Trends in Rates and Methods of Suicide

United States, 1985-2004

Based on US Vital Statistics data accessed from:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Available from URL: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars

What looks like long-term stability followed by recent increases in suicide is masked by showing only the number of deaths. The US population is increasing.
The suicide rate dropped about 13% comparing 1985 with 2004. Over the 20-year period, there was an average annual decline of 0.7% per year. In recent years, however, the decline has stalled and the rate is edging up. About 4,300 fewer deaths occurred in 2004 than if 1985 rates had applied. (Age-adjusted rates)

The decline in the suicide rate has largely been due to a decline in firearm suicides, particularly in the 1990s.
Age Groups with Declining Rates

- Elders
- Younger adults
- Youths
- Not the middle-aged (35-64 years)
- 2003 marked the first year in the 1984-2004 period in which the suicide rate of 35-64 year-olds equaled that of elders
US Suicide Rate, by Sex

Declines were seen among both males and females until the early 2000s.

Female Suicide Rate, by Age Group

Elder female suicide rates declined steadily throughout the period; all age groups declined in the 1990s. Middle-aged women’s rates have increased since 1999.
The suicide rate for elders declined steadily by all methods; drops in firearm suicide were the major contributor. During the 20-year period, the rate declined an average of 1.8% annually, or about 30% when comparing the 1985 rate with the 2004 rate.

The decline in suicide rates among the older-old began more recently than among the younger-old.
Suicide Rate, 35-64 year-olds

The suicide rate for middle-aged adults declined by roughly 12% from 1985-1999 but increased steadily after 1999. Because this is a large group comprising half of the suicides in the country, the recent increase is notable.

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Suicide Rate, 25-34 year-olds

The suicide rate for 25-34 year-olds declined an average of 0.9% annually, or about 17% when comparing 1985 with 2004. A drop in firearm suicides led the decline; a drop in poisonings also contributed. Suffocation suicides have been increasing. The overall rate has been flat from 2002 to 2004.

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The suicide rate for young adults did not begin to decline until the mid-90s and then declined sharply. During the 10 years 1995-2004, suicides dropped an average of 2.4% annually, closely mirroring drops in firearm suicides. Suffocations have been increasing.

The suicide rate for teens began declining sharply in the mid-90s. During the 10 years 1994-2003, suicides dropped an average of 3.8% annually, or 33% when comparing 1994 with 2003. Rates rose in 2004. Suffocations increased in the 2000s.
The suicide rate for children is very low (see change in scale on left axis) and is based on relatively small numbers (250-300 deaths per year). The rate began to decline in the mid-90s. This is the one age group in which suffocations have begun outnumbering shootings.

In Which Racial/Ethnic Groups Has the Suicide Rate Dropped?

- Steady, strong drops in suicide rates among Hispanics, Black Non-Hispanics, and Asians, leveling off recently.
- More gradual decline among White Non-Hispanics in 1990s, followed by increases in the 2000s. Strong decline among white youths and elders but increases among the middle-aged.
- American Indian rates fluctuated; no steady trend. Based on 200-400 cases annually.
US Suicide Rate, by Race/Ethnicity

White Non-Hispanic American Indian

Black Non-Hispanic Hispanic Asian

Note: Data on Hispanic ethnicity not available before 1990

US Suicide Attempt Rates

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

% of high school students reporting a suicide attempt in the past 12 months (school survey)

National Comorbidity Survey

Made a suicide attempt or gesture in past 12 months

1990-92 0.7%
2001-03 0.8%

Source: Kessler et al., JAMA 2005

Source: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/trends.htm
Summary

- Suicide rates declined over the 20-year period.
- The decline was led largely by declines in firearm suicides.
- Elder and youth suicide rates have declined; suicide among the middle-aged has not.
- Declines have been strongest among Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans.
- The declines of the 1990s have stalled or reversed in the early 2000s for all age groups except elders.
- Recent increases are largely among suffocation suicides.
Questions, Comments?

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