

Attempted Suicide Among Adolescents



Introduction

Suicide is a major but largely preventable public health problem and is among the top five to ten causes of death in the world. In Canada, suicide is a leading cause of death from adolescence to middle-age, yet it has not received the same attention as other public health problems which account for far fewer deaths.

In Newfoundland and Labrador suicide accounts for approximately 0.7% of all deaths, yet it is responsible for about 16% of deaths among young people aged 15 - 24 years. For this group, suicide ranks as the second leading cause of death after accidents (Source: Statistics Canada, 2001).

It has been shown that some overlap exists between populations that attempt suicide and those that commit suicide. Persons who attempt suicide are at greater risk for committing suicide in the future.

This Fast Facts presents information on

attempted suicide requiring hospitalization among adolescents in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a focus on Inuit and Innu populations¹ in Labrador. Data was obtained from the Clinical Database Management System (CDMS), which is maintained by the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information (the Centre). According to this study, on average, three young people aged 10-19 years will require hospitalization due to attempted suicide every two weeks in the province. The majority of suicide attempts do not result in enough harm to require hospitalization; therefore this research represents only the most serious cases.

The prevention and effective management of attempted suicide is possible through collaboration with community leaders, health professionals, researchers and all levels of government. The methodology used in this study can be found at www.nlchi.nl.ca/pdf/attemptedsuicide_methodology_nov04.pdf.

Highlights:

