Charity Fitch

26 April 2022

Causes of Suicide

Suicide rates have been steadily rising over the past two decades, according to the [National Institute of Mental Health](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/research-highlights/2021/nimh-addresses-critical-need-for-rapid-acting-interventions-for-severe-suicide-risk). It is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States and the second leading cause of death for 15 to 34 year olds.

In 2020 alone, there were about 46,000 deaths by suicide: roughly, one death every 11 minutes, according to the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html).

“The number of people who think or attempt suicide is even higher,” the CDC said. “In 2020, an estimated 12.2 million American adults seriously thought about suicide, 3.2 million planned a suicide attempt and 1.2 million attempted suicides.”

The CDC said there are many factors in one’s life that could cause people to consider suicide. These include financial, job or relationship problems. Previous trauma and mental illnesses can also contribute to suicidal ideation.

“Usually, there’s a trigger for the thought. Unless there’s just a lot of feelings of self-worthlessness and hopelessness, which can be derived from depression or trauma,” Crystal Hicks, a psychiatric nurse practitioner at Horizon Behavioral Health in Lynchburg, Virginia, said.

For Kathleen Johnson, her anxiety, panic attacks and eventual suicidal ideation stemmed from the pressures she placed on herself in high school.

“I was in a lot of AP classes. I’ve always been like a really high achiever, getting all A’s and stuff like that,” Johnson said.

With the rise of a pandemic in 2020, experts have also seen a rise in suicidal ideation and suicide rates. Hicks believes we have yet to see the worst of the effects of the pandemic on mental health.

“It’ll come out in years to come. The research will be there, but we’re seeing it, just frontline, in the mental health system,” Hicks said.

Hicks works mostly with children and teenagers, and she has seen them wrestle with suicidal ideation more and more since the pandemic began.

“Most certainly, the pandemic has really heightened especially our youth - young kids to especially teenagers - have been afflicted by the pandemic in terms of suicidality and the need for the mental health care system,” Hicks said.

Hicks said isolation plays a role in the rise of suicide.

In 2020, people were sent home from things like school, work and vacations. They quarantined in their homes with their families to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19.

Children, teenagers and adults had to adjust to a new pace of life. School and work switched to online formats.

Then, they were thrown back into the “normal” way of life, but it looked a little different than what they were used to.

“Kids had a lot of adjustment during that period. They experienced a lot of loss,” Hicks said. “There was a lot of death, a lot of grief. We’re dealing with the repercussions of that in our community. What the pandemic’s done to the adults, it trickles downstream.”