

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DEPRESSION & SUICIDE AMONG OLDER MEN IN WYOMING

Sandra Ritchie || RUOP iii-3 || 2019 || UWSOM

HYPOTHESIS: Using male-specific interventions to lessen social isolation will decrease the rates of depression & suicide in men age 65 and older.



Vincent Van Gogh || *At Eternity's Gate* || 1890
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

BACKGROUND

Figure 1

- Suicide rates decrease as women age older than 65, yet for men they **continue to increase**
- Gender/age group with the **highest suicide rate is men 65+**

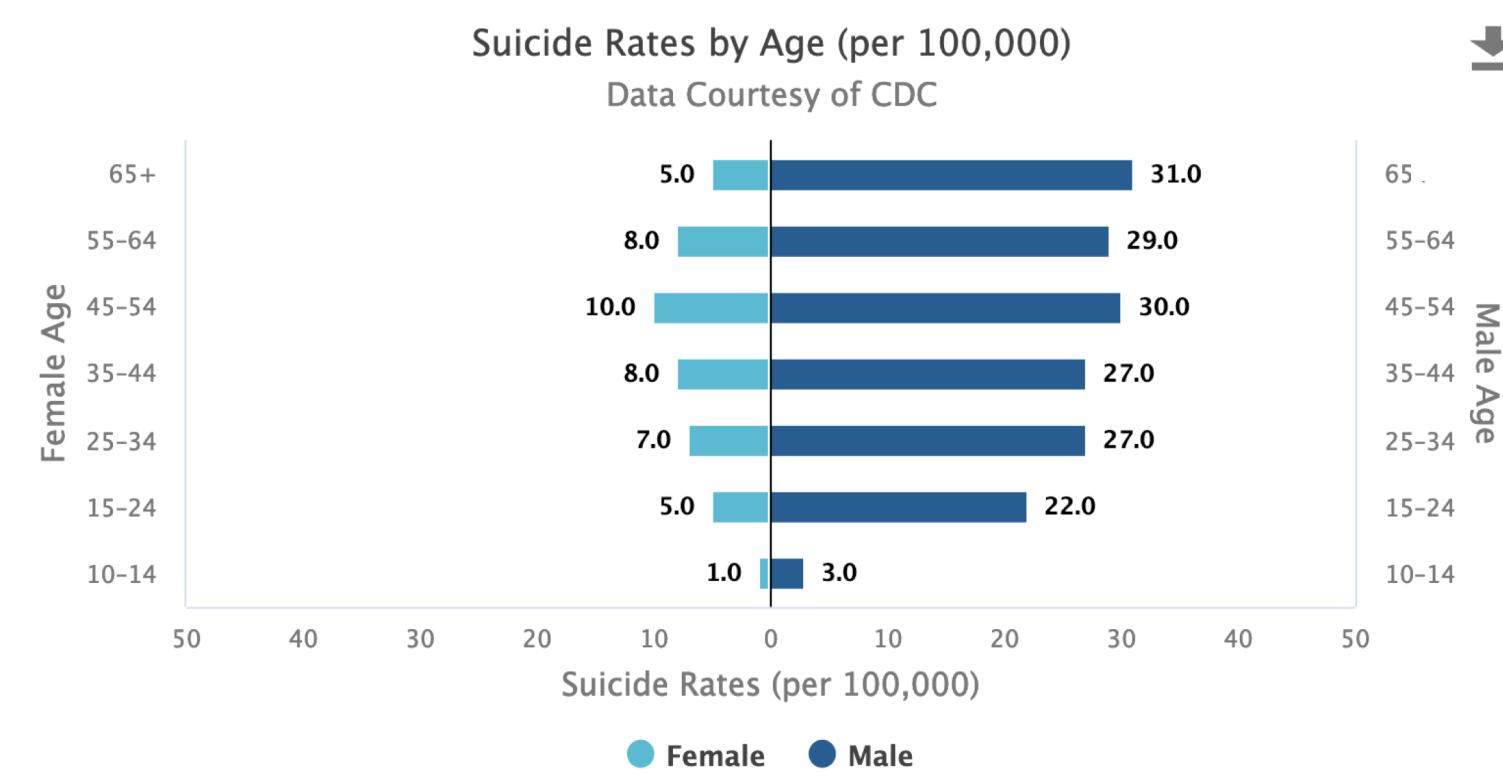


Figure 1 || Suicide Rates by Age in 2017 || Reprinted from NIH:National Institutes of Mental Health <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>

PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

- Interviewing local providers and reviewing the literature revealed that **social isolation/loneliness** is a major risk factor for depression & suicide in older adults.
- Studies show that older men are more isolated than older women:
14% of older men experience moderate to high social isolation compared to **11%** of women.
- My personal experience when attending social activities directed towards older adults was that **less than 20%** of participants were men.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Men are **less likely** to seek support when suffering from loneliness, depression, or suicidal ideation => likely due to **masculinity norms** & **gender roles**.
- Older men are less likely to participate in social activities, particularly those attended & led by women.
- Male-specific activities, especially when **led by men** and **limited to male members**, have been shown to lead to **increased participation** by and **decreased depressive symptoms** of socially isolated men.
- Male-specific activities with evidence-based success:
 - "Men's Sheds" – mechanical/woodworking activity centers
 - sports-based activities – ex. "Walking Football"
 - music-based men's groups
 - men's coffee groups



Figure 5 || US Men's Shed Association Logo || www.usmensheds.com

COMMUNITY ASSETS

- **Eppson Center for Seniors in Laramie, WY:**
 - daily meals in the dining hall
 - music, dance, art, & exercise classes
 - hiking club, bible study group
 - community service activities
 - theater & sporting event viewings
- There are **senior centers** in dozens of rural communities throughout Wyoming:
 - cities as big as **Casper** (pop 58,000)
 - towns as small as **Medicine Bow** (pop 267)

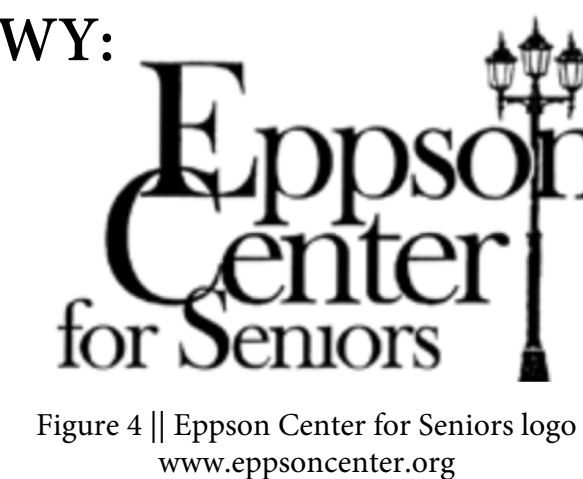


Figure 4 || Eppson Center for Seniors logo www.eppsoncenter.org

CONCLUSIONS

- Laramie and the surrounding rural communities have **robust senior center organizations** that provide many opportunities for decreasing social isolation/loneliness in older adults. Unfortunately, these activities are not being utilized by many older men.
- Recognizing the assets already in place allows us to focus on more fully utilizing them as well as enhancing them to better provide for socially isolated men.
- Incorporating more **male-specific activities with male leaders** into senior center programs may help lessen social isolation & loneliness in older men – and as a result decrease their rates of depression & suicide.

GRATITUDE

I would like to express my gratitude to:

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- **Dr. Bernard Steinman**
University of Wyoming Gerontologist

