



SIEC ALERT

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SIEC ALERT is a quick reference guide to some of the
newest resources in the field of suicide prevention.

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Please contact us if you'd like to be added to our free mailing list, or if you have an idea for a future topic!
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INMATE SUICIDE

RATES: Inmates are considered a high-risk group for completed suicide. Suicide still remains the number one cause of death for inmates in Canada, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Hayes, 1992) although in recent years, there has been a decline in suicide numbers among federal offenders in Canada (Correctional Services of Canada (CSC), 1998) and the United States (Hayes, 1995).

In Canada, a total of 93 inmates (92 males and one female) completed suicide from the beginning of 1991 to the fiscal year-end for 1997. CSC data for 1996-1997 shows an incidence rate of 7.1 deaths per 10,000 offenders (ie., 71 per 100,000 inmates as compared to Canada's 1996 standard rate of 13 per 100,000). Hayes (1995) reports a national suicide rate of 20.6 per 100,000 in U.S. prisons for the past decade - a rate 50% greater than in the general population, but far below the rate of jail suicides.

The large majority of prisoners who complete suicide are white, male, and use available bedding or clothing to hang themselves while housed alone in their cells. In 1988, a study by the National Center on Institutions & Alternatives (NCIA), found that most victims were not screened for potential suicidal behaviour. In Canada, CSC currently screens all inmates for suicidal risk at intake.

An Alberta study of 222 inmates found a lifetime prevalence rate of 22.8% for suicide attempts - a rate seven times more frequent in prisoners than in the general population (Bland, R.C., et al., 1990). According to CSC's *National Inmate Survey*, one fifth of the inmate population had thought of taking their life a week prior to being surveyed. (CSC, 1998)

REASONS: Lindsay Hayes, Project Director of NCIA and an expert in jail suicide prevention lists some explanations for the higher rate of suicide in jail:

- recent excessive drinking and/ or use of drugs
- recent loss of stabilizing resources
- severe guilt or shame over the alleged offense
- current mental illness
- poor physical health or terminal illness
- prior suicide attempt
- approaching an emotional breaking point. (Hayes, 1992)

RISK: Winkler (1992) notes three unique high risk elements for inmates, additional to suicidal risk factors (e.g. past history of suicidal behaviour) for the general population:

INTOXICATION ISOLATION and the Initial 24 hours of Incarceration.

Other risk factors noted in the literature include:

Acute psychiatric symptoms, shame about arrest, serious personal problems, sentencing changes and complications, loss or termination of a relationship.

(Cox, J. F., et al., 1990)

Inmate Suicide Prevention Programs

Several programs have reported success in substantially reducing suicide rates in custody. Rowan (1995) identifies the Chicago Police Department, the Philadelphia Police Department, Cook County Jail (Chicago), and county & city jails in New York state.

In Canada's federal institutions, CSC has been training all staff with LivingWorks Education, Inc.'s Suicide Intervention Workshop since 1984.

The Samaritans have established suicide prevention programs in western Canada and the U.K. where inmates are trained to recognize and assist fellow inmates who are suicidal.

Please see verso of this page for more information on the sources and programs listed here .

STRESSORS IN PRISON:

from: " New York State Suicide Prevention
& Intervention in State Correctional
Facilities Trainer's Manual " (see verso)

- ◆ personal loss
- ◆ other inmate suicide
- ◆ entry into prison
- ◆ lengthy incarceration
- ◆ denial of appeal/parole
- ◆ closeness to release
 - ◆ program/prison transfer
 - ◆ threat of assault
 - ◆ disciplinary action
 - ◆ isolation
 - ◆ physical illness
 - ◆ dates of personal significance

PREVENTION:

Hayes notes that successful suicide prevention strategies include:

Intervention of trained staff

Implementation of a written suicide prevention program

More common sense

Essential components include:

- 1) Regular staff training
- 2) Screening procedures for all admissions
- 3) Communication procedures providing clear information for staff involved
- 4) Suicide-resistant housing procedures that avoid isolation
- 5) Supervision procedures for frequency & duration of staff monitoring
- 6) Intervention procedures for handling suicidal inmates prior to attempt, or responding to an attempt in progress
- 7) Reporting procedures
- 8) Follow -up review procedures for a suicide incident.

(Hayes, 1992)

Suicide Affects All of Us. Let's Talk About it.

