Youth suicide rate up 56 percent from 2007 to 2016

Government report shows sharp rise in US teen deaths

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A report released Friday shows a shocking rise in deaths between 2013 and 2016 among US children and teens aged 10-19. While deaths in this age group declined between 1999 and 2013, from 2013 to 2016 the total number of deaths, as well as the death rate, increased by 12 percent.

These grim statistics expose the social crisis confronting America's youth in the form of gun violence, suicide, the opioid crisis, poverty and war.

The study published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that injury deaths—including unintentional injury, suicide, homicide and war—comprised 70 percent of all deaths for persons aged 10-19 in 2016. By contrast, the non-injury death rate (from natural causes such as cancer and heart disease) declined for this age group by 23 percent from 1999 to 2013 and remained relatively stable after that.

Particularly telling, the number and rate of total deaths in 2016 for adolescents aged 15-19 was more than three times that of children and teens aged 10-14. For teens aged 15-19, the injury death rate increased by 19 percent in 2016 from the recent low in 2013. At a time when young men and women in this age group should be finishing high school and contemplating college or a career, increasing numbers of them are meeting a violent death.

The CDC report is based on data from death certificates filed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia between 1999 and 2016. The data collected by researchers shows that motor vehicle traffic fatalities accounted for 62 percent of unintentional injury deaths, followed by poisoning at 16 percent and drowning at 7 percent. Poisoning deaths include drug overdoses, which account for 90 percent of these deaths, mostly in older teens.

Following a decrease in homicide deaths among children and adolescents between 2007 and 2014, these deaths increased by 27 percent from 2014 to 2016. The suicide rate declined by 15 percent between 1999 and 2007, then rose by a staggering 56 percent between 2007 and 2016. The three leading methods of suicide in 2016 were suffocation (including hanging), firearms and poisoning (including drug overdoses).

In 2016, 2,553 young people age 10 to 19 took their own lives, compared to 1,661 in 2007. For every young person who makes the horrific decision to end his or her life there are families and friends left devastated. Nothing is more tragic than losing a child, sibling or classmate, but to grapple with why a young person would consciously choose to die is overwhelming.

A separate study in the medical journal *Pediatrics* also found a rise in suicidal thoughts and attempts among 10- to 24-year-olds. The study showed that the proportion of young people treated at 31 US children's hospitals for suicidal thoughts or attempts more than doubled between 2008 and 2015, from 0.66 percent to 1.82 percent of all visits. Nearly two-thirds of these visits involved girls.

More than half of the suicide-related visits resulted in inpatient hospitalization, with 13 percent of patients treated in intensive care units. Researchers found that suicide-related visits were twice as high during October, at the start of the school year, than in July, during the summer vacation. The study did not investigate how academic pressure or bullying might contribute to suicidal thoughts among young people.

One of the researchers for the *Pediatrics* study, Gregory Plemmons, a physician and associate professor of clinical pediatrics at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, told CNN that he became interested in conducting the suicide study after noticing an increasing number of beds at his hospital being used for young people in need of psychiatric treatment, often after exhibiting suicidal behavior.

"What I'm noticing is kids seem to be less resilient and to have more pressure," he said. "I think social media also fuels this Instagram life of everything is perfect and cool and you don't see the other side of life."

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A study published in *Clinical Psychological Science* last year similarly concluded: "The increases in new media screen activities and the decreases in nonscreen activities may explain why depression and suicide increased among US adolescents since 2010."

But while some are quick to suggest that social media, cyberbullying and violent videos are leading factors contributing to youth suicide and school shootings, the causes are far more complex. The continued growth of income inequality can fuel depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts, particularly among young people who are looking for a future but find themselves unemployed, in low-paying dead-end jobs, or saddled with student debt.

A report published in January by the Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University in New York found that in 2016, 19 percent of US children under age 18 lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold. At the time, this was an abysmally low $24,339 for a two-parent family with two children.

The Pew Research Center released a study this week reporting that since 2000, suburban counties have experienced sharper increases in poverty than urban or rural counties. Since 1990, poverty rates in suburban areas have increased by 50 percent, while the number of suburban residents living in high-poverty areas has almost tripled.

Scott W. Allard, author of *Places in Need*, wrote in a recent column that rising suburban poverty is due to the "changing nature of the labor market." He added, "In most suburbs, unemployment rates were twice as high in 2014 as in 1990. Good-paying jobs that don't require advanced training have started to disappear in suburbs, just as they did in central cities more than a quarter-century ago."

A national survey by health service company Cigna revealed that nearly half of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone or left out. Young adults of Generation Z (ages 18-22) report the most loneliness and claim to be in worse health than older generations.

The survey found the main contributing factors to loneliness to be lack of sleep, insufficient time spent with family, lack of physical activity and jobs that require more hours or less hours than desired. Not surprisingly, young adults are more likely to be unemployed, overworked or working at low-paid jobs—and susceptible to loneliness and depression.

Addressing this crisis would begin with the allocation of billions of dollars for social services, including nutrition programs, job training and health care. The response of the ruling elite, however, is to impose work requirements for Medicaid and food stamps in an effort to cut people off of benefits. Funding for vitally needed mental health care services and treatment for opioid addiction is also a low priority.

There has been no outrage from the Democrats over the continuing wave of reports presenting indices of social misery—whether it be the rise in youth suicides or reports that the average US worker would need to work 275 years to earn the annual compensation of his or her company's CEO. Instead, the Democrats have provided the votes to fund the Pentagon's record $700 billion budget and secured the confirmation of black site torture administrator Gina Haspel as head of the CIA.

In a scathing critique, Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said the Trump administration is steering the country towards a "dramatic change of direction" that is rewarding the rich and blocking access for the poor even to the most basic necessities.

He told the *Guardian*, "This is a systematic attack on America's welfare program that is undermining the social safety net for those who can't cope on their own. Once you start removing any sense of government commitment, you quickly move into cruelty."

The beginning of a new period of working class struggle in the US and around the world—seen most graphically in the US in the wave of protests and strikes by teachers against both the government and the corporatist trade unions—is the key to how young people can put an end to the conditions that underlie the rise in drug abuse and other social evils. Young people are themselves coming into struggle and looking for ways to oppose the intolerable status quo. This has taken the initial form of mass demonstrations against school violence.

What is critical is that youth turn to the working class and break free from both parties of the capitalist class in the fight to build a mass socialist movement to put an end to the profit system, the source of poverty, inequality and war.

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