

# **SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY:**

**1995 - 2004**



**[www.sdchip.org](http://www.sdchip.org)**

**SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY:  
1995 - 2004**

CHIP's Message

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**Dear Reader,**

Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) is pleased to present *Suicide in San Diego County: 1995 - 2004*, a project of the CHIP Suicide Prevention Committee.

CHIP is a collaboration of San Diego health care systems, hospitals, community clinics, insurers, physicians, universities, community-based organizations and the County of San Diego. The partners of CHIP are dedicated to improving health for San Diego County's communities through collaboration and assessment.

This report draws on the epidemiological support of the County Health and Human Services Agency's Division of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to provide a picture of suicide in San Diego County from information in the Medical Examiner's Database. The Office of the Medical Examiner is charged with investigating and determining the cause of death in all homicides, suicides, motor vehicle fatalities, occupation-related deaths, drug abuse deaths, and certain deaths due to apparent natural causes.

Information about suicide, like that presented in this report, helps us understand and track the suicide problem from both a regional and a state/national perspective as we embark on strategies to reduce it. This information also serves to promote public awareness of the magnitude of the suicide problem and the need for broad-based support for suicide prevention.

CHIP would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Division of Emergency Medical Services staff for their help in the preparation of this report. Special recognition is extended to Alan Smith, Ph.D., M.P.H., EMS Epidemiologist, who co-authored this report.

We hope you find this report useful.

Sincerely,

Beth Sise, JD, RN, MSN, CPNP  
Chair  
CHIP Suicide Prevention Committee

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## Introduction

Suicide now ranks first among causes of non-natural death in San Diego County, exceeding deaths by motor vehicle crashes, homicide, drug overdose, and other non-natural causes. From 1995 through 2004, suicide took the lives of 3,331 San Diegans, claiming about one person each day and outnumbering homicides (1,416) by 2.35 to 1.

The devastating impact of suicidal behavior, however, reaches far beyond those who actually take their own life. It is believed that for every suicide, there are six "survivors"- persons who suffer lasting emotional trauma when someone close to them dies as a result of suicide.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, for every one completed suicide, there are an estimated 8 to 25 attempted suicides.<sup>2</sup>

Alarming numbers like these, evident nationwide, resulted in a recent call by the U.S. Surgeon General for the nation, states, and communities to apply public health methods to address the suicide problem. Among the goals set forth in the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention*,<sup>3</sup> the Surgeon General challenges us to work together to promote awareness that suicide is a major preventable public health problem. This calls for increasing collaboration among public and private entities to use means to raise public awareness of suicide and suicide prevention, including developing public education campaigns and disseminating information through the World Wide Web.

In this report, *Suicide in San Diego County: 1995 - 2004*, the Community Health Improvement Partners' (CHIP) Suicide Prevention Committee takes one important step toward meeting that goal. This report presents data about suicide in the county overall and among three distinct age groups: adolescents and young adults, working-aged adults, and older adults. The information in this report should prove helpful to those in need of basic information and trends on suicide in San Diego County, including community-based agencies, government agencies, businesses, healthcare, media, and private individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> American Association of Suicidology. Available at <http://www.suicidology.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Suicide Facts. National Institute of Mental Health. Available at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/suifact.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action. Rockville, MD: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, 2001. Available at <http://www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention>.

## Section 1: All Ages

### Leading Causes of Non-Natural Death

In San Diego County, suicide ranked as the leading cause of non-natural death for all ages from 1996 – 2001, followed by motor vehicle crashes, drug overdoses, and homicides.

- Among young people ages 15 to 24, suicide was the third leading cause of non-natural death.
- Among the population ages 25 to 64, suicide was either the first or second leading cause of non-natural death.
- Among older adults ages 65 and up, suicide was the second leading cause of non-natural death.

### Heaven's Gate

In March of 1997, 39 individuals participated in a cult-related group suicide. One additional person who was associated with the same group committed suicide a few weeks later. These suicides are included in the table on this page of leading causes of non-natural death, but because of the extraordinary nature of this event, they have been excluded from all further analyses in this report. Their exclusion does not change the ranking of suicide as a leading cause of death.

| Age Group of Victim | Rank of Cause of Death |                       |                       |                           |                           |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                     | 1                      | 2                     | 3                     | 4                         | 5                         |
| 0-4                 | Drown<br>66            | Homicide<br>65        | Motor Vehicle<br>54   | Asphyxia<br>27            | Drug/Alcohol<br>9         |
| 5-9                 | Motor Vehicle<br>54    | Homicide<br>13        | Drown<br>11           | Burn<br>5                 | Asphyxia<br>3             |
| 10-14               | Motor Vehicle<br>57    | Homicide<br>20        | <b>Suicide</b><br>17  | Drown<br>7                | Asphyxia<br>3             |
| 15-19               | Motor Vehicle<br>335   | Homicide<br>175       | <b>Suicide</b><br>138 | Drown<br>36               | Drug/Alcohol<br>34        |
| 20-24               | Motor Vehicle<br>456   | Homicide<br>249       | <b>Suicide</b><br>232 | Drug/Alcohol<br>111       | Drown<br>32               |
| 25-34               | <b>Suicide</b><br>572  | Motor Vehicle<br>496  | Drug/Alcohol<br>460   | Homicide<br>352           | Drown<br>46               |
| 35-44               | Drug/Alcohol<br>978    | <b>Suicide</b><br>712 | Motor Vehicle<br>510  | Homicide<br>246           | Drown<br>68               |
| 45-54               | Drug/Alcohol<br>899    | <b>Suicide</b><br>616 | Motor Vehicle<br>354  | Homicide<br>149           | Fall<br>123               |
| 55-64               | <b>Suicide</b><br>353  | Motor Vehicle<br>259  | Drug/Alcohol<br>212   | Fall<br>122               | Homicide<br>53            |
| 65-74               | <b>Suicide</b><br>272  | Motor Vehicle<br>216  | Fall<br>162           | Drug/Alcohol<br>60        | Medical/Therapeutic<br>46 |
| 75-84               | Fall<br>396            | <b>Suicide</b><br>298 | Motor Vehicle<br>225  | Medical/Therapeutic<br>50 | Asphyxia<br>38            |
| 85+                 | Fall<br>348            | <b>Suicide</b><br>117 | Motor Vehicle<br>112  | Asphyxia<br>27            | Medical/Therapeutic<br>14 |
| Total               | <b>Suicide</b><br>3331 | Motor Vehicle<br>3159 | Drug/Alcohol<br>2789  | Homicide<br>1416          | Fall<br>1291              |

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner database, 1995 - 2004

Note: Cases in which the mechanism of death was unknown are excluded.

**Suicides by Age Group and Year**

In San Diego County, there were a total of 17 suicides among children 14 years and under from 1995 through 2004. While each suicide is in itself significant, this relatively small number does not lend itself to reliable annual data that can support statistical conclusions.

**Table 1.2: Suicides by Age Group and Year:  
1995 – 2004**

| Age Groups   | 1995       | 1996       | 1997       | 1998       | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       | 2002       | 2003       | 2004       | Total       |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 15-19        | 23         | 18         | 10         | 16         | 10         | 13         | 11         | 13         | 10         | 14         | 138         |
| 20-24        | 25         | 21         | 27         | 25         | 14         | 28         | 21         | 21         | 29         | 21         | 232         |
| 25-34        | 61         | 68         | 60         | 59         | 54         | 54         | 49         | 55         | 59         | 49         | 568         |
| 35-44        | 88         | 75         | 68         | 71         | 54         | 77         | 70         | 64         | 67         | 62         | 696         |
| 45-54        | 48         | 56         | 43         | 52         | 65         | 72         | 69         | 68         | 64         | 68         | 605         |
| 55-64        | 33         | 36         | 23         | 35         | 26         | 37         | 36         | 51         | 32         | 37         | 346         |
| 65-74        | 36         | 32         | 35         | 24         | 26         | 23         | 28         | 15         | 24         | 27         | 270         |
| 75-84        | 38         | 31         | 36         | 32         | 32         | 28         | 26         | 21         | 31         | 23         | 298         |
| 85+          | 6          | 12         | 11         | 14         | 12         | 14         | 10         | 15         | 11         | 12         | 117         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>361</b> | <b>352</b> | <b>314</b> | <b>330</b> | <b>296</b> | <b>347</b> | <b>323</b> | <b>325</b> | <b>328</b> | <b>315</b> | <b>3291</b> |

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

Note: Total includes those with unknown age and younger than 15 years. Cult-related suicides are excluded.

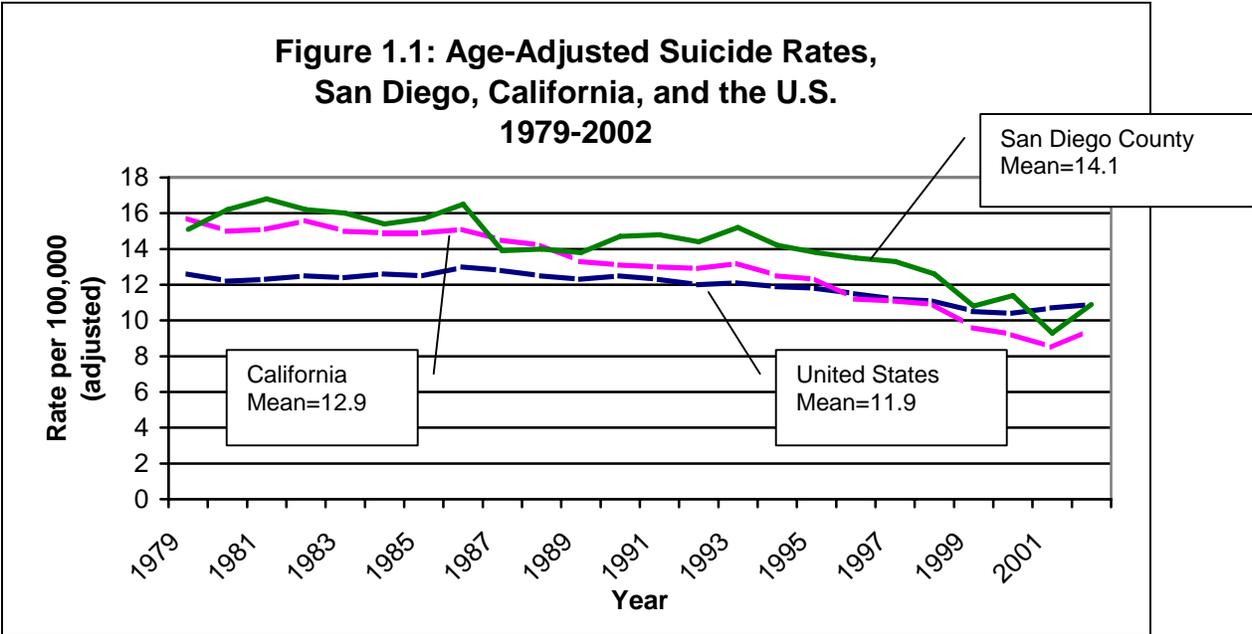
**Comparison with California and the United States**

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>1</sup>, the age-adjusted suicide rate<sup>2</sup> has been consistently higher in San Diego County than in the state of California or the United States overall.

In 2002, the most recent national data available, suicide rates per 100,000 population were as follows:

- United States: 10.9
- California: 9.5
- San Diego County: 10.9

The CDC, in its *Healthy People 2010* report<sup>3</sup>, has set a target of 5.0 suicides per 100,000 population. Clearly, our county, our state, and the nation as a whole must gear up to make a significant impact on the suicide problem.



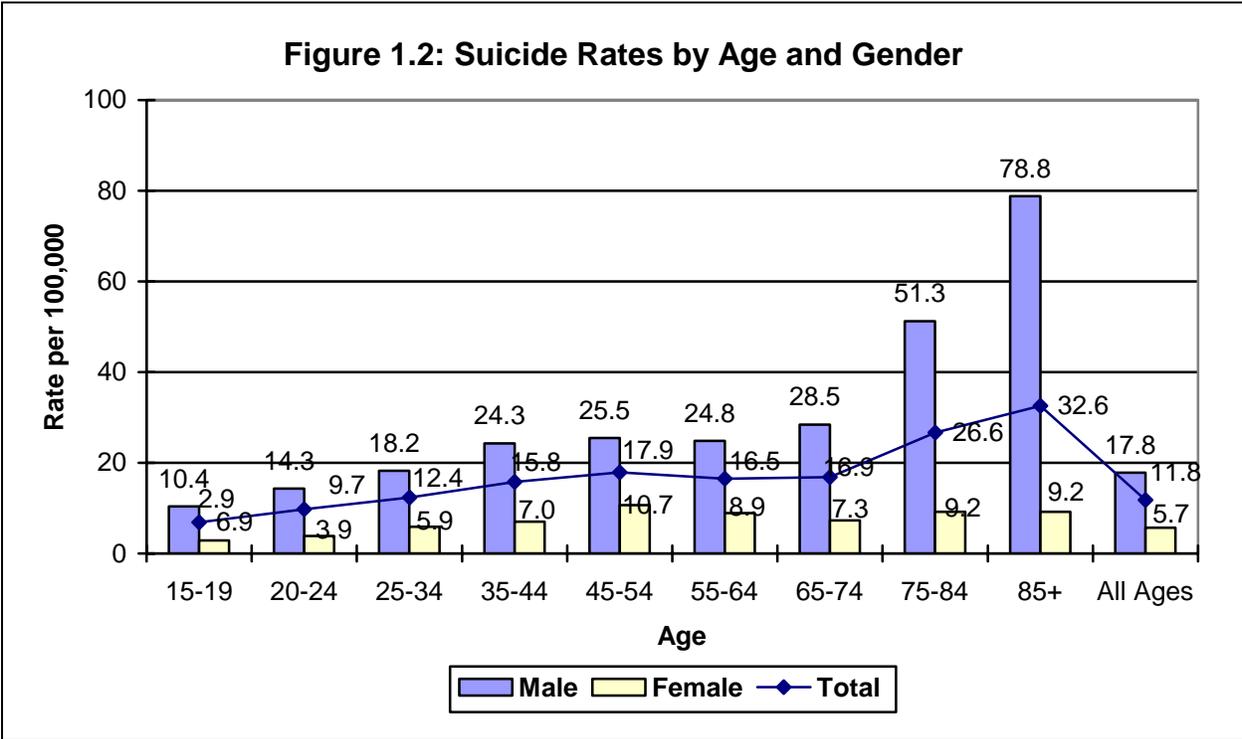
Source: CDC Wonder Compressed Mortality Database

<sup>1</sup> [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

<sup>2</sup> Age adjustment is performed to compare rates of conditions whose rates vary depending on age for populations with different age distributions. In this case, rates were adjusted to the United States population distribution for the year 2000.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.

**Suicide by Age and Gender**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

The rate of suicide tells us how many suicides there were in proportion to the total population. In San Diego County from 1995 through 2004, the annual suicide rate averaged 11.8 per 100,000 people. The male suicide rate was more than three times higher than the rate among females, and increased dramatically in older age groups. In contrast to males, who were at greatest risk of committing suicide when they reached the oldest age groups, the female suicide rate was highest in the 45 to 54-year age group.

