

# The NSDUH Report

December 21, 2010

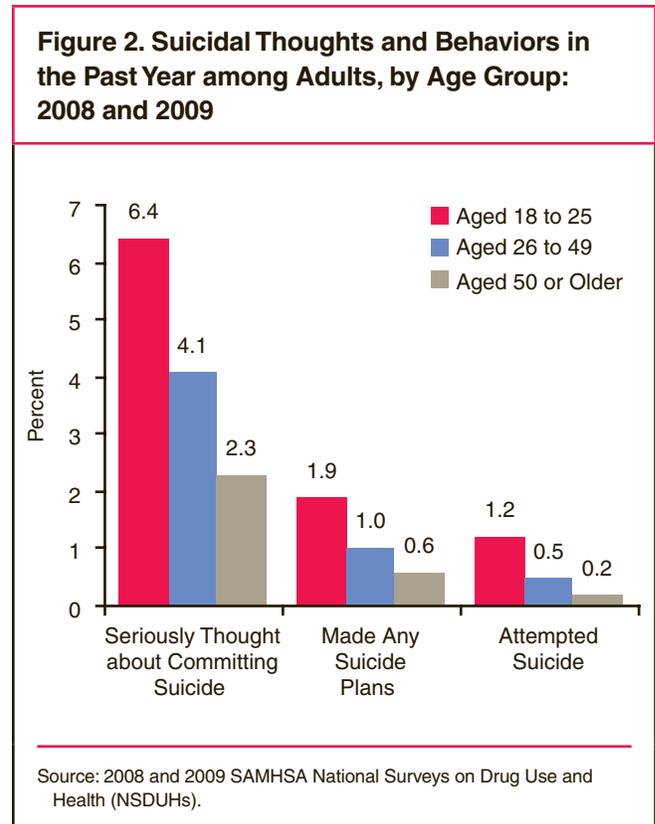
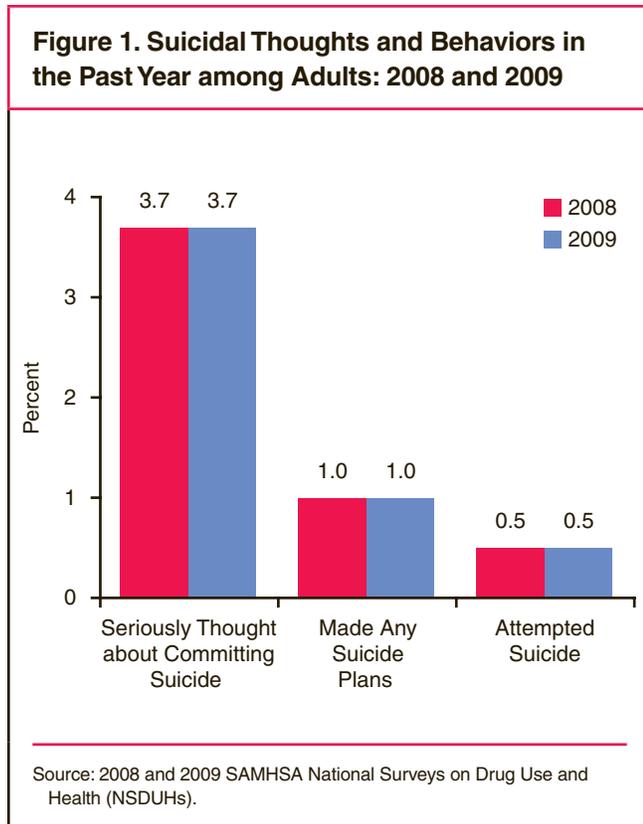
## Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors among Adults: 2008 and 2009

### In Brief

- Annual averages of combined 2008 and 2009 data indicate that an estimated 8.4 million adults aged 18 or older (3.7 percent of the adult population) had thought seriously about committing suicide in the past year, 2.3 million (1.0 percent) had made a suicide plan in the past year, and 1.1 million (0.5 percent) had attempted suicide in the past year
- The rates of thinking seriously about committing suicide, making plans for suicide, and attempting suicide were higher among young adults aged 18 to 25 than the rates among other age groups and among the unemployed than among those in other employment categories
- Of the 1.1 million adults who attempted suicide in the past year, 61.2 percent received medical attention for their suicide attempt, and 43.9 percent stayed overnight or longer in a hospital for their suicide attempt

