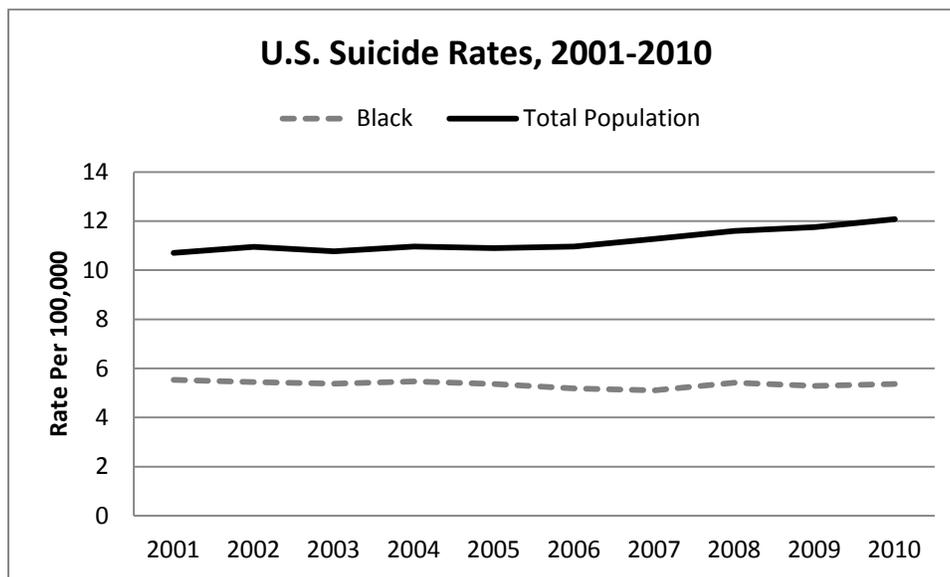


Blacks



This fact sheet is one in a series that summarizes data and research on suicidal behavior among particular racial and ethnic populations.* *Black* and *African American* are terms often used to describe this population, which can include Caribbean Blacks. The Office of Management and Budget defines *Black* or *African American* as a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.¹ Most national health data sources use the term *Black*. In 2010 Black people comprised 13% of the U.S. population.²

The U.S. Census and national suicide-related data sets categorize data by individual racial groups, (e.g., Black, White) and by one non-specific “other” or “multiple race” category. Therefore, the data in this sheet refer to individuals who classify themselves only as Black and not to those who classify themselves as both Black and of another racial/ethnic background.



Source: CDC, 2010 Fatal Injury Reports.

Mortality Data

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported the following statistics for 2010:³

- At 5.37, the suicide rate for Blacks of all ages was slightly less than half of the overall U.S. rate of 12.08.
- Suicide was the 16th leading cause of death for Blacks of all ages and the 3rd leading cause of death for young Black males ages 15–24.

* Visit <http://www.sprc.org> for the other fact sheets on suicide among different racial/ethnic populations.

Suicide Deaths: Rates per 100,000

Age	Black Rates		U.S. Rates	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total	9.42	1.85	19.78	4.99
15-24	11.54	2.08	16.90	3.89
25-34	16.43	2.43	22.50	5.34
35-64	11.20	2.60	27.64	8.21
65-84	8.38	0.77*	26.89	4.36
85+	8.39*	1.09*	47.33	3.27

* Number of deaths too low for precision

Although Black suicide rates are lower than the overall U.S. rates, suicide affects Black youth at a much higher rate than Black adults. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among Blacks ages 15-24.⁴ Since the Black community in the United States is disproportionately young, the number of deaths among youth may have a particularly strong impact on the Black community.⁵

Black Americans die by suicide a full decade earlier than White Americans. The average age of Black suicide decedents is 32, and that of White decedents is 44.⁶

Suicidal Behavior

Adults

Black adults ages 18 or older who responded to a national survey reported similar rates of suicidal behavior compared to adults in the total U.S. population:⁷

Results of 2011 National Survey of Drug Use and Health

"In the past year have you:"	Blacks	Total U.S. Population
Had serious thoughts of suicide	3.3%	3.7%
Made suicide plans	0.9%	1.0%
Attempted suicide	0.7%	0.5%
Gotten medical attention for a suicide attempt	0.3%	0.3%

