

Suicidality and Help-Seeking among Missouri College Students

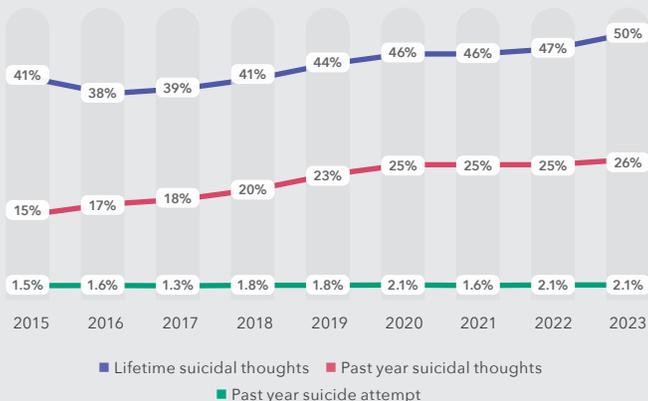
Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. This year, the coalition comprises 26 public and private colleges and universities throughout Missouri, 24 of whom have data included in the 2023 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey. PIP member campuses work to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the MACHB Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on suicidality and help-seeking among Missouri college students. In 2023, 5,817 Missouri college students were included in the survey sample. This brief discusses some subpopulation data, and the total number of students in the subpopulations are included here for reference: LGBQQAP+ students (1,478), TGQN students (329), students who experienced an abusive relationship in the past 12 months (655), students who experienced non-consensual sexual contact in the past 12 months (272), students with disabilities (703), students who thought of transferring (1,420) and students who thought of quitting higher education (1,189).

Trends in Suicidal Ideation and Attempts

Reported rates of suicidal ideation (thoughts of suicide) in the lifetime and in the past 12 months have

risen among Missouri college students since 2015 as shown in Chart 1. In 2023, half (50%) of students reported experiencing suicidal thoughts in their lifetime, and around 1 in 4 (26%) reported suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months. Reported rates of a suicide attempt in the past 12 months have remained relatively steady, ranging from about 1 to 2% of Missouri college students.

Chart 1: Suicidal Ideation

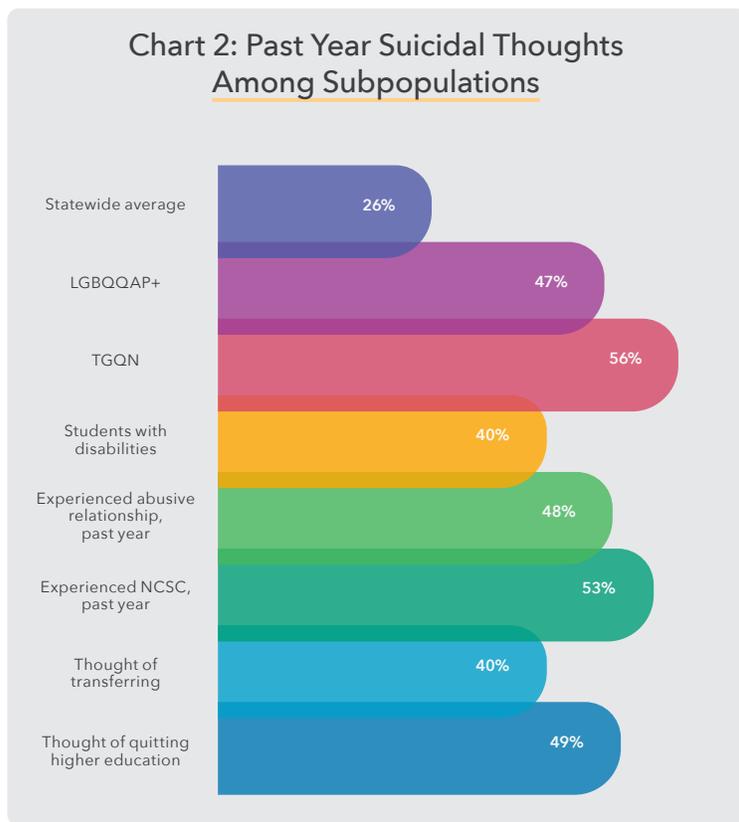


Subpopulations at Higher Risk for Suicide

While suicide can impact anyone, there are certain demographics and related risk factors that may indicate a higher risk for suicide (shown in Chart 2). In general, data indicates that individuals in sexual orientation (LGBQQAP+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, pansexual, etc.) and gender

identity (TGQN: transgender, gender queer, gender non-binary, etc.) minority groups are at higher risk for suicide, and MACHB data supports this. Almost half (47%) of LGBQQAP+ students and over half (56%) of TGQN students reported suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months. Additionally, students with disabilities also reported higher rates of suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months than the statewide average.

Additionally, experiences of interpersonal violence in the past 12 months are associated with higher rates of suicidal ideation. Forty-eight percent (48%) of students who had experienced an abusive relationship and 53% of students who had experienced non-consensual sexual contact (NCSC) in the past 12 months reported suicidal thoughts in that same time frame.



Related to student retention, it's important to note that students who thought of transferring from their current institution or quitting higher education altogether also reported higher rates of suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months, 40% and 49% respectively.

