

# Accessing Data About Suicidal Behavior Among College and University Students

## Key Considerations in Using Existing Campus Data

Most of the campus suicide-related data is collected through surveys of students and counseling center directors, and it includes attempts, other suicidal behaviors, and ideation. However, the ways in which individual campuses keep track of data and the types of data they collect on their students vary. There is very little compiled data available on campus suicide deaths because there is no uniform surveillance system for these deaths or any requirements that campuses collect data on suicide deaths. In addition, the numbers of suicide deaths are very small.

Most campus studies on mental health and suicide focus on undergraduate students. When graduate students are included, the numbers of them are usually much smaller than of undergraduates. However, graduate students and other older students typically have different needs and issues than typical undergraduate populations.

## Key Sources of Campus Suicide-Related Data

### ***American College Health Association National College Health Assessment (NCHA)***

<http://www.acha-ncha.org/>

This is a survey that some campuses choose to administer. Each fall and spring, results from all campuses that use the survey are combined into a “reference group” report. The number of participating campuses varies from year to year; however, since 2009, the number has been approximately 175 per year. The schools either survey all of their students or use a random sampling technique. Suicide-related questions include whether the student has ever seriously considered suicide, ever attempted suicide, or ever intentionally injured oneself. The survey also asks whether the student has received information about suicide prevention from the college or university and whether he or she would like to receive such information. In addition, the survey covers a wide range of other campus health topics, including other mental health issues; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; sexual health; personal safety and violence; and weight, nutrition, and exercise. Schools can choose to add questions specific for their campus.

### ***Association for University and College Counseling Center Director’s Survey***

[http://www.aucccd.org/director\\_surveys.html](http://www.aucccd.org/director_surveys.html)

This is a survey of campus counseling center directors that is conducted every year by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) and published in annual reports. Over 400 counseling center directors usually respond. Separate data are included for counseling center clients and for the whole student body. The data include suicide deaths, attempts, other suicidal behaviors, and ideation as well as the mental health services and suicide prevention programs the campus provides.

### ***Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH)***

<http://ccmh.squarespace.com/about>

CCMH is a collaborative practice-research network comprised of [over 170 college counseling centers](#), key partners, and a number of academic departments at Penn State University. It conducts surveys of college and university students’ mental health each year and publishes the results in annual reports. In addition to several suicide-related questions, the surveys include other mental health issues, substance use, and family and academic distress.

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## **Healthy Minds Study**

<http://www.healthymindsstudy.net/home.html>

This survey is conducted by the University of Michigan and Survey Sciences Group, LLC in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Each year, it studies a random sample of students. In 2010, 27 schools participated. Data are collected on the following:

- Disease burden of depression, anxiety, substance use and other mental health issues, including suicide-related behaviors
- Unmet need for mental health treatment
- Barriers to care
- Attitudes about mental health.

The data are included in articles that are published addressing certain data trends. Selected publications are available at the Healthy Minds website. The Healthy Minds Study also works with campuses who want to create a small set of their own questions to be included in their survey.

## **Nature of Suicidal Crises in College Students**

[http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/rc\\_project5.html](http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/rc_project5.html)

The Counseling and Mental Health Center at the University of Texas at Austin conducts large-scale, national research studies on the mental health issues of college students. In 2006, it conducted a large study about suicidal crises in college students. A number of papers have been written from this study. Seventy colleges and universities were included. Undergraduates comprised 57 percent of the students surveyed, and graduate students comprised 43 percent. This study gathered in-depth quantitative and qualitative data on a random sample of college and university students about the nature of their suicidal crises. The information covered previous mental health history, lifetime and 12-month data on suicidal ideation and attempts, emotional mood states during the suicidal crisis, help-seeking behavior, the people students told about the crisis, events coinciding with their suicidal thinking, and the reasons why they considered suicide.

## **The Big Ten Student Suicide Study**

Silverman, M., Meyer, P., Sloane, F., Raffel, M., & Pratt, D. (1997). The Big Ten student suicide study. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, 27, 285–303.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1943-278X.1997.tb00411.x/abstract>

The Big Ten Student Suicide Study was undertaken from 1980 to 1990 to determine the suicide death rates on the Big Ten University campuses. It is the main study of suicide death rates that is still being used. Data was collected on 261 suicides at 12 Midwestern campuses. The largest number of suicides for both males and females were in the 20–24-year-old age group (46%), and among graduate students (32%). The overall student suicide rate of 7.5/100,000 is one half of the computed national suicide rate (15.0/100,000) for a matched sample by age, gender, and race. Despite the overall lower suicide rate, the analyses revealed that students ages 25 and over have a significantly higher risk than younger students.