AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY

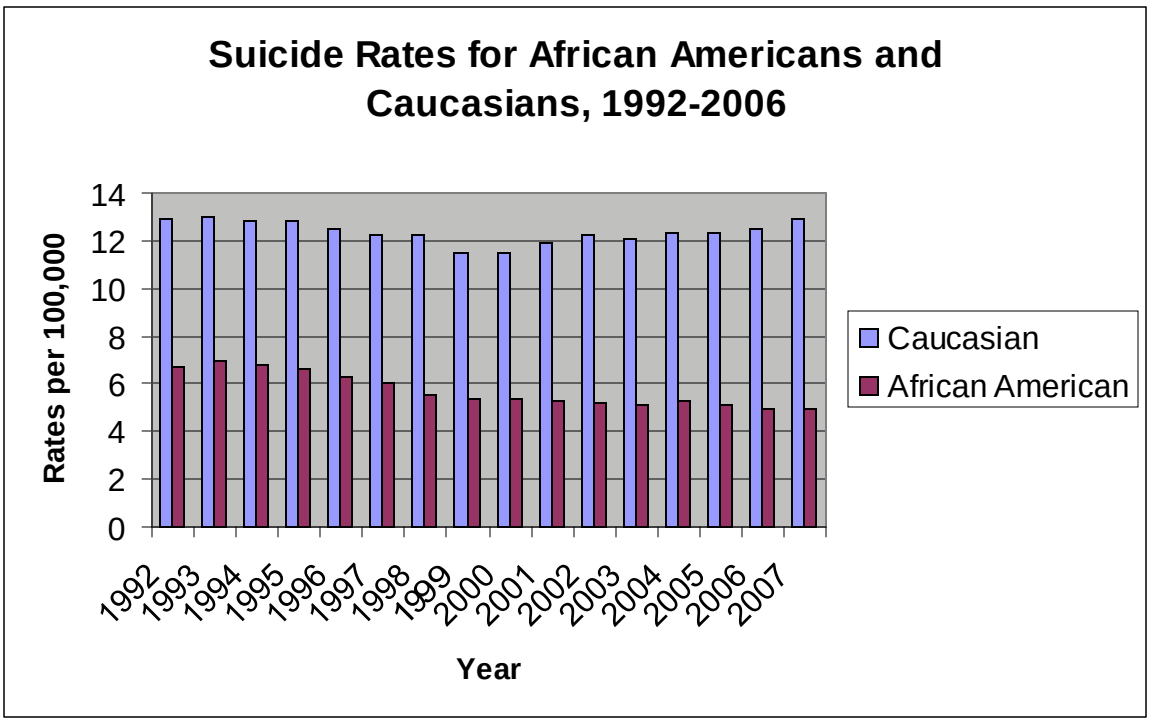
African American Suicide Fact Sheet[1]

- In 2007, 1,958 African Americans completed suicide in the U.S. Of these, 1,606 (82%) were males (rate of 8.4 per 100,000). The suicide rate for females was 1.7 per 100,000.

- In 2007, there were 352 African American female suicides. The ratio of African American male to female was 4.56 to 1. The suicide rate among African American females was the lowest of all racial/ gender groups.

- As with all racial groups, African American females were more likely than males to attempt suicide and African American males were more likely to complete suicide.

- From 1993 to 2007, the rate of suicide for African Americans (all ages) showed a small but steady decline, before increasing slightly since 2003.



- Suicide was the third leading cause of death among African American youth (ages 10-19), after homicides and accidents. The suicide rate for young African American youth was 2.68 per 100,000 (n = 184).

[1] In this fact sheet, unless otherwise specified, the information presented refers to the latest available data (i.e., 2007 data).

- For African American youth, the rate of male suicide (4.3 per 100,000) was 4.3 times higher than that of females (1.0 per 100,000).

- African American youth suicide rates were generally low until the beginning of the 1980's when rates started to increase radically. Between 1981 and 1994, the rate increased 78%. Since then, the rate has decreased significantly.

- Although Caucasian youth are twice as likely as African American youth to complete suicide, the rate of suicide grew faster in this time period among African American youth than among Caucasian youth.

- From 1981-1994, the suicide rate increased 83% for 15-24 year old African American males and 10% for African American females. Since 1994, the rates for males have decreased 67% for males and 23% for females.

- Males accounted for 87.2% of African American elderly (65 and older) suicides.

- Firearms were the predominant method of suicide among African Americans regardless of gender and age, accounting for roughly 50.4% of all suicides.

Things We Can Do to Help:

- Help remove the stigma and myths that suicide contradicts gender and cultural role expectations:
    - Religious stigma of suicide as the "unforgivable sin";
    - African American men are macho and do not take their own lives;
    - African American women are always strong and resilient and never crack under pressure.
- Remove barriers to treatment.
- Improve access to mental health treatment.
- Remove stigma associated with mental health treatment.
- Increase awareness in cultural differences in the expression of suicidal behaviors:
    - African American are less likely to use drugs during a suicide crisis;
    - Behavioral component of depression in African Americans is more pronounced;
    - Some African Americans express little suicide intent or depressive symptoms during suicidal crises;
- Develop liaisons with the faith community.
- Recognize warning signs and help a friend or family member get professional help.

For More Information:

American Association of Suicidology
www.suicidology.org
National Organization for People for Color Against Suicide
www.nopcas.com
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars

Sources

The information for this fact sheet was gathered from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) website (www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/default.htm) run by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institute of Mental Health website (www.nimh.nih.gov/) as well as the National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide (NOPCAS) website (www.nopcas.com).

American Association of Suicidology

AAS is a membership organization for all those involved in suicide prevention and intervention, or touched by suicide. AAS is a leader in the advancement of scientific and programmatic efforts in suicide prevention through research, education and training, the development of standards and resources, and survivor support services. For membership information, please contact:

American Association of Suicidology
5221 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.
Second Floor
Washington, DC 20015
tel. (202) 237-2280
fax (202) 237-2282
www.suicidology.org
info@suicidology.org

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