

Introduction to the Issue

Our group is concerned with an epidemic in our community that affects many of us, but not many of us in Stillwater County know much about it. Suicide affects people everywhere. It is a problem worldwide and results in approximately 3,000 deaths daily. We feel there isn't enough being said and done about suicide within the schools. Many people in our community have been affected by suicide. We are arguing this so that we can eliminate suicide all together. Suicide is something that should not be happening, and we think that if we get all the facts, find the evidence and talk about this enough suicide won't be an issue in the future. We believe that our community should be more aware of the fact that suicide is a big problem.

Research & Methods

We had so many questions, for example; "What are some warning signs?" "Are rates different between genders?" and lastly, "Why?" It took us a while to figure out what we wanted our argument to be on, but we finally decided on suicide awareness in the schools. We went through many different websites, a few different interviews, discussions, and we had a few secondary sources. Throughout this report, we will introduce the research, the evidence and our findings.

As a group we did a lot of research, we found a total of four websites. The 1st website was billingsgazette.com Cindy Uken was the author of this article.

The second website we found was mayoclinic.org that was authorized by the Mayo Clinic Staff. Mayo Clinic is a non-profit medical practice and medical research group based in Rochester, Minnesota.

The third website was dphhs.mt.gov which stands for Department of Public Health and Human Services, we also got some of this information from Mrs. Christina Robinson who is a nurse at the Public Health Clinic.

And lastly our fourth website was AFSP which is the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. We did some research on how our statewide rates compared with other states

We conducted surveys as well. We did surveys for the community and for the teachers. We had 30 responses from the teachers who taught 6-12, and 123 responses for the community survey.

Another thing we did was we held a couple interviews. We interviewed Joan Nye at the evangelical church, she works for the AFSP and she also had a personal experience with suicide. The second person we interviewed was Judge Lee Cornell, he was a police officer and had investigated suicides Big Horn County.

The last thing we did was we held a few discussions. We had discussions about what the school and the community can do to help prevent suicide and we talked about what the harm of not talking about it does.

It has also been brought to our attention that the teachers haven't been educated about the tragedies of suicide since 2006. A student had to take their life for this issue to be talked about within the schools.

Our Findings

We found four websites that were extremely helpful to us. We also held interviews, conducted a few surveys and held a couple discussions.

The first website was the Billings Gazette article. It had nearly all the information that we needed. We found a lot of numbers on this site, along with some facts and so much data. This website did a story on suicide because Montana has the highest suicide rate in the nation.

The second website we have is mayoclinic.org and all this website gave us was treatments and drugs, but we thought this would be helpful to us because we wanted to know our topic inside out. The website said treatment varied based on your behavior, specific situation, and your level of risk and what underlying problems may be causing you to feel suicidal.

The third website we found was the American Foundation For Suicide Prevention (AFSP). We found a little bit of information on this website, but we did find it to still be very educational. We found a lot of numbers on this, along with facts, rates, and lots of data.

The fourth and final website we found was the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS). We found a lot of information on this website, but we also got recommended this website by Christina Robinson, an employee at the DPHHS who we interviewed. She suggested this website so that we can look at more of the information that she was talking about in the interview. She also printed out a handout of the website for us to look at, but we went into more research on the website.

We have had a few interviews throughout the time period of this report. We interviewed Joan Nye, she is someone who works for the Out of the Darkness which is a organization that helps with the *American Foundation of Suicide Prevention*.

The first person we interviewed was Mrs. Joan Nye. She told us that she helps out the people at the AFSP and they do walks, and many other things to get out the awareness. Joan gave us so much information, she was an amazing person to interview. She gave us some brochures and some pamphlets throughout our hour of interview with her. She clarified many things for us. For instance, she told us that the term is not commit suicide, rather complete suicide.

When we were interviewing Joan, she also told us some of the leading causes of suicide. She said that depression is one of the main reason for someone committing suicide. Another thing was mental health problems, if you have mental health issues, such as bipolar, anxiety, gender disorders. .

She said that she hopes one day mental illnesses will be seen as any regular illness like asthma and diabetes. She believes that people shouldn't feel a stigma about mental illnesses and getting help with their specific situation. She also told us suicide knows no boundaries. Joan told us some risk behaviors as well. Some things you can do if you feel like your loved ones are thinking about suicide is you can ask the question, provide the hope, and take them directly to help. Here's an [Audio File](#) from our interview with Joan if you would like to listen.

We also interviewed Judge Cornell and Mrs. Christina Robinson at the Stillwater County Courthouse and they gave us some information on the AFSP website. We didn't get an audio file for this interview because they preferred if we would just take notes. This is a really interesting and helpful thing these people do at the American Foundation For Suicide Prevention. He told us what it's like seeing suicide from the perspective of a police officer. We asked him if talking about suicide was bad, and he told us that education is key. He also gave us the 2015 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey. This is a health risk behavior comparison of Montana High School students based on attempted suicide. This survey is administered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction every two years to students in grades 7-12. This particular survey was conducted in February 2015. In this survey, it shows that 8.9% of Montana high school students attempted suicide 1 or more times. This survey shows a lot of questions that are high risk factors, such as; not wearing a seat belt, riding with drunk drivers, drinking alcohol, carrying a dangerous weapon, using hallucinogenic drugs, trying smoking cigarettes and cigarette by products like cigars and electronic vape products.

Christina told us that one factor of suicide, is surprisingly, low vitamin D levels. They also stressed it very much that if you see the signs in someone, you ask. Don't be afraid to ask someone if they're feeling suicidal.

