

General Information

Background¹

Serious mental illness (SMI) is a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that results in functional impairment interfering with or limiting one or more major life activities. Most people with serious mental illness need medication to help control symptoms, but also rely on supportive counseling, self-help groups, assistance with housing, vocational rehabilitation, income assistance and/or other community services to achieve their highest level of recovery.

Risk Factors²

Suicidal behavior is one manifestation of SMI and is complex with some risk factors varying by age, gender and ethnicity and may change over time. Some generally accepted risk factors include:

- Previous suicide attempt
- Mental disorder (depression and bipolar)
- Co-occurring mental and alcohol/substance abuse disorders
- Barriers to accessing mental health treatment
- Family history of suicide
- Incarceration
- Family history of mental disorder or substance abuse
- Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Hopelessness
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies
- Physical illness
- Easy access to firearms, especially in the home
- Local epidemics of suicide that influence others

Prevention³

- Broaden the public's awareness of suicide and its risk factors
- Enhance services and programs, both population-based and clinical care
- Advance the science of suicide prevention

Size

San Diego County

- During 2003, 33.9% of adults in San Diego County aged 18 years and over reported they had at least one day during the past 30 days when their mental health was not good. The average number of days was 2.9 with 8.6% reporting they had 14 or more days of frequent mental distress.⁶
- During 2003, 308 persons in San Diego County died from suicide, for an age-adjusted rate of 10.8 per 100,000 population.⁴
- During 2003, 1,674 San Diego County residents were hospitalized with nonfatal self-inflicted injuries.⁵

California

- During 2001, 10.9% of adults aged 18 years and over in California reported they had 14 or more days of frequent mental distress during the past 30 days.⁷
- During 2002, 3,198 persons in California died from suicide; over 40% were between ages 21 and 44.⁵
- During 2002, 17,141 persons in California were hospitalized with nonfatal self-inflicted injuries.⁵

National

- During 2002, 2.9% of adults in the U.S. aged 18 years and over experienced serious psychological distress during the past 30 days.⁷ The mean number of mentally unhealthy days during 2001 was 3.4 days, with 10.1 percent reporting 14 or more mentally unhealthy days during the previous 30 days.⁶
- In the U.S. in 2002, 30,646 people died from suicide for an age-adjusted rate of 10.6 per 100,000.⁸
- In the U.S. in 2001, 184,286 persons were hospitalized with nonfatal self-inflicted injuries.⁹

Size (continued)

Serious Mental Illness¹⁰

The following presents the national estimates of SMI prevalence and characteristics among persons aged 18 or older during 2003:

- An estimated 19.6 million adults representing 9.2% of all adults.
- During the past 12 months, 13.2% of adults reported receiving treatment for mental health problems.
- Among adults reporting SMI, only 47.9% indicated they had received treatment for their mental health problem during the past 12 months. Cost or insurance issues and not feeling a need for treatment were the most commonly stated reasons for not receiving treatment, 45.1% and 40.6%, respectively.

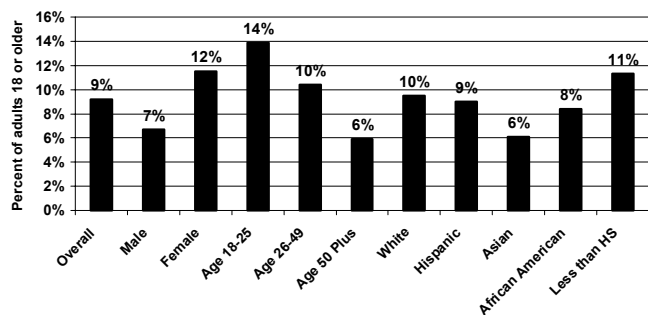
Youth¹⁰

During 2003, an estimated 5.1 million youths aged 12 to 17 received treatment or counseling for mental health problems. This represents 20.6% of this population.

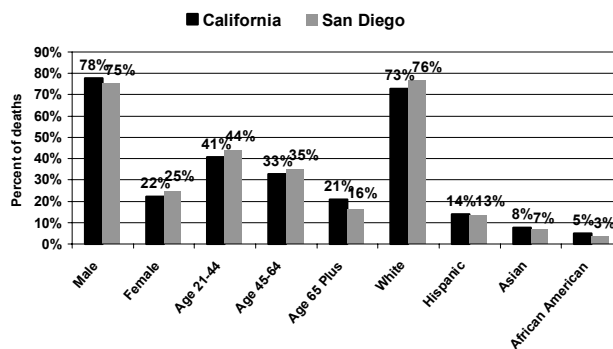
- The most common source of treatment during 2003 were school counselors, school psychologists and teachers—48.0%.
- An estimated 467,000 youths or 9.1% of those receiving treatment were hospitalized for treatment of mental health problems.
- The most common reasons for mental health problems among youth were depression (50.2%), acting out (25.7%), afraid or tense (21.4%) and suicidal thoughts or attempts (18.9%).

Healthy People 2010 Objective 18-1: Reduce the suicide rate to 5.0 per 100,000 population.¹¹

Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness
Select U.S. Characteristics - 2003¹⁰



Suicide in California & San Diego, 2001
Select Victim Characteristics⁵



Seriousness

Mortality⁸

While suicide was the 11th leading cause of death overall, it was the 8th leading cause of death for males and the 19th leading cause of death among females in 2000.

