

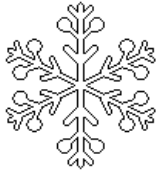


Are Suicide Rates Higher at Christmas?

Research defies the popular misconception that suicide rates are higher during the Christmas period. From a sample of more than 188,000 recorded suicides in the U.S., Phillips and Wills (1987) found that on average, there were 102 fewer suicides on holidays compared to other days of the year. They also noted a dip in suicide rates before and after the Christmas holiday.

Sparhawk (1987) found Christmas to be the one national holiday that had a suppressing effect on the suicide rate in his sample of 13,651 suicides. Studies on monthly and seasonal variation in attempted suicide also show decreases in December.

Looking at suicide rates in Alberta from 1989 to 1993, Dyck (1994) reports the highest frequency of suicides occurred during the month of August, and the least in September. December was found to be the ninth highest of all the months. These and other studies conclude that Christmas may indeed serve a protective function. *



Some Reasons Why

Those who have studied temporal trends in suicidal behaviour have speculated on reasons for the decline in suicide rates at Christmas. Here are some ideas:

- * The gathering of friends and relatives, surround and protect vulnerable people.
- * Christmas celebrations may evoke positive memories, hopefulness, and a renewed outlook for those in distress.
- * community resources: There is an increased awareness of *safety-nets* available during this period (food banks, shelter and outreach programs).

Coping with the Holidays



Suicide rates may be down during this period, but crisis workers all agree that Christmas can be a very stressful time. Loneliness, depression, feelings of loss, financial burdens, family conflicts, and alcohol abuse can intensify during the holidays.

Here are the expert's tips for coping!

Plan ahead. Take time to identify your feelings about Christmas.

*** Be realistic, look at what you can afford to give.* Choose to celebrate with the people who make you feel positive and hopeful. * Let go of your expectations & make time for what is important to you!**

"SIEC ALERT" is a quick reference guide to some of the newest print and a.v. materials at SIEC. Contact SIEC, if you'd like to be added to our free mailing list.

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Suicide & Christmas: Selected Articles

SIEC AN: 950153

Dyck, R.

Christmas: a Risk or Protective Factor for Suicide? (1994)

SIEC AN: 871076

Phillips, D.P. and Wills, J.S.

A Drop in Suicides Around Major National Holidays (1987)

SIEC AN: 880380

Sparhawk, T.G.

Traditional Holidays & Suicide (1987)

SIEC AN: 911302

Masterson, G.

Monthly and Seasonal Variation in Parasuicide. A Sex Difference (1991)

SIEC AN: 911563

Leidy, K.

My Most Treasured Christmas Gift (1991)

SIEC AN: 930363

Cullum, S.J., et al.

Deliberate Self-Harm and Public Holidays: Is There a Link? (1993)

articles on this page cost \$5.00 each plus p & h please order by SIEC AN.

more....

Some of the articles listed in the right hand column were used to compile this siecalert. If you collect monthly data on suicide, please let us know.