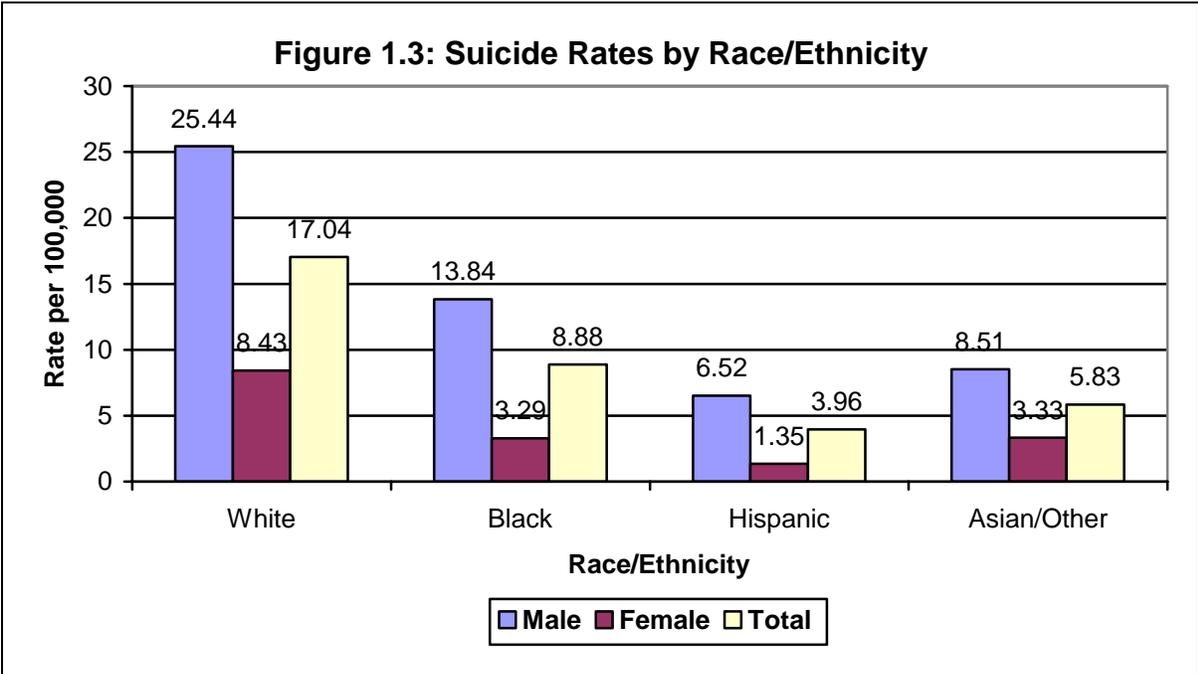
**Table 1.3: Suicides by Age and Gender**

| Age Group | Male   |       | Female |       | Total  |       |
|-----------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
|           | Number | Rate† | Number | Rate  | Number | Rate  |
| 10-14     | 10     | 1.00  | 7      | 0.73  | 17     | 0.87  |
| 15-19     | 111    | 10.40 | 27     | 2.87  | 138    | 6.87  |
| 20-24     | 192    | 14.29 | 40     | 3.85  | 232    | 9.74  |
| 25-34     | 440    | 18.24 | 128    | 5.86  | 568    | 12.35 |
| 35-44     | 543    | 24.31 | 153    | 7.04  | 696    | 15.79 |
| 45-54     | 422    | 25.45 | 183    | 10.66 | 605    | 17.92 |
| 55-64     | 248    | 24.81 | 98     | 8.91  | 346    | 16.48 |
| 65-74     | 206    | 28.45 | 64     | 7.29  | 270    | 16.85 |
| 75-84     | 238    | 51.26 | 60     | 9.17  | 298    | 26.64 |
| 85+       | 95     | 78.83 | 22     | 9.21  | 117    | 32.56 |
| Unknown   | 3      | **    | 1      | **    | 4      | **    |
| Total     | 2508   | 17.84 | 783    | 5.66  | 3291   | 11.80 |

†Rate per 100,000

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

**Race/Ethnicity**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

The suicide rate among Whites was nearly double all other races combined, with White males having the highest suicide rate of any race/gender combination. Both genders were at increased risk in the White population compared with other racial/ethnic groups, and males were substantially more at risk of committing suicide among all groups.

**Table 1.4: Suicides by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

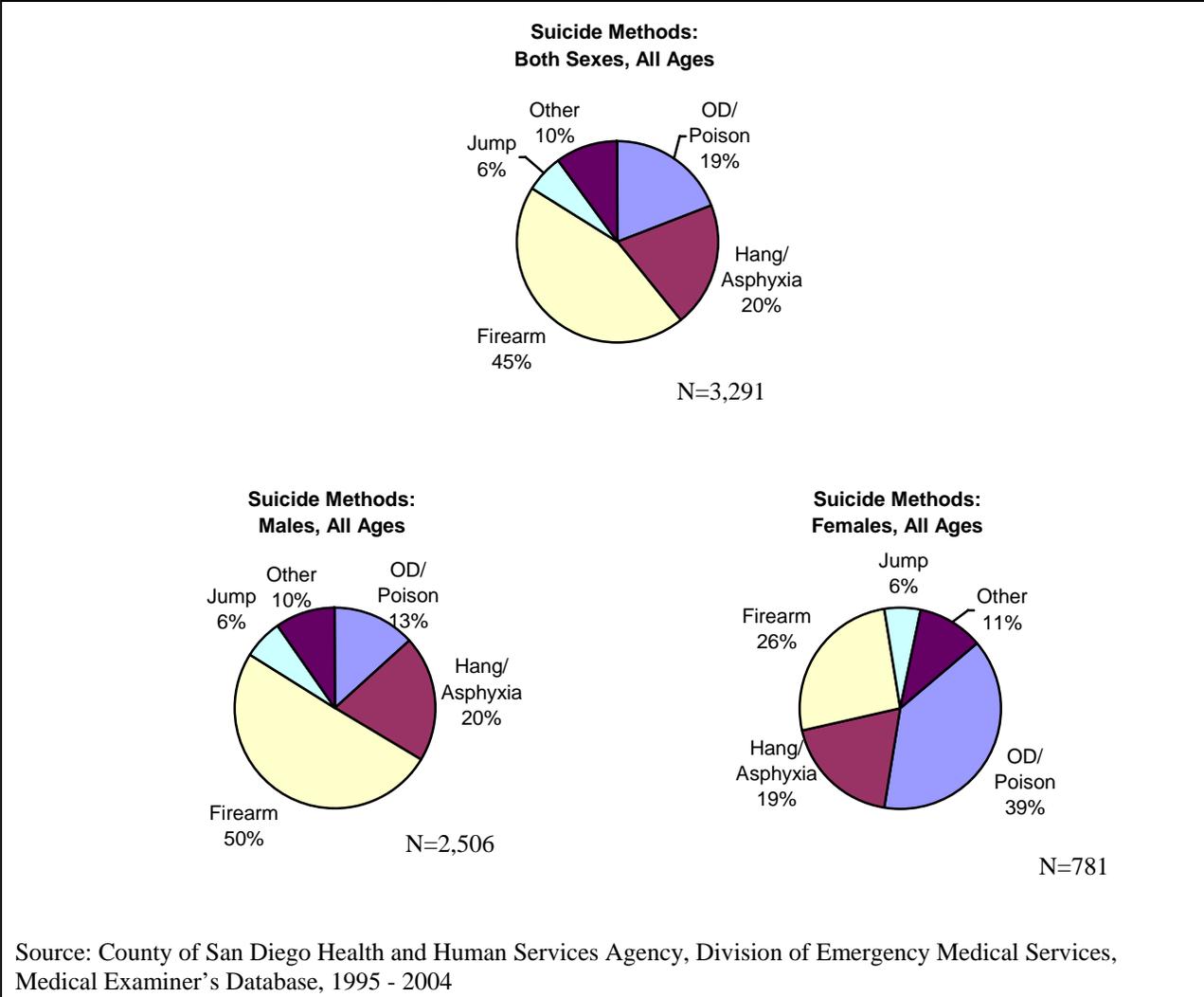
| Race/<br>Ethnicity | Male   |       | Female |      | Total  |       |
|--------------------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|
|                    | Number | Rate† | Number | Rate | Number | Rate  |
| White              | 2010   | 25.44 | 650    | 8.43 | 2660   | 17.04 |
| Black              | 114    | 13.84 | 24     | 3.29 | 138    | 8.88  |
| Hispanic           | 240    | 6.52  | 49     | 1.35 | 289    | 3.96  |
| Asian/Other        | 141    | 8.51  | 59     | 3.33 | 200    | 5.83  |
| Unknown            | 3      | **    | 1      | **   | 4      | **    |
| Total              | 2508   | 17.84 | 783    | 5.66 | 3291   | 11.80 |

†Rate per 100,000  
 Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

**Suicide Methods**

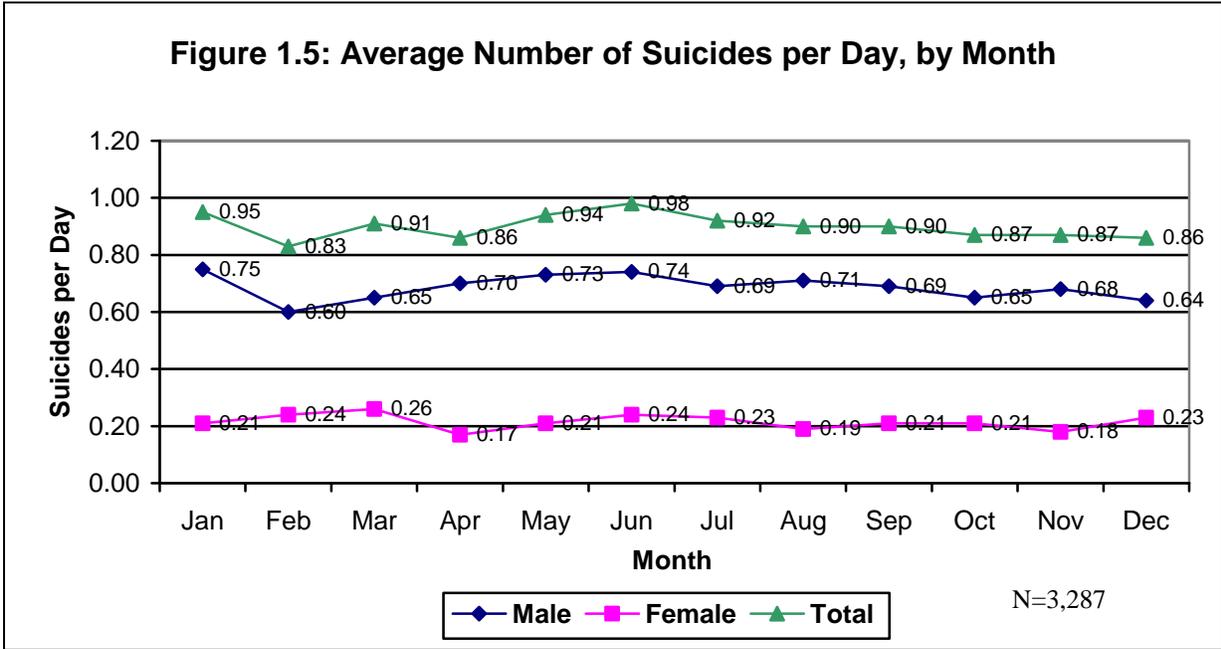
Firearms were by far the leading method of completed suicide, accounting for 45% of suicides overall, and half of suicides committed by males. Females more often used drugs or poisons to commit suicide (38%).

**Figure 1.4: Suicide Methods**



**Section 1: All Ages**

**Month**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

Suicide is commonly thought to vary depending on the time of the year. Figure 1.5 shows the average number of suicides per day in San Diego County for each month from 1995 through 2004. The average number per day is highest in the springtime and reaches its peak in June. February had the fewest suicides per day overall.

**Table 1.5: Suicides by Month and Gender**

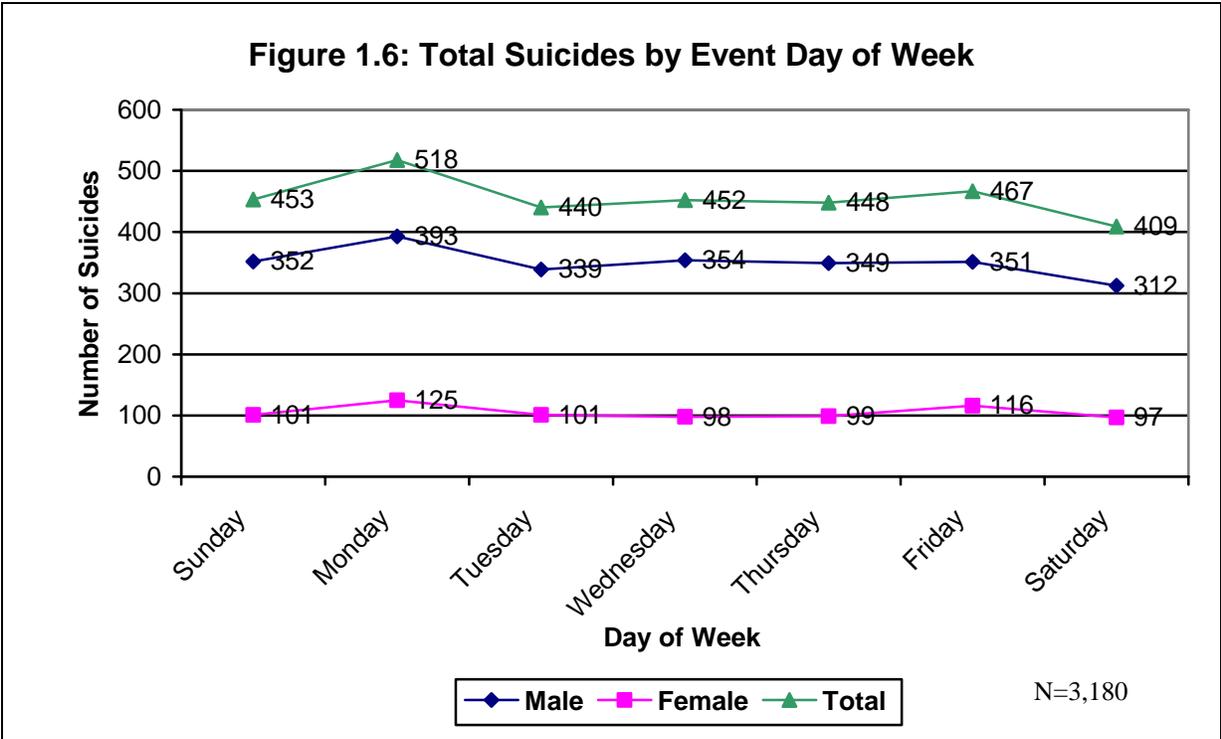
| Month | Male   |         | Female |         | Total  |         |
|-------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
|       | Number | Avg/day | Number | Avg/day | Number | Avg/day |
| Jan   | 232    | 0.75    | 64     | 0.21    | 296    | 0.95    |
| Feb   | 169    | 0.60    | 67     | 0.24    | 236    | 0.83    |
| Mar   | 202    | 0.65    | 80     | 0.26    | 282    | 0.91    |
| Apr   | 209    | 0.70    | 50     | 0.17    | 259    | 0.86    |
| May   | 227    | 0.73    | 65     | 0.21    | 292    | 0.94    |
| Jun   | 223    | 0.74    | 72     | 0.24    | 295    | 0.98    |
| Jul   | 214    | 0.69    | 72     | 0.23    | 286    | 0.92    |
| Aug   | 220    | 0.71    | 59     | 0.19    | 279    | 0.90    |
| Sep   | 207    | 0.69    | 63     | 0.21    | 270    | 0.90    |
| Oct   | 203    | 0.65    | 66     | 0.21    | 269    | 0.87    |
| Nov   | 205    | 0.68    | 55     | 0.18    | 260    | 0.87    |
| Dec   | 197    | 0.64    | 70     | 0.23    | 267    | 0.86    |
| Total | 2508   | 0.69    | 783    | 0.21    | 3291   | 0.90    |

