

# Suicide

By May, 2 to 4 UNC students may try it

by Elizabeth Leland  
Staff Writer

Before you finish reading this article someone in the United States will have tried to kill himself. And before you take your final exams in May, between two and four UNC students will have probably committed suicide. One female undergraduate already has.

She took her life on September 12 in an unfamiliar hotel room with an overdose of drugs.

Why? This question is raised again and again by family, friends, acquaintances and strangers. As in many cases, her motives were unknown, or at best, uncertain.

Usually, suicide is attempted by persons suffering from a sense of depression, isolation, frustration and loss, said Dr. Myron B. Liptzin, Director of the UNC Student Mental Health Division.

The loss may be of a parent, of a boyfriend or girlfriend or of self esteem because of a flunked test or the rejection

of an application to graduate school. Suicide's immediate causes—severe depression and hopelessness—are usually preceded by some degree of emotional instability.

Liptzin stressed the difference between attempted suicide and successful suicide. "There are probably 10 attempts for every successful suicide."

A suicide attempt is a final, desperate try to reach out to another person, Liptzin said. If the distressed person communicates successfully, he may be satisfied, but sometimes the method used in the suicide is irreversible.

Though women attempt suicide more often than men, the rate of successful suicides is highest in men and increases with age. Prior attempts are an added risk factor, Liptzin said.

Suicide is not limited to a person of any age, sex, race or class. In fact, almost everyone contemplates suicide at some point in his life, Liptzin said.

Among adolescents, the annual

suicide rate is four to six per 100,000, while the rate for the general population up to age 75 is 25 to 33 per 100,000.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among university students. It is second only to accidental death. There is speculation that some accidental deaths are actually suicides. People sometimes gamble with death when the odds are against them, Liptzin said.

Eighteen to 30 out of 100,000 university students commit suicide each year. This figure is 50 per cent higher than the statistics for the same age group who are not in college.

Liptzin suggested several factors which may contribute to this figure. There is perhaps greater chance for a sense of isolation at universities, he said, adding that the tasks of establishing independence, identification, sets of values and intimate relationships may be overwhelming to susceptible persons.

Suicide statistics at UNC are at the lower end of the national figures. Some years there are 3 to 4 suicides. Other years there are none. One suicide and several known attempts have already been made this semester.

About five years ago a UNC undergraduate tried to kill himself by jumping from a dormitory window. He felt he was not ready for school and didn't want to be at UNC, Liptzin said. His parents initially pressured him into



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remaining.

Liptzin said the boy was so depressed that his parents, the boy and Liptzin decided it would be best for him to leave school.

However, following his decision, the boy's parents convinced him to give it one more try. Apparently unable to withstand the strain, he jumped from a window of high-rise dorm.

The boy miraculously survived the leap. He was hospitalized briefly, and then he returned home. Nothing has been heard from him since, Liptzin said.

"His attempt was a kind of desperation at the moment," Liptzin said, but he added that many suicides are premeditated.

When a suicide is premeditated, the person's behavior varies within two extremes.

Family members or roommates may say that the person seemed fine or even happier than usual, Liptzin explained

that having planned to kill himself, the person no longer considers his problems so burdensome.

Other persons may become frenzied, clinging, demanding and desperate prior to a suicide attempt, Liptzin said. A person may even talk about his plans, hoping to be talked out of them.

Liptzin stressed that indications that a person may commit suicide are often unidentifiable. The blame which persons closest to a suicide victim assume is therefore unwarranted.

Even so, they are often haunted by the horror of the person's death.

## Mental health services available to students

by Elizabeth Leland  
Staff Writer

The stress of life on a large university can cause problems as diverse as mild depression and suicide. The UNC Mental Health Clinic is available free to students seeking solutions to these problems.

"You don't need to be desperately ill or suicidal to come by the Mental Health Clinic," Dr. Myron B. Liptzin said. "It is open to any troubled student for consultation on a free and strictly confidential basis."

"We see over 1000 students, but only 30 to 50 of them will have attempted suicide."

The clinic is a division of Student Health Services operated by a multidisciplinary group of doctors, specialists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and counselors.

Its services include crisis intervention, brief psychotherapy, couples counseling, group psychotherapy and behavior therapy.

In addition to the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. office hours, a psychiatrist is available 24 hours a day through the Student Health Services.

The program not only provides services but also researches conditions on campus in the hope of identifying areas of needless stress and working toward their elimination.

"Emphasis must be placed on the word *needless*," Liptzin said. "Exams are not needless stress."

The stress and tensions of university life may be instrumental in some student suicide cases, Liptzin added.

"Many people who have attempted suicide come here for help," Liptzin said. "If we can help identify what their problem has been and the crisis situation that got them into the state of hopelessness, we can then help them find alternatives to get out of the bind or entrapment."

When persons commit suicide, the program tries to help those who have known or been involved with the person. "Friends, R.A.'s and other people associated with the person who committed suicide may have 'if only I had kinds of feelings,'" Liptzin said. "This is often needless and unrealistic guilt."

"We never know how many people we help by preventive measures," Liptzin added. "But we're here to try to help anyone who needs it."

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