

# Suicide & Substance Abuse

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*(Weyrauch & Scallet, 2002)*

## An Important Risk Factor

BY THE STATEWIDE OFFICE OF SUICIDE PREVENTION, FLORIDA OFFICE OF DRUG CONTROL

Substance abuse and suicide have a complex relationship. The association between the two has been well documented over the years; and the use of drugs and alcohol as a method of suicide has also been well established. Although there are many risk factors for suicide, substance abuse disorders are involved in nearly 60% of all suicides (Weyrauch & Scallet, 2002).

Substance abuse disorders include intoxication, binge drinking and withdrawal, as well as substance dependence and substance abuse. These disorders can be common among persons prone to be impulsive and among persons who engage in many types of



high risk behaviors that result in self harm (sprc.org). Persons who are dependent on substances often have a number of other risk factors for suicide because it contributes to other significant suicide risk factors. These include: loss of relationships, job trouble, financial difficulties, legal troubles, recent heavy drinking, presence of major depression, suicidal thoughts, poor social support, living alone and unemployment (Murphy & Wetzel, 1992).

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Substance abuse is a multi-faceted risk factor for suicide because it contributes to other significant suicide risk factors. In addition to its direct relationship with suicide, substance abuse also causes suicide via a number of indirect paths. Substance abuse exacerbates the presence of psychiatric disorders and is associated with a host of dangerous behaviors (e.g., needle sharing, accidents, overdoses, impulsivity, etc. ) that may be considered passive suicide attempts (Frances, Fyer, & Clarkin, 1986). Perhaps of most importance is the tendency for individuals with substance abuse disorders to lose significant relationships with loved ones and social support systems.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services:

- Between 40%-60% of those who die by suicide are intoxicated at the time of death.
- An estimated 1%-6% of individuals with alcohol dependency will die by suicide.
- People who are addicted to alcohol are at a higher risk if they also suffer from depression.
- Adolescents who die by suicide are more likely to use a firearm than another method if they have alcohol in their blood at the time of death.
- Intoxication by drugs or alcohol may increase suicide risk by decreasing inhibitions, increasing aggressiveness, and impairing judgment. Additionally, substance use such as alcohol increases the lethality of some medications, making it more likely that suicide attempt via overdose will be lethal (sprc.org).



To learn more about the risk factors of suicide please visit [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org) or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK for help.