

Deaths due to suicide, homicide on the rise among U.S. youth

October 17 2019, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—The anger and fear seething throughout the United States

could be having a fatal impact on some of the nation's youngest citizens.

More teens and [young adults](#) are coming to a violent end in recent years, either at their own hand or another's, new federal data show.

Both suicide and homicide death rates are rising among 10- to 24-year-olds, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

"Recently, in the last few years, they're both trending upward. Suicide began to turn upward earlier, in 2007, and now in 2014, homicide turned around as well," said Sally Curtin, an NCHS statistician. "These are leading causes of death, and they both are increasing now."

The suicide rate for young people aged 10 to 24 rose 56% between 2007 and 2017, with the pace increasing of late, the researchers said.

Suicide deaths increased 7% annually from 2013 to 2017, compared with 3% annually between 2007 and 2013, the investigators found.

Meanwhile, homicide deaths among 10- to 24-year-olds rose 18% between 2014 and 2017, after nearly a decade in decline, the researchers said.

Accidental deaths—car crashes, drug overdoses and drownings—remain the leading cause of [death](#) in this age group, Curtin said. But deaths due to suicide and homicide are right behind, and rising.

These statistics amount to a "very serious public health crisis," said Dr. Victor Fornari, vice chairman of child and adolescent psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, N.Y.

It's impossible to nail down any single cause for this increase in violent

deaths among the young, said Dr. Alex Crosby, chief medical officer for the division of injury prevention at the CDC.

"There's probably a combination of several factors," Crosby said.

One likely suspect, according to Fornari, is increasing levels of anger across the country.

"Society as a whole has become more polarized, angrier, less tolerant," he said. "There's more scapegoating. Emotions are running very high, and society as a whole is becoming a bit angry. We see that in the overt aggression that's manifested by the increased rates of homicide."

Children also are faced with home lives full of stress, as families struggle to make ends meet, Fornari said.

"As family problems accumulate, the stress is imparted to the kids as well," he said. "The environment at home becomes toxic with fear and stress and anger, and these kids are having a very hard time coping."

Crosby said other factors that could play into suicide and homicide risk include childhood mental illness, exposure to violence, relationship problems, [child abuse](#) or neglect, and access to firearms or other lethal weapons.

Depression could also play a role, said Glenn Thomas, clinical director of community-based services for behavioral health at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

"We have seen the rates of depression increase significantly, which is consistent with an increase in the suicide rate," he said.

Thomas added that youth suicide could be influenced by "contagion"—the potential for copy-cat suicides.

"When a young person dies by suicide, other young people are at elevated risk because there has been shown to be a contagion effect," he said.

Media reporting on prominent suicides can contribute to suicidal contagion, as can TV shows and movies, Thomas added.

Homicide and suicide rates differed slightly between specific age groups of young people, the researchers reported.

For example, the suicide rate for 10- to 14-year-olds nearly tripled between 2007 and 2017, while their homicide rate declined 18% during the period between 2000 and 2017.

But people in the 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age ranges have experienced increases in both suicide and [homicide](#) rates.

The report was published in the October issue of the CDC's *NCHS Data Brief*.

Fornari said at an annual meeting of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, in Chicago, that plans are afoot for a major study of ways to prevent teen [suicide](#).

"We have to be able to identify vulnerable youth, and strategies are being developed to try to screen," he said. "In the same way we screen for cholesterol and blood pressure, we have to screen for suicidal thoughts and then have targeted interventions for youth identified as being at risk."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [violence prevention](#).

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Citation: Deaths due to suicide, homicide on the rise among U.S. youth (2019, October 17)
retrieved 31 December 2022 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-10-deaths-due-suicide-homicide-youth.html>

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