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

**Section 1: All Ages**

**Day of Week**

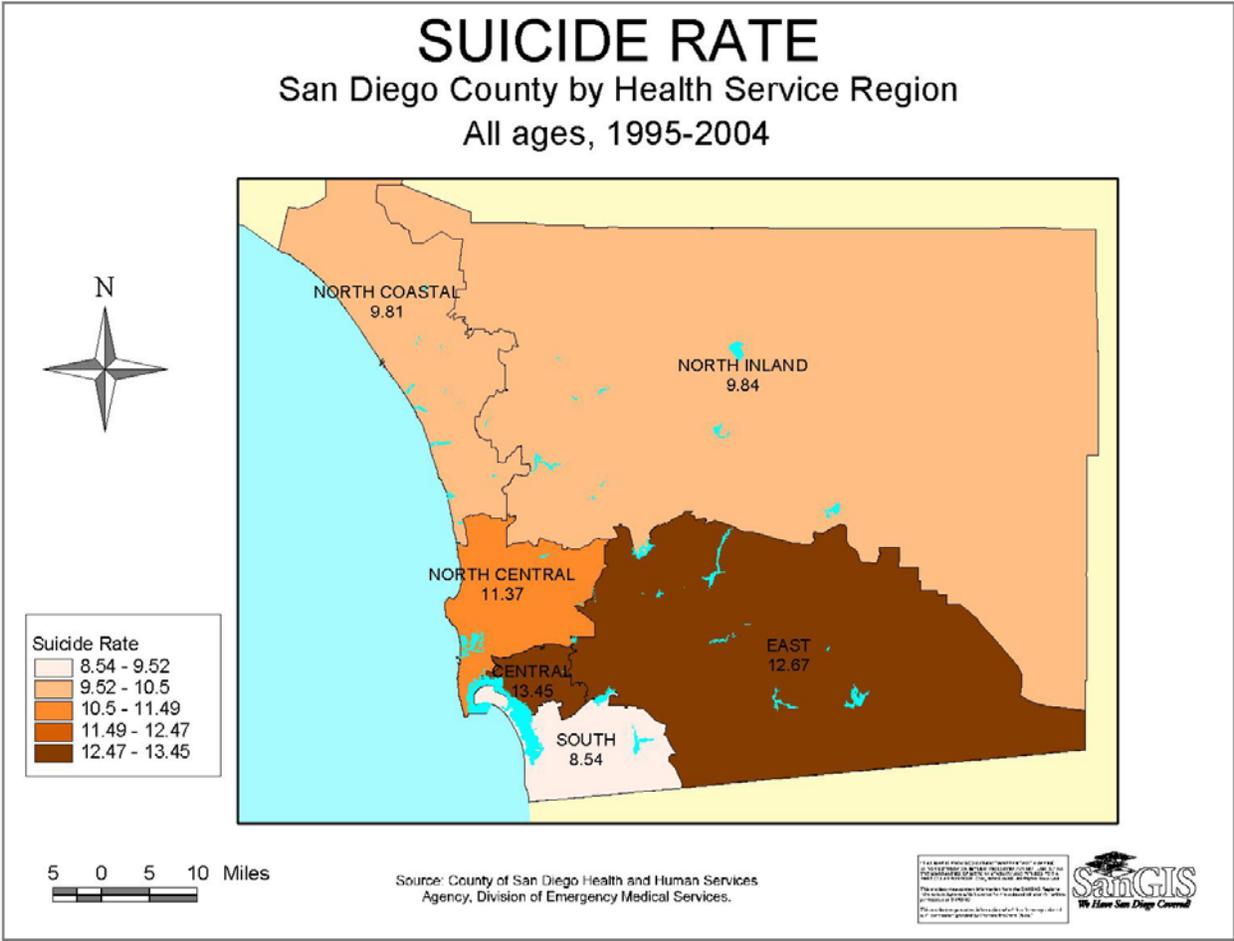
When looking at the day of week on which a suicide occurs, it is important to note that about two-thirds of those who died from suicide were found dead. When this was the case, the event date was recorded as the date when they were found, although the event may have taken place at an earlier date. The number of suicides that were discovered on Mondays (516) was 16% higher than the average suicide incidence for the other six days of the week. Because of the large proportion that were found, this may indicate a relatively high rate of suicide on the weekends.



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004  
 Note: Event date was unknown for 104 individuals.

**Geographic Distribution**

**Figure 1.7**



The suicide rate was highest in the Central and East regions of the county, and lowest in the South region.

**Table 1.6:  
Suicides by San Diego County  
Health Service Region**

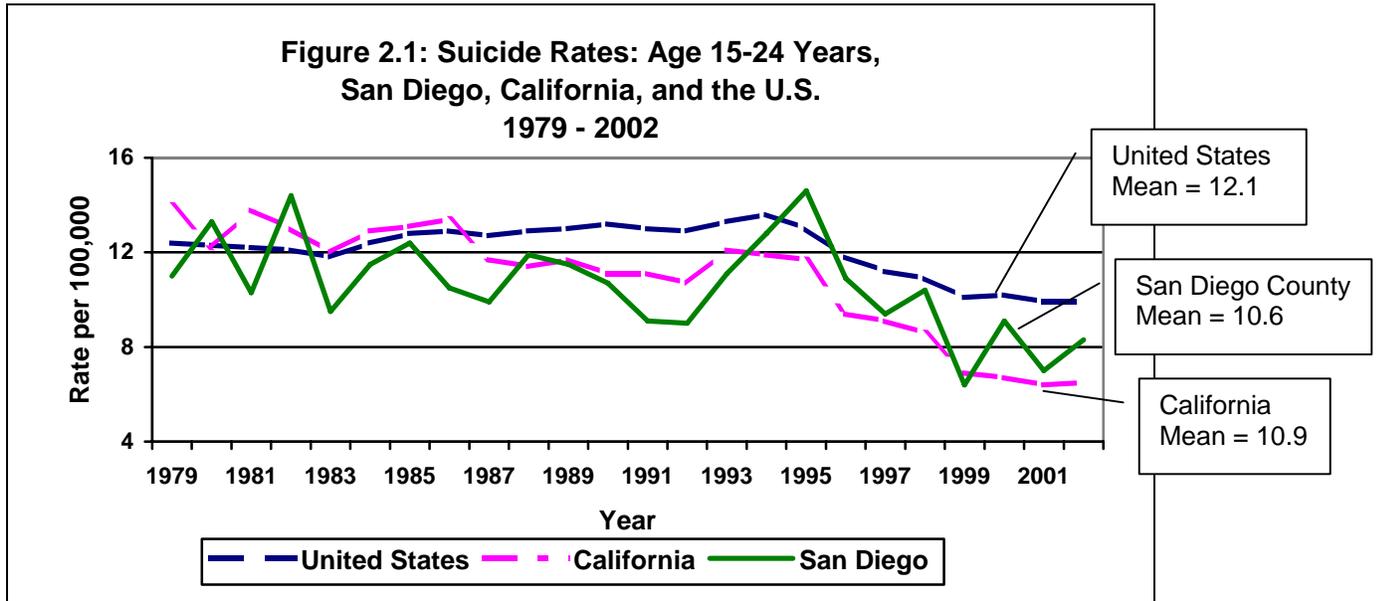
| Health Service Region | Number      | Rate <sup>†</sup> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| North Coastal         | 452         | 9.81              |
| North Central         | 625         | 11.37             |
| Central               | 635         | 13.45             |
| South                 | 332         | 8.54              |
| East                  | 558         | 12.67             |
| North Inland          | 470         | 9.84              |
| Unknown               | 219         |                   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>3291</b> | <b>11.80</b>      |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000  
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

## Section 2: Adolescents and Young Adults

### Comparison with California and the United States

Suicide rates in teens and young adults over the past two decades have seen an overall decline, but remain at levels that are unfortunately too high.

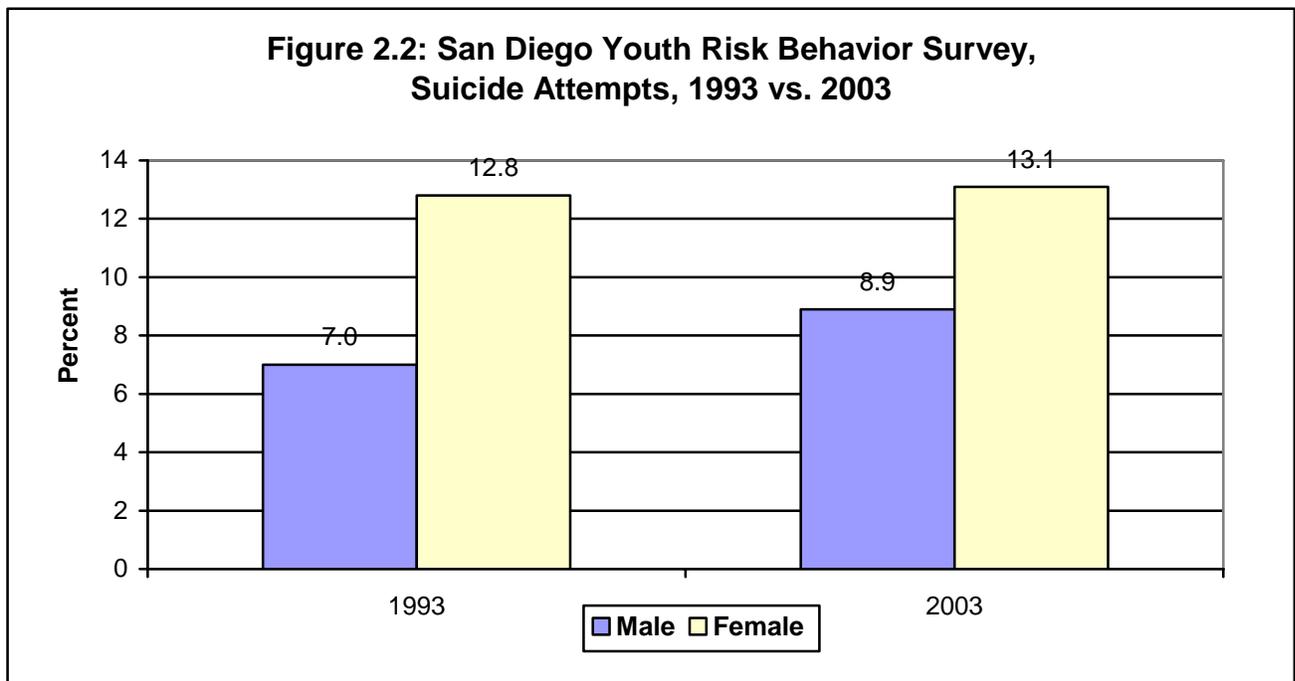


Source: CDC Wonder Compressed Mortality Database

**Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

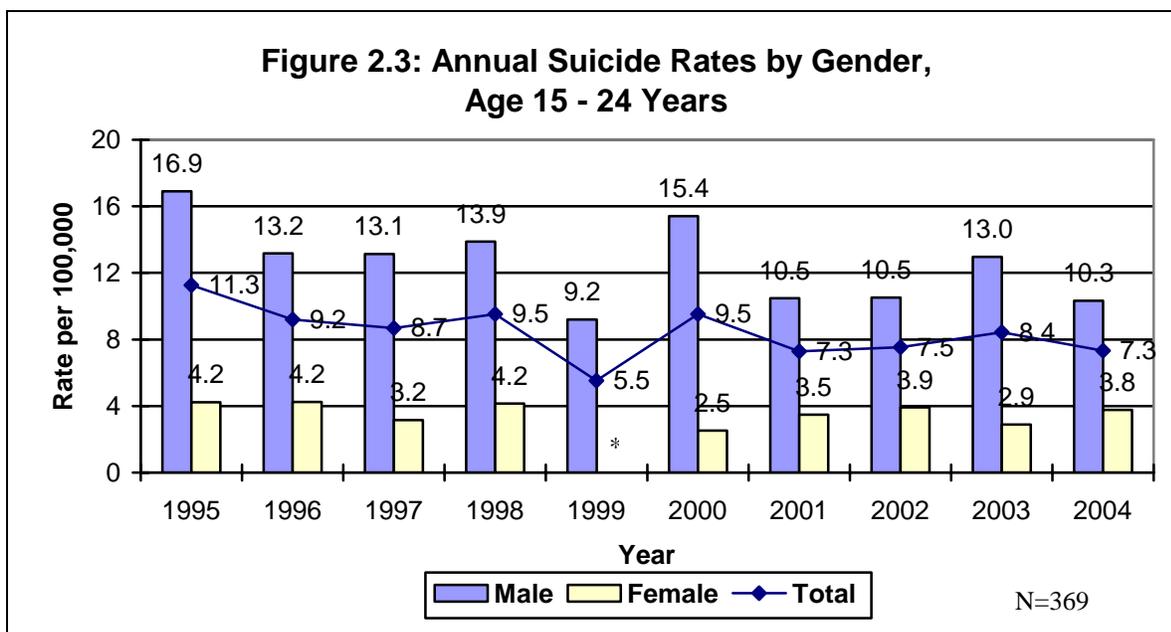
Examining data on suicide attempts may lead to important information on reducing the rate of suicide, particularly among youth. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), measures behaviors that put teens at risk, including suicide attempts. San Diego City Schools participate in this voluntary survey, which is given every two years to students in grades 9-12.

In the spring 2003 YRBS, 10.9% of students surveyed from San Diego City Schools reported attempting suicide at least once during the previous 12 months. This was up from 9.9% in the 1993 survey. Nationally, 8.5% of all students surveyed reported a suicide attempt during the previous 12 months.



Source: 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results, San Diego High School Survey Summary

**Annual Rates**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

\*Rates not calculated for fewer than five incidents

The annual suicide rate among young people in San Diego County averaged 8.41 per 100,000 from 1995 through 2004. The overall trend has been downward, dropping 34% from 1995 (11.3 per 100,000) to 2004 (7.5 per 100,000).

