

## Survivors of Suicide Loss, 2018

### Suicide in Montana

Montana has ranked among the top five states with the highest suicide death rate for over 40 years. In 2018, Montana ranked third highest, based on the age-adjusted suicide death rate of 24.6 deaths per 100,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, over the past decade, the age-adjusted rate of suicide in Montana has been nearly double the U.S. rate.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Who are survivors of suicide loss?

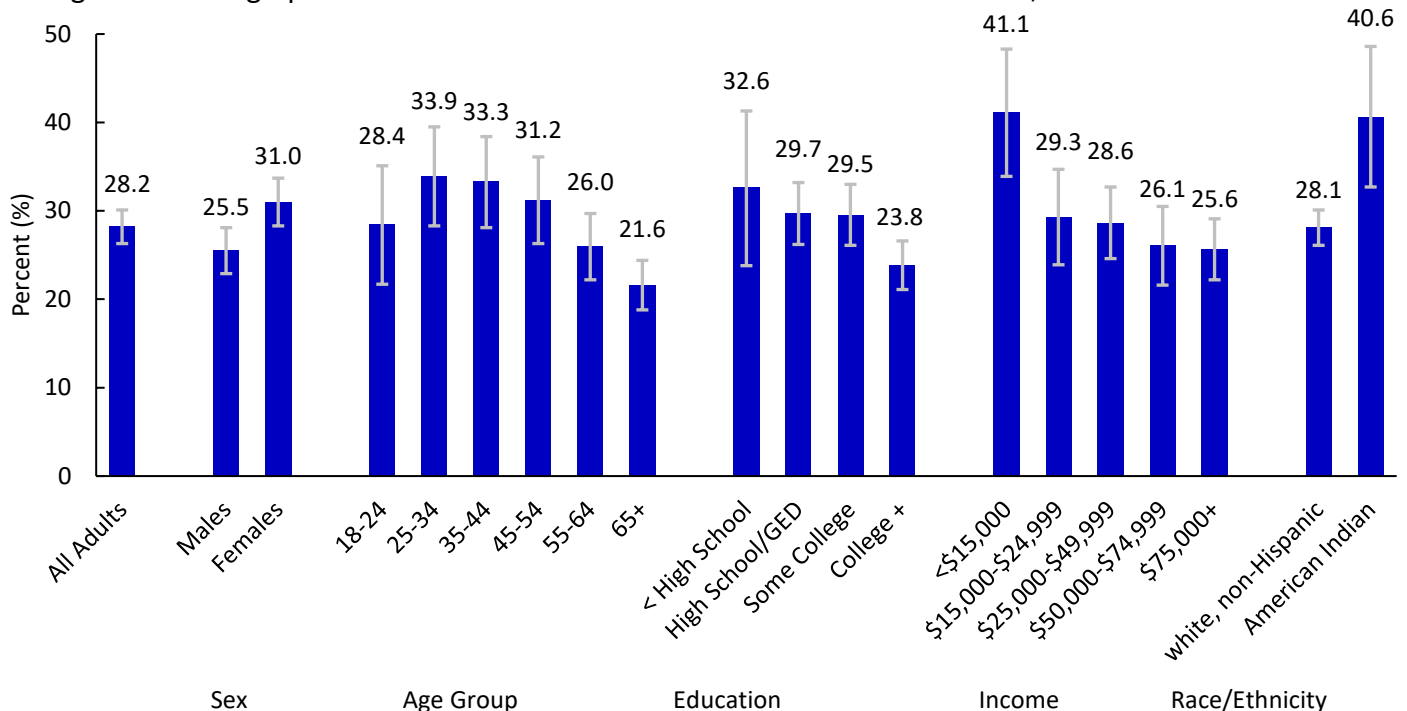
Suicide loss survivors are individuals who are affected by suicide, i.e. they personally know someone who has died by suicide, and experience considerable distress as a result of the loss.<sup>3</sup> Research suggests that, for every suicide death, 147 people are affected.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, among those affected, it is estimated that more than six persons will experience significant distress.<sup>4</sup>

In 2018, there were 48,344 suicide deaths nationwide.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is estimated that more than 290,000 people in the U.S. became survivors of suicide loss in 2018. In Montana, there were 262 suicide deaths, which equates to nearly 1,600 survivors of suicide loss in a single year.<sup>2</sup> This report describes the demographic characteristics and mental health status of Montana adults who reported having ever lost a loved one to suicide. Data come from the 2018 Montana Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, which is an annual telephone survey of non-institutionalized adult Montana residents.

