

Suicide now kills more Americans than car crashes: study

September 20 2012, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



Prevention efforts lowered traffic fatalities, more attention needed for suicide, experts say.

(HealthDay)—More Americans now commit suicide than die in car crashes, making suicide the leading cause of injury deaths, according to a new study.

In addition, over the last 10 years, while the number of deaths from car crashes has declined, deaths from poisoning and falls increased significantly, the researchers report.

"Suicides are terribly undercounted; I think the problem is much worse than official data would lead us to believe," said study author Ian Rockett, a professor of [epidemiology](#) at West Virginia University.

There may be 20 percent or more unrecognized suicides, he said.

Many of the poisoning deaths may actually be intended, he added. A lot of these deaths are due from [overdoses](#) of [prescription drugs](#), Rockett noted.

"We have a situation that has gotten out of hand," he said. "I would like to see the same attention paid to other injuries as has been paid to [traffic injuries](#)."

The report was published online Sept. 20 in the [American Journal of Public Health](#).

For the study, Rockett's team used data from the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics to determine the cause of [injury deaths](#) from 2000 to 2009.

The leading causes of unintentional deaths were [car accidents](#), poisoning and falls, and for intentional deaths they were suicide and [homicide](#).

Deaths from intentional and unintentional injury were 10 percent higher in 2009 than in 2000, the researchers noted.

And although deaths from car crashes declined 25 percent, deaths from poisoning rose 128 percent, deaths from falls increased 71 percent and deaths from suicides rose 15 percent, according to the study.

Suicide is now the first cause of injury deaths, followed by car crashes, poisoning, falls and murder, Rockett said.

Fewer women die from these causes than men, the researchers noted. In addition, blacks and [Hispanics](#) have fewer [car crashes](#) and suicides, but higher [murder rates](#) than whites, they found.

Lanny Berman, executive director of the American Association of

Suicidology, said, "Both global and national increases in the number and rate of suicides through 2009, and as even more recent data indicates, through 2010, should concern all of us."

Prevention of suicides and unintentional injuries would extend the life of those whose deaths would not have otherwise occurred by some three decades, he said.

"We know a great deal about how to prevent [suicides](#), but have yet to overcome centuries of stigmatic attitudes—and the consequent lack of political will—to build the collaborative effort to turn these many lives from despair and hopelessness to ones of meaning and brighter futures," Berman added.

Another expert, Simon Rego, director of psychology training at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine, in New York City, said that "the time has come for clinicians, public health officials, state and county health departments, legislatures and corporations to come together and direct our efforts toward understanding the etiology and prevention of injury, in particular by poisoning via prescription medications, falls in the elderly, and most importantly, suicide—which is the only intentional injury in this group."

Recently, the U.S. government along with private groups like Facebook, launched a program focusing on suicide prevention.

In 2009, more than 37,000 Americans took their own lives, and more than 500,000 were at risk of suicide, according to Pamela Hyde, administrator of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The new program will have \$56 million of federal money to help fund suicide prevention programs under the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.

The act was signed into law in memory of the son of Gordon Smith, president of the National Association of Broadcasters and a former U.S. Senator, who took his own life nine years ago.

"Our goal is, in the next five years, we will save 20,000 human lives," Smith said at a Sept. 10 news conference. "This issue touches nearly every family. It is something we can do something about. It's the work of angels."

More information: To learn more about suicide, visit the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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