**Table 2.1: Annual Suicide Number and Rate, Age 15 – 24 Years**

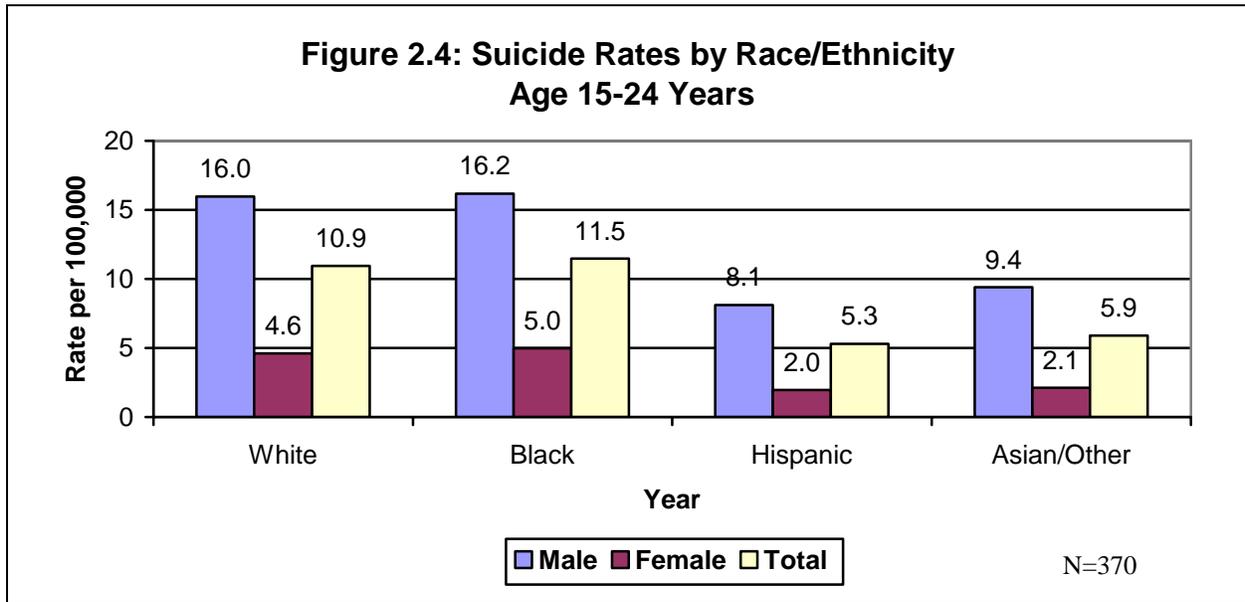
| Year  | Male   |                   | Female |      | Total  |      |
|-------|--------|-------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
|       | Number | Rate <sup>†</sup> | Number | Rate | Number | Rate |
| 1995  | 40     | 16.9              | 8      | 4.2  | 48     | 11.3 |
| 1996  | 31     | 13.2              | 8      | 4.2  | 39     | 9.2  |
| 1997  | 31     | 13.1              | 6      | 3.2  | 37     | 8.7  |
| 1998  | 33     | 13.9              | 8      | 4.1  | 41     | 9.5  |
| 1999  | 22     | 9.2               | 2      | *    | 24     | 5.5  |
| 2000  | 36     | 15.4              | 5      | 2.5  | 41     | 9.5  |
| 2001  | 25     | 10.5              | 7      | 3.5  | 32     | 7.3  |
| 2002  | 26     | 10.5              | 8      | 3.9  | 34     | 7.5  |
| 2003  | 33     | 13.0              | 6      | 2.9  | 39     | 8.4  |
| 2004  | 26     | 10.3              | 9      | 4.2  | 35     | 7.5  |
| Total | 303    | 12.6              | 67     | 3.4  | 370    | 8.4  |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

\*Rates not calculated for fewer than five incidents

**Race/Ethnicity**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

Unlike all ages combined, in which the suicide rate among Whites was more than double that of any other ethnic group, suicide rates in the 15 to 24-year age range were much more even across race/ethnic groups. Suicide among San Diego County’s young people is highest among Black males and White males, followed by Asian/Other males and Hispanic males.

**Table 2.2: Suicides by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, Age 15-24 Years**

| Race/<br>Ethnicity | Male   |                   | Female |      | Total  |      |
|--------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
|                    | Number | Rate <sup>†</sup> | Number | Rate | Number | Rate |
| White              | 183    | 16.0              | 42     | 4.6  | 225    | 10.9 |
| Black              | 27     | 16.2              | 6      | 5.0  | 33     | 11.5 |
| Hispanic           | 64     | 8.1               | 13     | 2.0  | 77     | 5.3  |
| Asian/Other        | 29     | 9.4               | 6      | 2.1  | 35     | 5.9  |
| Total              | 303    | 12.6              | 67     | 3.4  | 370    | 8.4  |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

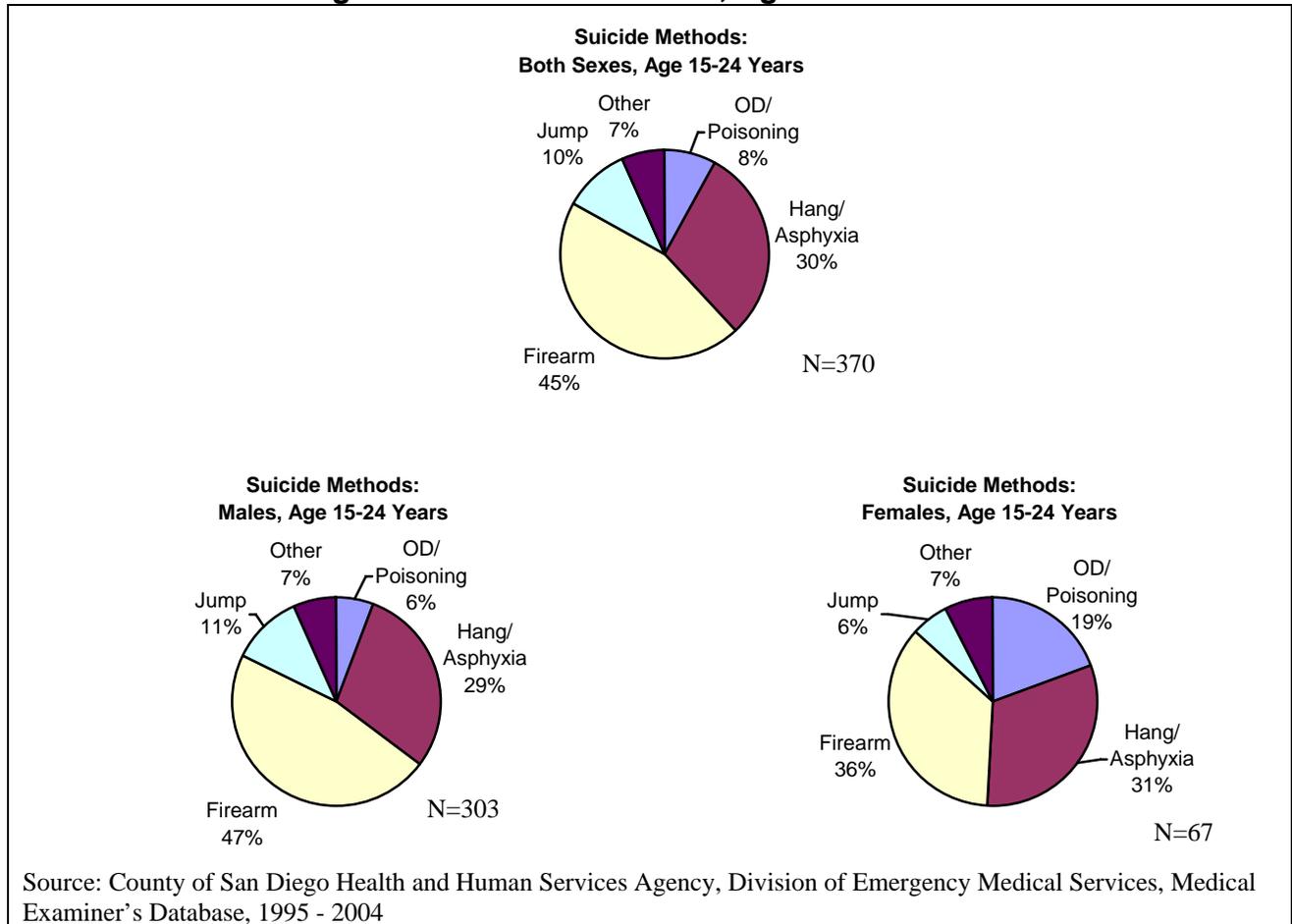
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

## Section 2: Adolescents and Young Adults

### Suicide Methods

Firearms were by far the leading method of completed suicide among young people, accounting for 47% of suicides by males and 36% by females. Suicide methods were much more evenly distributed between the sexes in this age group than in older ages, where females overall were more likely to use drugs/poisons and males were more likely to use firearms.

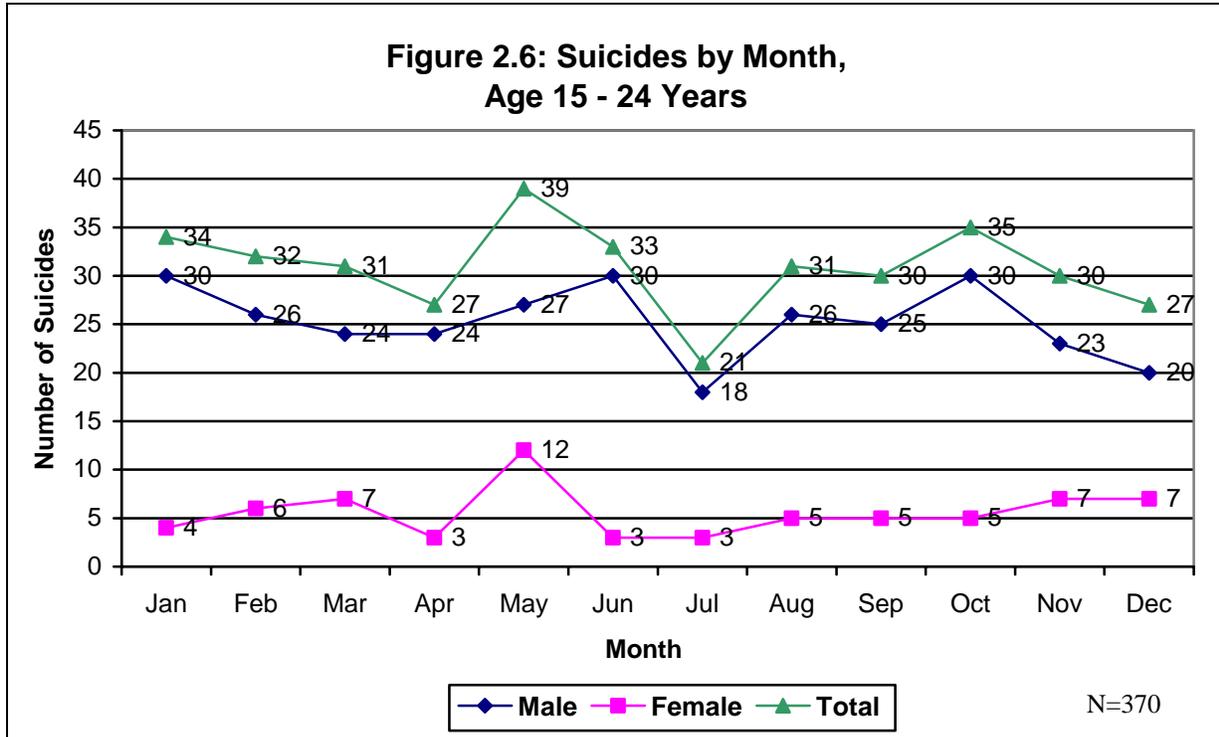
**Figure 2.5: Suicide Methods, Age 15 - 24 Years**



## Section 2: Adolescents and Young Adults

### Month

The highest number of suicides among individuals aged 15 to 24 years occurred during the month of May, and the lowest number was in July.

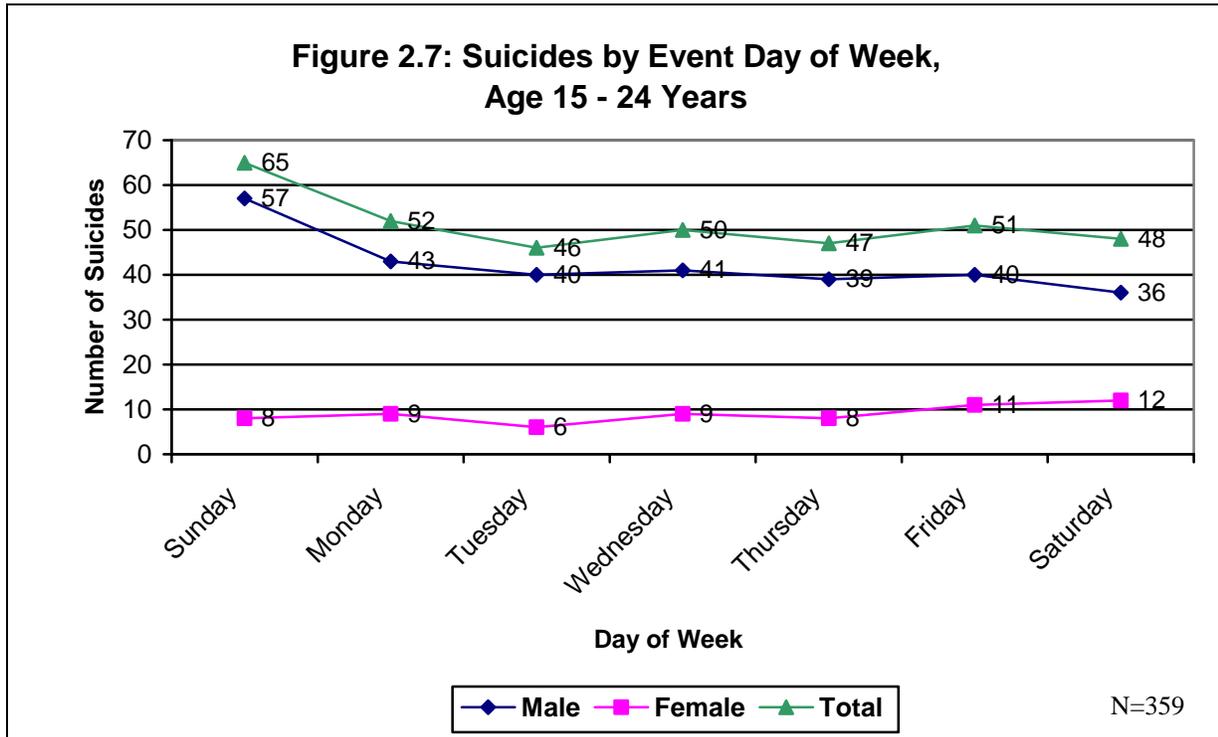


Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

## Section 2: Adolescents and Young Adults

### Day of Week

Unlike other age groups, which showed a peak number of suicides on Monday, the 15 to 24 year age group had its highest incidence of suicide on Sundays. Just over half of the individuals in this age group (54%) were dead when they were found, which may impact how the date of the incident was recorded.