Help-Seeking for Suicidal Thoughts and Attempts

Among those who reported suicidal thoughts or attempts in the past 12 months, 36% sought assistance for their thoughts/attempt(s). The highest percentages of students reported primarily seeking assistance at an off-campus mental health center (32%), from family/friends (25%), or their college/university counseling services (19%). Other commonly utilized resources (but not the primary source of assistance) include family/friends (49%), an off-campus mental health center (22%), or an off-campus medical doctor (19%).**

Students who reported not seeking assistance were asked about barriers that stop them from seeking help* (shown in Table 1). The most common reasons that contribute to students not seeking assistance are related to not thinking they need assistance (40%), the cost or lack of insurance coverage (26%), stigma - such as experiencing shame (39%) or judgment from others (32%) - and fear of hospitalization (32%).

Table 1: What are the Barriers that Stop You from Seeking Assistance?

I do not think I need any assistance	40%
I feel shame	39%
I am afraid people will judge me	32%
I have a fear of hospitalization	32%
The cost is too expensive/my insurance does not cover it	26%
It is not helpful	26%
The waiting list is too long	11%
I do not know any resources	11%

Bystander Behaviors and Encouraging Help-Seeking

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of Missouri college students have been concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts or exhibiting suicidal behaviors in the past 12 months. Sixty-four percent (64%) of students say they would likely or very likely bring up the topic of suicide with someone they think is at risk, and 89% would

refer someone who says they are thinking of suicide to a local resource. Students are also asked to report if they would want a peer to do something if the person thought they were in danger of harming themselves, and 83% of students agreed or strongly agreed.

Suicide Prevention Training

Over half (54%) of students indicated that they would be willing to complete an online suicide prevention training. Additionally, around one-third (32%) of students reported that they had heard of Ask. Listen. Refer. which is a free online suicide prevention training available to colleges and universities in Missouri to help students, faculty, and staff learn to help prevent suicide.

Summary

As suicide is currently the second leading cause of death among college-aged individuals (18-24) it is vital to address the mental health needs and suicidality of Missouri college students. It is also important to promote help-seeking behaviors and work to eliminate barriers that may prevent students from seeking assistance. Encouraging active bystander behaviors and equipping students to have conversations about suicide (including how to refer others to resources) are evidence-based strategies that can also increase help seeking. For more information about a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention, visit the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#).

Resources

Ask. Listen. Refer.

Ask. Listen. Refer. (ALR) is a free online suicide prevention training program for colleges and universities. During the 20-minute ALR training program, participants learn about signs and symptoms of suicidal behavior, common myths about suicide, how to ask if someone is considering suicide, and how to make trauma-informed resource referrals. Participants are given a pre and post-test to evaluate knowledge, attitudes, and willingness to intervene. Find the training at asklistenrefer.org.

Engage

Engage is a multi-level violence prevention program, created by Missouri Partners in Prevention with support from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Office on Women's Health in collaboration with the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Engage frames bystander behavior within the context of community connection and sense of belonging and covers 4 primary topics, 1) alcohol and other substance use, 2) bias and discrimination, 3) interpersonal violence, and 4) mental well-being and suicide. [Click here for more information about Engage!](#)

The National Suicide Prevention & Crisis Lifeline

The National Suicide Prevention & Crisis Lifeline has transitioned to 988, a 3-digit call and text number. The lifeline is available 24/7 and is also accessible online via chat. People can use 988 if they are having thoughts of suicide, mental health or substance use crises, or any other kind of emotional distress. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. [Learn more about 988 here!](#)

The Crisis Text Line

The Crisis Text Line (text MOSAFE to 741-741) is also a 24/7 digital resource for anyone experiencing issues such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, thoughts of suicide, and more. [Learn more about the Crisis Text Line here!](#)

Missouri Suicide Prevention Resources

The Missouri Suicide Prevention Network

The Missouri Suicide Prevention Network (MSPN) is MSPN is an independent, non-partisan, voluntary group of individuals, organizations, and agencies (public and private) who lead statewide suicide prevention efforts. This group crafts the [Missouri Suicide Prevention Plan](#), which has recently been updated for the 2024-2028 timeframe. The plan includes 3 primary goals, 1) raise public awareness about suicide risk and prevention, 2) support community-led efforts to promote suicide

prevention, intervention, and postvention care, and 3) help diverse groups and organizations create suicide prevention programs, systems, and policies. Every Missourian plays a role in preventing suicide and the Missouri Suicide Prevention Plan is for those who want to learn about our state's efforts for preventing suicide at the community level. [Learn more about MSPN here!](#)

The Suicide Prevention & 988 Guide for Schools

The Suicide Prevention & 988 Guide for Schools which was developed by MSPN to help school personnel utilize suicide prevention, intervention, and crisis

response services along with postvention resources to better address and meet the needs of schools across the state. While primarily geared towards elementary through high schools, there is a higher education consideration section and can be helpful for parents, coalitions, and more. [View the guide here!](#)

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared by Margo Leitschuh, Prevention and Implementation Team Lead. Data prepared by Kayleigh Greenwood and Meg Mottola, Research Coordinators. Published March 2024.

*question is select all that apply

**question is select up to 2