

A Look at Mental Health in Pierce County

Prepared by the Office of Assessment, Planning & Improvement

Overview

Mental health is an integral part of health and well-being. Like other aspects of health, a range of socioeconomic factors affect mental health. In the US, mental illness is the second leading cause of disability and premature death.

- In Pierce County, 12.9 percent of adults reported poor mental health lasting two or more weeks in the past month. (BRFSS 2013)
- Among Pierce County high school students, 38.3 percent of 10th graders reported feeling sad or hopeless enough to stop doing their usual activities for two weeks or more. (HYS 2014)
- Women, female youth and low-income residents in Pierce County are more likely to report poor mental health. (BRFSS 2013; HYS 2014)
- About 100,000 or 12.8 percent of Pierce County residents are uninsured. (US Census, 2013 ACS) Lack of insurance and underinsurance limits one's ability to access mental health care.
- Mental illness creates enormous social and economic costs. In 2012, mental health care costs in the U.S. rose to \$83.6 billion – up from \$58.6 billion in 2002. However, much of the economic burden of mental illness is not the cost of care, but the loss of income due to unemployment, expenses for social supports, incarceration and a range of indirect costs due to a chronic disability that begins early in life.¹

Suicide

Mental health diagnoses are generally associated with a higher rate of suicide. Psychological autopsy studies have shown that more than 90 percent of suicide victims had a treatable mental illness at the time of their death.²

People who die by suicide frequently experience undiagnosed, undertreated, or untreated depression.

- In 2014, 151 Pierce County residents committed suicide. This equals a suicide rate of 18.5 per 100,000 residents, which is slightly higher than the Washington state rate of 15.4 per 100,000.³ (DOH CHS 2014)
- In Pierce County, suicide is the eighth leading cause of death for all ages and the second leading cause of death for ages 15-24 years. (DOH CHS 2014)
- Suicide among males in Pierce County is four times higher than among females and represents 80 percent of all suicide cases in 2014. Of the 151 suicides in 2014, 121 were males and 30 were female. (DOH CHS 2014) Females are more likely to have had suicidal thoughts.⁴
- In Pierce County, firearms are the most commonly used method of suicide among males (50.4 percent), similar to the national rate of 56.9 percent.⁵ Poisoning is the most common method of suicide for females (53.3 percent). (DOH CHS 2014)
- About one of every ten Pierce County 10th graders (10.8 percent) reported attempting suicide at least once in the past year. Attempts were reported more frequently by female students (14.1 percent vs. 7.4 percent for males). (HYS 2014)
- Twenty-three percent of Pierce County 10th graders reported serious thoughts of killing themselves in the past year. (HYS 2014)

¹ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. [Medical Expenditure Panel Survey](#). 2012

² Shaffer D, Gould MS, Fisher P, et al. (1996). Psychiatric diagnosis in child and adolescent suicide. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 53,339-348.

³ The difference between the two rates is not statistically significant, meaning it may be due to random variation or chance instead of reflecting a "true" difference.

⁴ Crosby AE, Han B, Ortega LAG, Parks SE, Gfroerer J. (2011). Suicidal thoughts and behaviors among adults aged ≥18 years-United States, 2008-2009. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 60(no.SS-13); 1-22.

⁵ CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System, 2013.

Pregnancy and Postpartum

The many changes involved during pregnancy and after the birth of a child can put some women at risk for developing postpartum depression. Depression can have far-reaching consequences for women and their families, including the health and development of their babies.

- From 2004-2008, 10 percent of mothers in Pierce County who had recently given birth had postpartum depression. (PRAMS 2004-08).
- Maternal depression is a risk factor for child abuse and neglect. Depression interferes with parenting and is linked to a decreased ability to regulate emotions in children.⁶
- Researchers report that women with a controlling or threatening partner are five times more likely to experience persistent symptoms of postpartum maternal depression.⁷

Military

Pierce County is home to Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), the largest American military installation in the Western United States. JBLM supports about 100,000 active, guard and reserve service members and family members, 15,000 civilian workers and nearly 30,000 military retirees living within 50 miles.⁸ The complex effect of wartime service presents unique challenges for service members, their families, and the community health professionals who treat them. National data are reported because Pierce County health data are not available for military only.

- Mental disorders are the leading cause of all hospitalizations for active-duty forces.⁹
- Suicide rates of veterans are nearly twice that of the general population. An estimated 8,000 veterans die by suicide each year; about 22 per day.¹⁰
- Suicides among military personnel are increasing. This recent increase is the result of untreated mental illness and substance abuse rather than combat experience or number of deployments.¹¹
- Military service affects the mental health of families. Thirty-two percent of children of military families scored “high risk” for emotional and behavior problems – a risk 2.5 times higher than the national average of children without military parents.¹²

The Office of Assessment, Planning & Improvement (OAPI) provides services to community organizations and health departments to improve community health. We specialize in community health assessments, community health planning, quality improvement and program evaluation through consulting, training, and both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis services. Contact us at oapi@tpchd.org or (253) 798-7668.

Data Sources: Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Survey (BFRSS); Healthy Youth Survey (HYS); US Census, American Community Survey (ACS); Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, Death Certificates (DOH CHS); and Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS).

⁶ Hoffman C, Crnic KA, and Baker JK. (2006). Maternal depression and parenting: Implications for children’s emergent emotion regulation and behavioral functioning. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 6(4), 271–95.

⁷ Blabey MH, Locke ER, et al. (2009). Experience of a controlling or threatening partner among mothers with persistent symptoms of depression. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 201(2), 173.e1-9.

⁸ Joint Base Lewis-McChord. (Feb. 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.lewis-mcchord.army.mil/about.html>

⁹ Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center. Hospitalizations among members of the active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2011. *Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*, 19(4),10-16.

¹⁰ Kemp J, and Bossarte R. (2012) Suicide Data Report, 2012. Department of Veterans Affairs. Mental Health Services, Suicide Prevention Program. Retrieved from <http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf>

¹¹ LeardMann CA et al. (2013). Risk factors associated with suicide in current and former US military personnel. *JAMA*, 310(5), 496-506.

¹² Flake EM, Davis BE, Johnson PL, and Middleton LS. (2009). The psychosocial effects of deployment on military children. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 30(4), 271-8.