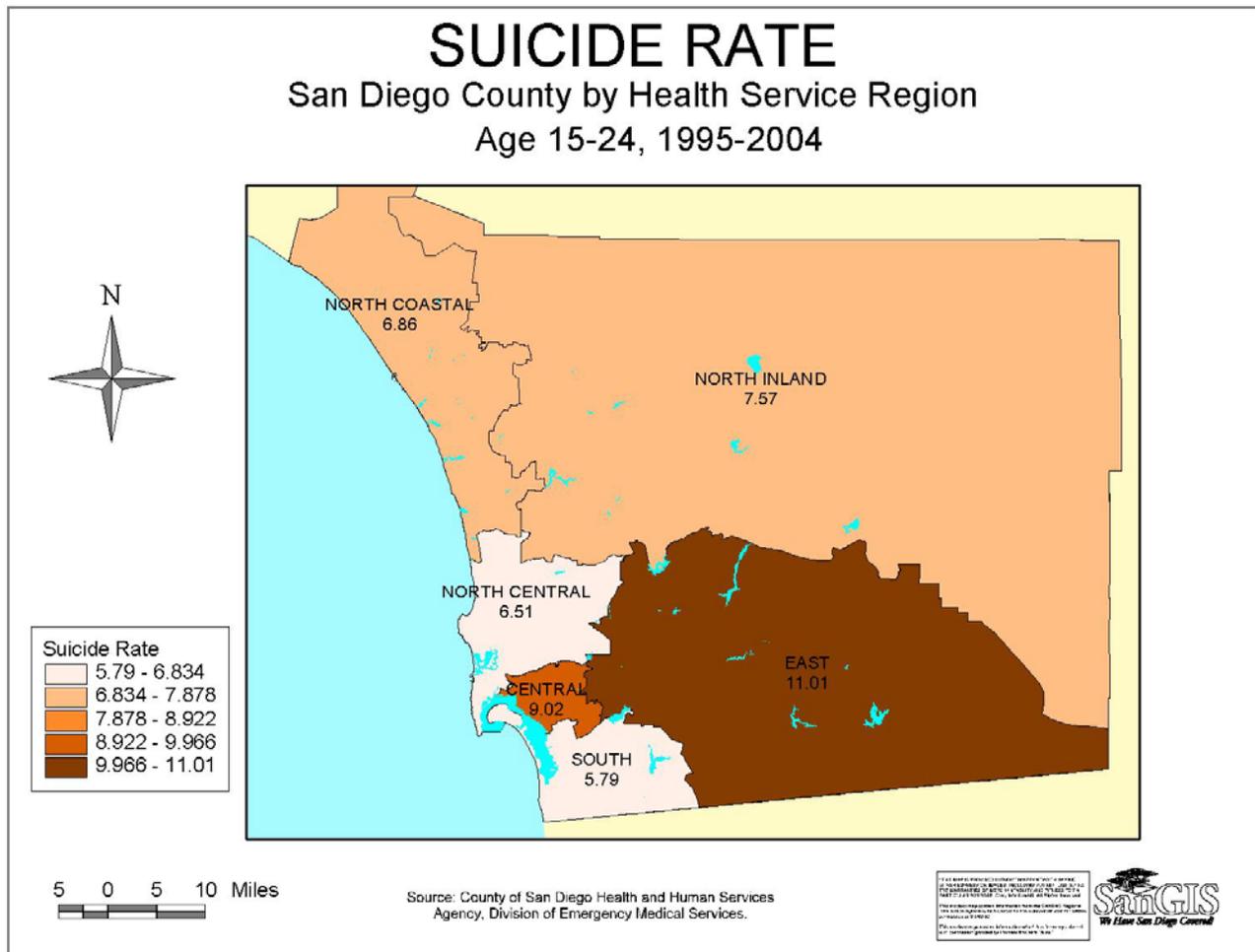


Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

Note: Event date was unknown for 11 individuals.

**Geographic Distribution**

**Figure 2.8**



The suicide rate was highest in the East Health Service Region (HSR). The lowest rate was observed in the South HSR, which covers the communities of Chula Vista, Sweetwater, and South Bay.

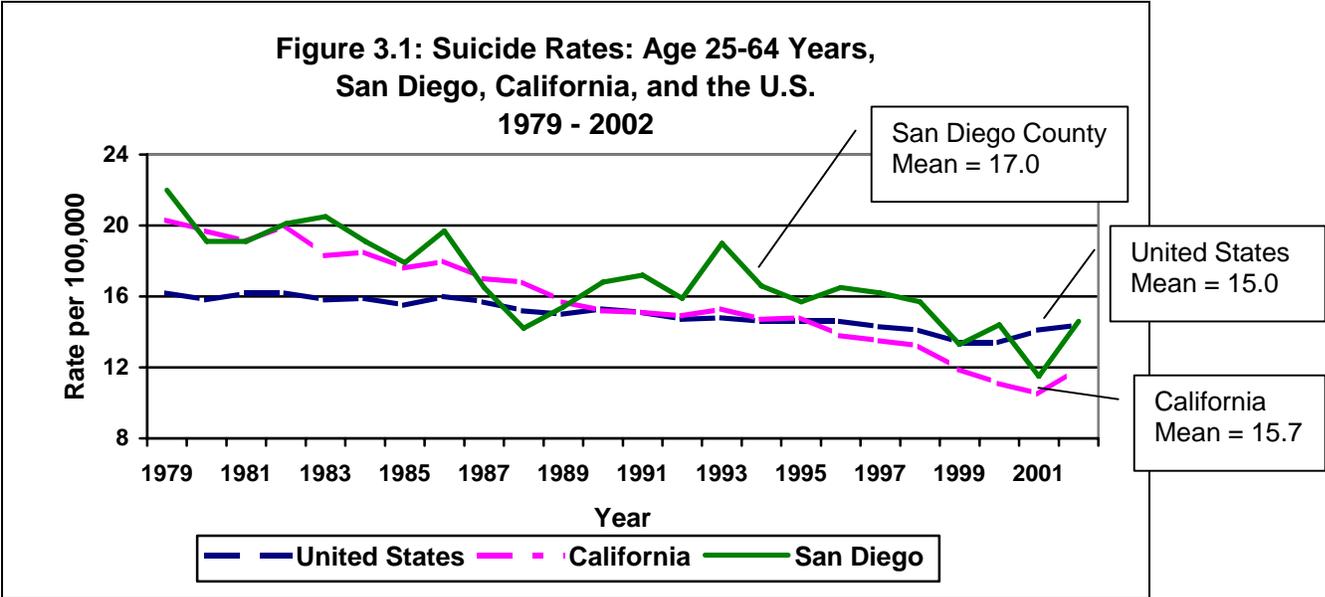
**Table 2.3:**  
**Suicides by San Diego County Health Service Region**

| Health Service Region | Number     | Rate <sup>†</sup> |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------------|
| North Coastal         | 52         | 6.86              |
| North Central         | 56         | 6.51              |
| Central               | 75         | 9.02              |
| South                 | 39         | 5.79              |
| East                  | 68         | 11.01             |
| North Inland          | 49         | 7.57              |
| Unknown               | 31         |                   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>370</b> | <b>8.43</b>       |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000  
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

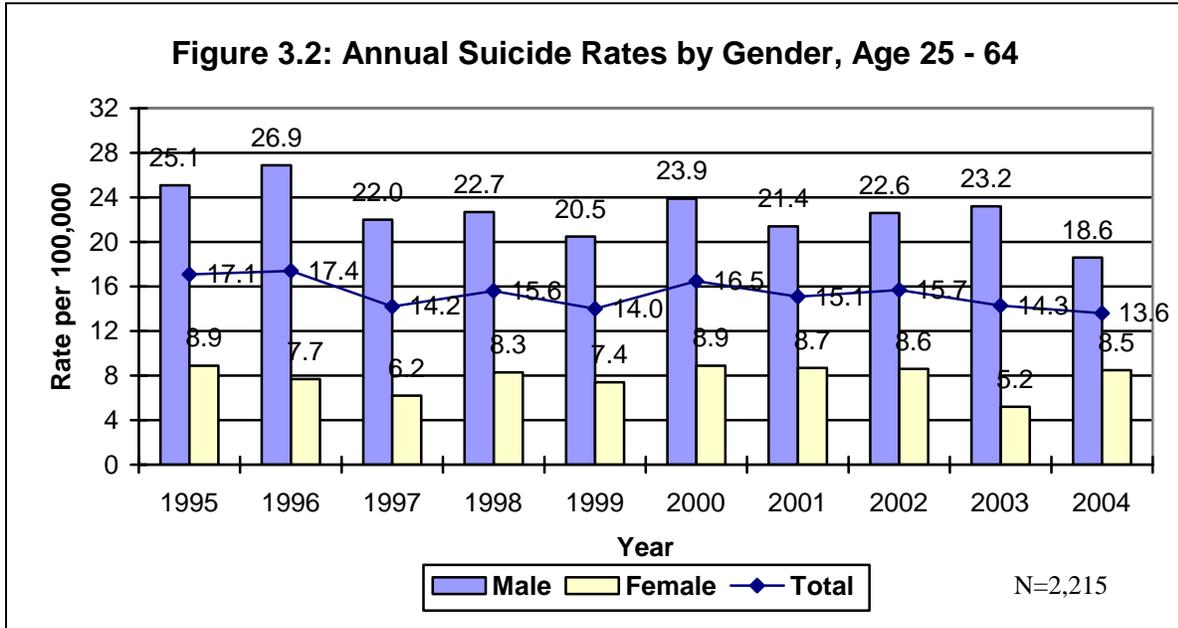
Comparison with California and the United States

Suicide rates in working aged adults (25-64 years) over the past two decades have seen an overall decline, but remain at levels that are unfortunately too high. In contrast with the 15 to 24 year age group, in which San Diego has lower rates than California and the United States, the rates are generally higher in San Diego for this age group.



Source: CDC Wonder Compressed Mortality Database

**Annual Rates**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

The suicide rate among working aged adults in San Diego County fell 20% from 1995 to 2004. During this decade, men in this age group had an average annual rate of 22.6 per 100,000, and the rate for women was 7.8 per 100,000.

**Table 3.1: Annual Suicide Number and Rate, Age 25 - 64**

| Year  | Male   |                   | Female |      | Total  |      |
|-------|--------|-------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
|       | Number | Rate <sup>†</sup> | Number | Rate | Number | Rate |
| 1995  | 171    | 25.1              | 59     | 8.9  | 230    | 17.1 |
| 1996  | 184    | 26.9              | 51     | 7.7  | 235    | 17.4 |
| 1997  | 152    | 22.0              | 42     | 6.2  | 194    | 14.2 |
| 1998  | 160    | 22.7              | 57     | 8.3  | 217    | 15.6 |
| 1999  | 147    | 20.5              | 52     | 7.4  | 199    | 14.0 |
| 2000  | 176    | 23.9              | 64     | 8.9  | 240    | 16.5 |
| 2001  | 160    | 21.4              | 64     | 8.7  | 224    | 15.1 |
| 2002  | 173    | 22.6              | 65     | 8.6  | 238    | 15.7 |
| 2003  | 182    | 23.2              | 40     | 5.2  | 222    | 14.3 |
| 2004  | 148    | 18.6              | 68     | 8.5  | 216    | 13.6 |
| Total | 1653   | 22.6              | 562    | 7.8  | 2215   | 15.3 |

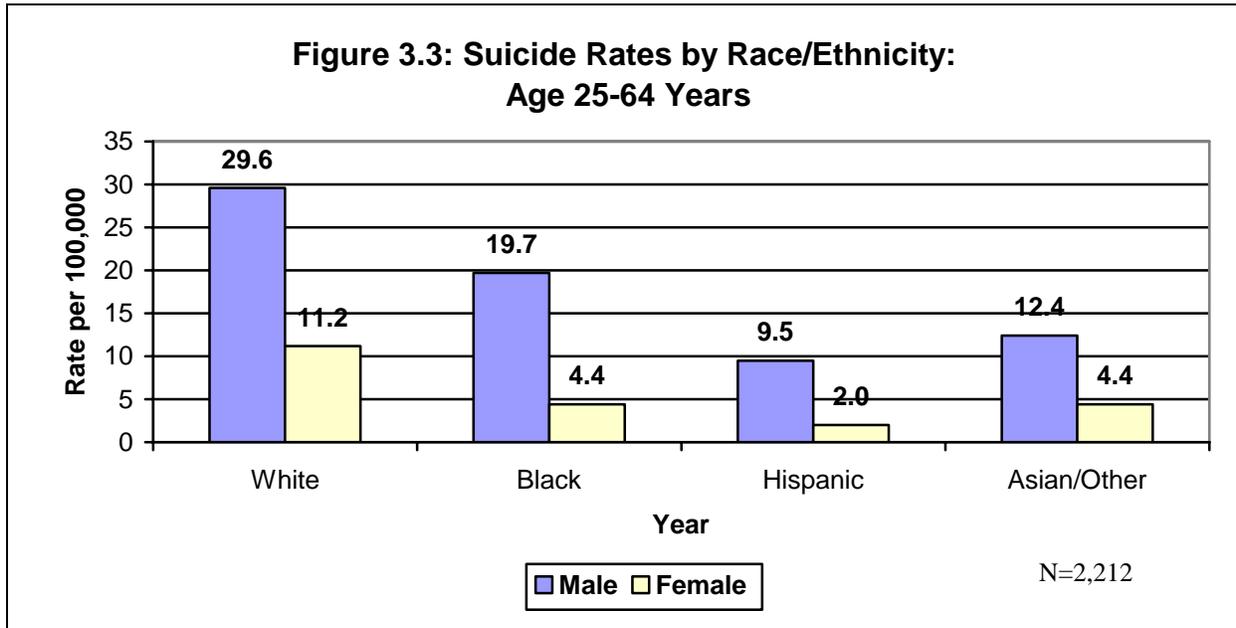
<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

## Section 3: Working-Aged Adults

### Race/Ethnicity

The suicide rate among working aged adults was highest in Whites, with White males having the highest risk of any race/gender combination. Males were substantially more at risk of committing suicide among all racial/ethnic groups.



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

Note: Race/ethnicity unknown for three cases.

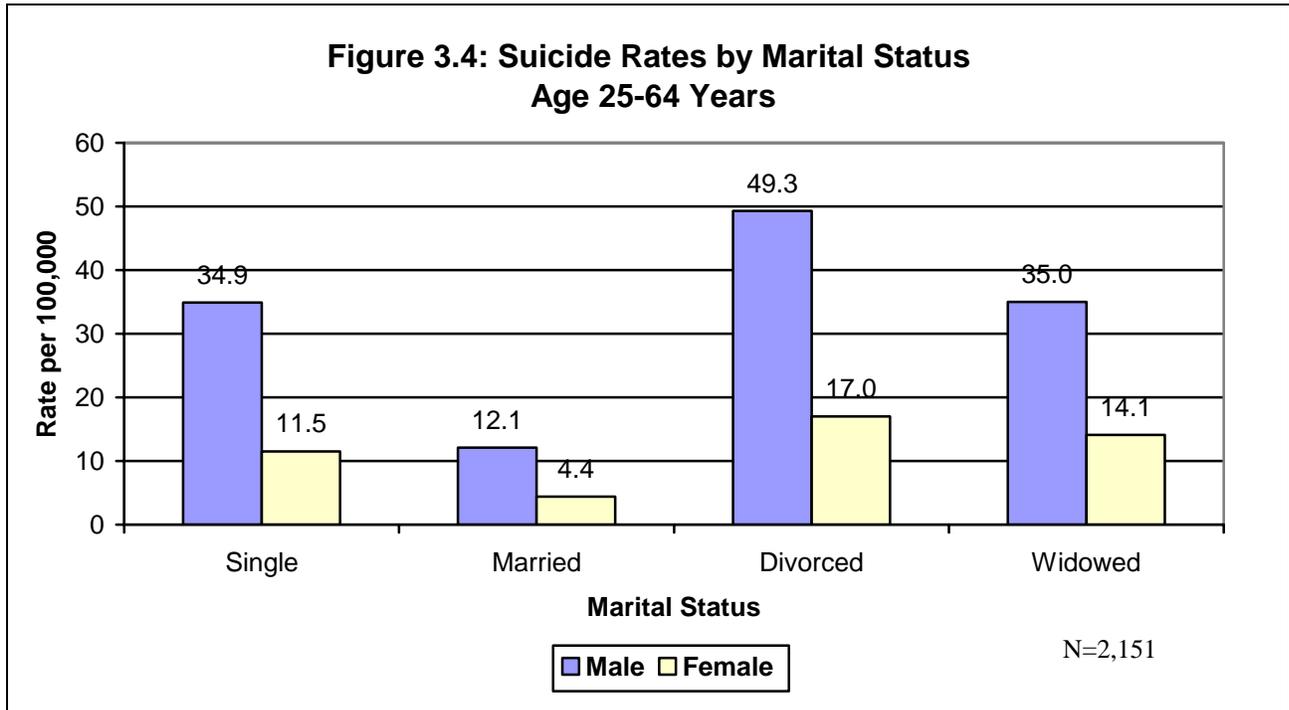
**Table 3.2: Suicides by Race/Ethnicity and Gender,  
Age 25-64 Years**

| Race/<br>Ethnicity | Male   |                   | Female |      | Total  |      |
|--------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
|                    | Number | Rate <sup>†</sup> | Number | Rate | Number | Rate |
| White              | 1311   | 29.6              | 470    | 11.2 | 1781   | 20.7 |
| Black              | 82     | 19.7              | 16     | 4.4  | 98     | 12.5 |
| Hispanic           | 155    | 9.5               | 33     | 2.0  | 188    | 5.7  |
| Asian/Other        | 103    | 12.4              | 42     | 4.4  | 145    | 8.2  |
| Unknown            | 2      | *                 | 1      | *    | 3      | *    |
| Total              | 1653   | 22.6              | 562    | 7.8  | 2215   | 15.3 |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

**Marital Status**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004  
 Note: Marital status unknown for 64 cases

Among working aged adults (25-64), it appears that marital status has a strong association with suicide risk. Those who were divorced, widowed, or single had a higher risk of suicide than those who were married. For example, a divorced male in this age group was more than four times more likely to commit suicide than a married male.

