality perpetuates binge drinking and often ends with bad decisions. Two other participants noted how there is no social drinking here, mostly binge drinking, with one saying, “The culture here is to drink until the bottle is gone and there is someone bawling or fighting. This type of binge drinking has led to numerous accidental injuries and untimely deaths.” Another participant said, “They can drink anytime of the day for days – binge. It be hard to get, so they just drink whenever they can get it – guzzle it like fish... Some people drink for days – I don’t think anybody could just drink for a night anymore in the village.”

Another participant noted how many people believe alcohol addiction is a disease and said, “Because Native people have only been introduced to alcohol for 100 years, if you believe alcohol is a disease, it’s going to affect them harder than people who have been around it for thousands of years.” Another participant discussed how it is only a problem for some people, but unfortunately, the people who cannot handle their alcohol are the people you hear about. You never hear about the responsible drinkers.

#### *Why people still choose to drink alcohol, even though it is illegal*

Participants believe people still choose to drink for various reasons. Living in an isolated village in the arctic can be hard at times, and alcohol provides an escape from the monotony of this life. One participant believes it is human nature to want to experience something different from your normal life – and alcohol provides people with the opportunity to do just that. When people’s inhibitions are changed, their life may seem slightly more tolerable. One participant discussed how drinking also gives people something to do in a place where you have to be inside most of the year.

Another participant talked about how the changing culture affects traditional gender roles throughout the village. Young males, traditionally seen as the providers within the village for their hunting and fishing skills, no longer have a place in village society. In villages today, women are typically the breadwinners. Young men and males seem to have lost a sense of self-esteem and self worth, causing a sense of displacement and a rise in drinking.

#### *How alcohol addiction affects the children in a village*

All participants agreed that when an adult chooses to drink, their actions also affect their children. Children are exposed to alcohol and the behaviors associated with it at a very young age, at times even while in the womb. Three participants noted how undiagnosed Fetal Alcohol



Syndrome is affecting the children in their village. One participant said, “I don’t know how they always diagnose kids, but I know some children must have it.”

Houses in a village are small and often crowded. Three participants discussed how school attendance is the main problem in many rural village schools. When parents are drinking all night, children stay awake throughout the night and sleep into the day. Since the parents are either still drinking into the morning or passed out, no one wakes them up and gets them ready for school. If they do wake up for school, they often come to school late, tired, and hungry. With high stakes testing and pressure from the state for schools to succeed, unreasonable burdens are being placed on the teachers to teach children who are not coming to school ready to learn. Meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) according to the No Child Left Behind Act is becoming more and more difficult because of many factors, including attendance, as the years progress and the stakes for meeting it are increased.

Another growing problem throughout the village is the notion of ‘kids raising kids.’ Two participants discussed how this is becoming an increased problem throughout their village due to alcohol. One participant noted, “Kids raising kids because their parents are drunk. People can drink anytime of the day, it doesn’t matter what time of day it is. Whenever they get their hands on a bottle, they drink.” This means that while parents are drunk, the children are left to fend for themselves. Inadequate diets and poor dental hygiene is rampant throughout Native villages.

Two interviewees discussed the high costs incarceration is having on the children in the village. Many parents go in and out of jail throughout their children’s lives from decisions they made while intoxicated, never realizing how this affects their children. An interviewee told a story about how their student’s dad went to jail. The students showed up to school upset, worried, and distraught. The teacher went on a home visit later that day to their house and found

the mother had been drinking for two days straight. The children were falling behind in reading, and now they have a father in jail and an intoxicated mother.

High rates of sexual abuse and domestic violence are also reported in Native Villages. When I first arrived in Selawik, I learned that one of my students had been sexually abused by her older half brother while he was intoxicated. He was sent away to a group home for a year. After his time was complete, he was sent back to stay in the house where she was living. Everyday she woke up and faced the brother that had sexually abused her due to lack of other places for him to go. Another person told a similar story and later said, “There is a lot of sexual abuse. I think it might be because we know everyone, and in places like Fairbanks you don’t know your 800 neighbors. I know the whole village here and I know there’s a lot of it going on.”

Also, as noted earlier, buying alcohol in the village is extremely expensive, and the money spent on alcohol is money that could be spent bettering the lives of their children. Each interviewee discussed the high costs of alcohol and how it takes away money that should be spent on raising their children – providing warm clothes, healthy meals, and warm shelters. One participant noted how they felt parents often can find money to buy a bottle of alcohol, but find themselves borrowing money for stove oil (oil used to heat the house). Since it is illegal to drink and bootlegging occurs throughout the village, it is often the children that must suffer from the high costs and decisions made while intoxicated. As one interviewee put it, “Drinking makes families so dysfunctional, and kids just think this is normal behavior.”

