

What will it take to change the world?

David Litts
Suicide Prevention Resource
Center
December 12, 2006

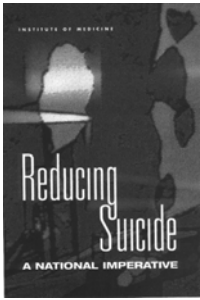
In the United States, the cultural values and norms, laws and regulations, and the healthcare and social services delivery systems are *designed* to produce 30,000 suicides each year.

Question:
How to change a system in equilibrium; how to change the world?

•Social factors and social integration of individuals exert a powerful influence over suicidal behavior...broad social forces account for the variation in suicide rates. *Suicide* 1897



Institute of Medicine Report - 2002



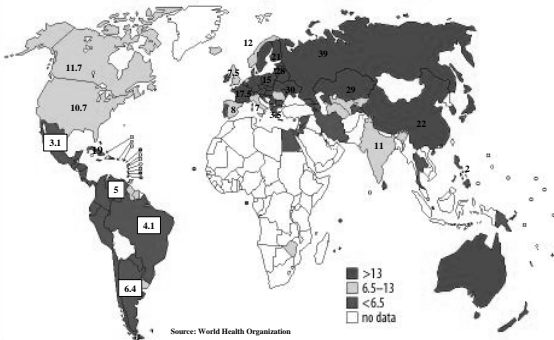
“A society’s perception of suicide and its cultural traditions can influence the suicide rate.” (p 204)

“Completed suicide occurs more often in those who are socially isolated and lack supportive family and friendships.” (p 200)

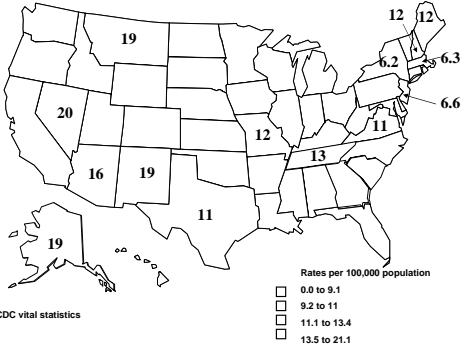
“...with one study suggesting that perceived social support may account for about half of the variance in suicide potential in youth.” (p 200)

Source: Goldsmith, SK, et al., Reducing Suicide: a national imperative. 2002.

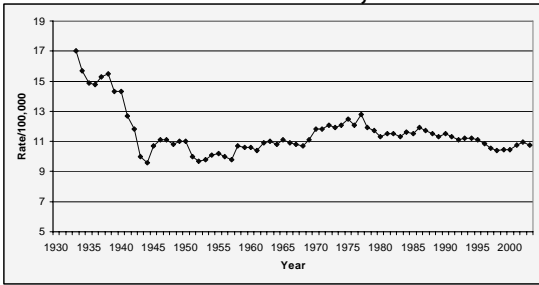
Map of suicide rates
(per 100 000; most recent year available as of March 2002)



Age-adjusted suicide rates among all persons by state – United States, 1999-2002



**Suicide Rates
United States, 1933-2003**



**Suicide Prevention
Myth:**

1. If we just do “X” it will make a big difference.

Suicide Prevention Myth:

1. If we just do “X” it will make a difference.

2. X = Finding the sick people and getting them into treatment

“We are on a treadmill to nowhere if all our efforts are directed at helping individual victims.....It is well-known public health doctrine that no mass disorder afflicting humankind has ever been eliminated or brought under control by treatment of affected individuals. Only successful efforts at primary prevention reduce the rate of distress in the future.”

-- George Albee

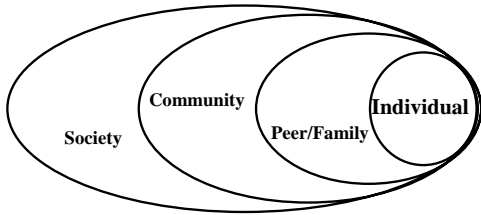
Albee, G. (1996). Editorial: Primary Prevention Means a Change in Business as Usual. J Nerv Ment Dis, 184(2).

“The work of suicide prevention must occur at the community level, where human relationships breathe life into public policy.”

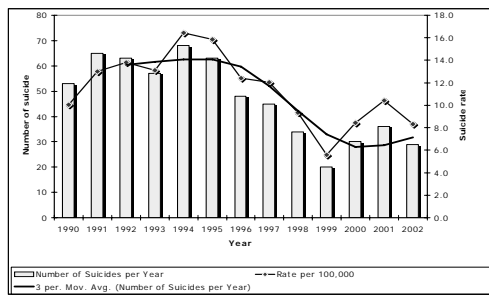


David Satcher, MD,
PhD
Sixteenth Surgeon
General

Understand the Ecology



Suicide Among Airmen



Knox, K, et al., Risk of Suicide and related adverse outcomes after exposure to a suicide programme in the US Air Force: cohort study. British Medical Journal, December 13, 2003.

“Addressing risk factors across the various levels of the ecological model may contribute to decreases in more than one type of violence.”

Violence - A global public health problem, World Health Organization, 2002, p. 15.

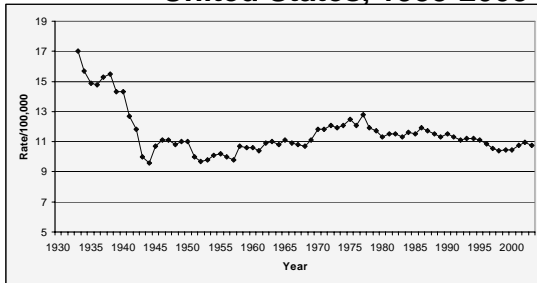
Do What Works

- Evidence-Base (effectiveness)
 - Achieves desired outcome
 - Multi-layered
 - Addresses risk *and* protective factors
 - “...focusing on protective factors such as emotional well-being and connectedness with family and friends was as effective or more effective than trying to reduce risk factors in the prevention of suicide.”

Borowsky IW, et al. Suicide attempts among American Indian and Alaska Native youth: risk and protective factors. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 1999, 153: 543-547.

Suicide Rates

United States, 1933-2003



Source: Natl. Center for Health Statistics; Rates prior to 1999 Age-adjusted to 1940 U.S. population; 1999 and after adjusted to 2000.

•Social factors and social integration of individuals exert a powerful influence over suicidal behavior...broad social forces account for the variation in suicide rates. *Suicide* 1897