Inmate Suicide: Studies

Title: *Correctional Service of Canada 1996-1997: Retrospective Report on Inmate Suicides*
by Michel A. S. Larivière
and *Prisoner Suicide: A Review of the Literature*
by Natalie H. Polvi
CSC: Ottawa, 1998, [70 pp.]

For copies of this report, contact:

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For more information about NCIA's report *National Study of Jail Suicides: Seven Years Later* (1988) the *Training Curriculum on Suicide Detection & Prevention in Jails & Lockups* (2nd ed., 1995), or to subscribe to the periodical *Jail Suicide/Mental Health Update* contact:

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phone: 508-337-8806 web: <http://www.ncianet.org/ncia>
email: hayesta@aol.com fax: 508-337-3083
see also: reading list this page (SIEC AN: 920368, 920560, 980250)

Training Programs

For more information about staff training in suicide prevention by *LivingWorks Education, Inc.* at *Correctional Services of Canada (CSC)*, contact:

Barbara Banks
Training Delivery CSC
Regional Correctional Staff College, Prairie Region
2313 Hanselman Place, PO Box 9223
Saskatoon, SK S7K 3X5
phone: 306-975-5444 fax: 306-975-5299

For more information about suicide prevention training for inmates in Canada, contact:

Hilde Schlosar, Director
Samaritans of Southern Alberta
phone: 403-320-9334
see also: reading list this page (SIEC AN: 971377)

For more information about U.S. training materials (e.g. the *New York State Suicide Prevention & Intervention in State Correctional Facilities Trainer's Manual*), contact:

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Corrections Information Center
phone: 303-682-0213 or toll-free: 800-877-1461(U.S.)
fax: 303-682-0558

■■■■■■■■ SIEC Sources & Resources on Inmate Suicide ■■■■■■■■

Photocopies available from SIEC for documents on this list.
(Cost per article: \$6.00 plus postage. Prepayment is not necessary. Please quote SIEC # when ordering.)

SIEC # 970401

Biggar, K. & Neal, D. (1996). Caring for the suicidal in custody: developing a multi-disciplinary approach. *Omega*, 33 (3), 207-213.

SIEC # 970708

Blaauw, E., Kerkhof, A., Vermunt, R. (1997). Suicides and other deaths in police custody. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 27 (2), 153-163.

SIEC #900710

Bland, R. C., Newman, S. C., Dyck, R. J., & Orn, H. (1990). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders & suicide attempts in a prison population. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 35 (5), 407-413.

SIEC #930306

Bonner, R. L. (1992). Isolation, seclusion, and psychosocial vulnerability as risk factors for suicide behind bars. In R. W. Maris, J. T. Maltzberger, & R. I. Yufit (Eds.) *Assessment and Prediction of Suicide* (pp. 398-419). New York: Guilford Press.

SIEC #900222

Cox, J. F., McCarty, D. W., Landsberg, G. & Pavarati, M. P. (1988). A model for crisis intervention services within local jails. *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry*, 11 (4), 391-407.

SIEC #971387

Felthous, A. R.. (1994). Preventing jailhouse suicides. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry & Law*, 22 (4), 477-488.

SIEC #920368

Hayes, L. M. (1992). Jail suicide — an overview of yesterday. *Crisis*, 13 (1), 11-13.

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SIEC #920560

Hayes, L. M. (1992). Can jail suicide be prevented? *Crisis*, 13 (2), 60-62.

SIEC #980250

Hayes, L. M. (1997). From chaos to calm: one jail system's struggle with suicide prevention. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 15 (1), 7-29.

SIEC #930914

Liebling, A. (1993). Suicides in young prisoners: a summary. *Death Studies*, 17(5), 381-409.

SIEC #900575

Rakis, J. & Monroe, R. (1989). Monitoring & managing the suicidal prisoner. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 60 (2), 151-160.

SIEC#950499

Rowan, J. R. (1995). The prevention of suicide in custody. *International Medical Journal*, 2(1), 65-66.

SIEC #971377

Schlosar, H. & Carlson, L.W. (1997). Befriending in prisons. *Crisis*, 18(4), 148-149,151.

SIEC #920830

Winkler, G. E. (1992). Assessing & responding to suicidal jail inmates. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 28(4), 317-326.

SIEC ALERT is intended to be a brief guide to resources on current topics in the field of suicide prevention, and is not all-inclusive.