

# Suicide rates and suicidal behavior rise sharply among American youth

Trévon Austin  
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According to a report released this week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide rates among those Americans aged 10 to 24 years old sharply increased by 56 percent between 2007 and 2017. Within the same period, suicide ideation, or thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts have doubled for adolescents and young adults. The rate of homicide deaths for this age group also saw an increase of 18 percent between 2014 and 2017, after an initial decrease of 23 percent from 2007 to 2014.

The CDC report shows that while the increase is particularly acute amongst young people, there had been a general increase in suicide rates across all ages and ethnicities by 30 percent from 1999 to 2016.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth aged 12 to 18 in the United States, behind unintentional injuries such as car accidents and drug overdoses. In 2017, suicides accounted for more than 2,200 deaths in the age group. Researchers suggest a number of risk factors that are associated with the rising epidemic, including childhood maltreatment, mental and neurological illnesses and poverty.

Within the span of a decade, suicide deaths increased from 6.8 deaths per 100,000 people to 10.6 deaths, with 2,449 more suicides in 2017 than in 2007. Previously, 10-to-14-year-olds had the lowest rates of suicide, but that rate tripled between 2007 and 2017.

Daniel Webster, the co-director for the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, told the *Wall Street Journal* that homicide deaths among youth in the US has decreased dramatically since the 1990s and were mostly in decline and stable through 2014 before the recent increase. Webster noted the growth in homicide death rates in 2015 and 2016 was largely concentrated in a limited number of cities, including St. Louis and Chicago.

Experts say the increased homicide rate is most likely related to the illicit drug trade, poverty, and police violence but are unable to point to a specific influence on the national shift. According to the CDC, school-related shootings account for less than 2 percent of all youth homicide deaths in the US and likely don't influence the trend. However, data from the FBI suggests a slight decrease in the youth homicide rate in 2018.

A separate study released last week in the medical journal *Pediatrics* examined trends of suicidal behavior across groupings by ethnicities and sex of teenage high school students. The study found that self-reported suicide attempts among African American teenagers in high school rose by 73 percent between 1991 and 2017.

The study utilized results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a school-based survey administered by the CDC, from 198,540 high school students in 9th through 12th grade who took the survey between 1991 and 2017. The survey asked participants a set of four questions on suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

While black youth were the only group to display an overall increase in the nearly three-decade period, all groups experienced an increase in suicide ideation, suicide plans, suicide attempts, and injury from attempt since 2009. The recent rise in suicide attempts is particularly concerning because the most prominent risk factor associated with suicide death is prior suicide attempts. In 2017, more than 111,000 youth 12 to 18 years old were seen in an emergency department for self-harm behavior.

Researchers behind the study also noted a shift in the sex disparity in youth suicidal behavior. Traditionally, girls are more likely to attempt suicide and have suicidal ideation, and boys are more likely to die by suicide. However, recent studies indicate that the gap in

suicide deaths between sexes may be decreasing in youth aged 10 to 19 years.

A study from Nationwide Children's Hospital in Ohio found the number of children and young adults who have attempted suicide by poisoning, including drug and alcohol overdoses, has increased in the United States in recent years as well. A significant increase was observed between 2011 and 2018 with 71 percent of cases studied in the report consisting of girls and young women.

Using data from the National Poison Data System, which reports information from all 55 poison control centers across the United States, researchers found more than 1.6 million children and young adults aged 10 to 24 attempted to kill themselves by poisoning between 2000 to 2018.

This staggering number outlines the scope of the epidemic of suicide in the United States. Self-poisoning, defined as when a person intentionally overdoses on drugs or exposes themselves to toxic substances, is the most common form of suicide attempt among women of all ages. Its fatality rate is below 5 percent, meaning that individuals are likely to be rescued. This results in a suicide death rate that some researchers believe underestimate the severity of the issue.

While the factors behind the growth of desperation in youth is multifaceted and complex, the last two decades has been marked growth of staggering social inequality, unending violent wars overseas, unceasing police brutality at home, an ever-rising student debt burden, and persistent underemployment.

The latest CDC statistics on youth suicide are a stark confirmation, despite President Donald Trump's boasting over record low unemployment figures and a booming stock market, of the complete failure of the capitalist system to meet the most basic needs of young people and the working class in general.

Not coincidentally the rise in the suicide rate for young people has accompanied the growth of so-called deaths of despair from drug and alcohol overdoses and disease associated with addiction amongst working-age adults. Millions lost their homes or jobs in the economic collapse of 2008 only to see the banks who were responsible for the disaster bailed out with trillions of dollars. The greatest transfer of wealth in history was carried out on the backs of the working

class to save capitalism resulting in the human catastrophe which is now finding expression in these grim statistics.



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