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Maine Department of Health and Welfare

Division of Vital Statistics

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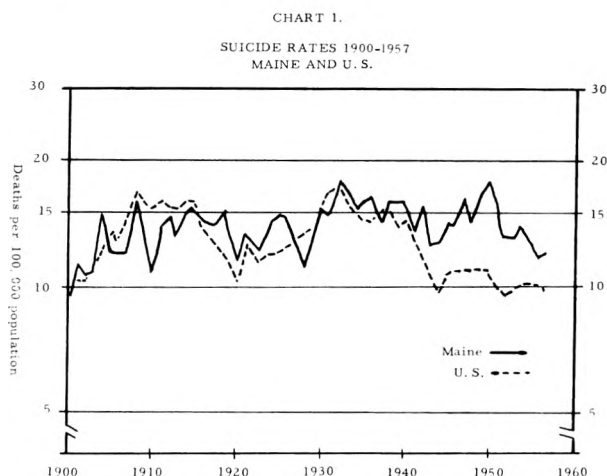
Department of Health and Welfare

Suicide—Demographic Aspects Of The Problem

EDSON K. LABRACK, M.P.H.*

In 1957 there were 113 suicides in Maine and the suicide rate was 12.0 per 100,000 population. Suicide ranked 9th among leading causes of death for residents of the State during that year. Suicide first made an appearance among the 10 leading causes of death in Maine in 1954. Since that time Maine has been one among about 20 states in the U. S. where suicide is one of the 10 leading causes of death.

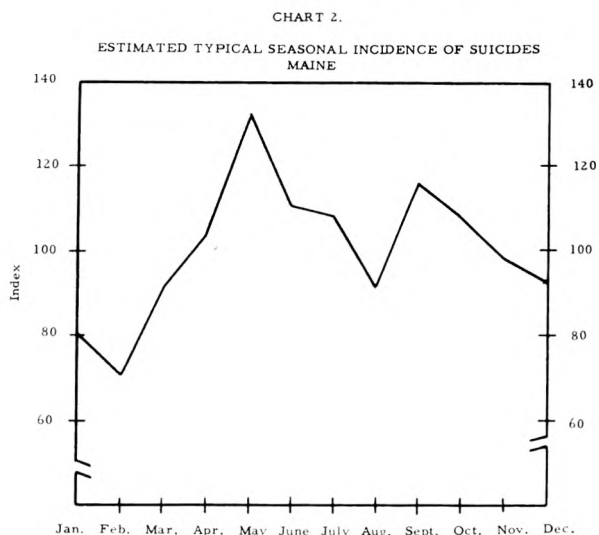
show the distinct cycle that the U. S. rate shows. It is apparent, however, that the suicide rate in Maine has been higher than the suicide rate in the remainder of the U. S. since about 1915 and that it has been significantly higher since the early 1940's.



TREND IN THE SUICIDE RATE

Chart 1 shows the suicide rate in Maine and in the U. S. between 1900 and 1957. The U. S. suicide rate shows a pronounced cyclical pattern with two complete cycles visible on the chart. The U. S. suicide rate appears to rise during times of economic stress and to decline during times of war. The U. S. suicide rate has remained relatively low during the past 15 years or so.

The trend in the Maine suicide rate is more difficult to analyze. The Maine suicide rate does not appear to



SEASONAL PATTERN OF SUICIDES

Chart 2 shows the estimated typical seasonal pattern of the incidence of suicides in Maine. The suicide rate is at its lowest during the winter. During the spring suicides increase rather sharply to an annual peak during the month of May. Suicides decline during the summer, but rise to a secondary peak during the month of September.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN SUICIDES

There are 4 to 5 times as many suicides among men as among women in Maine. In 1957 the estimated suicide rate was 20.0 per 100,000 population for men

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and 4.3 per 100,000 for women. Suicide ranked as the 8th most important cause of death for men and the 15th most important cause of death for women.

There appear also to be sex differences in the manner in which suicidal injury is inflicted. The following table shows suicide rates per 100,000 population in Maine in 1957 by manner of injury:

<i>Manner of Injury</i>	<i>Suicide Rates</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Total	20.0	4.3
Poisoning	5.4	1.5
Hanging and Strangulation ..	3.9	1.1
Firearms and Explosives	11.3	1.1
Other	2.2	1.2

AGE DIFFERENCES IN SUICIDES

The suicide rate increases with increasing age. Suicide, however, ranks higher on the list of leading causes of death in younger persons than it does in older persons. Suicide was the 4th most frequent cause of death

in persons 15-44 years of age, the 7th most frequent cause of death in persons 45-64 years of age, and the 14th most frequent cause of death in persons 65 years of age or over in Maine in 1957. The following table shows age specific suicide rates per 100,000 population in Maine and in the U. S. in 1956:

<i>Age in Years</i>	<i>Suicide Rates</i>	
	<i>Maine</i>	<i>U.S.</i>
5-14	0.1	0.2
15-44	8.8	8.2
45-64	21.9	20.2
65 and over	34.7	26.8

CONCLUSION

Suicide is an important health problem in Maine, ranking 9th among the leading causes of death in the State in 1957. The suicide rate is higher in Maine than in the U. S. as a whole. There are certain seasonal, sex, and age patterns which may indicate that further study of the problem might be useful.