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Suicide- Awareness of Patterns and Symptoms

There is one death by suicide in the United States every twelve minutes (“Suicide Statistics and Facts”). According to the World Health Organization, almost 800,000 people around the world commit suicide every year. This is equivalent to one suicide every forty seconds, and there are estimates that for each suicide committed, twenty were attempted. These numbers show how prevalent suicide has become in our society. Unfortunately, it has become a common “solution” (that is permanent) to a temporary problem, sometimes including depression or anxiety. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health became or continued to be a struggle for many people. Isolation and a changing world worsened depression and anxiety. Young people especially were separated from their friends and thrown into a new routine. The negative impacts of COVID-19 on mental health and the pattern of suicide rates over the last two decades show the necessity of mental health tips and suicide prevention tactics for young people in 2021.

An examination of suicide rates over the last two decades shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has a potential to raise suicide rates even more. “In the last decade, suicide has become more common among young people” (Dastigir). Some have attributed this rise to social media, but experts are suspicious of other stressors. Suicide rates for young people were relatively stable in the United States from 2000 to 2007. Then our country entered an economic recession at the end of 2007. Since 2008, suicide rates have been steadily increasing. With the COVID-19 pandemic came a similar economic downturn. In both situations, many young people saw their parents lose jobs and may have had to move schools and lose friends. Because of the potential

for increased stress, health professionals have been concerned that suicide rates will increase over the next few years following the COVID-19 pandemic, as they did after the 2007 economic recession.

The stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have also negatively impacted the mental health of young people in the United States. According to Mental Health America, “recent surveys indicate that as many as one in five teens suffers from clinical depression” (“Depression in Teens”). In the article, the organization provides a list of symptoms that may indicate depression if they continue for more than two weeks, including the symptom of suicidal thoughts or actions. At the end of June 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found through a mental health survey that “symptoms of anxiety and depression were up sharply across the board between March and June, compared with the same time the previous year” (Kamenetz). The survey also found that the group struggling the most with anxiety and depression was young people. Finally, this June survey found that “almost 11 percent of all respondents...said they had ‘seriously considered’ suicide in the past 30 days” (Kamenetz). In the group of ages 18 to 24, the number was twice as high and equivalent to one in four respondents. These surveys show the negative impact of the pandemic on mental health and how it has increased anxiety and depression in young people.

Finally, health professions have suggestions for both suicide prevention and good mental health during a pandemic. Mental Health America reports that “four out of five teens who attempt suicide have given clear warnings” (“Depression in Teens”). It is crucial to be aware of these signs, including changed eating or sleeping patterns, a severe drop in school performance, and a dramatic change in personality and appearance. Mental Health America also provides some tips on helping those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts. Depending on the situation, it

can range from offering help and listening to seeking professional help. There are also tactics to encourage good mental health in yourself and in others. Especially during isolation, it is important to stay connected to the people you can, even if it is electronically. When everyone was quarantined in the spring of 2020, I tried to stay active and connected to my friends. My family went on walks around our neighborhood every day, which I quickly began to look forward to. I called my friends and even wrote letters to one of them. I also did some fun, crafty projects, like making a design with chalk on our sidewalk. Exercise, hobbies, and brain-stimulating activities are great ways to stay physically and mentally healthy.

There is a great need for mental health tips and suicide prevention strategies as many young people face the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their depression and anxiety and as suicide rates could continue to rise. It is extremely important for everyone to be aware of the people around them and understand how they could be affected by the many challenges of the pandemic. COVID-19 increased awareness of the struggle of mental health for many people, but families should be constantly aware of potential symptoms of those around them. Even without the struggles of the pandemic, suicide is a leading cause of death, particularly with young people. Suicide is not an issue that should be overlooked or pushed aside. Conversations about it should be prioritized, as well as help for those who are struggling with suicide or their mental health.

Works Cited

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