### Survivors of Suicide Loss in Montana

In 2018, over 1 in 4 (28.2%) Montana adults reported having ever lost a loved one to suicide.<sup>5</sup> Thus, an estimated 193,000 Montana adults have been affected by suicide loss and may have experienced or may currently be experiencing high levels of distress as a result. Furthermore, the prevalence of having ever lost a loved one to suicide varied significantly by sex, annual household income, and race/ethnicity (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

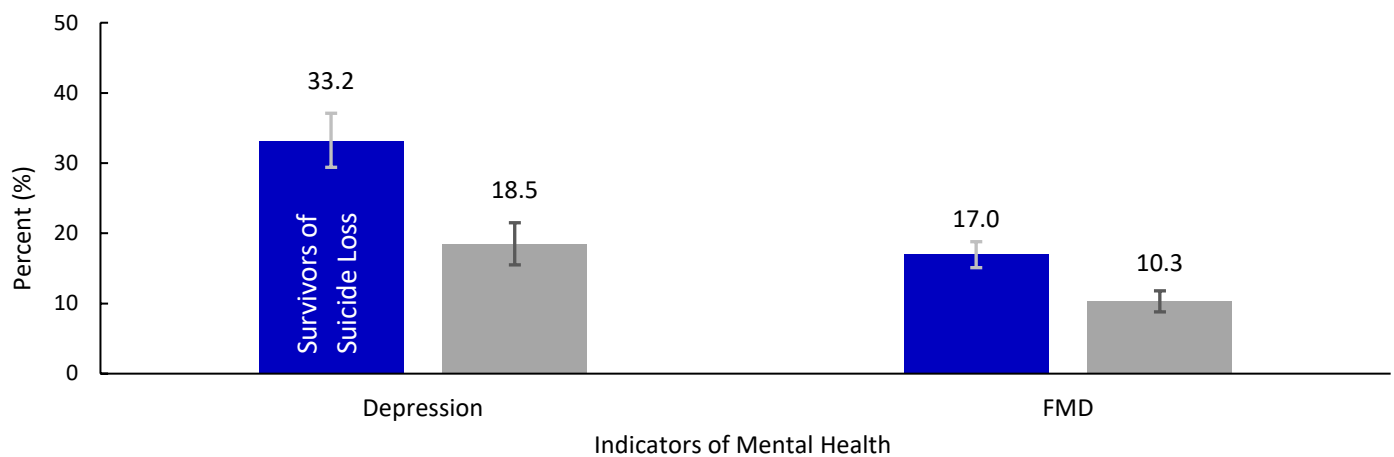
Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of **Montana Survivors of Suicide Loss, 2018**





One-third (33.2%) of Montana adults who reported having ever lost a loved one to suicide (labeled “Survivors of Suicide Loss” in Figure 2) also reported having ever been diagnosed with a depressive disorder (labeled “Depression” in Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> By comparison, the prevalence of having ever been diagnosed with a depressive disorder was 18.5% among Montana adults who reported that they have never lost a loved one to suicide (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, 17% of adults who reported having ever lost a loved one to suicide reported experiencing frequent mental distress (FMD), defined as experiencing 14 or more days out of the past 30 during which their mental health was not good (labeled “FMD” in Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> The prevalence of frequent mental distress was 10.3% among adults who reported having never lost a loved one to suicide (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> Each of these differences were statistically significant between groups.

Figure 2. Prevalence of Select Mental Health Indicators among **Montana Survivors of Suicide Loss** and **Montanans Who Have Never Lost a Loved One to Suicide**, 2018



### Resources for Survivors of Suicide Loss

The suicide prevention lifeline recommends four practices to help survivors of suicide loss take care of themselves. These include: 1) finding a support group, 2) writing about feelings, 3) doing what feels right for themselves, and 4) asking for help.<sup>6</sup> Additional resources for loss survivors can be found on the suicide prevention lifeline website at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/loss-survivors/>. If you are in crisis and want help, you can reach the Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24/7 by calling 1-800-273-8255 or texting “MT” to 741 741.

### Sources

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- Cerel, J. (2015, April 18). *We are all connected in suicidology: The continuum of “survivorship.”* Plenary presentation at the 48<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the American Association of Suicidology, Atlanta, GA. [data from Cerel, Brown, Maple, Bush, van de Venne, Moore, & Flaherty, in progress: personal communication 20 Dec 2015]
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- Loss Survivors. (n.d.). In *Suicide Prevention Lifeline*. Retrieved February 26, 2020, from <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/loss-survivors/>

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