Health Care Impacts¹⁰

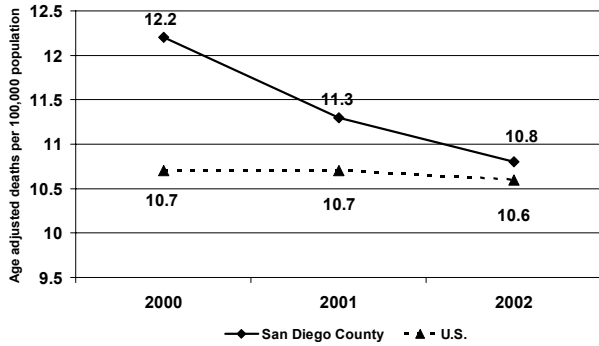
- Persons with serious mental illness have higher rates of illicit drug use, cigarette smoking and dependence on abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs than those without serious mental illness. The following rates compare persons with SMI to those without SMI:
 - Illicit drug use—18.1% vs. 7.8%
 - Use of cigarettes—44.2% vs. 25.2%
 - Dependence on or abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs—21.3% vs. 7.9%

Seriousness (continued)

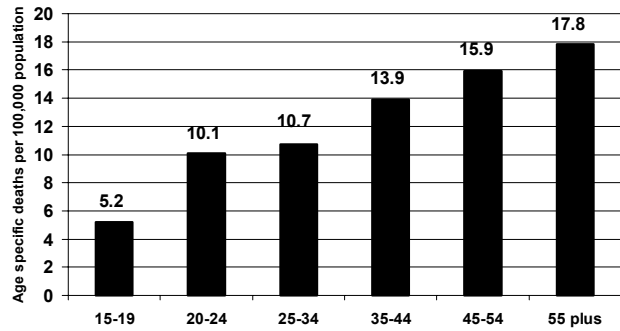
Economic costs

In the U.S., a total of \$69.3 billion was spent on direct services for mental illness in 1990, the last year for which data are available. It is estimated that indirect costs were around \$78.5 billion in the same year.¹²

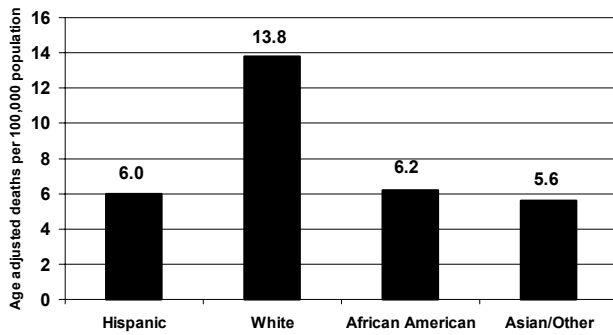
Suicide Deaths
2000 – 2002^{4,8}



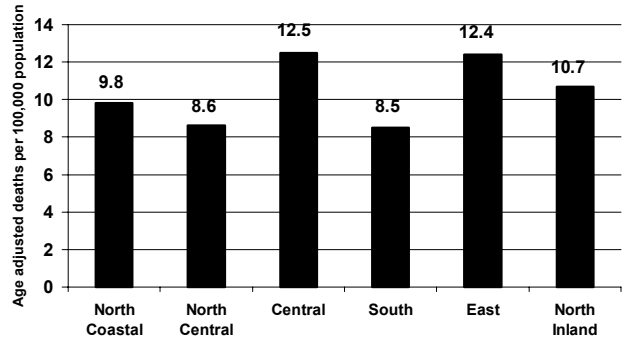
Suicide Deaths
By Age Category
San Diego County 2002⁴



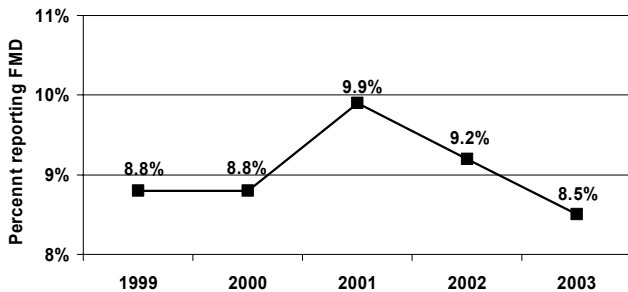
Suicide Deaths
By Race/Ethnicity
San Diego County 2002⁴



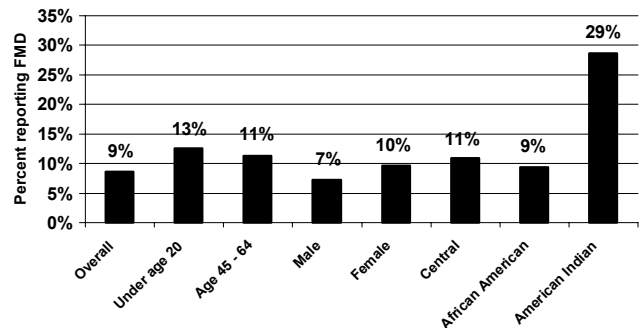
Suicide Deaths
By Region
San Diego County 2002⁴



Frequent Mental Distress
San Diego County 1999 – 2003⁶



Frequent Mental Distress
Select Characteristics
San Diego County 2003⁶



(FMD = mental health not good 14 or more days during past 30 days.)

Community Concern*

Focus Group Discussion Points

Participants in the Hispanic focus group indicated a concern about mental health disorders. Some indicated that there is a shortage of programs and services to meet the needs of families with these issues and that schools are ill-equipped to offer assistance.

Key Informant Scoring

Overall, key informants scored mental health as third most important out of 14 health issues presented. Moreover, key informants identified mental health as the fourth most important health issue for all individuals aged 15 and older.

*Please note that focus groups and key informant surveys are qualitative in nature and findings presented may not be representative of a larger population.

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