

Suicide More Likely Among Divorced Immigrants

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Divorced immigrants are more than twice as likely to commit suicide as native-born Americans who are divorced, according to a study of Riverside County residents co-authored by UC Riverside sociology professor Augustine J. Kposowa and published in *Archives of Suicide Research* in March.

Kposowa and co-authors Riverside County Sheriff's Capt. James P. McElvain, who holds a Ph.D. in sociology from UCR, and sociology professor Kevin D. Breault of Middle Tennessee State University also found that the longer immigrants live in the United States the less likely they are to kill themselves.

The researchers focused on Riverside County, Calif., one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation and where, in 2000, nearly one in five residents was born outside the United States. About 15 percent of the county's suicide victims over age 15 were immigrants. Riverside County's average suicide rate in 2000-2002 was 10.4 per 100,000, slightly above the California average of 9.1 per 100,000.

Using Riverside County death records from 1998 through 2001 and 2000 Census data, the researchers found no significant relationship between immigration and suicide. But among immigrants, marital status and length of residence were significant factors. Immigrants who have lived in the United States for 10 to 19 years are more than three times as likely to commit suicide as those who have lived here for 20 years or more, the sociologists said.

“The main finding of this research was that social integration offers important immunity from suicide among immigrants,” the researchers wrote. “. . . Social integration is critical with regard to the ability to obtain the skills and networks needed for gainful employment and the fulfillment of economic desires.”

Many immigrants come to the United States expecting to become financially successful and send money to relatives who remain in their native country, the researchers said. Failure to achieve financial success and help those at home “may elevate suicide risk for the immigrant who cannot embrace the shame of returning home,” the researchers said.

Policies aimed at reducing suicide should address depression, anxiety and acculturation stress problems that are prevalent in immigrant communities, the authors said. The group that needs special attention is newly arrived immigrants. “It is likely that those new to the country have fewer social support systems and also possess relatively little knowledge about utilizing options for seeking help in times of crisis, including suicide prevention hotlines and mental health clinics,” they said.

Source: University of California, Riverside

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