



2003 Sedgwick County Suicide Prevention Task Force Annual Report

"Suicide can be prevented"

Each year, approximately 54 citizens, our family members and friends, take their own lives in moments of extreme despair. How can we change this course for the better when there are so many contributing factors? We know that untreated depression, substance use, and ready access to guns combine to play a role in most suicides. We know that our teenage youth and older adults are particularly at risk. We understand that stress and personal loss are usually present in the lives of those who attempt what has been referred to as "a permanent solution to a temporary problem." Perhaps the most important factor is our resistance as a society to speak openly about suicide. Our lack of understanding keeps us from detecting signs, asking direct questions, and acting to get immediate help.

The Sedgwick County Suicide Prevention Task Force is working to cut the number of suicides by nearly one-half before year 2010. In this 2003 annual report, you will learn more about suicide, what we are doing to prevent this public health tragedy, and how you can become directly involved in our efforts. This report explains signs of suicide risks and how you can get needed help.

The annual report is also an opportunity to thank Sedgwick County Commissioners, their appointed Task Force members, and the dozens of subcommittee members who are dedicated to the cause of suicide prevention. They constitute the driving force behind this community effort and we are so very grateful for their contribution of time and resources.

Kevin Bomhoff
2002-2003 Chair



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Suicide Prevention Hotline - 660-7500

Who Commits Suicide?

Although females may attempt suicide more often, white males are more likely to die by suicide compared to any other race and gender. These numbers hold true right here in Sedgwick County as well, but with some surprising changes in 2003 as compared to previous years.

- The most lethal combination for suicide is access to a gun and the existence of either depression or substance abuse.
- More people died from suicide during the middle of the week and during afternoon and nighttime than any other day or time.
- As expected, males still completed suicide this year more often than females. However, the number of completed suicide for females doubled from the average in previous years.
- Thankfully, fewer of our teenagers completed suicide this year than in previous years. But the numbers for suicides for adults in their 40's and 50's rose by over 136% this year.
- While suicide by gunshot remained fairly stable in our county as a method of choice, a sign of a change in the times was indicated by a 200% increase in the use of drug overdose as a method of choice for suicide. None of those deaths were of teenagers.
- Compared to last year, suicide in older adults declined only slightly than in previous years.

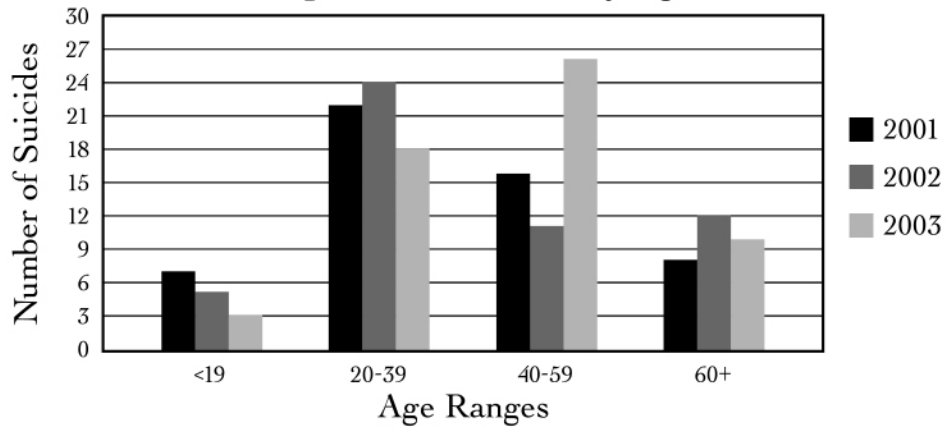
Not surprisingly, a large number of our citizens choosing suicide had recently suffered from psychological, physical, or financial distress, with depression being noted by family members in over half of the deaths. Many of those completing suicide did not have a documented history of previous attempts, nor did they leave their family members indication or explanations for their choices.



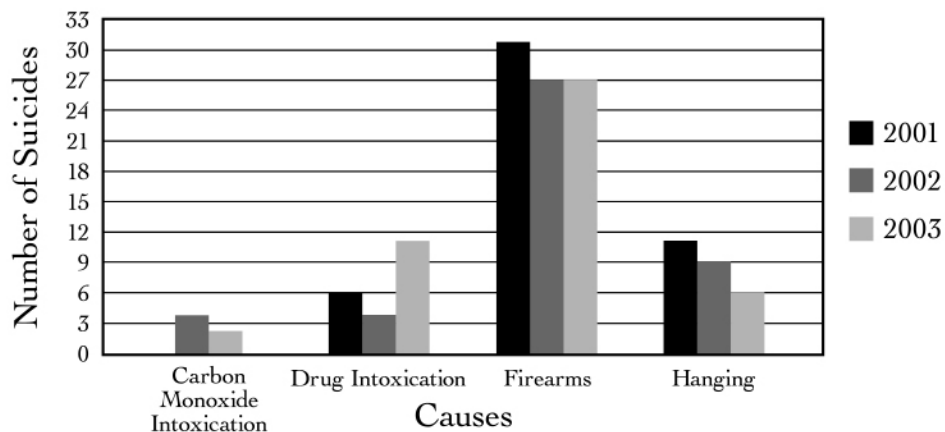
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Comparison of Suicides by Age



Cause of Suicides



In the United States, one person commits a suicide every 18 minutes, and it is estimated that 4.4 million people in the United States are suicide survivors of a loved one.