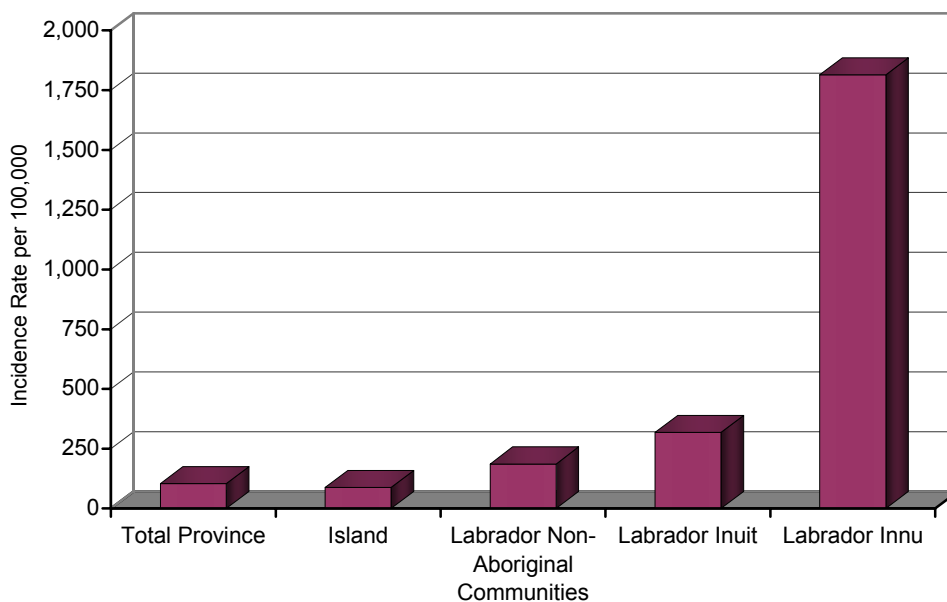
Incidence Rates

Geographic Trends

Risk Factors

Protective Factors

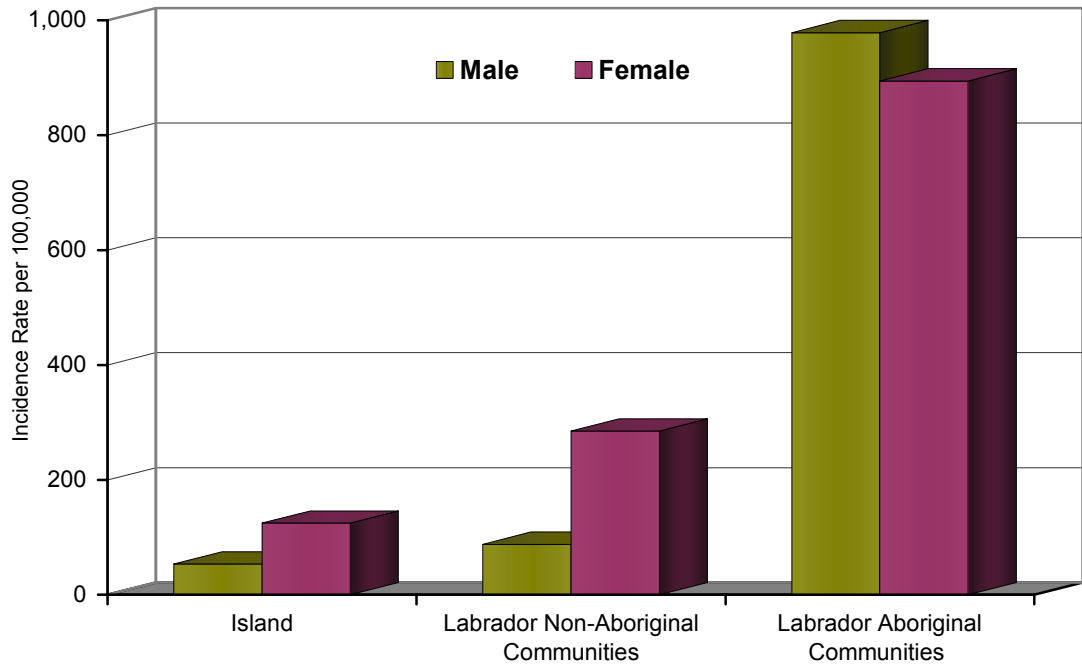
Incidence Rate of Attempted Suicide among Population 10-19 Years by Geographic Region, Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998-2000



The rate of attempted suicide among adolescents in Innu communities in Labrador was 17 times the rate for the total province and more than 20 times the rate for the island portion of the province

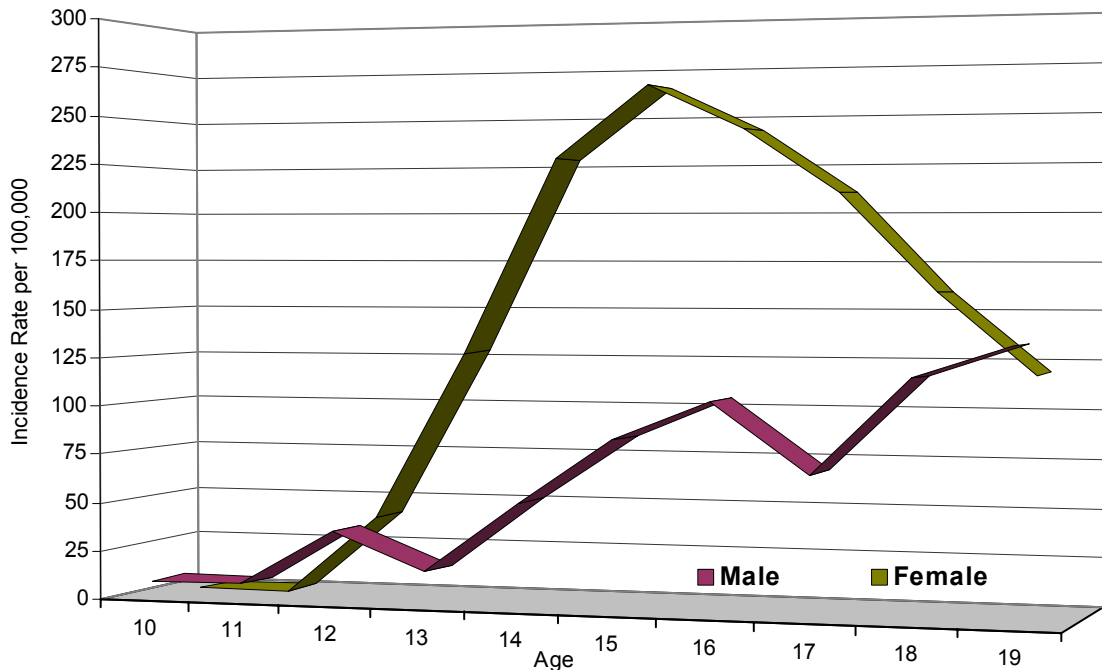
¹ Populations were derived from communities with an Inuit/Innu population of 85% or greater.