**Table 3.3: Suicides by Marital Status and Gender,  
Age 25-64 Years**

| Marital Status | Male   |       | Female |      | Total  |      |
|----------------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|------|
|                | Number | Rate† | Number | Rate | Number | Rate |
| Single         | 624    | 34.9  | 133    | 11.5 | 757    | 25.7 |
| Married        | 563    | 12.1  | 205    | 4.4  | 768    | 8.2  |
| Divorced       | 391    | 49.3  | 187    | 17.0 | 578    | 30.5 |
| Widowed        | 18     | 35.0  | 30     | 14.1 | 48     | 18.1 |
| Unknown        | 57     |       | 7      |      | 64     |      |
| Total          | 1653   | 22.6  | 562    | 7.8  | 2215   | 15.3 |

†Rate per 100,000

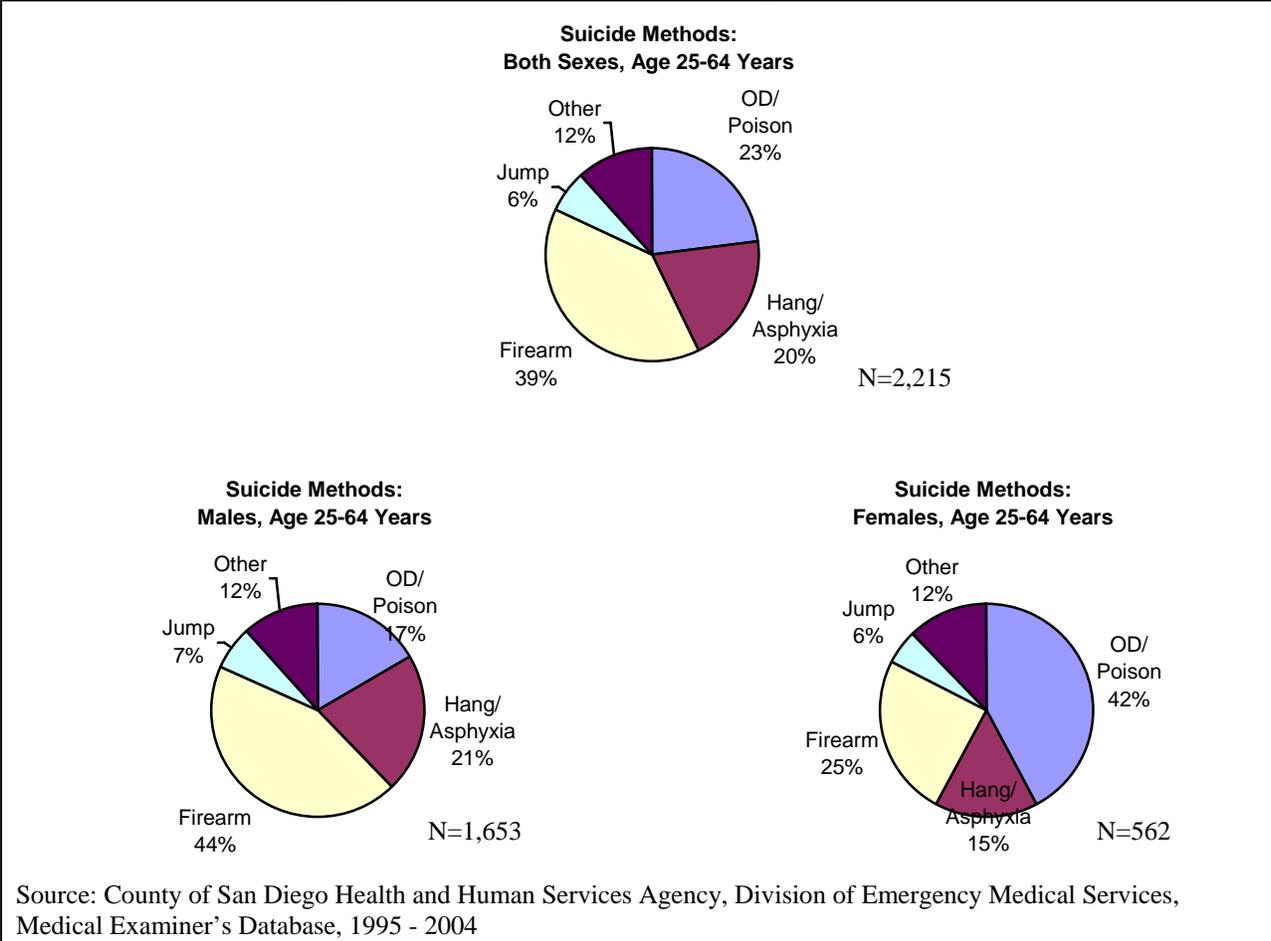
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

**Section 3: Working-Aged Adults**

**Suicide Methods**

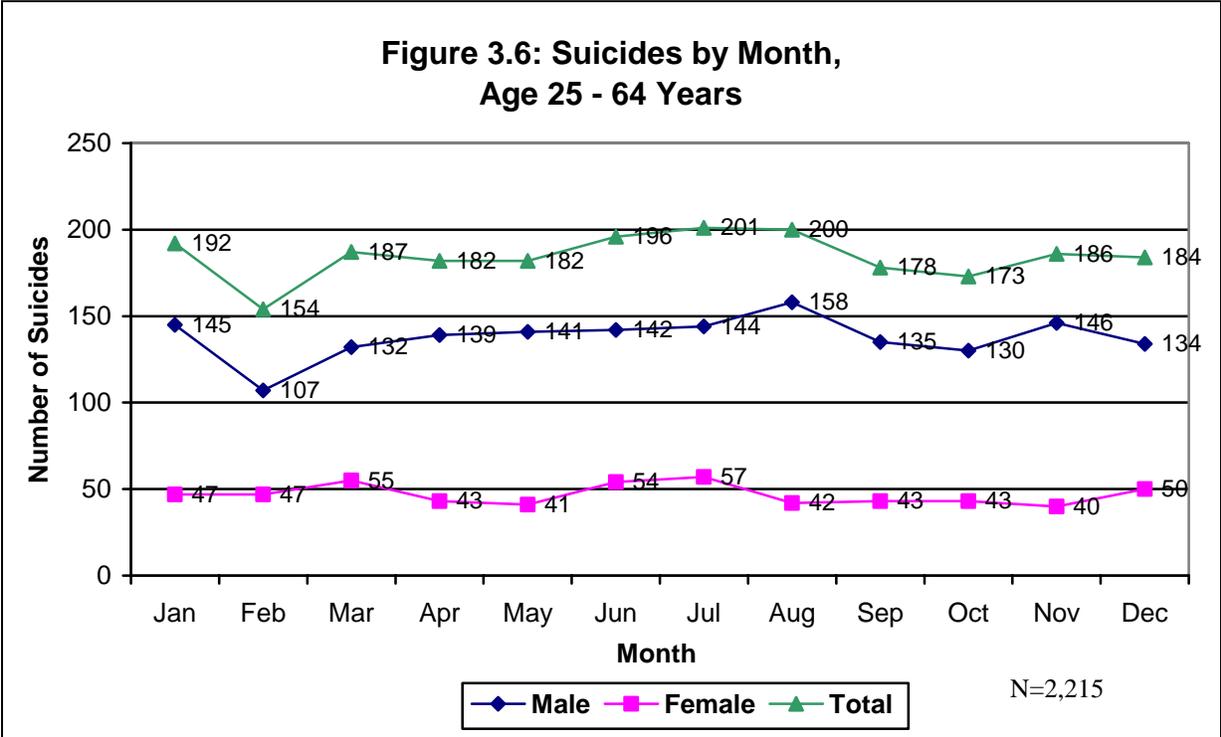
Firearms were by far the leading method of suicide among working aged males, accounting for 44%. Among working aged females, 25% of suicides were attributed to firearms, with 42% choosing drugs/poisons.

**Figure 3.5: Suicide Methods, Age 25-64 Years**



**Month**

For the working-aged population, San Diego County does not show a strong seasonal trend in suicides, although the average number per day appears to increase in the springtime and reaches its maximum point in July. February had the fewest suicides overall.

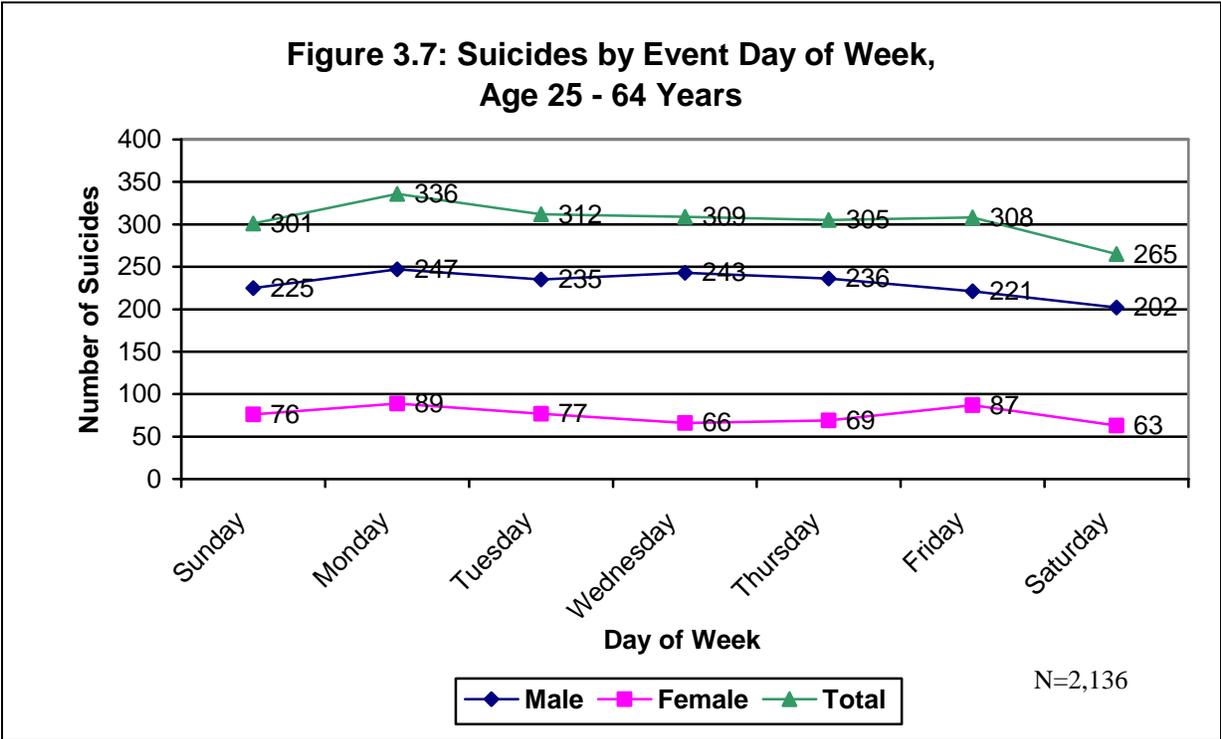


Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

**Section 3: Working-Aged Adults**

**Day of Week**

Mondays had the highest number of suicides for both working aged men and women, while Saturdays had the fewest during this time period. This may be more indicative of when these people were discovered rather than the actual day of the event, as two-thirds were found deceased.

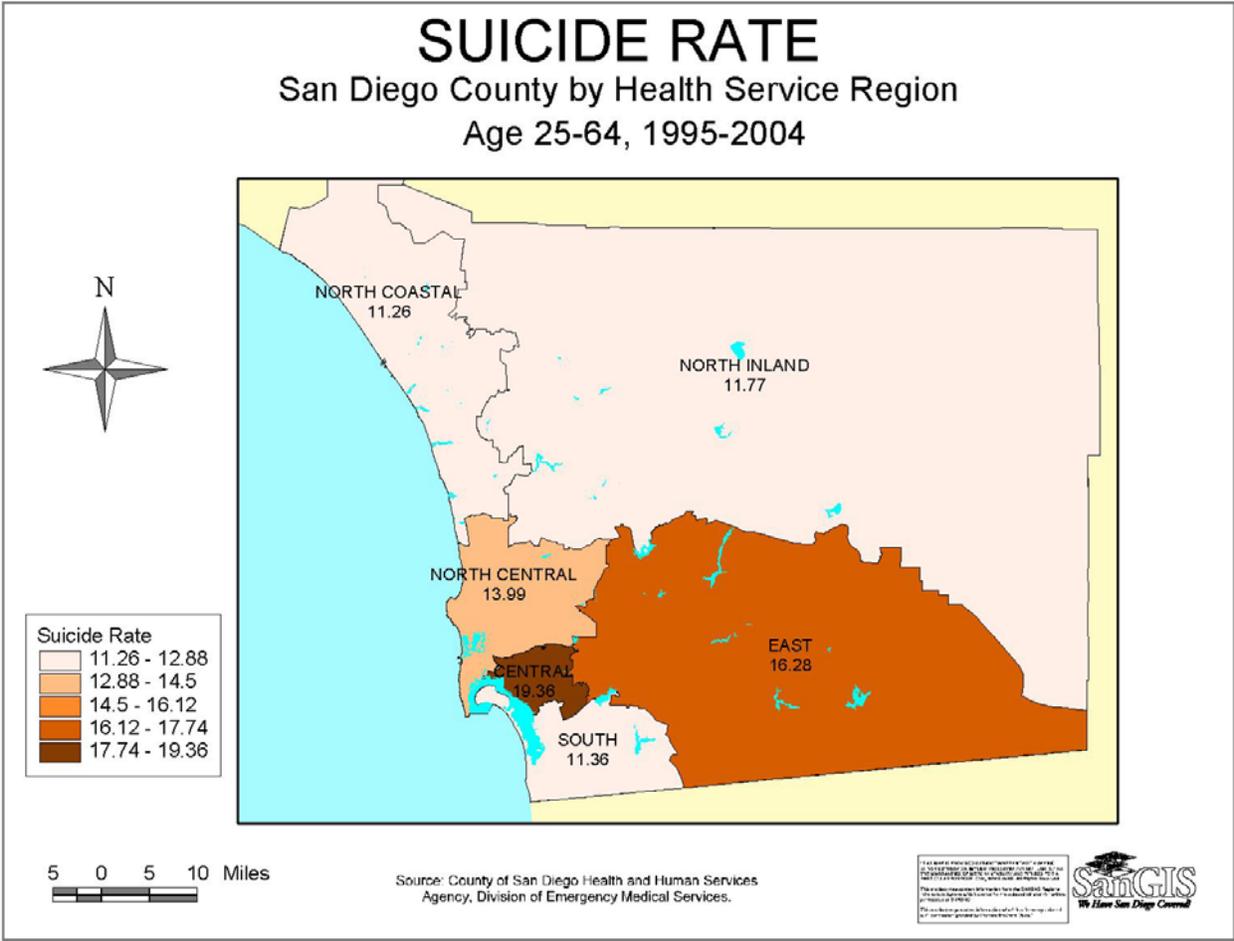


Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

Note: Event date was unknown for 79 individuals.