Suicide is now the fourteenth leading cause of all deaths in the state of Kansas.

One out of every six Kansans who die from suicide is from Sedgwick County.

Firearms are now the most frequent method of suicide for men and women of all ages in Sedgwick County.

In Sedgwick County, 59.6% of the suicides were by firearms in 2003. No gun is a "safe" gun: whether handguns or long guns, stored locked or unlocked, loaded or empty, guns in the home are associated with an increased risk of suicide and unnatural death for family members. Clinicians treating suicidal patients must insist on the removal of firearms from their environments. Patients and family members should be informed that nothing short of removing the guns from the environment will reduce the suicide risk associated with firearms in the home.

Suicide can be prevented. While some suicides occur without any outward warning, most do not. The most effective way to prevent suicide among loved ones is to learn how to recognize the signs of someone at risk, take those signs seriously and know how to respond to them. The emotional crises that usually precede suicide are most often both recognizable and treatable.



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What is Being Done?

Below are some of the strategies now being employed by the Sedgwick County Suicide Prevention Task Force and its Subcommittees:

- Development of the Sedgwick County Suicide Prevention web site and helpful links via the website www.sedgwickcounty.org
- Development of a partnership with Sedgwick County media to assist with news stories based on suicide.
- Distribution of 200 older adults awareness posters regarding signs and symptoms of suicide.
- Distribution of 200 Kansas teen suicide prevention posters to area's where teens congregate.
- Community Resource List in four languages, English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Loa.
- Lend support to USD 259, to implement the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Campaign including a training track for teachers.
- Distribution of 7000 suicide stigma brochures in the Sedgwick County area.
- Presentations to community groups about suicide in Sedgwick County.
- Establishment of an official Task Force position paper titled "Integrated Treatment for Persons at Risk for Suicide".
- Facilitates a Survivors of Suicide support group designed for immediate assistance following the suicide of a loved one.
- Distribution of 2,500+ Survivors of Suicide brochures.
- Began tracking suicide trends in our local community to evaluate and discover best methods for preventing suicides.
- Identifying external funding for Sedgwick County based research and prevention activities.
- Second Annual Suicide Prevention Community Meeting on suicide assessment featuring Shawn Christopher Shea, MD
- Third Annual Suicide Prevention Forum - Task Force and Subcommittee members were devoted to 2 primary goals, 1) to provide feedback on the State Suicide Prevention Plan Draft and 2) Have local community dialogue regarding resources, gaps and potential needs.

Future Strategies

The SPTF will continue current efforts while introducing the following new strategies.

- Expand the Yellow Ribbon Campaign to new target groups and the community at large.
- Host the 1st Annual "Link 4 Life" Run/Walk to promote community awareness and to distribute prevention information.
- Promote general public awareness of the Suicide Prevention website.
- Research specific characteristics of local suicides in order to better target prevention efforts.
- Expand the number of community organizations involved in suicide prevention education.
- Placing a suicide prevention message in Student Daily Planners within the school districts in Sedgwick County.

Be Aware of the Warning Signs

- Life changes, medical illnesses, losses
- Increased complaints about physical problems without a medical reason (somatic complaints)
- Sudden change from extreme depression to being 'at peace' (may indicate that a person has decided to commit suicide)
- Withdrawn or isolated from friends and family
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Overwhelming feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Inability to make decisions or concentrate
- Making negative comments about self
- Purposefully putting affairs in order by giving away possessions or 'clearing the air' over personal incidents from the past
- Talking, writing, or hinting about suicide
- The association between mental illness and substance abuse increases the risk of suicidal behavior in adults and young people
- Existing research suggests higher rates of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among the gay and lesbian population.

How You Can Help

- LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN;
- Don't promise to keep their comments of suicide a secret; and
- Help them to get help by talking to a family doctor, counselor, clergy, by calling the Suicide Prevention Hotline or going to an emergency room.

If you experience these feelings, get help! If someone you know exhibits these symptoms, offer help!

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Source: Sedgwick County Suicide Prevention Task Force Educational Materials

If you are interested in helping to reduce the number of suicides in Sedgwick County through education, awareness, intervention or methodology, please call Bev Baalman at 316-660-7652. Get involved and make a difference.

SUICIDE PREVENTION IS A COMMUNITY EFFORT.

2003 Suicide Prevention Task Force

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Tim Norton - 2nd District
Tom Winters - 3rd District
Carolyn McGinn - 4th District
Ben Sciortino - 5th District

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Vickie Forbes
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Sally Frey
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