## PREPARING NON-NATIVE TEACHERS TO TEACH EFFECTIVELY IN RURAL ALASKA

### *Obstacles non-native teachers face*

I remember stepping off the plane in Kotzebue, Alaska. I had just flown over 3,000 miles across the country and slept on a bench in the Anchorage airport. It was August, and the chill in

the air felt as the wind swept by made it clear I was no longer in 100 degree temperatures. There were no trees, there were no shopping malls, there wasn't even a McDonald's, and the ground was dusty and broken. The houses seemed small, the village seemed small, the grocery store even seemed small. And I wasn't even home yet. I got on the plane and flew to my new home, Selawik.

When asking participants about the obstacles non-native teachers faced when traveling to here to teach, the same experience I shared was mentioned time and time again. Teachers are normally from far away. They are far from friends and family – their personal support groups. People often don't realize how much they rely on entertainment. As one participant said, "They are strangers in a strand land. Everything is different... some people have a really hard time with that. People that are really hooked into 21<sup>st</sup> century America – malls, clubs, bars on Saturday night – they find it hard because none of that stuff is available to them." Another participant said, "A lot of times they do not know a lot about the culture they are going to teach in – a lot are used to going out to eat all the time."

Three participants also mentioned the differences when working in a different culture. Iñupiaq culture has a different set of values than the culture of white America, including when it comes to Western education. One interviewee noted how crucial it is for teachers to remember the concept of school is still relatively new to the Iñupiaq culture. The participant said, "School is still so new. If education got introduced 500 years ago, I'm pretty sure we would be a lot better at it. Fifty or sixty years ago was when education was introduced to the Iñupiaq people." Western schooling is not a traditional value within Iñupiaq culture, and therefore the expectations and discipline levels of kids within a school setting are often lower than the ones in the Lower 48. The same interviewee stated, "You can get by here in the village with just a high school

education – it’s not really even that necessary. You could get by here without even knowing how to read... If it was more necessary here, then parents would be more invested.” Parents want their children to be successful, but in Iñupiaq culture, success is not always defined by a report card and how well your child is doing in school.

Another difficulty faced to teachers coming to teach in a village is being treated as an ‘outsider.’ One interviewee said, “The fact is they are going into a close-knit community and most teacher’s that come here aren’t seen as people, but are branded as “teachers”... They’re not from here so they are seen as teachers from out of town – no one’s cousins, uncles, brothers... just people from out of town that come to teach their kids.” Two interviewees mentioned this concept and when asked why, both felt the high teacher turnover rate could be a factor. One participant said, “They come into a village that sees teachers come and go and don’t seem to want to accept them.” Many teachers come to a village, stay for nine months or two years, and leave the village – never to be seen or heard from again.

#### *Preparing non-native teachers to teach in rural Alaska*

When this question was asked, each participant had a very different idea of how to best prepare non-native teachers for classroom success in rural Alaska. While one participant was unsure of how to better prepare non-native teachers to teach in rural Alaska saying, “I think it basically comes down to the type of person you are,” others had very clear ideas. One participant felt providing a teacher mentor for new teachers that lives in the village would be effective. The mentor would be able to answer any questions asked by the incoming teacher while providing insight into the culture, village life, and the school.

Another idea mentioned was to have a quality cultural in-service for incoming teachers provided by the school district. This in-service would not only focus on classroom curriculum,

but also classroom management skills and learning the local culture. One participant noted how in the Kashunamiut district, incoming teachers go camping for a week to learn the culture. Survival skills and learning the Iñupiaq way of life is crucial for gaining better understanding of the values that provide the foundation for the Iñupiaq culture.

There was also the suggestion to bring the potential incoming teachers to the village over the summer. This would ensure the incoming teachers are ready to make a commitment to the village and to this way of life. Lake and Penn, a school district located on the Alaskan Peninsula, is having success with this approach.

Another interviewee believes the best preparation for an incoming teacher is to be mentally prepared and understand that not everything is going to work out exactly the way they want it to. Life in the village is different, and at times very hard with the harsh weather, long work hours, and demanding students. The participant put it best by saying, “The kids aren’t going to be the best, the parents aren’t going to be the best, the weather’s not going to be the best; so you give it your best and go home at the end of the night knowing you’ve done just that.”

