

US suicide rate jumps 24 percent since 1999: study (Update)

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Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

The suicide rate in the United States has jumped 24 percent in the past 15 years, including a troublesome spike among girls aged 10-14, according to US government statistics out Friday.

The rate increased by about one percent a year from 1999, then accelerated to two percent annually from 2006 to 2014, said the findings

by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics.

The rise was seen among both males and females and for all ages 10-74, said the report.

The biggest jump was among girls aged 10-14, whose suicide rate tripled from 0.5 per 100,000 people in 1999 to 1.5 per 100,000 in 2014.

A total of 150 girls in this age group killed themselves in 2014, a 200 percent increase over 1999, the report said.

"We are seeing younger and younger kids dying by suicide," said Victor Fornari, director of the division of child and adolescent psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, New York.

This is "really a worry," added Fornari, who was not involved in the study.

"I think it may be a reflection of access to social media, Internet and cyber bullying, and youth are hurried. They are being exposed to things sooner than they would have been," he told AFP.

Suicide rates among boys aged 10-14 were higher than in girls, but they did not experience the same spike over the course of 15 years.

In 1999, 1.9 per 100,000 people in this age group committed suicide, and by 2014 the number had risen to 2.6 per 100,000, a 37 percent increase.

Adult suicide

Among men, those over age 75 were most likely to kill themselves in

both 1999 and 2014.

However, in contrast to other age groups, elderly men's suicide rate decreased by eight percent over the 15 years studied, going from 42.4 per 100,000 in 1999 to 38.8 in 2014, the report said.

The second-highest suicide rate among men was in those aged 45-64, a group that saw the largest percent increase (43 percent) in rates, increasing from 20.8 in 1999 to 29.7 in 2014, said the study.

Among women, suicide rates were highest for those aged 45-64 in both 1999 (6.0 per 100,000) and 2014 (9.8), said the report.

"This age group also had the second-largest percent increase—63 percent—since 1999."

The study pointed to a narrowing of the suicide gender gap over the years, largely due to a 46 percent increase in female suicides.

Men remain more than three times as likely as women to commit suicide.

The most common method of suicide for men was by firearm (55.4 percent). Among women, it was poisoning (34.1 percent).

The findings raised concern among mental health experts, who urged a new push for suicide prevention efforts.

"The vast majority of people who die by suicide have a psychiatric illness—such as depression, bipolar disorder, chemical dependency, schizophrenia," said Jeffrey Borenstein, president and CEO of the Brain and Behavior Research Foundation.

"If there was a finding about such a substantial increase in some other cause of death in the United States, this would be on the front page of all our newspapers and there would be a call to action on the part of public policy to address," added Borenstein, who was not involved in the study.

"And I think we really need to see the same thing happen for the important issue of suicide prevention," he said.

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