Suicide Trends Among Youths and Young Adults Aged 10-24 — United States, 1990-2004

In 2004, suicide was the third leading cause of death among youths and young adults aged 10--24 years in the United States, accounting for 4,599 deaths (1,2). During 1990--2003, the combined suicide rate for persons aged 10--24 years declined 28.5%, from 9.48 to 6.78 per 100,000 persons (2). However, from 2003 to 2004, the rate increased by 8.0%, from 6.78 to 7.32 (2), the largest single-year increase during 1990--2004. To characterize U.S. trends in suicide among persons aged 10--24 years, CDC analyzed data recorded during 1990--2004, the most recent data available. Results of that analysis indicated that, from 2003 to 2004, suicide rates for three sex-age groups (i.e., females aged 10--14 years and 15--19 years and males aged 15--19 years) departed upward significantly from otherwise declining trends. Results further indicated that suicides both by hanging/suffocation and poisoning among females aged 10--14 years and 15--19 years increased from 2003 to 2004 and were significantly in excess of trends in both groups. The results suggest that increases in suicide and changes in suicidal behavior might have occurred among youths in certain sex-age groups, especially females aged 10--19 years. Closer examination of these trends is warranted at federal and state levels. Where indicated, health authorities and program directors should consider focusing suicide-prevention activities on these groups to help prevent suicide rates from increasing further.

Significant upward departures from modeled trends in 2004 were identified in total suicide rates for three of the six sex-age groups: females aged 10--14 years and 15--19 years and males aged 15--19 years. The largest percentage increase in rates from 2003 to 2004 was among females aged 10--14 years (75.9%), followed by females aged 15--19 years (32.3%) and males aged 15--19 years (9.0%). In absolute numbers, from 2003 to 2004, suicides increased from 56 to 94 among females aged 10--14 years, from 265 to 355 among females aged 15--19 years, and from 1,222 to 1,345 among males aged 15--19 years.

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In 1990, firearms were the most common suicide method among females in all three age groups examined, accounting for 55.2% of suicides in the group aged 10--14 years, 56.0% in the group aged 15--19 years, and 53.4% in the group aged 20--24 years. However, from 1990 to 2004, among females in each of the three age groups, significant downward trends were observed in the rates both for firearm suicides (p<0.01) and poisoning suicides (p<0.05), and a significant increase was observed in the rate for suicides by hanging/suffocation (p<0.01). In 2004, hanging/suffocation was the most common method among females in all three age groups, accounting for 71.4% of suicides in the group aged 10--14 years, 49% in the group aged 15--19 years, and 34.2% in the group aged 20--24 years. In addition, from 2003 to 2004, hanging/suffocation suicide rates among females aged 10--14 and 15--19 years increased by 119.4% (from 0.31 to 0.68 per 100,000 persons) and 43.5% (from 1.24 to 1.78), respectively. In absolute numbers, from 2003 to 2004, suicides by hanging/suffocation increased from 32 to 70 among females aged 10--14 years and from 124 to 174 among females aged 15--19 years. Aside from 2004, the only other significant departure from trend among females in these two age groups during 1990--2004 was in suicides by hanging/suffocation among females aged 15--19 years in 1996.