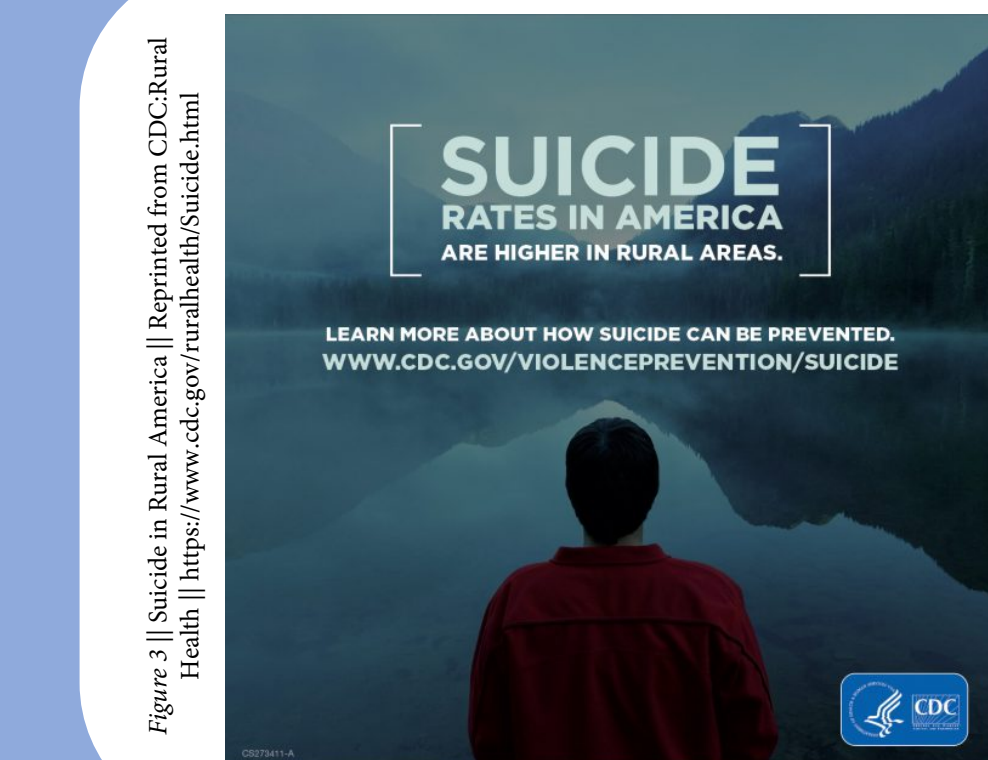


Figure 3 || Suicide in Rural America || Reprinted from CDC:Rural Health || <https://www.cdc.gov/ruralhealth/suicide.html>

- Suicide rates are higher in **rural counties** than in metropolitan/urban counties.

Figure 2:

- Wyoming ranks **3rd** in the nation for suicide rates:
 - US: 13.9 per 100,000
 - Wyoming: 23.2 per 100,000
- Most prevalent racial/ethnic groups:
 - Am. Indian/Alaska Native
 - Non-hispanic white

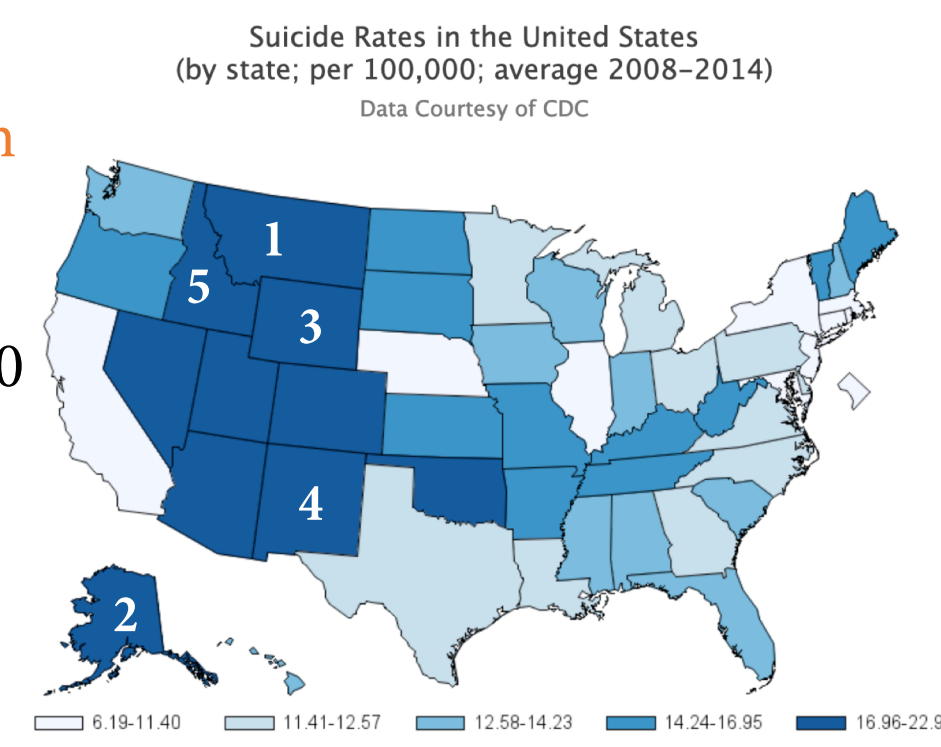


Figure 2 || Suicide Rates in the US by State || Reprinted from NIH:National Institutes of Mental Health <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>