Suicide continues to be a major public health problem in this country. In 2007, suicide was the 11th leading cause of death in the United States, with more than 34,000 Americans committing suicide.<sup>1</sup> In addition to those Americans who commit suicide, thousands of others each year think seriously about committing suicide, make a suicide plan, or attempt to commit suicide.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks respondents aged 18 or older whether they had thought seriously about killing themselves in the past year. If respondents had thought seriously about killing themselves (i.e., committing suicide), they were asked whether they made plans to kill themselves (i.e., made suicide plans) and whether they had tried to kill themselves (i.e., had attempted suicide) in the past year. If respondents had reported having made a suicide attempt, they were asked whether they had received medical attention from a doctor or other health professional for their suicide attempt; if they had received medical attention, they were asked whether they had stayed in a hospital overnight or longer for their suicide attempt.



This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines suicidal thoughts and behaviors among adults aged 18 or older. Data are presented by demographic characteristics. Findings in the report are based on 2008 and 2009 data.

**Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors**

Combined 2008 and 2009 data indicate that an estimated 8.4 million adults (3.7 percent of the adult population) had thought seriously about committing suicide in the past year, 2.3 million (1.0 percent) had made a suicide plan in the past year, and 1.1 million (0.5 percent) attempted suicide in the past year. There were no statistically significant changes in any of these suicide-related measures from 2008 to 2009 (Figure 1).

**Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors, by Demographic Characteristics**

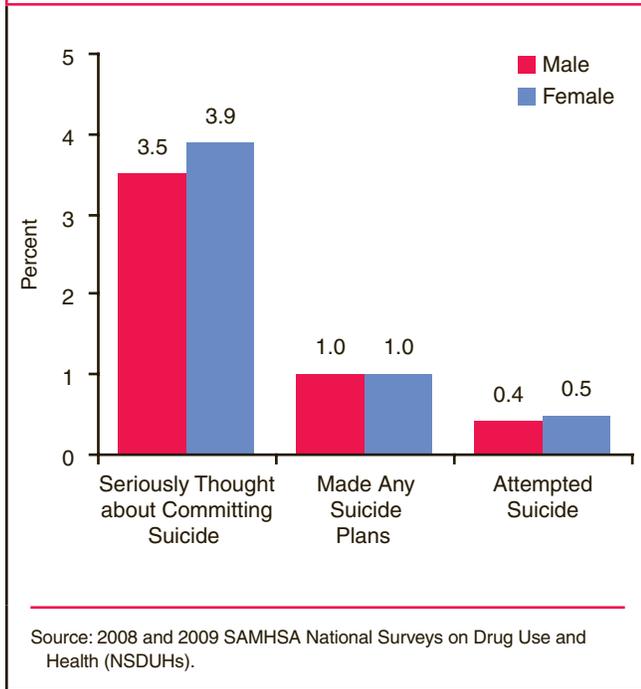
In the combined data for 2008 and 2009, rates of thinking seriously about committing suicide, making suicide plans, and attempting suicide in the past

year were higher among young adults aged 18 to 25 than among adults aged 26 to 49 and those aged 50 or older (Figure 2). For example, 6.4 percent of adults aged 18 to 25 had thought seriously about committing suicide in the past year compared with 4.1 percent of adults aged 26 to 49 and 2.3 percent of adults aged 50 or older. The rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts were slightly higher among females than among males (Figure 3). The rates of past year thinking seriously about committing suicide, making plans for suicide, and attempting suicide were higher among adults who were unemployed than among those in all other employment categories (Figure 4).