## **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

By comparing and contrasting individual responses and reactions during the interviews, it became clear that while participants appreciate the comforts and security the village provides, alcohol abuse and addiction is a problem in the village and its abuse affects all members of the community. All participants talked about how alcohol is having a negative impact in their community and how this impact is affecting everyone throughout it – from the youngest child to the oldest elder. Every participant commented on how expensive drinking is in their village, how binge drinking is a clear problem, and how people who choose to drink often should be spending

their money on more necessary things like heating their home and providing food and clothing for their children. Each person shared stories about how people they knew, loved, and cared for were struggling with addictions to alcohol and the impact it has had on their own personal life.

Even with the problems and stress alcohol creates within each village, each participant commented on the more simple and slower pace life in the village provides. While many mentioned how gossip and lack of privacy is an issue, they also appreciated how everyone has a place in a village. There is a sort of intimacy, community pride, and longstanding traditions and culture that keep them here year after year.

Each participant also discussed how it seems no one in the village drinks socially; it almost always turns into binge drinking. While everyone agreed this is a problem, when contrasting responses, it was clear participants did not agree on why people in the village chose to drink. One person commented on how it is human nature to want to experience something different from everyday life, while another felt it was attributed to young men in the village losing their identity within the culture. Others simply felt people drank because they think it is fun, and it gives them something to do.

Further exploration of contrasting participants opinions showed participants also differed in their thoughts of how to prepare incoming non-Native teachers new to rural Alaska. Everyone agreed that many come to Alaska unfamiliar with the culture and the high teacher turnover rates throughout villages makes the Native people less accepting of the incoming teachers, which are both clear problems. Participants had differing opinions of how to address these problems. One felt providing a new hire with a mentor who lives in the village and creating a quality cultural inservice would alleviate the stress and unknown felt by incoming teachers, while another felt visiting reservations in the Lower 48 would provide a better idea of what to expect. Others said

you cannot really be prepared, you just have to be open and ready to tackle any challenge that may come your way.

Comparing participant responses to literature reviewed for the research, I saw similarities between my study and how the history of drinking in Alaska has not changed. Just as they did when the Russians and Europeans brought alcohol to the Natives in the 1700 and 1800s, people still binge drink and make poor decisions with their money. Participants also shared the same stories of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse between village members while drinking,

The history of alcohol laws in Alaska chart demonstrates a constant struggle with alcohol in rural Alaska throughout the years, showing that alcohol addiction in the village is not a new problem. Alcohol abuse and addiction has been around since alcohol was introduced to this culture. Even though it is clear alcohol addiction is rooted from Western explorers introducing alcohol to Alaska Natives, the United States government refuses to accept responsibility for this issue and does little to provide services to alleviate this problem to Alaska Natives throughout rural Alaska.

My content analysis of comparing and contrasting participant responses and literature demonstrated that all participants believed alcohol addiction is affecting their village and causing damaging results. Furthermore, participants felt it is a problem that needs to be addressed so all members of the community can be more active and engaged. By addressing the alcohol addiction problem within the village setting, all members will be able to live a happier, healthier, and less stressful life.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The alcohol abuse and addiction must be addressed because it is one factor keeping villages from being a socially just community. The alcohol abuse and addiction is not allowing

all community members to live in village where everyone feels physically and psychologically safe and secure. It is clear participants feel strongly that alcohol abuse is a problem in their village, but it is not something typically discussed in such a formal setting. I did not feel finding people to interview would be as difficult as it was because alcohol abuse is discussed regularly in the casual setting. It is common for students to walk into the classroom saying they are tired because their parents kept them up all night partying, teacher aides pulling teachers aside to tell them they saw a student's family member the night before intoxicated, or small talk among teachers discussing the events unfolding outside of their house the previous night. Yet, when asked to sit down and reflect on how alcohol affects each person's own life, many people hesitated or did not want to participate at all. The answers from the white participants were much more detailed than the answers given from the Native participants. This could be due to a hesitancy to talk about family members and friends, or it could be a cultural difference. At times it was transparent that the person being interviewed was clearly uncomfortable discussing the issue, which needs to happen in order for the village to come together and address this issue.