The *lifetime* prevalence of *suicidal ideation* and *suicide attempts* of Blacks has been placed at 11.82% and 4.15%, respectively.⁸

Black rates can differ by ethnicity. One study found that among adult males, Caribbean Blacks had a higher rate of suicide attempts than African American Blacks.⁹ On the other hand, another study found that among adolescent males, African American Blacks were approximately five times more likely than Caribbean Blacks to attempt suicide.¹⁰

Youth

Black high school students report slightly lower rates of certain suicidal behaviors, except for attempts, than the general population of U.S. high school students:¹¹

Results of 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of high school students:

"In the past 12 months have you:"	Blacks	Total U.S.
Had serious thoughts of suicide	13.2%	15.8%
Made suicide plans	11.1%	12.8%
Attempted suicide	8.3%	7.8%
Gotten medical attention for a suicide attempt	2.4%	2.4%

The percentage of Black female students reporting suicidal thoughts and plans was similar to that of White female students but higher than that of Black male and White male students:

"In the past 12 months have you:"	Blacks		Whites	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Had serious thoughts of suicide	17.4%	9.0%	18.4%	12.8%
Made suicide plans	13.9%	8.4%	13.7%	10.6%
Attempted suicide	8.8%	7.7%	7.9%	4.6%
Gotten medical attention for a suicide attempt	2.4%	2.4%	2.2%	1.5%

Strengths and Protective Factors

Across all populations, some of the most significant protective factors are:^{12, 13}

- Effective mental health care
- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Problem-solving skills
- Contacts with caregivers

In addition, research has shown the following to be among the most significant protective factors in Black populations:

Religion: Orthodox religious beliefs and personal devotion have been identified as protective against suicide among Blacks.¹⁴

Participation in organized religious practices, such as church attendance, is linked to lower suicide risk in African Americans.¹⁵

Among Blacks with psychiatric disorders, religiosity has been found to delay age of onset of ideation as well as decrease the number of psychiatric disorders.¹⁶

Social and emotional support: Family support, peer support, and community connectedness have been shown to help protect Black adolescents from suicidal behavior.¹⁷ Similarly, positive interactions and social and family support have been shown to significantly reduce risk for suicide attempts among Black adults.¹⁸

Although emotional support from family decreased the risk of suicide attempts for both Caribbean Blacks and African Americans, the impact was stronger for Caribbean Blacks than for African Americans.¹⁹

Black identity: Two small studies of African American women found that having a strong sense of African American identity, heritage, and history was protective against suicide.^{20, 21}

Risk Factors

Across all populations, some of the most significant risk factors are:^{22, 23}

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Mood and anxiety disorders
- Access to a means to lethal means

For individuals who are already at risk, a “triggering” event causing shame or despair may make them more likely to attempt suicide. These events may include relationship problems and breakups, problems at work, financial hardships, legal difficulties, and worsening health.

In addition, research has shown the following to be among the most significant risk factors in Black populations:

Marital status: Among Black Americans, being divorced or widowed has been significantly associated with increased odds of suicidal ideation compared with being married or never married.²⁴

Family conflict: Negative interaction with family members was associated with increased suicidal behavior among Black adults. The effect was more pronounced among Caribbean Blacks than among African Americans.²⁵

One study noted that Black adolescents reporting parental conflict were 6.4 times more likely to attempt suicide than Black adolescents who did not report parental conflict.²⁶

Acculturation: Increased acculturation into White society, which can include loss of family cohesion and support, leads to increased risk for suicidal ideation²⁷ and suicide attempts.²⁸

Hopelessness, racism, and discrimination: Among Black youth, perceived racism and discrimination along with social and economic disadvantage may lead to having no hope for the future, which is a risk factor for suicide.²⁹

Mental health services access and use: In a study using a nationally representative sample, Black youth were substantially less likely than White youth to have used a mental health service in the year during which they seriously thought about or attempted suicide.³⁰

In a large national survey, Blacks who reported suicidal thoughts or attempts were less likely than Whites to seek or receive psychiatric services.³¹ The chart below shows the percentages of adults who did **not** seek or receive any psychiatric services in the year prior to having suicidal thoughts or attempts:

	Blacks	Whites
Suicidal Thoughts	59.7%	42.8%
Suicide Attempts	57.8%	24.1%

Endnotes

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- ⁵ Sherry Molock, e-mail message to author, May 30, 2013.
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