



Suicide Among Hispanic Americans

General Statistics

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that, from 1999 to 2004, among Hispanic Americans¹:

- The suicide rate for all ages was 5.09 per 100,000, about half the overall U.S. rate of 10.75 per 100,000.
- The highest suicide rate, 30.69 per 100,000, was found among adult males 85 and older.
- Suicide ranked as the 11th leading cause of death for individuals of Hispanic origin of all races and ages, and the third leading cause of death for those 15 to 24 years old.

Youth Statistics

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in 2005, among Hispanic American high school students²:

- 11.3% reported having made a suicide attempt (vs. 8.4% overall U.S.).
- 14.5% reported having made a suicide plan (vs. 13% overall U.S.).
- 17.9% reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months (vs. 16.9% overall U.S.).
- More female students report suicidal ideation and behaviors than their non-Hispanic white or black female counterparts:
 - 24.2% reported having seriously considered attempting suicide (vs. white: 21.5%; black: 17.1%)
 - 18.5% reported having made a suicide plan (vs. white: 15.4%; black: 13.5%),
 - 14.9% reported having made a suicide attempt (vs. white: 9.3%; black: 9.8%),
 - 3.7% reported having made a suicide attempt that required medical attention (vs. white: 2.7%; black: 2.6%).

Mental Health Considerations

- Multiple studies suggest that children and adolescents of Hispanic origin experience more mental health problems than their non-Hispanic Caucasian counterparts.³
- Research indicates that, among individuals of Hispanic origin with mental disorders, fewer than 1 in 11 contacts a mental health professional, and fewer than 1 in 5 contacts a general health care provider.⁴

Ethnic and Cultural Considerations

- One study of Mexican immigrants emphasized the importance of culturally competent treatment, finding that many who experienced the stresses related to adapting to a new culture may be at higher risk of depression and suicidal ideation.⁵
- Population studies find that individuals of Hispanic origin born in the U.S. have higher rates of mental illness than immigrants of Hispanic origin.⁶

Strengths and Protective Factors

- Immigrants of Hispanic origin have been found to exhibit high levels of resiliency and strong aspirations to succeed,⁷ which might contribute to their lower rates of mental illness.
- Social support provided by the extended family and the religious belief that suicide is a sin, common features of Hispanic heritage, may serve to buffer Hispanic American people against suicide. A fatalistic life orientation often found in Hispanic cultures, in which people struggle to accept adverse events, may also lessen a person's suicidality.⁸

Notes

The term "Hispanic Americans" includes many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. We used the term because the majority of data and research use this category. When specific sources refer to Mexican Americans, that term is used.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) collaborated with the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN) USA to produce fact sheets on suicide in various American populations – American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Black Americans, and Hispanic Americans. All facts sheets are available at www.sprc.org.

The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention emphasizes that cultural appropriateness is a vital design and implementation criterion for suicide prevention activities. SPRC and SPAN USA hope these fact sheets advance the work of those continuing to strive for cultural effectiveness.

References

- ¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)*. Retrieved Jan. 3, 2007, from: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars>.
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006, June 9). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2005. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 55(SS-5), 9-10, 50-53.
- ³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity - A supplement to Mental health: A report of the Surgeon General* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 01-3613). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 135.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.
- ⁵ Hovey, J.D. (2000). Acculturative stress, depression, and suicidal ideation among Mexican immigrants. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 6(2), 134-51.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity - A supplement to Mental health: A report of the Surgeon General*, 140.
- ⁷ Suarez-Orozco, C., Suarez-Orozco, M. M. (1995). *Transformations: Immigration, family life, and achievement motivation among Latino adolescents*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- ⁸ Range, L. M., Leach, M. M., McIntyre, D., Posey-Deters, P. B., Marion, M. S., Kovac, et al., (1999). Multicultural perspectives on suicide. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 4(4), 417-8.