

Facts

Elderly Suicide

Older people (65+) make up the age group at highest risk for suicide. While they represent 12.5% of the total population, they commit 20% of all suicides.

(National Center for Health Statistics)

In 1997 there were 5,728 suicides in this age group, 15.7 deaths per day at a rate of 11.4 per 100,000 according to The American Association of Suicidology.

In 1996 the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reported that the number of suicides among Americans 65 and older had jumped by 36% since 1980.

In 1996 the actual rate of suicide among those over 65 also went up, by 9%, for the first time in forty years.

Of injury related deaths, only falls and motor-vehicle crashes killed more elderly Americans.

In 1997, firearms were used in 70% of elderly suicides.

Some of the increase in elderly suicide is due to greater numbers of elderly Americans but not all of it.

Elderly white males are at the highest risk

More than 80% of such suicides had visited their primary care physician within a month of their death.

Causative factors

Depression

Alcoholism

Losses (loved one, self-identity after retirement, health, safety, independence)

Social isolation

Ageism

Poor coping mechanisms

Poverty

Increased use of firearms

Resources

Suicide in Later Life—Recognizing the Warning Signs, Nancy Osgood

Lexington Books, NY, 1992

Suicide and Life—Threatening Behavior, Vol. 22, No. 1, spring 1992

American Association of Suicidology, NY

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