CULTURAL ISSUES

- The Eye of the Beholder - differing views of suicide
- Rates of Suicide in Industrialized Nations
- Rates of Suicide in Different Racial/ethnic Groups in the USA.
- The Impact of Religion on Suicide Rates
- Decriminalization of Suicidal Behavior











Political Dimensions of Suicide

- A young man who sets off a bomb in a crowded square:
  - For Israeli's a "terrorist and suicide bomber"
  - For Palestinian's a "martyr and hero"
- During Wartime - suicidal behavior may be highly honored:
  - Kamakazi pilots
  - Medal of Honor winners who sacrifice their lives for comrades

Cross National Comparisons: Industrialized Nations

- The Roman Catholic Church views suicide as a mortal sin.
- Does religion, like Catholicism, impact the suicide rate?:
  - USA - average rate for all industrialized nations (12/100k)
  - Hungary, Germany, Scandinavian countries, and Japan have twice (>25/100k) the US rate
  - Greece, Ireland and Italy have less than half (<6/100K) the US rate

Geography and Suicide

- Suicide rates are highest in the Western states and lowest in the the Northeast states.
- The Northeast states have the highest concentrations of Catholics.
- Does Catholicism play a role in these lower rates?



Caveat: Geography should not be considered a risk factor in individual cases.

Race/ethnicity in the USA

- In general, suicide among whites is significantly greater than non-whites
- In urban settings the suicide rate among young African-American males is twice the rate for young white males.
- Native-American suicide rates vary dramatically by tribe.

Native American Suicide Rates:

- Tribes on reservations in the West and Northwest have suicide rates that are four times the national average.
- Tribes in the Midwest have suicide rates that are below their state averages.



Practitioners must be careful to realize that ethnicity is a complex factor in determining suicide risk.

Suicide as a Crime:

- In Colonial America, attempted suicide was considered a capital crime - punishable by death.
- Today, most states have decriminalized suicide and attempters are not punished.
- Today, suicide is seen as a medical/psychiatric condition that requires treatment.
- Some civil libertarians would argue that involuntary hospitalization is still criminalizing suicide.

SUMMARY

1. Perspectives on suicide vary dramatically from culture to culture, from nation to nation, and even over time in the USA.
2. Practitioners must be careful how they interpret suicide rates in various ethnic, religious, racial, national, and geographical groups.
3. Though suicide rates vary across demographic groups, this variance may not be as useful in determining suicide risk with individuals as other factors discussed in the next section.

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