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### **K41 The Psychological Autopsy: Psychiatry & Behavioral Science and Toxicology in a Working Relationship — Suicide—A General Overview**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand and appreciate the recent trends in suicide-related deaths in the United States, groups of individuals at high risk for completed suicides, preventative factors in reducing suicide, and the common means and methods utilized in completed suicides.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the scope and factors involved in suicide-related deaths in the United States in an effort to assist postmortem analysis and allow the identification of intervention and prevention strategies.

Suicide is a top-ten cause of death in the United States and the second leading cause of violent death following accidental injury. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of completed suicides has increased in the last ten or more years, and has varied based on demographic factors such as race, region of residence, age, and gender. It is estimated there are at least ten times the number of self-harm attempts as there are completed suicides. The highest rates of completed suicide have been in White males, aged 45 to 64 years, living in western states; however, there are substantial numbers of suicide deaths across all demographics and states.

Much of the literature regarding suicide deaths has been the result of research incorporating postmortem analysis and psychological autopsies. Firearms have been the most common method of completed suicide in recent years, followed by suffocation and toxic ingestion. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the majority of those completing suicide suffer from mood disorders, substance use disorders, schizophrenia, and personality disorders; approximately two-thirds of those individuals expressed their intent prior to their death.

Public and mental health literature has investigated risk factors for suicide. Risk factors for suicide include major mental disorders, substance use, prior suicide history, family history of suicide, trauma, serious medical illness, environmental and interpersonal losses, access to lethal methods, barriers to accessing treatment, and exposure to suicide. Protective factors that may decrease risk of suicide include strong social support, mental health and substance abuse treatment, restricted access to lethal methods, and life-affirming cultural and religious participation.

Suicide is a preventable cause of death. Far beyond the individual, the effects impact society emotionally, legally, and financially. More research is needed to identify clinical and sociologic interventions to reduce this tragic loss. Forensic science, through postmortem analysis and psychological autopsy, serves as a major contributor to understanding this phenomenon.

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#### **Suicide, Psychological Autopsy, Toxicology**