As a teacher, I am able to see how alcohol abuse and alcohol addiction affects my students' lives. Many come in exhausted and not ready to learn complaining from lack of sleep because their parents were partying all night. Some come in hungry because the last meal they ate was at school the morning before. Others show signs of learning difficulties in the classroom often associated with FASDs. All of these factors keep children from learning and being their best self, which often leads to low test scores and falling behind according to No Child Left Behind standards, providing additional unwanted and unneeded stress on teachers. As a friend, I see the devastation that alcohol abuse and alcohol addiction has had on many of my friends' relationships. Many of my friends accept the emotional or physical abuse that ensues when their



loved ones drink. Loved ones are hurt, houses get damaged, and things go missing. And as a village community member, I see a place slowly slipping further and further away from their culture. I see parents spending a lot of money they do not have on a bottle of alcohol they do not need. I see parents too hungover to teach their children how to hunt. I see children staying home to play video games as opposed to going out whaling and fishing. So, as a village member, I am concerned about the future of a place I care about filled with people and a culture I have grown to love.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study provided insight into how alcohol addiction in two villages in Northwest Alaska is affecting all village community members. Participants consistently commented on how alcohol abuse is problem in their village, even though the village has voted to remain dry. The high price of a bottle of alcohol and the pressure to binge drink not only affects the adults drinking, but their children as well. A study to further examine how the alcohol abuse among adults is impacting their children and their families could benefit villages throughout rural Alaska by giving people further insight as to how their actions are affecting everyone.

This study also sought to hear people's ideas on how to prepare incoming non-Native teachers how to teach effectively in the arctic. Not only do incoming teachers have to be prepared and ready to deal with alcohol related issues in their classroom on a regular basis, but they must learn how to live and teach in a culture different from their personal Western principals and values. The learning curve is great, and there needs to be a study done on how to prepare incoming teachers to be prepared and successful in their classrooms from the start of the school year – not half way through it.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a student at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont. I am writing a capstone paper on how alcohol addiction is affecting village life throughout rural Alaska, and I am asking you to participate in research for this project.

I am interested in learning about your perceptions of alcohol abuse in the village where you live. No individual person will be the focus of this research.

Your participation will entail one interview lasting about thirty minutes in a mutually agreed upon location of your convenience. You will be given the interview questions before the actual interview begins so that you may complete demographic information of your choosing and gain preliminary insight into what will be discussed. For the purpose of accurately recording data, I would like to audio-record the interviews **only** if you feel comfortable with this procedure. If you choose that I do not audio-record the interviews I will take notes on the topics discussed.

I will bring you a copy of my notes once typed up or the transcripts if the interview is audio-recorded for your review and to afford you the opportunity to verify the information you provide me. I request that you read the information and feel at liberty to add, delete, or change any part as necessary and return the document to me. I will use the information that you verify as accurate in my report.

I will not release notes/transcripts/audio-tapes to any other person other than amongst the two of us. To ensure confidentiality, I will shred the documents and (erase audio-tapes) on the last day of the semester.

I will protect the identities of participants through the use of pseudonyms in this and any future publications or presentations. If you are interested, you may choose your own pseudonym. Participants should understand that they may be quoted directly but that their names will not be used in any part of the report. All data will be stored in a secure location and transcripts will be destroyed on the last day of the semester. Please understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice.

I appreciate your willingness to give your time to this project and to help me learn more about your perspective of alcohol addiction and abuse in rural Alaska. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me any time at 907-280-9722 or casillo.cristina@gmail.com.

Thank you,

Ms. Cristina Casillo

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I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

## APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer: “Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study on alcohol is affecting Native villages throughout rural Alaska. Your responses to the following interview questions will be used to help me gain more insight into alcohol addiction throughout villages and how it affects all people in them –especially the children. I will present my findings to the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, North Slope Borough School District, and SIT Graduate Institute faculty when the research is complete. Please complete the first four questions to your best ability and/or to your choosing. Then read over the interview questions and when you’re ready we will begin.”

1. If you would like to devise your own pseudonym, please write it below.  
(If you prefer to leave this portion blank, the researchers will assign you a random pseudonym)
  
2. Where are you from?
  
3. (If necessary) How long have you lived in rural Alaska?
  
4. Please highlight (make bold) your age range.  
*under 19   20-25   26-30   31-35   36-40   41-45   45-50   51-55   55-60   61-over*
  
5. How is life in the village different from life on the road system?
  
6. Why do you feel people choose to live in a village as opposed to life on the road system?
  
7. (If necessary) What are the positive aspects of life in a village?
  
8. (If necessary) What are the negative aspects of life in a village?

9. Do you feel drinking alcohol is a problem in your village? How?
10. Even though it is against the law to drink, why do you feel people still choose to drink?
11. How does drinking affect the children in your village?
12. What obstacles do non-native teachers face when preparing to teach in rural Alaska?
13. How could non-native teachers be better prepared to teach in rural Alaska?
14. What closing thoughts do you have on life in the arctic?

