

How Far Is Too Far?

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Did you know that in 2021 there were over 48,000 deaths by suicide (CDC 2023)?

That is 1 death every 11 minutes. In the article “Suicide is a leading cause of death. It does not have to be” from *MSNBC*, Jill Harkavy-Friedman (2023) argues that “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recent publication of provisional data on suicide deaths demands that we pay attention and take action.” As suicide rates sit high, action needs to be taken and resources need to be provided to help everyone who is struggling with mental health issues. She points out that experts need to share the research that they have at hand with the public so people can get more familiar with mental health illnesses, specifically depression. Overall, she expresses that it will be so beneficial if awareness of suicide and the damage done by mental health issues get spoken about more. And it will be beneficial because more people will be able to get the help that they need if there is more awareness about suicide. I agree with Harkavy-Friedman (2023) that action needs to be taken for the high rates of suicide that our world is experiencing today. However, her research lacks the medical standpoint on how to fix this problem and truly what happens when people are suffering from a mental health issue like depression. Learning the background of what a mental health issue is will allow more insight into how to medically fix this problem for the better of the world. The steps already implemented, like the hotlines and more accessible medical help, have made an impact but certainly not enough.

In the middle of her article, Harkavy-Friedman (2023) writes, “When people know more about mental health and suicide prevention, suicide rates go down. Just like recognizing the signs of a heart attack, imagine the difference we could make if we all knew

the warning signs of suicide and how to help.” Harkavy-Friedman (2023) explains herself that educating and making people aware of signs and deeper information on mental health is already starting to solve a piece of this puzzle. Now the question is how are we able to spread the information faster and deliver it to more people? Possibly creating better, new, and more insightful curriculums in health classes, or hosting classes for concerned parents to learn more. Most people now are aware of the problem but are not aware of what the problem truly contains and how to fix it. And without fixing the suicide rate soon, it will keep affecting more people. While the suicide rates are up, the number of people struggling with mental health issues is up too. Which is where the root of the suicide rate problem is coming from.

When awareness is increasing on suicide and mental health it is also important to look at the demographics of where you live. Understanding why suicide is at the rate it is in your area can help to prevent suicidal feelings before they even start. In the article “A Look at the Latest Suicide Data and Change Over the Last Decade” from KFF, Heather Saunders (2023) figure 4 shows that the states where the population is more spread out are more prone to a higher suicide rate. Saunders (2023) says, “The suicide rate may vary by state due to factors such as demographics, firearm availability (involved in over half of suicides), mental health status, and access to mental health services.” This statement shows that being more isolated than others can have a bigger impact on your mental health. When I say isolated, I am referring to living in a more rural area, where it may not be as close to going to see a therapist or mental health specialists as it would be if they were living in a more populated city. But also living in a more rural area may mean you may not be able to

get to have as much interaction with others as opposed to someone living in a metropolis or suburb. When looking at Minnesota in this figure, it shows that as a state we were at a 14/100,000 death rate by suicide. I personally have had 2 friends take their own lives and it is not a feeling that I would or could wish upon anyone. Losing people is already hard enough but having to live with guilt about not doing more for them is unbearable. So, while the 14/100,000 death rate may not seem like a lot, and compared to other states it is low, there is still work to do to lower that number as much as possible.

When looking at these two articles, Harkavy-Friedman (2023) and Saunders (2023), there is a clear commonality between them. The importance and urgency of solving the high suicide rates are seen in both articles. Harkavy-Friedman (2023) states, “We need more innovative education programs to reach minority communities.” But later she also says, “Investment in making this a standard practice is crucial and there is some movement in a positive direction.” Both quotes go hand in hand with a quote from “Suicide Statistics,” from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (2023). Where they state, “In 2021, the suicide rates were higher among adults ages 25 to 34 years”. Connecting all these quotes shows that if more education is taught to younger students, by the time they meet the age range of 25-34 years old they will have already been taught and given resources in case of the development of a mental health illness. But it will also give other people an understanding of signs and more knowledge in case people around them are suffering from a mental health illness and do not want to speak up for themselves. One organization whose mission is to bring awareness to suicide and mental health is Sophie’s Squad. “Sophie’s Squad is a non-profit

organization that aims to improve the mental health of athletes from youth to college...

Sophie's Squad was founded in 2021 with the goal of raising awareness for mental health issues and removing the stigma associated with seeking help for athletes." (Sophie's Squad.org). They hold events like 5k's, hockey games, and even have booths at other events to spread awareness and to share Sophie Wieland's story with the hope that it will help other athletes with their own mental health struggles.

Harkavy-Friedman (2023) is missing the medical terminology behind depression and some causes of suicidal feelings. And while I agree with Harkavy-Friedman's (2023) argument, this missing piece is extremely important to the topic. In the report "Depression (major depressive disorder)" from Mayo Clinic, Craig Sawchuk (2022) explains the medical background of what depression is. "Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression, it affects how you feel, think, and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems." Sawchuk (2022). This is crucial when it comes to spreading information about depression. This definition allows people to grasp a basic understanding of depression and without a definition, it would be hard for people to understand what to look for in other people or the signs of depression because they may or may not know what depression entails.

How can we help to solve this problem? We can start by improving health class curriculums. After that, we need to work past the resentment about getting professional help. Seeing professionals, even before recognizing signs, can help to prevent these mental illnesses which lead to fewer suicidal feelings altogether. One program starting to

do this is a 4-H lead program called STAR (Anoka High School, n.d.). They use a youth teachingyouth method to bring awareness to all different health aspects. Bringing more awareness to younger students in an environment where they feel more open to asking questions since their teacher is not leading the discussion, it is students that are around their age.

Overall, talking and learning more about depression needs to be normalized. While I may have repeated the word “depression” 13 times in this essay, depression affects around 7% - 9% of the world's population. And in some cases, it takes over their whole life. So, let us come together to make sure that in 2024 there are 0 suicide deaths every 11 minutes.

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