The Latest in Maternal Suicide Trends

Fireside Chat
September 22, 2023
Maternal Suicide in the U.S.
Opportunities for Improved Data Collection and Health Care System Change

Introduction

Maternal suicide is a leading cause of maternal mortality in the U.S. While maternal mortality has rightfully garnered increasing attention in recent years, maternal suicide has been historically overlooked as a cause of maternal mortality because national maternal mortality rates previously excluded suicides as pregnancy-related deaths, instead classifying maternal suicides as incidental or accidental deaths. According to the provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) there was a record for public health data collection from state to state still exist, state Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRCs) are increasing consistency regarding how they review and document maternal deaths. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has determined, using the data from 36 state MMRCs, that mental health conditions are a leading underlying cause of pregnancy-related deaths.

Maternal Mental Health Conditions are defined by the CDC as ‘suicide, overdose/poisoning related to substance use disorder, and other health conditions determined by the MMRC to be related to the use of substance’.

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https://www.2020mom.org/issue-briefs-and-papers
Maternal Mortality Rates

This March the CDC reported:

The U.S. maternal mortality rate is more than 10x the rate of other developed nations.

Our maternal mortality rate has continued to rise.

32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, compared with a rate of 23.8 in 2020 and 20.1 in 2019.
When Do These Deaths Occur:

Among pregnancy-related deaths with information on timing, 53% occurred 7 days to 1 year after the end of pregnancy.

84% (or 4 in 5) were determined to be preventable.

The CDC has determined, using the data from 36 state Maternal Mortality Review Committees that pregnancy-related deaths from suicide are 80% preventable.
Definitions: Maternal Mortality

Understanding Maternal Mortality Definitions

Pregnancy-Associated Death
The death of a woman while pregnant or within one year of the end of pregnancy, regardless of the cause.

Pregnancy-RELATED Death
A death during pregnancy or within one year of pregnancy from a pregnancy complication, a chain of events initiated by pregnancy, or the aggravation of an unrelated condition by the physiologic effects of pregnancy.¹⁰

OR

Pregnancy-Associated but NOT-RELATED Death
A death during pregnancy or within one year of the end of pregnancy from a cause that is not related to pregnancy.

Unable to Determine

“Pregnancy-Associated” Death: According to the CDC, death during or within one year of pregnancy, regardless of the cause. These deaths make up the universe of maternal mortality; within that universe are (1) pregnancy-related deaths and (2) pregnancy-associated, but not related deaths.⁹

One way to differentiate between Pregnancy-RELATED and Pregnancy Associated, but NOT RELATED death is to ask the question:

“Would the woman have died if she wasn't pregnant?”

- If the answer is no, then it is a pregnancy-related death.
- If the answer is yes, then it is a pregnancy-associated, but not related, death.¹¹

What are MMRCs?
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Maternal Mental Health Conditions are defined by the CDC as “suicide, overdose/poisoning related to substance use disorder, and other drug use disorders determined by the MMRC to be related to a main substance use disorder.”

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Findings

MATERNAL SUICIDE IS A LEADING CAUSE OF MATERNAL MORTALITY IN THE U.S.

The 2022 CDC report on pregnancy-related maternal mortality revealed mental health conditions* as the leading underlying cause of pregnancy-related deaths.

MATERNAL SUICIDE IS A LEADING CAUSE OF MATERNAL MORTALITY IN THE U.S.

While maternal suicides can happen during pregnancy, most maternal suicides occur in the postpartum period and not just in the immediate postpartum period.

- 62% of pregnancy-related suicides occur between 43-365 days postpartum
- 24% during pregnancy
- 14% within 42 days postpartum

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POLICY CENTER FOR Maternal Mental Health
Suicidal Ideation & Race

MATERNAL SUICIDE IS A LEADING CAUSE OF MATERNAL MORTALITY IN THE U.S.

Hispanic and Black women are more likely to report suicidal ideation than White women.

2X

In the immediate postpartum period, Asian women are 9X more likely to report suicidal ideation than their White counterparts.

LEARN MORE: POLICYCENTERMMH.ORG

POLICY CENTER
FOR Maternal Mental Health
**Intervention**

Perinatal Quality Collaboratives

Screening

Treatment
Research: Risk Factors

For Ideation
For Suicide Attempts/Deaths
Learn more

www.PolicyCenterMMH.org

Maternal Suicide Resources:
https://www.2020mom.org/maternal-suicide