Incidence Rate of Attempted Suicide among Population 10-19 Years by Geographic Region and Gender, Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998-2000



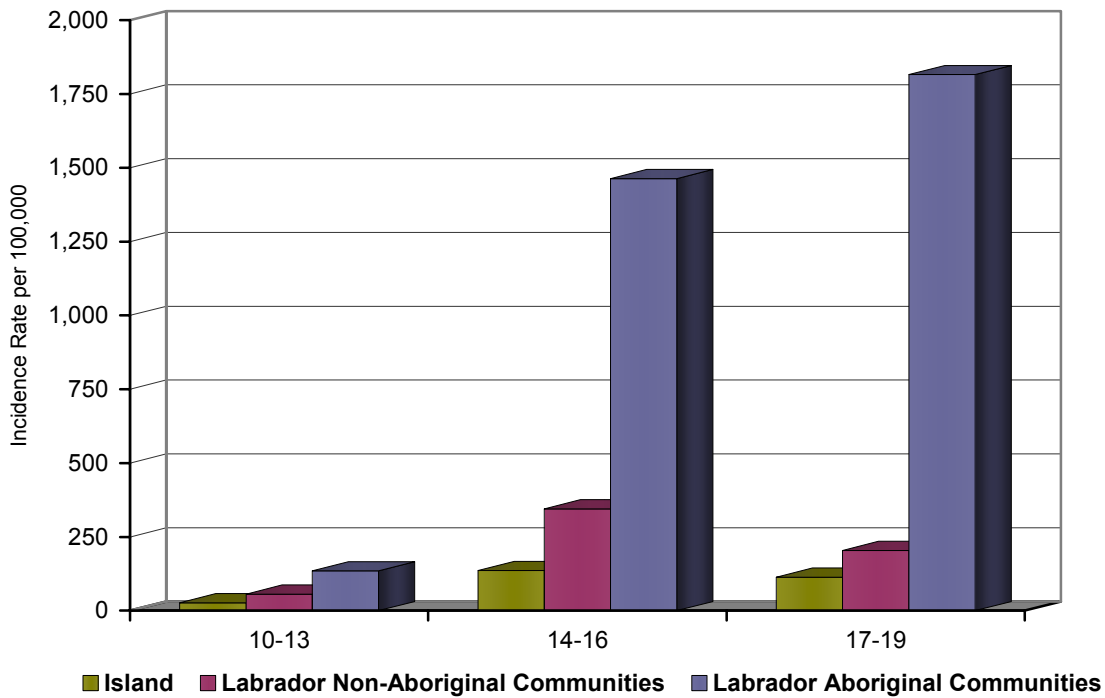
Rates of attempted suicide among adolescents on the island portion of the province and in non-aboriginal communities in Labrador were higher among females than males. Conversely, attempted suicide rates among adolescents in aboriginal communities in Labrador were higher among males than females.

Incidence Rate of Attempted Suicide among Population 10-19 Years by Gender, Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998-2000