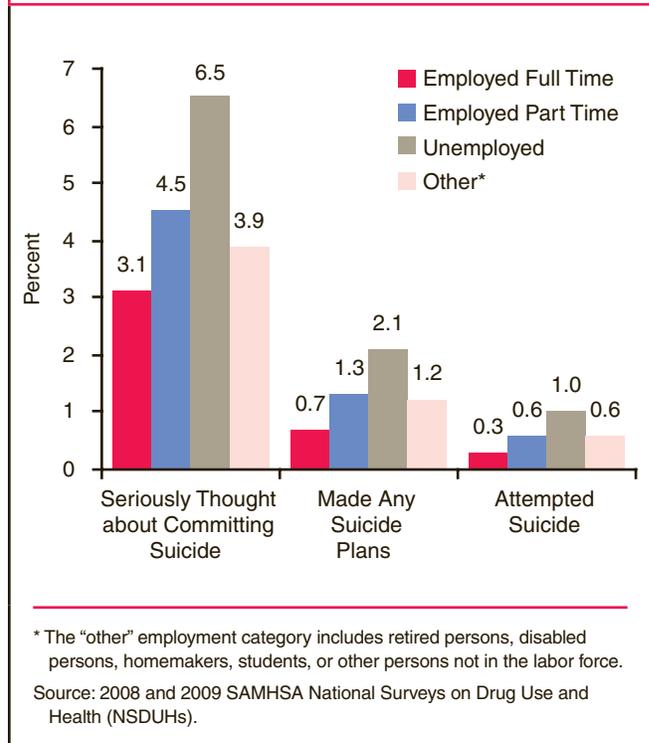
**Medical Attention for Suicide Attempts**

Of the adults who attempted suicide in the past year, 61.2 percent received medical attention for their suicide attempt, and 43.9 percent stayed overnight or longer in a hospital for their suicide attempt. Among adults who attempted suicide, adults aged 26 or older were about twice as likely as young adults aged 18 to 25 to have received medical attention (74.4 vs. 37.2 percent) or to have stayed in the hospital (54.3 vs. 25.4 percent) for their suicide attempt (Figure 5).

**Figure 3. Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors in the Past Year among Adults, by Gender: 2008 and 2009**



**Figure 4. Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors in the Past Year among Adults, by Employment Status: 2008 and 2009**



**Discussion**

Preventing suicide and addressing the health care needs of persons at risk for suicidal behavior require public health information-sharing efforts that not only highlight effective preventive interventions, but also attempt to identify and target risk factors, such as unemployment and young adulthood, that are associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Further research on these and other risk factors, such as mental illness and substance use disorders, is needed to help guide the further development of screening tools and prevention and intervention programs.

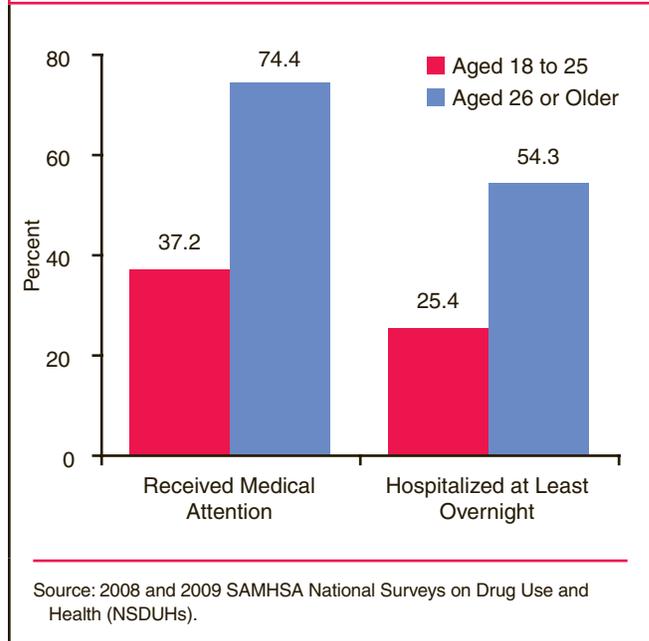
**End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Xu, J., Kochanek, K. D., Murphy, S. L., & Tejada-Vera, B. (2010, May). Deaths: Final data for 2007. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 58(19), pp. 1-73. [Available as a PDF at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/nvsr.htm>]

**Suggested Citation**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (December 21, 2010). *The NSDUH Report: Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors among Adults: 2008 and 2009*. Rockville, MD.

**Figure 5. Receipt of Medical Attention among Adults Who Attempted Suicide in the Past Year, by Age Group: 2008 and 2009**



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Findings from the SAMHSA 2008 to 2009 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

## Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors among Adults: 2008 and 2009

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The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The combined 2008 and 2009 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 92,264 persons aged 18 or older. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

*The NSDUH Report* is prepared by the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information on the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2009). *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (HHS Publication No. SMA 09-4434, NSDUH Series H-36). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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