INMATE SUICIDE FACT SHEET

Statistics

- Suicide is the leading cause of preventable death in U.S. jails, comprising 29% or more of all deaths.¹
- Suicide rates in correctional facilities are 3 to 9 times higher than outside of them. ii, iii, iv
- Local jails often have higher rates of suicide than large jails and state or federal prisons. v, vi, iv, vii

The most comprehensive standards for correctional facilities to follow in order to reduce suicide have been laid out by the National Commission on Correctional Healthcare: vii

1. Identification – Screening forms using observations and interviews to assess suicide risk.
2. Training – All staff trained to recognize cues of suicide risk.
3. Assessment – Mental health worker conducts thorough assessment and assigns risk level.
5. Housing – Avoid isolation unless constant observation is possible; house with other inmates in safe environment with 10-to-15 minute checks.
6. Referral – Refer potentially suicidal prisoners to mental health providers and corrections staff.
7. Communication – Procedures for constant communication between mental health provider and corrections staff.
8. Intervention – Immediate intervention procedures for stopping a suicide in progress.
9. Notification – Procedures for notifying authorities and family members of suicide attempts or completions.
10. Reporting – Careful documentation of screening, monitoring effects, and suicide attempts or completions.
11. Review – Plan for review by prison administrators and medical professionals if suicide occurs.

RISK FACTORS UNIQUE TO THE INCARCERATED

- Isolation, loss of control, shame, and fear that are part of life in jail. vii
- Offenders are also significantly likely to have pre-existing dispositions, including:
  I. Aggressive and impulsive tendencies,
  II. Psychological disorders,
  III. Substance abuse problems,
  IV. Previous attempt history. vii, i
  V. More likely to engage in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior including cutting, head banging, and the ingestion of foreign objects and substances.

- 86% of inmates who die by suicide have engaged in self-injurious behavior prior to their death. viii

Most At-Risk Populations:
The majority of inmates that die by suicide are:

- White ix
- African American inmates have significantly lowest rates i
- Younger than average age of the prison or jail population i

More at risk:

- Those who recently been sentenced or incarcerated x, xi, xii
- Those who have been dealt longer sentences x, iii, xii
- Those facing new legal problems or inmate-related conflicts is

⁵ Clarke, M. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/(S(g0zwk0jou1x4vz45tggpf45))/displayArticle.aspx?articleid=22941&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

If you or someone you know is suicidal, please contact a mental health professional or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).