High School Women's News Page

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Youth Suicide Growing Problem

By Jennifer Church
San Diego High School

There are 28,700 suicides each year in the United States — a figure greater than the number of homicides.* Suicide is a growing problem that our nation as a whole must face, even though many people might prefer to either ignore it or cover it up.

Teenage suicide, particularly, requires attention. While overall suicide rates have remained fairly stable (increasing slightly), adolescent rates have more than doubled in the past 15 years, according to DEFY counselor Chris Lawson. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among the young.

Certain types of people seem more susceptible to suicide than others. Twice as many white people kill themselves as all the other races combined. People between the ages of 75 and 79 are the most likely to commit suicide (almost three times as many as young people, although teenage rates are climbing). Also, more men than women commit suicide, by a ration of 3 to 1.

These figures, however, can be misleading. Although many more men than women, die, 3 times as many women attempt suicide, according to The California Medical Association. Only a fraction of the people who try to succeed.

Many people who try to commit suicide don't really want to die, says Lawson. It can be a cry for help, a release or an escape.

"Everybody, at one time or another, is going to consider suicide as an alternative to the problems they are having. That's not unusual or unnatural," comments Lawson. The DEFY Counseling Line exists to help people who feel suicidal.

DEFY is a 24-hour hotline for San Diego County (236-3339). It is staffed by professional counselors. They help people who are having suicidal thoughts, emotional upsets, drug problems, or who need mental health information. During the 1979-80 fiscal year they received 1,594 suicide calls (out of a total of 12,115 requests for help).

Lawson says if you know someone who is considering suicide that "talking to them and letting them know they have your support and ear is the most important thing you can do, followed by putting them in touch with someone who can really help them."

One person who was interviewed for this article was a young man named John.** He is 18 years old and has tried to commit suicide 6 times (between the ages of 10 and 15) using barbituates, speed, and heroin. He tried the first time because a close relative died.

Joanne Kander

Young Woman Suffers From Mental Distress

"It was like there was nothing left to live for. I guess I took about a dozen pills. My brother found me and took me to the hospiital," he explains. "I didn't care anymore. I didn't want to eat. I was crying all the time." The other times problems just built up, he says now.

Another student we spoke to, Eddie, is 17 years old. He almost committed a violent suicide about a year ago. "I had a lot of things that I had covered up and all of a sudden they began to fall on me. I needed an easy way out," he said.

Linda, another potential suicide victim, is 16 years old. She tried to kill herself 4 times between the ages of 11 and 15. She tried aspirin once

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Supreme Court Curtails Abortion Rights For Teens

WASHINGTON (SPS) — The Supreme Court recently ruled that states can require doctors to notify parents before performing abortions on teen-agers, or face criminal charges.

The court, in a six-three decision, upheld a Utah law challenged by a 15-year-old girl who argued that the law violated her right to privacy.

The Utah law applies only to unmarried women under 18 who are living with and are dependent upon their parents. The law exempts "mature" or "emancipated" minors.

Emancipated minors are those who are married, self-supporting, or independent of their parents. Mature minors are those found by the courts to be capable of making informed decisions about their own health and welfare.

Since the girl did not allege or show any evidence that she is mature or emancipated, the court concluded she was not able to challenge the law.

Writing for the majority, Chief Justice Warren Burger said parental consultation often is desirable and in the best interest of the minor. There is no logical relationship between the capacity to become pregnant and the capacity for mature judgement concerning the wisdom of an abortion, he wrote.

"The Supreme Court is saying you're not mature enough to have an abortion only to have a baby," said Janet Beals, press coordinator for the National Abortion Rights League.

"This is one more step in restricting people or narrowing the number of people who have access to abortion. Abortions have already been stopped for women in the military, Peace Corps or through Medicaid. This decision is also dangerous because it reaffirms state rights to protect potential life."

Anti-abortionists have been seeking congressional legislation or a constitutional amendment blocking abortions entirely. There are now five states — Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, North Dakota and Tennessee — that have mandatory notification for minors seeking abortions.

"You're going to see rapid movement to pass laws like this from legislative bodies still sitting," said Dr. John Willke, physician and family counselor for National Right to Life.

What the law "gives neither parents nor judges a veto power over the minor's abortion decision . . ." Burger wrote, "parental notice provides an opportunity for parents to supply essential medical information to a physician."

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Panelists Discuss Youth Press

by Chris Kehoe

"An Alternative to the High School Press" was the topic of the Young Women's Journalism and Community Education Project's most recent Youth Forum. The panel discussion took place in the Seneca Falls Auditorium of the Center for Women's Studies and Services.

Two current members of the project, Jennifer Church of San Diego High School and Debbie Hardin of Kearny High School, discussed their participation in the Project during the last year.

Lisa Cobbs, editor of the ***High School Women's News Page*** and founder of the Young Women's Journalism and Community Education Project, moderated the discussion.

In her introduction, Ms. Cobbs stressed the importance of young women's concerns. Although young women are still expected to be "empty-headed and docile" at home and in school, Cobbs emphasized, "young women face very tough problems and have a lot to say if given the chance."

Ms. Cobbs stated that groups like the Young Women's Journalism Project provide a structure in which high school age women can grow in self-esteem, political awareness, and practical skills.

Student member Jennifer Church, a senior at San Diego High and editor of her school magazine, recounted some of her experiences in the project and how she has been affected by them.

As a reporter, she stated, "I never had an article I really wanted to do turned down."

However, Ms. Church, who intends to pursue a career in writing, did not find all her assignments on the paper equally easy.

"Distribution (of the Page) was hard at first. People didn't want it. Now they ask for it, and that's a positive change."

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