When we conducted the surveys we asked minimal questions, because this is such a serious topic and we wanted to make sure we didn't offend anyone. We ask questions like, "Have you lost anyone to suicide?" And "Do you think suicide is a problem in our schools?" The results we got were surprising. Some of the results that we found are there are more men that completed suicide than women, but more women that attempt suicide than men.

We did a survey for the county and for the teachers here at Columbus High School. We also held many discussions throughout this report. We started with this argument being on just suicide, but we decided suicide within the schools was a better target. We didn't think we should start as broad as just suicide, we really want to make a difference so we are starting small, and hopefully this will turn into something that isn't a major issue like it is now.

Suicide happens every day, every where, and most people don't see it coming. Throughout our discussions we've decided that we want to change that. We want people to know the warning signs, know what to do, how to get help, where to turn and who to call. The Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255 or (TALK). We didn't think people would be so in for us doing all this on suicide. Suicide has been a problem for a very long time, people have always been losing themselves and others to suicide and it's an awful thing. We think that if we talk about it enough it will get the word out and if everyone knows the warning signs, we think that we can cut the number of suicide losses at least in half. Some of the data that we found for risk behaviors is an increased use of alcohol or drugs, looking for a way to kill themselves for example looking online for materials or means, withdrawing from activities, isolating from your family and friends, sleeping too little or too much, visiting or calling people to say goodbye, giving away your prized possessions, aggression, and fatigue.

Analysis

In the 1st article we found, the Billings Gazette, we found information on Joan Nye, and it's partially what inspired us to interview her. Our teacher Mr. Chris Kapor also referred us to her as she is an amazing source on suicide prevention.

The second article was about the Mayo Clinic, we found out what happens in a nonemergency situation and helping a loved one. In non-emergency situations you can retrieve physiological counseling, medication such as; antidepressants, antipsychotic medications, anti-anxiety, and other medications used for mental illness. Family support can be a source of support but also a conflict. Involving them in your treatment can help them understand what you're going through, give them better coping skills, improve family communication and relationships.

Helping a loved one can be stressful and exhausting. Have an open and honest discussion about your concerns. Take advantage of all the suicide prevention resources there are today so you know what to do when someone is seeking help. You might think that your loved one would be mad at you if they told you they were feeling suicidal and you told someone and they would have to take treatment. It's better to have them mad at you then have them gone forever.

The third website we found was American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP).

We went online to the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) for our last website. We found a lot of numbers and facts of this website. We got referred to this website by Christina Robinson when we interviewed her.

In our interview with Joan Nye we found out that mental illness is a big factor in suicide and depression is one of the leading factors in teenage suicide. We know that people think talking about suicide may put an idea into someone's head, or that it does more harm than good, but they're wrong. Studies have shown and people who really know about suicide know that talking helps. Depression can go untreated because people don't talk about it or they feel a stigma about it. In our interview with Joan we asked her what she thought schools could do to help prevent suicide, she said, "The best thing that the school can do is to make students, teachers, and the community aware of the problem. Show them the signs, the behaviors, and what to do if they think their friend, child, or family member or anyone close to them might be considering suicide." Some of the signs that some may be thinking about suicide are substance abuse, purposelessness, anxiety, feeling trapped, hopelessness, withdrawal, anger, recklessness, and mood changes.

Some other risk behaviors that we found are; increased use of alcohol or drugs, looking for a way to kill themselves, for example looking online for materials or means, not wanting to do activities, isolating from family and friends, sleeping too little or too much, visiting or calling people to say goodbye, giving away your prized possessions, aggression, and fatigue. Some things you can do if you feel like your loved ones are thinking about suicide is you can ask the question, provide the hope, and take them directly to help.

In our interview with Judge Cornell and Christina Robinson we didn't ask many questions, we let them have free reign of the information they thought would be best for us to know. Judge Cornell gave us really good insight on what's it's like to be a police officer and investigating suicides. We asked him what he thought the school could do to help suicide rates. He said "awareness is the best thing that anyone can do, education is key". We think that if you educate people maybe the rates will go down. Education is the key, in the interviews that we have conducted each one of them said that education is the best thing that anyone can do. He said, "People always talk about suicide when it's too late, maybe if we start to educate people before the tragedy then it might stop someone from contemplating suicide."

We think that people within schools don't have enough knowledge on how to tell if someone is suicidal. There are people who think that suicide awareness is not a problem within the school, which is a major issue. Some people think that it's not the school's job to make the community and the students know the signs of suicidal thoughts. In our opinion the school should do as much as they can to make students aware, and show them how to handle a situation in which their friend or family member might be suicidal.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on all of our findings, we definitely think that the school needs to make students aware of this epidemic. When someone completes suicide it doesn't just affect the families, it also affects the community. We think that everyone, teenagers especially, need to know how to deal with these kinds of tragedies. School is supposed to prepare us for life after high school. They don't teach how to deal with life during high school like, bullying, mental illness, or suicide.

Our recommendations would be that the school should have an assembly maybe even a week dedicated to the knowledge and awareness of suicide. We have homecoming red ribbon week and we think that we should do something similar. Suicide awareness day is September 10th we thought it would be a good idea to do a suicide week then. The week would be at the beginning of the year, it might affect how the rest of the year goes. We also thought we could bring a few speakers in. For example some families of someone who completed suicide, someone who didn't complete suicide, and maybe some with a professional view of suicide. We think that bringing in people who have different perspectives on suicide would be helpful. Judge Cornell gave us a website that has posters and videos and other things that we could use for the week/ assembly. Our friend showed us this very inspiring poem, *To This Day* written by Shane Koyczan. We thought it would be interesting to maybe have some students read it out loud. It is a very sad poem, it talks about how teasing and bullying other kids can actually hurt them, and that suicide and depression aren't just words to throw around. We really just want the community to know and be aware of how much an issue suicide is, especially in Montana.