

Advancing Suicide Prevention™

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN PROTECTING VULNERABLE, TROUBLED AND MENTALLY ILL YOUTHS FROM SUICIDE IS EXPLORED

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among youth populations in some states; third-leading cause for youth nationwide



JANUARY 31, 2006 – Sheboygan, Wis. – It's the **third-leading cause of death** among 10- to 24-year-olds in America. And for every youth who dies by suicide, an estimated 100 to 200 more attempt suicide. The upshot? **In a typical high school classroom, it's likely that three students have made a suicide attempt in the past year.** The numbers don't improve for post-high school young adults, with suicide rising to be **the second leading cause of death for college students.** Moreover, rates of suicide in children age 10-14 have **increased since the 1950s by 300 percent.**

"We're talking about millions of school-age children who are losing hope in themselves and their future," says A. Kathryn Power, MEd, Director, Center for Mental Health Services within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "This is youth suicide: tragic, shocking, incomprehensible."

Halting youth suicide has become a focus at federal, state, tribal and local levels. And schools are among the key settings where suicide prevention can occur, according to experts. In fact, **schools are mandated to educate and protect students.** "It's in the legislation state by state," says Rutgers University researcher John Kalafat, PhD, an expert in implementing and evaluating school-based suicide prevention programs. "The kids are already there – that's where you're going to find them. So that's where prevention and intervention can occur."

And the need for school-based intervention and prevention is real, especially in light of 2005 data released by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), revealing the incredible prevalence of mental illnesses, the early age of onset and the tragically long delay before most individuals obtain treatment. The July 2005 NIMH National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R) showed that surprisingly, **half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14**, and three-quarters by age 24. These are school-age children, in school for the majority of their day. So it makes sense that schools be well equipped and willing to confront youth suicide if lives are to be saved.

The issue of the role of schools in preventing youth suicide is explored in depth in the January 2006 issue of *Advancing Suicide Prevention™*, the new landmark strategic health policy magazine from PDV Communications Inc. Content includes model suicide prevention programs for school settings, and the importance of building a competent school community, one that offers a climate where students feel respected, supported and comfortable with approaching an adult when facing problems. Data reported include:

- **HISPANIC YOUTH AT HIGH RISK: More than one in four Hispanic girls in grades 5-12 report symptoms of depression. And Hispanic adolescent girls have higher rates of reported suicide attempts** than Non-Hispanic White and Black adolescent girls or boys. Yet because of language, cultural, economic and other barriers, far too few of these vulnerable youngsters receive the mental health services they desperately need.
- **PREVALENCE OF SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AMONG YOUTHS:** In the past 12 months, **16.9 percent of students in grades 9-12 have seriously considered attempting suicide**, according to data from the CDC.
- **DEARTH OF CHILD PSYCHIATRISTS:** Conservatively about **12 percent of U.S. children and adolescents suffer from functionally impairing mental disorders**, according to cautious estimates from the Institute of Medicine and NIMH. Yet a **severe shortage of child and adolescent mental health practitioners places a burden on pediatricians**, family physicians and others to identify at-risk children – and make referral and treatment decisions for which they may be inadequately trained.
- **BARRIER TO TREATMENT: Lack of health insurance for more than 43 million Americans** impedes parents' ability to obtain appropriate treatment for their children who may be at risk for suicide.

Other content in the just-released third issue of *Advancing Suicide Prevention* includes:

“Storm surge” of rising suicides that are beginning to ripple through the hurricane-battered Gulf Coast including those who have relocated to other regions of the country. This includes a substantial increase in calls to a national suicide-prevention hotline, 1-800-273-TALK, from people with suicidal ideation.

Suicide attempt survivor and researcher DeQuincy Lezine applies a firsthand understanding of suicidal despair to develop better prevention methods for others.

Landmark study from researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and published in JAMA, showing that **talk therapy can reduce suicide risk in adults. Because suicide is the fourth-leading cause of death for adults under age 65, this groundbreaking work has important public health implications** given its effectiveness for preventing repeat suicide attempts, which are one of the strongest risk factors for completed suicide.

Also featured in the current issue of *Advancing Suicide Prevention* are: Harvard University Press, American Psychological Association, Columbia University TeenScreen Program, Jed Foundation, National Institute of Mental Health, The Prevention Researcher, LivingWorks, QPR, Eastern Washington University, Devereux, Suicide Prevention Action Network USA, American Association of Suicidology and other organizations and programs relevant to suicide and its prevention.

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About *Advancing Suicide Prevention*

A unique strategic health policy magazine, Advancing Suicide Prevention™ presents the state of the science and policy on suicide prevention from diverse perspectives and for diverse audiences. These include over 20,000 leaders and key decision makers in health care, social and human services, policy development, advocacy, education and training, research, legal and judicial arenas, law enforcement, corrections, crisis intervention, risk management and pastoral counseling. This full-color 36-page magazine is published by PDV Communications, Inc., a Wisconsin-based magazine publisher serving the mental health and social services arenas. For more information about Advancing Suicide Prevention including how to advertise or subscribe, visit advancingsp.org or call 920-457-4033.