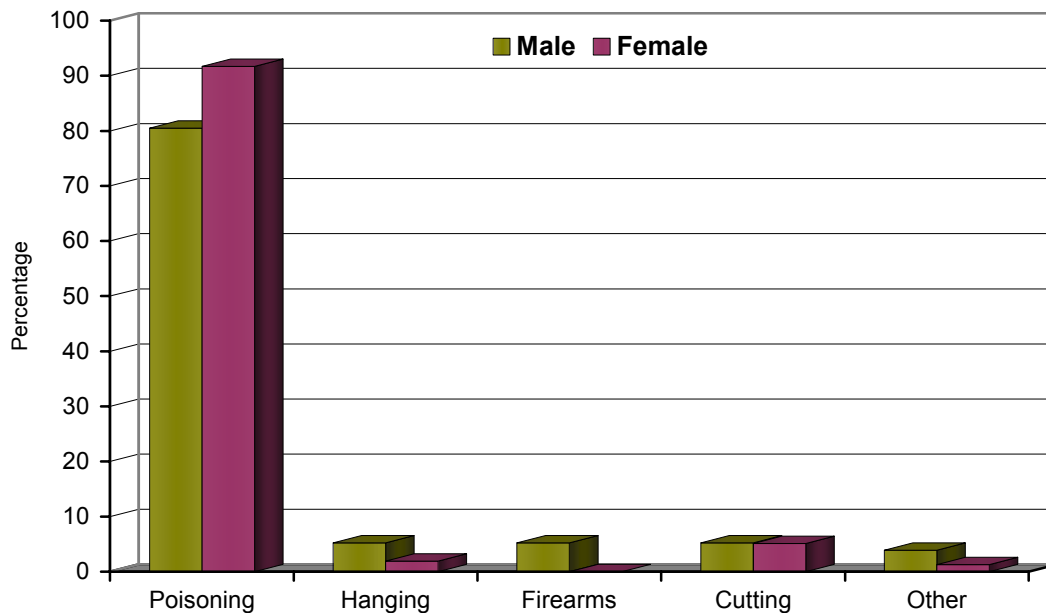
Overall, adolescent females had more than twice as many suicide attempts as adolescent males. The typical profile of an adolescent suicide attempter in Newfoundland and Labrador is a female who ingests prescription and/or over-the-counter drugs.

Incidence Rate of Attempted Suicide among Population 10-19 Years by Age Group and Geographic Region, Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998-2000



Rates of attempted suicide among adolescents increased with age for all geographic areas. Rates of suicide attempts in Labrador aboriginal communities were highest among adolescents aged 14 – 19 years.

Method Used for Attempted Suicide among Population 10-19 Years by Gender, Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998-2000



Poisoning using liquid or solid substances was the most commonly used method for attempted suicide by both males and females.



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Risk Factors

The first step in preventing suicide is to identify and understand the risk factors. Risk factors can be anything that increases the likelihood that suicide will occur. However, they are not necessarily causes. Research has identified the following risk factors for suicide (United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 1999):

- Mental health issues, particularly depression; low self-esteem; feelings of hopelessness
- Previous suicide attempts
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Family or caretaker history of mental health problems, including alcoholism, drug abuse, or depression; family or caretaker history of suicide; family or caretaker history of child maltreatment
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Barriers to accessing mental health treatment
- Recent severe stressor; loss (relational, social, work, or financial)
- Physical illness
- Easy access to lethal methods
- Unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma attached to mental health and substance abuse disorders or suicidal thoughts
- Cultural and religious beliefs—for instance, the belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma
- Isolation, a feeling of being cut off from other people

In addition to those listed above, the following are some common risk factors for suicide among aboriginal populations (National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) 2001):

- Local epidemics of suicide
- Sexual orientation (homosexuality)
- Community instability or lack of prosperity; poverty; limited opportunities for employment
- Lack of proper housing and inadequate sanitation and water quality
- Isolated geographic location; loss of control over land and living conditions
- Breakdown of cultural values and belief systems

Protective Factors

Protective factors buffer people from the risks associated with suicide. A number of protective factors have been identified (DHHS 1999, NAHO 2001):

- Family and community support
- Sense of belonging; positive self-esteem
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and non-violent handling of disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation instincts
- Good school performance; positive attitude toward school
- Good physical and mental health
- Early identification and appropriate treatment of psychiatric illness
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions
- Effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders
- Support from ongoing medical and mental health care relationships

About Our Organization...

The Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information is mandated by the Provincial Government to develop a Health Information Network for the Province. This network will link hospitals, long term care facilities, doctors, pharmacists and health and community service providers within each health

region and provincially. The Centre is also responsible for developing and promoting standards for health information, preparing and releasing health information products and promoting enhanced policies for the protection of personal health information. The Centre welcomes feedback on its work.