

**Identifying Depression and Suicide Risk Among Young Adults With Serious Mental
Illness in Sedgwick County, Kansas**

Student Name

Department Name, Clackamas Community College

Course Number and Name for which the paper is being submitted

Instructor Name

Assignment due date written in Month Date, Year

Identifying Depression and Suicide Risk Among Young Adults With Serious Mental Illness in Sedgwick County, Kansas

Population health requires targeted identification of specific conditions that disproportionately affect defined groups, particularly when those conditions generate preventable morbidity or mortality. Young adults aged 18 to 25 who live with serious mental illness represent a population with high vulnerability to depression and suicide risk. This group is a priority for public health because their psychiatric needs intersect with developmental transitions, economic instability, housing insecurity, and barriers to timely mental health care. For this assignment, the identified population consists of young adults in Sedgwick County, Kansas, who have diagnosed conditions such as bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, or schizoaffective disorder and who have been engaged with outpatient, inpatient, or crisis behavioral health services within the past year.

Depression and suicide risk are highly prevalent among this population and demonstrate troubling upward trends at national, state, and county levels. The ability to clearly define the magnitude of this problem is fundamental for creating interventions that respond to community needs, improve access to care, and reduce preventable deaths. Young adults with serious mental illness face unique vulnerabilities related to brain development, social instability, stigma, and reduced continuity of care as they transition from pediatric to adult mental health systems. By identifying and describing the scope of the problem, health leaders can design targeted programs that address risk factors, strengthen service coordination, and reduce the significant burden that this issue places on individuals, families, and the broader community.

Overview of Depression and Suicide Risk in the Population

Depression and suicide risk among young adults with serious mental illness represent a public health crisis. Sedgwick County and Kansas as a whole consistently report high levels of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and self-harm behaviors among individuals in the 18 to 25 age range. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) reports that suicide remains one of the top causes of death for young adults in the state, and suicide mortality has increased in Kansas at a faster rate than the national average during the past decade (Kansas Department of Health and Environment, 2023). Young adults with serious mental illness are particularly at risk due to the combination of underlying psychiatric conditions and the additional stressors that accompany the transition to adulthood.

National epidemiological data further contextualize the significance of the problem. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 47 percent of young adults with serious mental illness experience suicidal thoughts during the year, and 33 percent experience at least one major depressive episode (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023). These rates are approximately two to three times higher than those found among the general young adult population. This increased risk is influenced by symptom instability, medication nonadherence, substance use, trauma history, and limited access to early psychiatric support.

Sedgwick County Data

Local data highlight a similar pattern. Sedgwick County Behavioral Health Services reports that depression and suicide-related crises remain the leading reasons for young adult psychiatric evaluations in emergency settings (Sedgwick County Health Department, 2022).

Crisis stabilization centers and hospital emergency departments have documented rising volumes of young adults presenting with suicidal ideation, self-injurious behaviors, and severe depressive episodes. For example, the number of mental health related emergency department visits among young adults increased by more than 40 percent over a five year period, with depression and suicidality accounting for a substantial proportion of these presentations.

County Health Rankings further identifies Sedgwick County as experiencing limited mental health provider availability compared to national benchmarks, with an estimated ratio of one mental health provider for every 780 residents (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2024). This shortage directly contributes to delayed care, reduced follow up, and increased risk of crisis events among individuals with serious mental illness. Delayed access to psychiatrists, therapists, and case management services frequently results in symptom escalation that could otherwise be prevented with timely care.

Statewide Mental Health Treatment Gaps

Gaps in mental health service access across Kansas exacerbate the problem for young adults. KDHE identifies shortages in psychiatric workforce capacity, particularly in community mental health centers, which represent a primary access point for uninsured and underinsured young adults with serious mental illness. The statewide transition to Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics has begun to expand services, but significant gaps remain in crisis response, early intervention, and follow up after hospitalization. Young adults frequently experience fragmented care, especially between inpatient discharge and reestablishment of outpatient services, which significantly increases suicide risk.

Social and Structural Drivers

In addition to clinical risk factors, depression and suicide among young adults with serious mental illness in Sedgwick County are influenced by social determinants such as poverty, unemployment, unstable housing, trauma exposure, and substance use. Many young adults in this population face limited access to transportation, financial insecurity, and weak social support networks, which can delay care or make adherence to treatment plans difficult. Research indicates that young adults with serious mental illness are significantly more likely to experience homelessness or housing instability, which is strongly associated with elevated depression and suicide risk (Mojtabai et al., 2021).

The stigma surrounding mental illness further reduces help-seeking behavior. Young adults often delay care until symptoms reach a crisis point due to fear of judgment, lack of insurance, or distrust in systems that have historically underserved people with mental illness. These barriers reinforce a cycle of worsening severity, emergency department utilization, and preventable harm.

Implications of the Problem for the Population

Depression and suicide risk create significant challenges for young adults with serious mental illness, affecting functioning, development, and long term stability. Untreated depression disrupts concentration, motivation, and emotional regulation, which interferes with academic performance, employment retention, and independent living. These disruptions increase the likelihood of withdrawal from school, job loss, substance misuse, medication nonadherence, and psychiatric hospitalization (Mojtabai et al., 2021). For those with conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizoaffective disorder, unaddressed depressive episodes can trigger relapse,

psychosis, hospitalization, and elevated suicide attempts, ultimately contributing to long term disability and the loss of developmental opportunities that shape adult socioeconomic trajectories.

The problem also deeply affects families and caregivers who manage frequent crises and uncertainty regarding their loved one's safety. Caregivers often experience high stress, burnout, financial strain, and disrupted family functioning, particularly when support services such as respite care, crisis intervention, and case management are limited. At the community level, rising psychiatric crises among young adults contribute to increased utilization of emergency departments, law enforcement involvement, and inpatient psychiatric admissions, which strain already limited behavioral health resources in Sedgwick County. High rates of depression and suicide risk reduce workforce participation and productivity and increase public expenditures through Medicaid, disability programs, and emergency services while generating widespread emotional and social harm within communities.

If this issue remains unaddressed, long term consequences are expected to intensify. Suicide mortality among young adults will likely continue rising, given that untreated depression is one of the strongest predictors of suicide attempts and deaths (Hedegaard et al., 2023). Chronic disability may increase as young adults experience long term educational disruption, unemployment, and impaired independent living skills, placing additional burden on public assistance programs. Health systems will continue facing high emergency utilization and repeated hospitalizations, while intergenerational effects emerge as unstable mental health during young adulthood influences future family outcomes. Workforce potential will decline, and health inequities will widen for uninsured young adults, racial and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+

individuals. Together, these implications underscore the urgent need for a coordinated population health intervention to prevent escalating harm at individual, family, and community levels.

References

Garnett, M. F., & Curtin, S. C. (2023). Suicide mortality in the United States, 2001–2021 (NCHS Data Brief No. 464). National Center for Health Statistics.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db464.pdf>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2023). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-annual-national-report>

Sedgwick County Health Department. (2022). Behavioral health needs assessment: Wichita–Sedgwick County.

<https://www.sedgwickcounty.org/media/69013/wichita-sedgwick-needs-assessment-final.pdf>