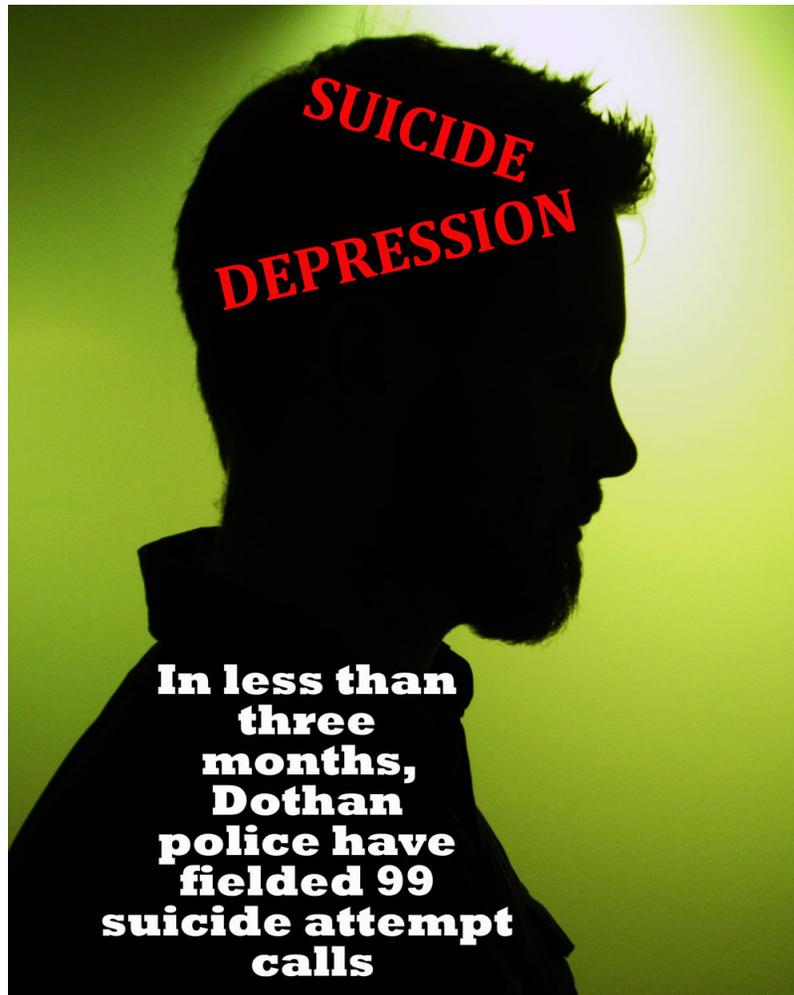


[https://www.dothaneagle.com/news/local/significant-increase-seen-locally-in-suicide-attempts/article\\_06ab5df8-c37c-11e8-8ccb-b33b7de2c14a.html](https://www.dothaneagle.com/news/local/significant-increase-seen-locally-in-suicide-attempts/article_06ab5df8-c37c-11e8-8ccb-b33b7de2c14a.html)

## Significant increase seen locally in suicide attempts

Michele W. Forehand

mwatson@dothaneagle.com Sep 29, 2018



JAY HARE PHOTO ILLUSTRATION/DOTHAN EAGLE

Suicide knows no boundaries.

It can affect anyone. It is known for leaving family members behind asking a lot of questions and carrying a lot of blame.

An increasing number of suicides and suicide threats in the Wiregrass have law enforcement personnel and professional counselors urging those who are thinking about taking their life to reach out for help.

In a two-month span from July to September this year, the Dothan Police Department alone responded to 99 calls involving suicide or suicide attempts.

According to the Alabama Department of Public Health, the suicide rate in 2016 was higher than the homicide rate, and local law enforcement fear more will become victims of suicide or try to commit suicide.

“This is a concern for everyone,” said Dothan Police Lt. Lynn Watkins. “We are seeing all ages fall victim to committing suicide or attempting to commit suicide. We are also seeing the main reason someone commits suicide or attempts to commit suicide is that person suffers from depression. They are either depressed because of relationship issues, health issues, financial issues, etc.”

Houston County Sheriff Donald Valenza has been in law enforcement for more than 30 years, and remembers responding to multiple suicides and suicide attempt calls.

“From September 2017 to September 2018 we have responded to 12 threat calls stating they wanted to commit suicide, and one suicide,” Valenza said. “But, during my career I have responded to hundreds. It’s truly sad to know someone is that depressed; that they believe suicide is the only answer. They actually believe the only way they can get relief is to end their life. Just think about that. Depression affects everyone differently. Someone can be depressed over their finances and someone can be depressed over a family dispute.”

Although the recent rash of suicides and attempts span all age groups, Valenza said teen suicides have increased over time.

“Years ago it was typically adults who committed suicide or attempted to commit suicide,” Valenza said. “Adults are still affected, but now we are also seeing teenagers fall victim due to drugs and bullying.”

Houston County is not the only county seeing an increase in suicide or attempts. Geneva County Sheriff Tony Helms said his office has responded to 11 calls over the past few months.

“Actually, just a short time ago, I was notified by dispatch we had a young male call stating he was going to commit suicide. He had actually taken several drugs trying to take his own life. Dispatched talked to the young man, and he finally stated the only person he would talk to was me. I gladly talked with the young man, and we were able to get him help. Thankfully, time was still on our side, but sometimes time is not on our side,” Helms said.

Helms said the inability to overcome drug addiction is a primary factor in suicide attempts.

“Those who have a drug problem are not getting the help they need, and there is no funding for mental health. If we had a 150-bed facility that served a seven-county area built today, that facility would be full by tomorrow. We need somewhere to help those who need help.”

Headland Police Chief Mark Jones agrees with Helms. Drugs play a major role.

“The number of suicide attempt calls we respond to is heartbreaking,” Jones said. “Too many people believe they have no one to turn to, or they just can’t do anything about the situation they are in, and suicide seems to be the answer. First of all, suicide is never the answer, and there is someone to talk to.”

Living Waters Counseling Executive Director Dr. Virginia Mayer said the center has experienced a significant increase in clients who have considered suicide.

“The horrible truth is this number is growing, and it will continue to grow until we realize this is a problem,” Mayer said. “It not only affects adults but our precious children. We are seeing an increase with those affected by bullying. Bullying is a problem for children of all ages, and bullying has led to teenagers and young students committing suicide. We are seeing pre-teens and teenagers who have reached their limit and believe they just take it anymore. This is scary.”

Mayer stated in many situations the person who is contemplating committing suicide believes they have nowhere to turn for help, or no one cares.

“There is help available,” Mayer said. “There is someone who cares and there is someone who will listen. Don’t give up, because you are not alone.

Living Waters can be reached at 334-693-3380. The National Suicide Hotline can be reached at 1-800-273-8255.

## More Information

### **REACH OUT**

Living Waters Counseling: 334-693-3380

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255.

Chat Online: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### **BY THE NUMBERS**

30%: Increase in suicide rate for more than half of U.S. states between 1999 and 2016

42%: Percent of those lost to suicide in 2015 in which relationship trouble was a known factor

54%: Percent of those who died by suicide and did not have a known mental health condition

45,000: Number lost to suicide nationally in 2016

- *Centers for Disease Control*

---

Michele Forehand