

Youth suicide rates in US linked to shortages of mental healthcare workers at county level

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Youth suicide rate increased as county levels of mental health professional shortages increased, after adjusting for county demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, according to the first national study

to assess this association. The association remained significant for youth suicides by firearms. Findings were published in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*.

"Our results underscore the critical need to expand the [mental health](#) professional workforce in counties across the country," said lead author Jennifer Hoffmann, MD, MS, Emergency Medicine physician at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "In addition, policies that restrict firearm access to young people may be considered as a suicide prevention strategy."

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among U.S. adolescents, with rates rising over the last decade. Disparities exist by area geography, with higher suicide rates in rural and high poverty areas of the U.S., where [mental health professionals](#) are scarce. Mental health problems are among the most common precipitating factors for youth suicide. Up to one in five children in the U.S. has a mental health condition, but only about half of children who need [mental health care](#) receive it.

Dr. Hoffmann and colleagues evaluated 5,034 suicides by youth aged 5-19 years that occurred from 2015 to 2016. Of 3,133 U.S. counties, more than two-thirds were designated as mental health workforce shortage areas.

"Mental health workforce capacity can be increased through integration of mental health care into primary care settings and schools, and through expansion of telehealth services," said Dr. Hoffmann, who also is the Children's Research Fund Junior Board Research Scholar. "Improving reimbursement rates for mental health services may further aid in recruitment and retention of mental health professionals, and hopefully reduce suicide rates among [young people](#)."

More information: *JAMA Pediatrics* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.4419](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.4419)

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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