

SUICIDE PREVENTION AMONG OLDER ADULTS

SPRC Discussion Series
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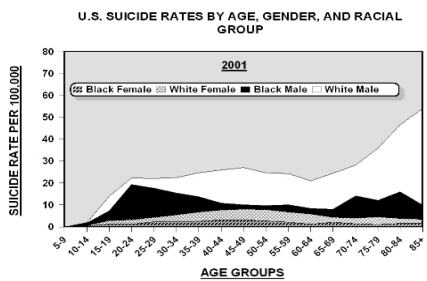
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Objectives

- Be aware of suicide risk among elders
- Know about effective suicide prevention programs for elders
- Be able to select appropriate interventions to implement in their communities or states to prevent elder suicides
- Understand the prevalence of suicide among the elderly





Source: National Institute of Mental Health
Data: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics



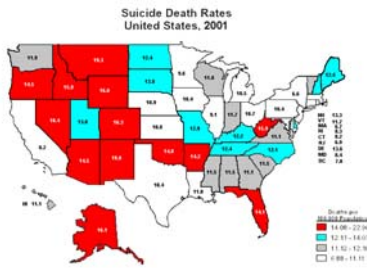
The Numbers

- In 2002, 5,548 Americans over the age of 65 died by suicide.
- Firearms were used in 72% of suicides completed by adults over the age of 65 in 2002.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics,
National Vital Statistics System



Regional variations



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001



Risk Factors for Elderly Suicide

- Male
- Mood disorders
- Social isolation
- Divorced/widowed
- Physical illness

Source: Conwell et al., 2002; Turvey et al., 2002



The Extent of the Problem

- In 2002, older individuals comprised 12.3% of the U.S. population and accounted for 17.5% of completed suicides.
- There are approximately 15 elderly suicides per day or 1 elderly suicide every 95 minutes.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics,
National Vital Statistics System



Risk factors (continued)

- Risk factors for suicide among older persons differ from those among the young:
 - Alcohol or substance abuse less important
 - Higher prevalence of depression
 - Social isolation more important
- Evidence suggest that physical disability plays a more important role than presence of a terminal illness.



The Risk Among Older Men

- White men over 85 are at the greatest risk of all age-gender-race groups.
- Men accounted for 85% of suicides among persons aged 65 years and older (n=4,695).
- Elderly male suicide rate 7.6 times the elderly female suicide rate.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics,
National Vital Statistics System



Attempts and Completions

- For all ages combined, ratio of attempts to completion = 25 to 1
- For young (15-24), ratio of attempts to completions = 100-200 to 1.
- For elderly (65+) , ratio of attempts to completions = 4 to 1.



Source: American Association of Suicidology

Opportunities

- Elders (55 and older) who complete suicide:
 - 77% have contact with PCP within a year of their suicide
 - 58% have contact with PCP within a month of their suicide



Source: Luoma et al., 2002

Suicide Prevention for Elders

- Treatment of Depression in Primary Care
 - PROSPECT (treatment guidelines & care management) found reductions in suicidal ideation and depressive symptoms.
 - IMPACT (depression care management) found reductions in depressive symptoms.
- Physician Education
 - Götland, Sweden
- Restricting Access to firearms
 - Intervention has not been evaluated. Good underlying evidence.
- Screening
 - Good instruments. Limited evidence.
- Community Outreach
 - Gatekeeper training (Spokane, WA)
 - TeleHelp-TeleCheck (Northern Italy)



Additional Prevention Information

- Building Community Competence: The Role of Gatekeepers in Preventing Late Life Tragedies
<http://www.sprc.org/library/BuildingCompetence.pdf>
- Elderly Suicide: Secondary Prevention
<http://www.nursing.uiowa.edu/centers/gnirc/protocols.htm>
- The Prevention of Suicide in Primary Care Elderly: Collaborative Trial (PROSPECT)
<http://www.sprc.org/whatweoffer/factsheets/prospect.pdf>