Geographic Distribution

Figure 3.8



Among working aged adults, the suicide rate was highest in the Central Health Service Region (HSR), which encompasses downtown San Diego and the surrounding communities. The lowest rate was observed in the North Coastal region, which includes Carlsbad, Oceanside, Pendleton, and San Diegoito.

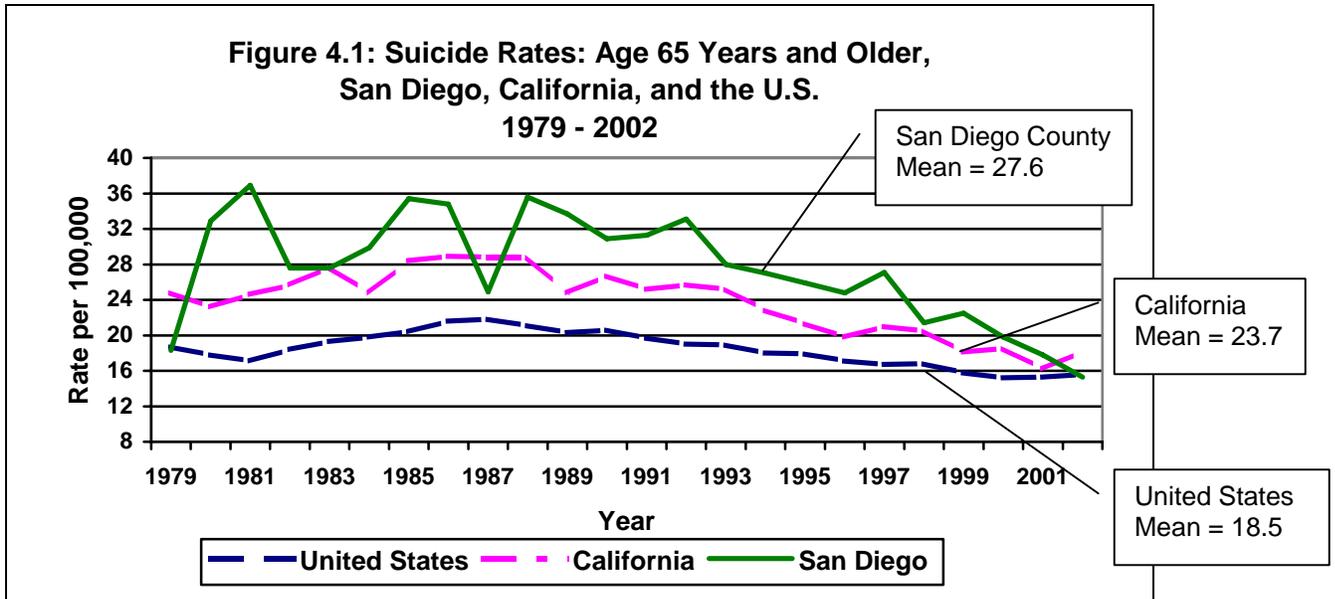
**Table 3.4:**  
**Suicides by San Diego County Health Service Region**

| Health Service Region | Number      | Rate <sup>†</sup> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| North Coastal         | 261         | 11.26             |
| North Central         | 430         | 13.99             |
| Central               | 468         | 19.36             |
| South                 | 218         | 11.36             |
| East                  | 377         | 16.28             |
| North Inland          | 287         | 11.77             |
| Unknown               | 174         |                   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>2215</b> | <b>15.30</b>      |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000  
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

**Comparison with California and the United States**

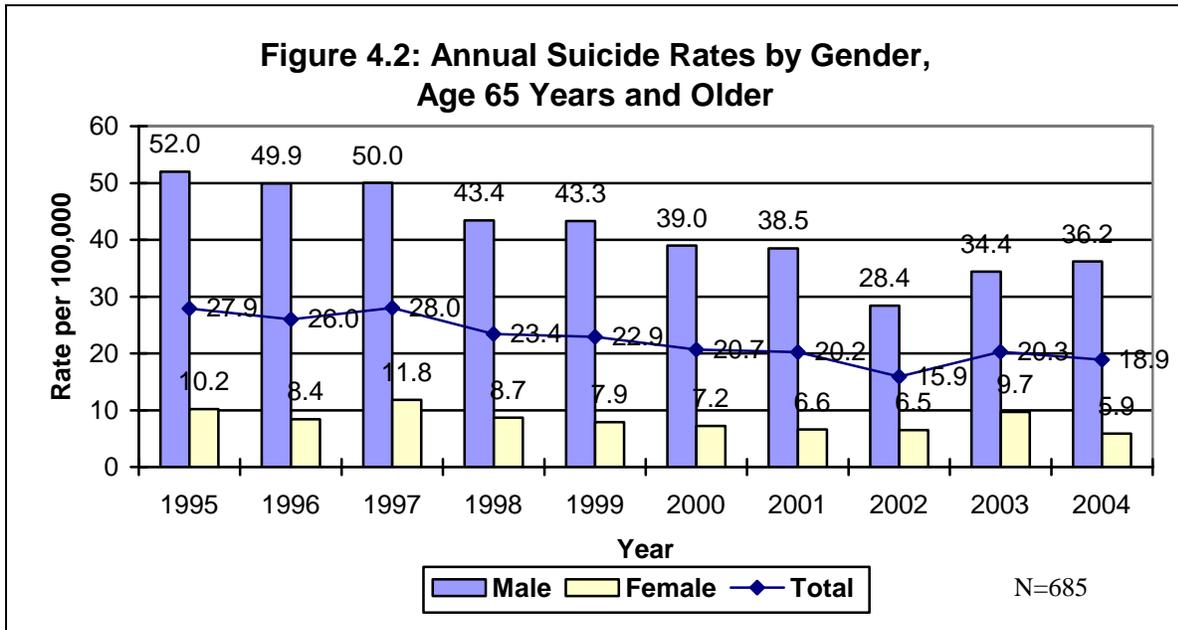
According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>1</sup>, the suicide rate among older adults has been generally higher in San Diego county than in either the state of California or the United States overall since 1979, although the rate for San Diego County, California, and the United States has declined since the late 80's.



Source: CDC Wonder Compressed Mortality Database

<sup>1</sup> [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Annual Rates**



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

The suicide rate for adults 65 years and older fell by 43% from 1995 to 2002 before rising again in 2003. This change was especially pronounced among older men, whose suicide rate fell from 52 per 100,000 in 1995 to 28.4 per 100,000 in 2002, and climbed to 36.2 per 100,000 in 2004.

**Table 4.1: Annual Suicide Number and Rate, Age 65 Years and Older**

| Year  | Male   |                   | Female |      | Total  |      |
|-------|--------|-------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
|       | Number | Rate <sup>†</sup> | Number | Rate | Number | Rate |
| 1995  | 63     | 52.0              | 17     | 10.2 | 80     | 27.9 |
| 1996  | 61     | 49.9              | 14     | 8.4  | 75     | 26.0 |
| 1997  | 62     | 50.0              | 20     | 11.8 | 82     | 28.0 |
| 1998  | 55     | 43.4              | 15     | 8.7  | 70     | 23.4 |
| 1999  | 56     | 43.3              | 14     | 7.9  | 70     | 22.9 |
| 2000  | 52     | 39.0              | 13     | 7.2  | 65     | 20.7 |
| 2001  | 52     | 38.5              | 12     | 6.6  | 64     | 20.2 |
| 2002  | 39     | 28.4              | 12     | 6.5  | 51     | 15.9 |
| 2003  | 48     | 34.4              | 18     | 9.7  | 66     | 20.3 |
| 2004  | 51     | 36.2              | 11     | 5.9  | 62     | 18.9 |
| Total | 539    | 41.2              | 146    | 8.2  | 685    | 22.2 |

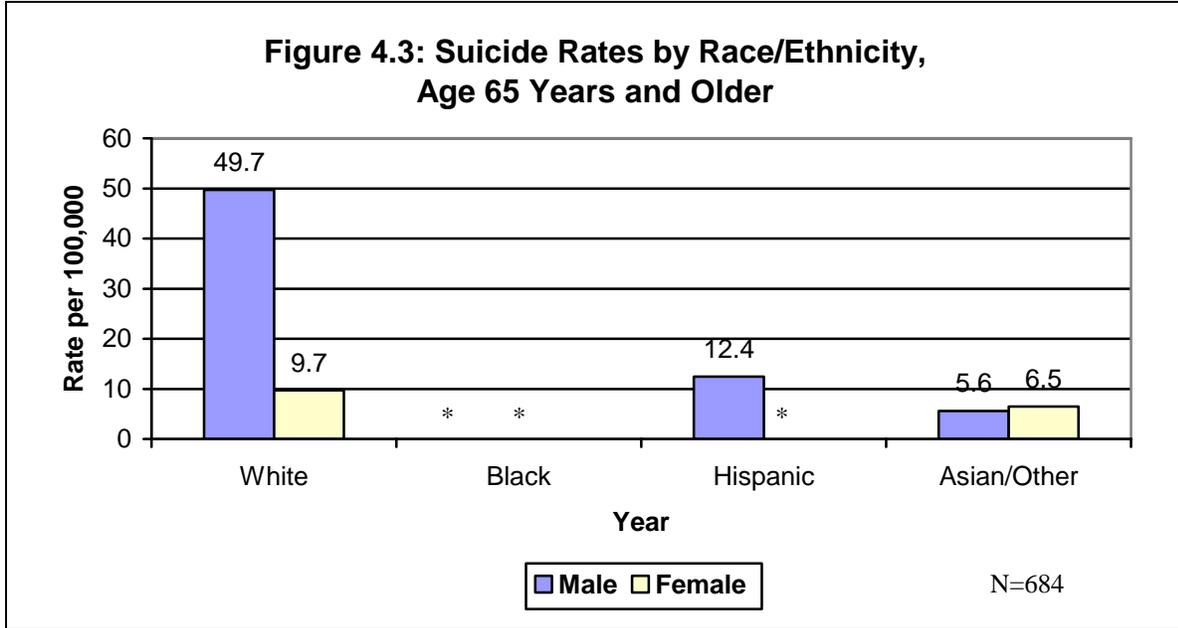
<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

**Section 4: Older Adults**

**Race/Ethnicity**

Suicide among older adults in San Diego County is largely a White male phenomenon. Almost 80% of suicides in this age group were male, and 94% were White.



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

\*Rates not calculated for fewer than five incidents

Note: Race/ethnicity unknown for one case.

**Table 4.2: Suicides by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, Age 65 Years and Older**

| Race/<br>Ethnicity | Male                |             | Female     |            | Total      |             |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                    | Number <sup>†</sup> | Rate        | Number     | Rate       | Number     | Rate        |
| White              | 511                 | 49.7        | 133        | 9.7        | 644        | 26.8        |
| Black              | 4                   | *           | 1          | *          | 5          | 5.8         |
| Hispanic           | 17                  | 12.4        | 2          | *          | 19         | 5.7         |
| Asian/Other        | 6                   | 5.6         | 10         | 6.5        | 16         | 6.1         |
| Unknown            | 1                   |             | 0          |            | 1          |             |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>539</b>          | <b>41.2</b> | <b>146</b> | <b>8.2</b> | <b>685</b> | <b>22.2</b> |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

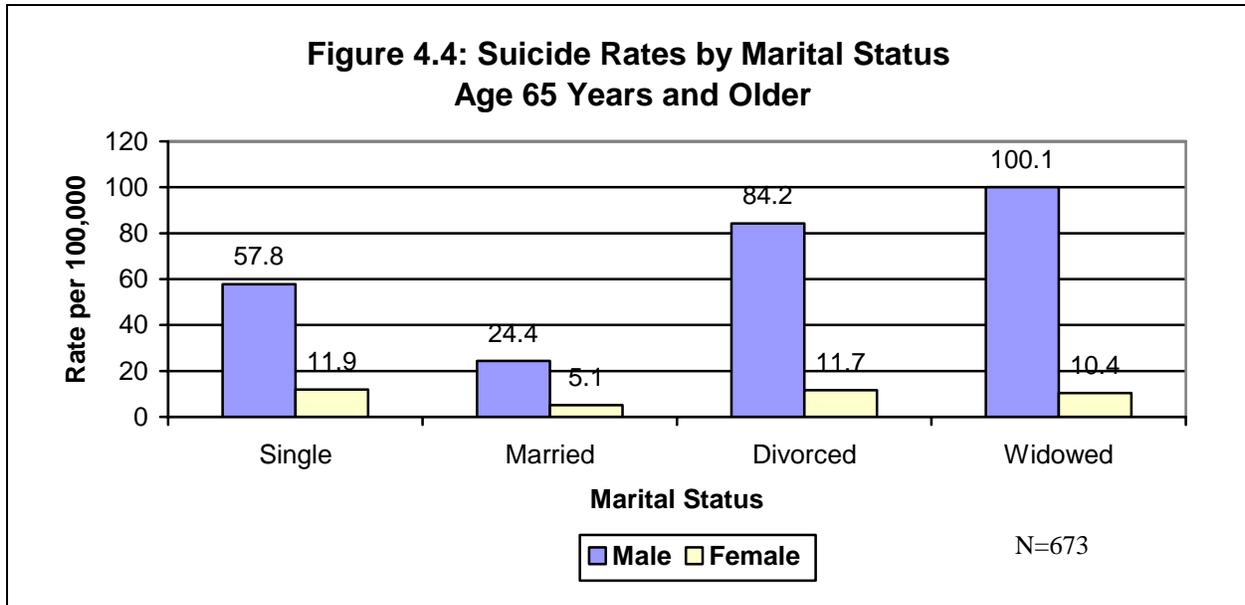
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 – 2004

\*Rates not calculated for fewer than five incidents

## Section 4: Older Adults

### Marital Status

Among older adults (65 and up), marital status has a strong association with suicide risk. Those who were divorced, widowed, or single had a higher risk of suicide than those who were married. For example, a divorced male in this age group was just over three times more likely to commit suicide than a married male, and widowed men had a suicide rate four times higher than married men. Note that this is in addition to an already high rate of suicide in this age group.



Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

Note: Marital status unknown for 12 cases

**Table 4.3: Suicides by Marital Status and Gender  
Age 65 Years and Older**

| Marital Status | Male       |                   | Female     |            | Total      |             |
|----------------|------------|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                | Number     | Rate <sup>†</sup> | Number     | Rate       | Number     | Rate        |
| Single         | 35         | 57.8              | 7          | 11.9       | 42         | 35.1        |
| Married        | 239        | 24.4              | 41         | 5.1        | 280        | 15.7        |
| Divorced       | 89         | 84.2              | 23         | 11.7       | 112        | 37.1        |
| Widowed        | 165        | 100.1             | 74         | 10.4       | 239        | 27.3        |
| Unknown        | 11         |                   | 1          |            | 12         |             |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>539</b> | <b>41.2</b>       | <b>146</b> | <b>8.2</b> | <b>685</b> | <b>22.2</b> |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

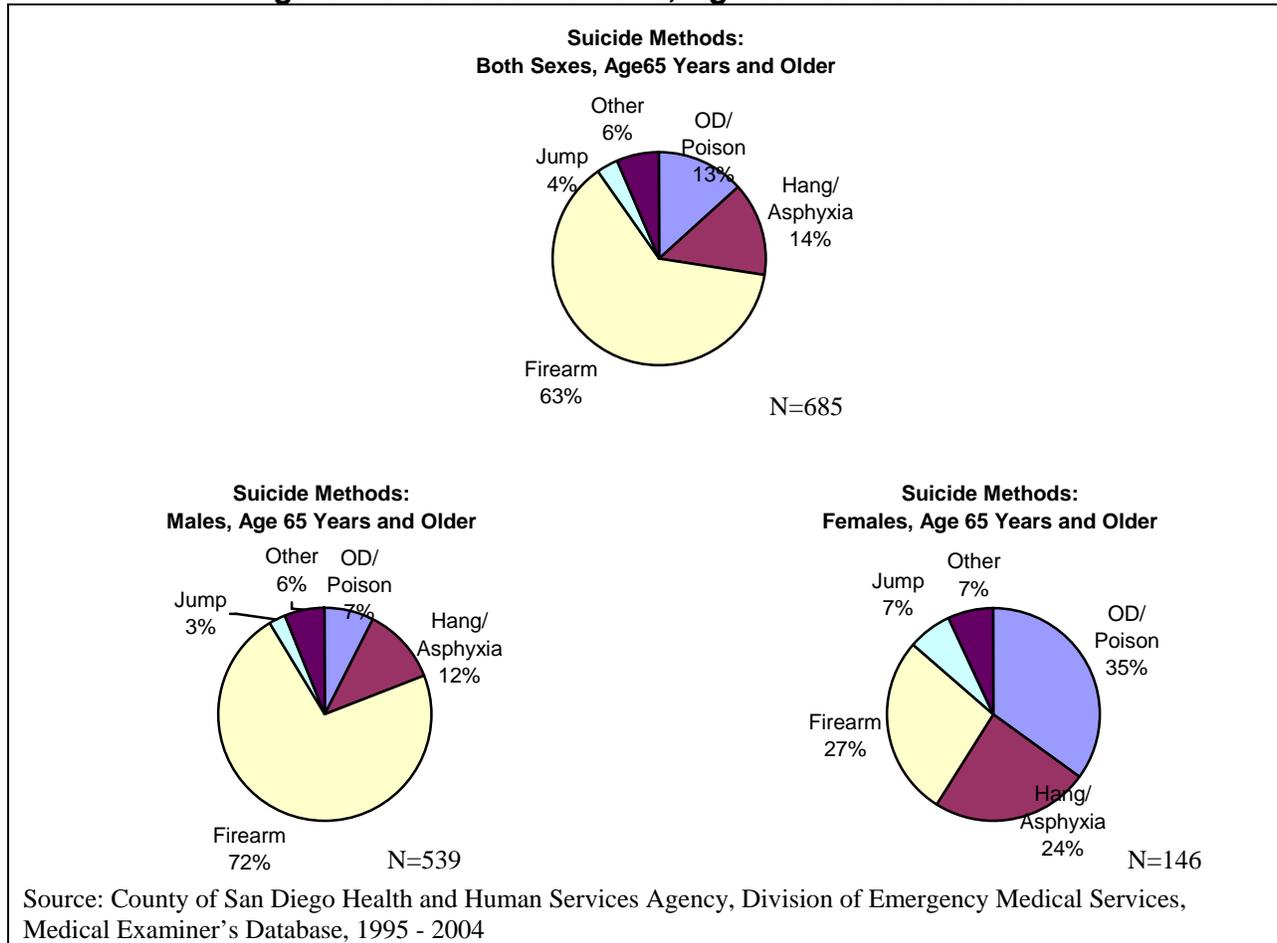
Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

## Section 4: Older Adults

### Suicide Methods

Firearms again were by far the leading method of completed suicide among older adult men, accounting for 72%. Among older women, however, only 27% were attributed to firearms, with 35% choosing drugs/poisons.

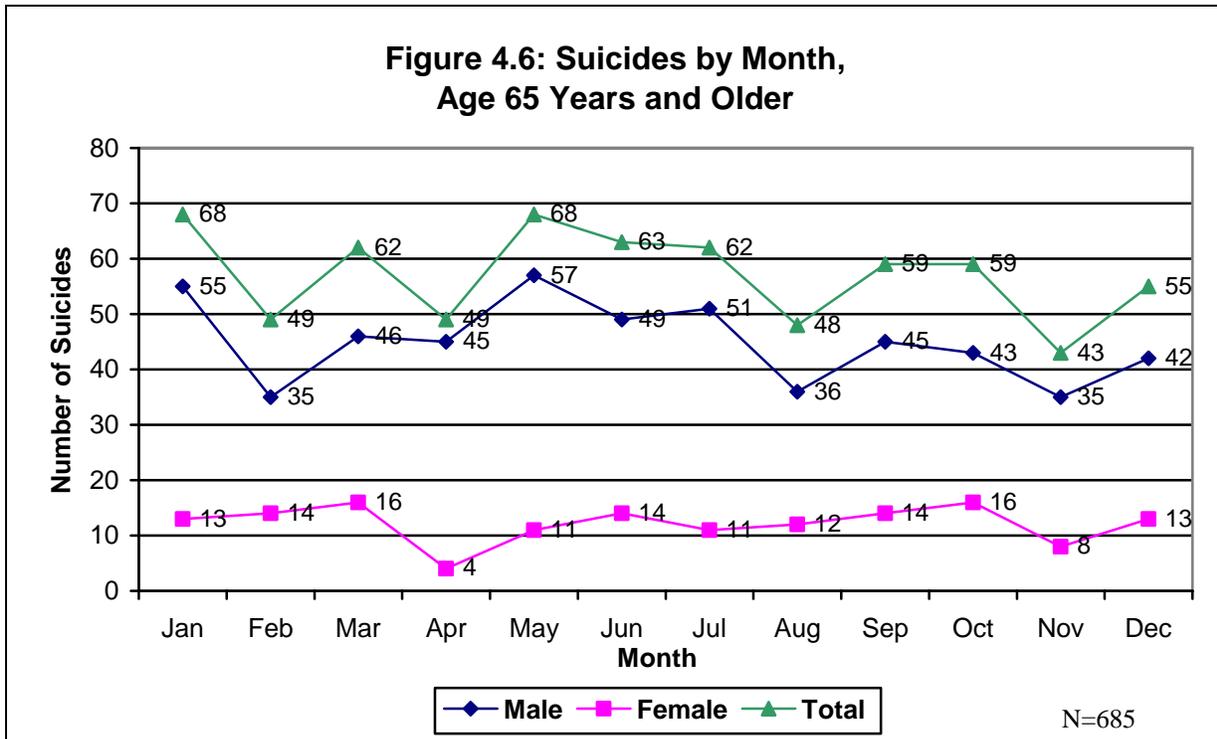
**Figure 4.5: Suicide Methods, Age 65 Years and Older**



## Section 4: Older Adults

### Month

May had the highest number of suicides per month among older adults and November had the fewest over this time period.

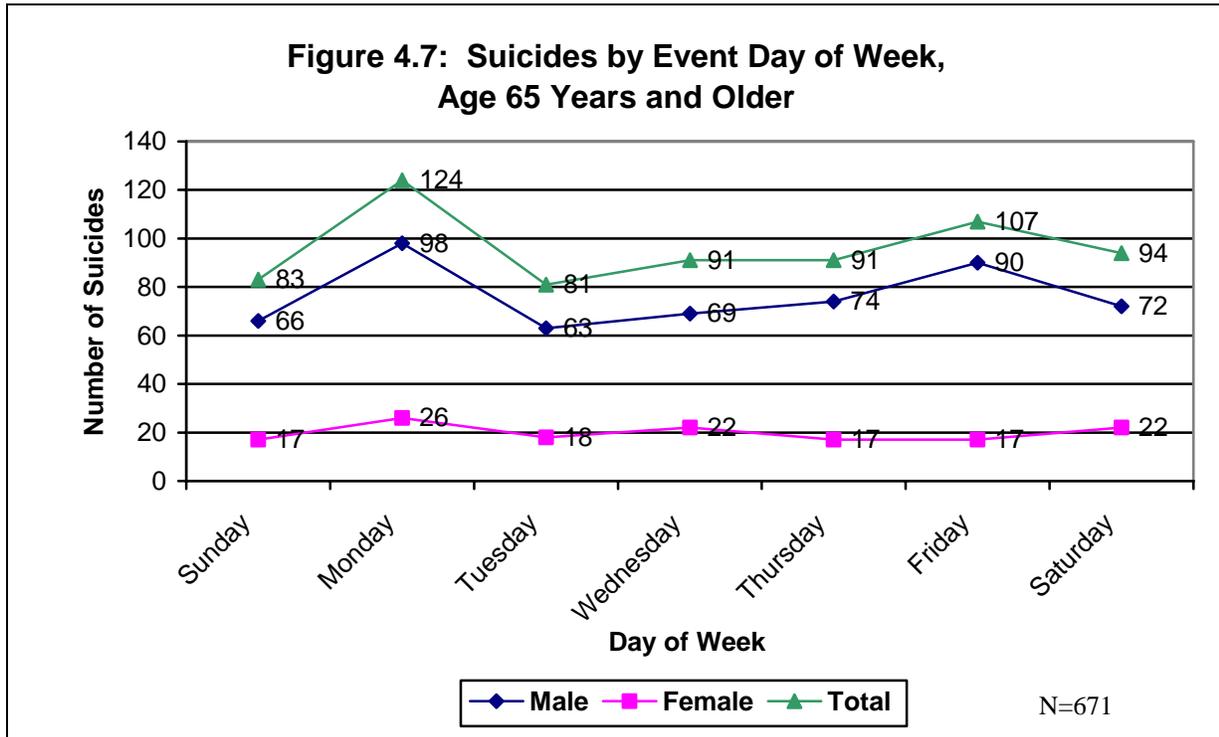


Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

## Section 4: Older Adults

### Day of Week

Among older adults, there was a strong peak in suicides on Mondays compared to other days of the week. This may be more indicative of when these people were discovered rather than the actual day of the event, as 71% were found deceased.

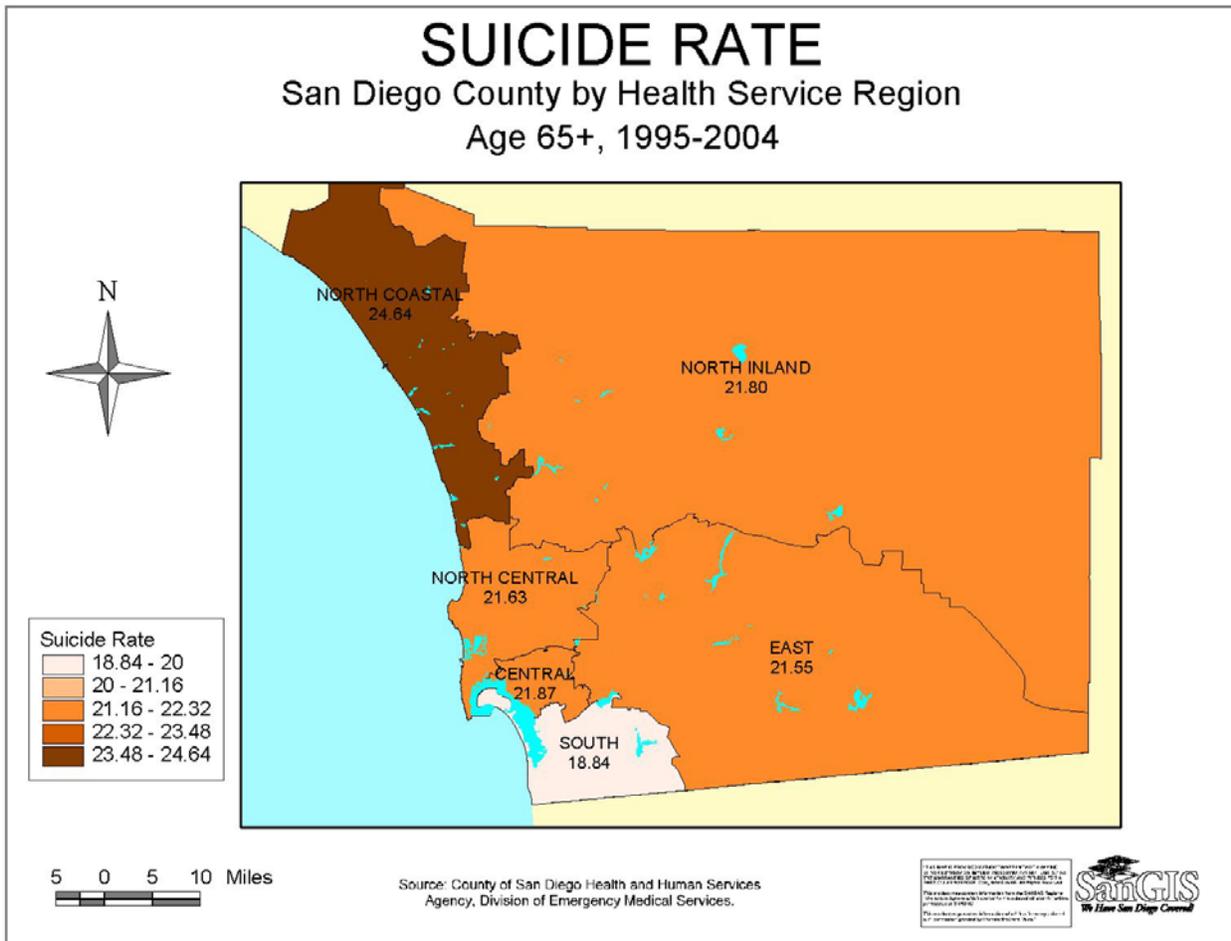


Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

Note: Event date was unknown for 14 individuals.

Geographic Distribution

Figure 4.8



The suicide rate among older adults was highest in the North Coastal Health Service Region (HSR), which includes Carlsbad, Oceanside, Pendleton, and San Diegoito. The lowest rate was observed in the South HSR.

**Table 4.4: Suicides by San Diego County Health Service Region**

| Health Service Region | Number | Rate <sup>†</sup> |
|-----------------------|--------|-------------------|
| North Coastal         | 132    | 24.64             |
| North Central         | 137    | 21.63             |
| Central               | 90     | 21.87             |
| South                 | 74     | 18.84             |
| East                  | 108    | 21.55             |
| North Inland          | 132    | 21.80             |
| Unknown               | 12     |                   |
| Total                 | 685    | 22.24             |

<sup>†</sup>Rate per 100,000

Source: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Emergency Medical Services, Medical Examiner Database, 1995 - 2004

### **End Note**

Suicide is clearly a major cause of death in San Diego County. It is also a particular burden for certain age, gender, and ethnic groups, as well as certain geographic areas.

Nonetheless, suicide is, in many cases, preventable. At least 90 percent of all people who kill themselves have a mental or substance abuse disorder, or a combination of disorders.<sup>7</sup> Thus, early recognition and treatment of mental illness and substance abuse problems are among the most promising approaches to suicide prevention. So, too, are strategies that target known risk factors, for example, the reduction in access to lethal suicide methods.

Putting these strategies to work requires a major investment in public health action, which in turn requires significant public awareness of the need for change. This report aims to be one means to help raise the public awareness necessary to achieve that end and reduce the rate of suicide in San Diego County.

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<sup>7</sup> Healthy People 2010, Volume II (second edition), Objective 18: Mental Health and Mental Disorders. Available at [http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/Document/HTML/Volume2/18Mental.htm#\\_Toc486932699](http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/Document/HTML/Volume2/18Mental.htm#_Toc486932699).