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NEARLY A FIFTH OF STATE AND FEDERAL PRISONS AND A TENTH OF LOCAL JAILS HAD AT LEAST ONE SUICIDE IN 2019

WASHINGTON — A total of 340 persons in state and federal prisons and 355 persons in local jails died by suicide in 2019, the Bureau of Justice Statistics announced today. The number of suicides in local jails increased 5% from 2018 to 2019, while suicides in state and federal prisons were stable. Suicides accounted for 30% of deaths in local jails and 8% of deaths in state and federal prisons in 2019, based on the most recent mortality data from BJS.

Nearly a fifth (19%) of the nation's 1,161 state and federal prisons and a tenth (9%) of the 2,845 local jails had at least one suicide in 2019. More than half of the largest jails (those with an average daily population of 1,000 inmates or more) had at least one death by suicide, as did 45% of state and federal prisons holding 2,500 or more persons.

Over the 20-year period from 2000 to 2019, more than 6,200 local jail inmates died by suicide while in custody. Suicide deaths among jail inmates increased 13% over the period. Those who died by suicide were most often male, non-Hispanic white, incarcerated for a violent crime and died by self-strangulation. More than three-quarters of jail inmates who died by suicide from 2000 to 2019 were unconvicted and awaiting adjudication of their current charge. Nearly half (46%) of those who died by suicide in local jails had been held for 7 days or less at the time of death.

During the aggregated period of 2000–19, the average suicide rate in local jails was highest among persons who were white (86 suicides per 100,000 white inmates), American Indian or Alaska Native (57 per 100,000) and Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander (52 per 100,000). The rate was lowest among persons who were Hispanic (25 per 100,000) and black (16 per 100,000). Jail inmates age 55 or older had the highest average suicide rate (78 per 100,000) of all age groups.

During the 5-year period of 2015–19, about 18% of local jail suicides were of persons held for assault, and almost 10% were of those held for murder or nonnegligent manslaughter. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of jail suicides took place in the person's cell and 8% in jail segregation units. During this period, two-thirds of suicides (66%) occurred within the first 30 days of incarceration and 44% within the first week.

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In state and federal prisons, a total of 4,500 people died by suicide from 2001 to 2019. The number of suicides increased 83% over that period. Similar to local jails, most persons in state and federal prisons who committed suicide were incarcerated for a violent crime and died by self-strangulation. They were also typically male, non-Hispanic white and age 25 to 44.

During the aggregated 5-year period of 2015–19, an estimated 29% of state prisoners who died by suicide were serving time for murder or nonnegligent manslaughter. Federal prisoners serving time for weapons offenses and sex offenses each accounted for about 20% of suicides in federal facilities during this period. About 13% of federal prisoners who committed suicide had been sentenced for a drug offense, more than three times the share of state prisoners (4%).

Suicides in state and federal prisons were more likely to occur during the first year of imprisonment. Three-quarters (75%) of state prisoners and nearly two-thirds (64%) of federal prisoners who died by suicide during 2015–19 did so after their first year in prison. Almost 76% of state prison suicides took place in the person's cell or room, 11% in a segregation unit and 4% in a special medical or mental health services unit. Among federal prisoners, more than half of suicides (58%) occurred in a medical or urgent care center outside of the prison facility. An equal percentage of suicides took place in general housing or on prison grounds (13%) or in a segregation unit (13%).

During 2015–19, white people had the highest average suicide rate (41 per 100,000) among state prisoners, followed by Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander (36 per 100,000) and American Indian or Alaska Native (29 per 100,000) people. These rates were roughly double the rate among black (16 per 100,000) and Hispanic (15 per 100,000) people. In federal prisons, American Indian or Alaska Native people had the highest suicide rate (77 per 100,000), followed by white (43 per 100,000), black (9 per 100,000) and Hispanic (5 per 100,000) people.

The report, *Suicide in Local Jails and State and Federal Prisons, 2000–2019 – Statistical Tables* (NCJ 300731), was written by BJS statistician E. Ann Carson, Ph.D. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs are available on the BJS website at bjs.ojp.gov.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for collecting, analyzing and disseminating reliable statistics on crime and criminal justice in the United States. Doris J. James is the acting director.

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance and other resources to improve the nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, advance racial equity in the administration of justice, assist victims and enhance the rule of law. More information about OJP and its components can be found at www.ojp.gov.

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