

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Suicide Prevention Awareness

An Urgent Call to Action for Employers Worldwide

By Joel Axler, MD, *National Behavioral Health Leader*



Suicide is a leading cause of death worldwide, posing a significant public health challenge. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), each year, over 700,000 people die by suicide, and many more attempt it, leaving lasting impacts on families, communities and societies at large. For employers, recognizing the signs, understanding the causes and fostering supportive environments are crucial steps in preventing suicide. The following statistics* highlight the gravity of the situation:



Global Suicide Rates

The global age-standardized suicide rate in 2019 was 9.0 per 100,000 population. While there has been a slight decline over the past decade, suicide rates remain alarmingly high, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where nearly 77% of global suicides occur.



Regional Variations

Suicide rates differ widely across regions. For instance, the WHO reports that in 2019, the African and Southeast Asian regions had the highest suicide rates, while the Eastern Mediterranean region had the lowest.



Age and Gender Disparities

Suicide rates vary significantly across different age groups and genders. The highest rates are found among older adults, with men being more likely to die by suicide than women. In many countries, males aged 70 and older have the highest suicide rates. Among young people aged 15-29, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death globally.



Lasting Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic did not create mental health issues but has exacerbated them, leading to concerns about a potential increase in suicide rates. Factors such as social isolation, economic stress and limited access to mental health services have contributed to heightened anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts in many individuals.

*** Reference and Data Resources:**

World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Observatory: <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/mental-health>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - Suicide Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/index.html>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>



Substance Use

Addiction is a significant risk factor for suicide, often intertwined with mental health disorders and other stressors. Alcohol and drug use can lower inhibitions, impair judgment and increase impulsivity, making individuals more likely to act on suicidal thoughts. Substance abuse can also lead to depressive disorders, further compounding the risk.



Co-occurring Medical Disorders

Many individuals who struggle with physical conditions, such as cardiac illness, diabetes and cancer, also have co-occurring mental health disorders, such as depression or anxiety. This dual diagnosis significantly increases the risk of suicide, necessitating integrated treatment approaches that address both issues simultaneously.



Mental Health Disorders

Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and substance abuse are significant risk factors for suicide. Psychosocial stressors such as the loss of a loved one, financial problems, relationship issues and exposure to violence or trauma can increase suicide risk. A history of previous suicide attempts is one of the strongest indicators of future suicide risk.

Suicide Prevention Awareness: A Vital Role for Employers

Workplaces play a crucial role in the mental well-being of employees. Employers are in a unique position to identify and address mental health issues, including substance use disorders, which are significant risk factors for suicide. As mentioned, regional variances in suicide rates are wide and should be built into specific plans and communications. Here are some tips for employers on how to help stem this global suicide crisis:

- **Culture:** Foster an open and supportive workplace culture where employees feel safe discussing their mental health and substance use concerns without fear of stigma or retaliation.
- **Communication:** Encourage managers to have regular check-ins with their team members to discuss their well-being and provide support as needed. Offer training programs, such as Mental Health First Aide Courses, for managers and employees to recognize the signs of mental health and substance use issues and how to respond appropriately.
- **Crisis intervention plans:** Develop and communicate clear procedures for crisis situations. This includes having protocols in place for responding to suicidal behavior or threats, ensuring that all employees know how to access emergency support services and having trained personnel available to handle crises.



- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Implement or promote EAPs that provide confidential counseling, support and referrals for employees dealing with mental health and substance use issues. Ensure employees have access to mental health and substance use resources, including hotlines, resilience programs, support groups and treatment programs.
- **Work-life balance:** Offer flexible work arrangements to help employees manage stress and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Encourage employees to take breaks, use their vacation time and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Overwork and burnout are significant contributors to mental health issues, and promoting a balanced approach to work can help mitigate these risks.
- **Integrated treatment:** Ensure that your U.S. carrier groups provide collaborative treatment options that address both mental health and physical disorders, recognizing the interconnected nature of these issues. Develop clear policies regarding substance use in the workplace, including supporting those seeking help.

By fostering a mentally and emotionally supportive environment, promoting mental health awareness and addressing substance use proactively, employers can significantly reduce the risk of suicide among their employees. Integrating these strategies into overarching workplace safety programs enhances employees' overall well-being and contributes to a healthier, more productive workplace.

Global Resources for Suicide Prevention**

International Organizations

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)
- [International Association for Suicide Prevention \(IASP\)](#)
- [United for Global Mental Health](#)

Regional and National Organizations

United States

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 988
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: [Website](#)

United Kingdom

- Samaritans: Call 116 123, [Website](#)
- Papyrus - Prevention of Young Suicide: [Website](#)

Australia

- Lifeline Australia: Call 13 11 14, [Website](#)
- Beyond Blue: [Website](#)

Canada

- Crisis Services Canada: Call 1-833-456-4566, [Website](#)
- Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP): [Website](#)

India

- Snehi: [Website](#)
- AASRA: [Website](#)

Online and Digital Resources

- [Crisis Text Line](#)
- [Befrienders Worldwide](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)

***For reference only and should not be considered an exhaustive list.*



About the Author



Dr. Joel Axler, MD, National Behavioral Health Leader

Dr. Axler is a board-certified child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist with more than 30 years of experience in academic, private practice and insurance settings. He is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He remains in clinical practice and serves on several executive committees and organizations, including the Georgia Psychiatric Physicians Association and the Georgia Council on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



Find Your Solution at [BBrown.com](https://www.brownsandbrown.com)

Please be advised that any and all information, comments, analysis, and/or recommendations set forth above relative to the possible impact of COVID-19 on potential insurance coverage or other policy implications are intended solely for informational purposes and should not be relied upon as legal or medical advice. As an insurance broker, we have no authority to make coverage decisions as that ability rests solely with the issuing carrier. Therefore, all claims should be submitted to the carrier for evaluation. The positions expressed herein are opinions only and are not to be construed as any form of guarantee or warranty. Finally, given the extremely dynamic and rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, comments above do not take into account any applicable pending or future legislation introduced with the intent to override, alter or amend current policy language.

Brown & Brown, Inc. and all its affiliates, do not provide legal, regulatory or tax guidance, or advice. If legal advice counsel or representation is needed, the services of a legal professional should be sought. The information in this document is intended to provide a general overview of the topics and services contained herein. Brown & Brown, Inc. and all its affiliates, make no representation or warranty as to the accuracy or completeness of the document and undertakes no obligation to update or revise the document based upon new information or future changes.