Near-death experiences are profound and subjective emotional experiences which people report after having been close to death or in situations of intense physical or emotional danger. They are intense psychological events that often transform an individual’s life and beliefs.

NDEs have reported over 15 common features of an NDE. These include: a sense of being outside one’s physical body; intense emotions; encounters with deceased loved ones, spiritual beings and/or religious figures; a sense of oneness and interconnectedness; a profound sense of peace. The most commonly reported type is characterized by intense feelings of peace, joy and love, and an encounter with an unconditionally loving light.

According to the 2008 Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Alaska has been in the “top ten” states for suicides per capita since 1991. Alaskans are immersed in nature almost constantly, but many of the elements and animals are extremely dangerous. Given the kind of lifestyle that is a common aspect of Alaskan culture, I expect to find a high prevalence of persons who have had a near-death experience.

**Introduction**

“There is one common element in all near-death experiences: they transform the people who have them. In my twenty years of intense exposure to NDEs, I have yet to find one who hasn’t had a very deep and positive transformation as a result of his experience.”
--- Raymond A. Moody, M.D.

**Objectives**

The intent of this mixed-methods pilot study is to analyze qualitative and quantitative information gathered from members of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and affiliated community who have undergone a Near-Death Experience. The ultimate goal of this investigation is to catalogue the quantity and quality of NDEs in Alaska and to determine if there are common cognitive, behavioral, and/or affective changes found among this NDE population that is unique to Alaska. The goal of this pilot study is to determine the frequency in occurrence of NDEs among the UAF-affiliated community.

**Hypothesis**

The environment and lifestyle typical to Alaska contributes to a relatively large population of individuals who have undergone an NDE. There are common cognitive, behavioral, and/or affective changes unique to the Alaska population.

**Methods and Materials**

**Analysis and Data Management**

- When the participants responded, they were sent a 20 question screening survey via e-mail
- The interviews were held in a Psychology Department conference room in Gruening
- The survey content was composed of questions related to changes in beliefs and attitudes after the experience
- Research panel independently ranked interviews based on significance of changes, from most significant to least
- Data was stored in a secure location known only by the head researcher
- Participants were assigned identification numbers to protect confidentiality

**Participants**

- Recruitment took place through fliers distributed around campus, announcements within the psychology and sociology departments, a segment on KSUA
- Candidates were UAF affiliated community members who had undergone an NDE or Exceptional Life Experience
- Informed consent was given before surveys and interviews were carried out

**Interview Quotations:**

- “I’m not afraid of dying because of [the event]. It was so beautiful that I knew I was going to be all right. And I knew there was a God.”
- “I felt really happy, and really confident.”
- “I felt my purpose in life is really to help others.”
- “I felt like I’ve gotten a second chance.”
- “I’m not afraid of dying because of [the event]. It was so peaceful. It was like I was going back to a place where everything that was alive at one point gone.”
- “It was like floating on a cloud and I knew everything was all right. And I knew there was a God.”
- “It was the St. Pauli girls. Dozens of St. Pauli girls in their little blue dress with white aprons and holding buckets. They’re passing these buckets and building a fence with white bricks and red mortar. Somehow I knew that was blood.”
- “I feel like we go through life, task to task, caught up in trivial details, it’s easy to overlook that things exist.”
- “Through that I really gained a sense of familiarity with people, and more of a sense of unity.”

**Results**

- **Strongly Increased (SI), Increased (I), Not Changed (NC), Decreased (D), Strongly Decreased (SD)**

**Results Continued**

**Discussion**

The results found during this study are consistent with the findings of previous research regarding changes following Near-Death Experiences. There is a strong correlation (r=6.3) found between participants and the cognitive, behavioral, and affective changes that followed their experiences. Specifically, there is general agreement that their changes included a significant decrease in the fear of death, an increased sense of purpose in life, an increased concern for others, an increased appreciation for “the ordinary things” in life, an increase in reverence for all forms of life, and a strong increase in concern for spiritual matters.

**Limitations**

Some of the problems we ran into during the study included not having enough time to recruit the preferred amount of participants. The population size was limited, which made it difficult to gather data from a wider range of experiences. Most of the participants were college students, which may affect the responses found.

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**References**