



RESEARCH BRIEF: September 3, 2024

Sadness, Depression, Suicide, and Marriage in Maryland - What the Research Says

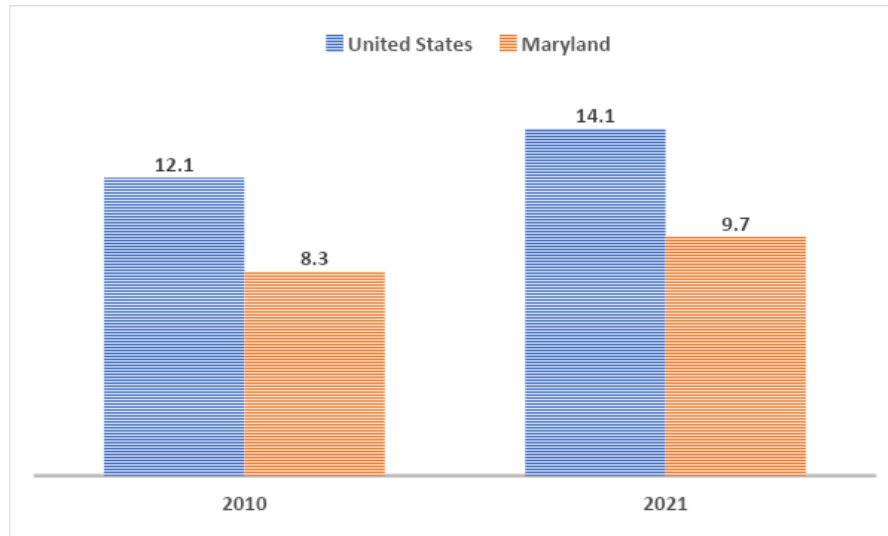
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KEY TAKEAWAYS
When considering every variable, the county by county marriage rates do not seem to impact rates of depression and suicidal ideation in Maryland.
Maryland rates of suicidal ideation and depression match that of the national average.
The rising rates of depression and suicidal thoughts should alert Marylanders to be aware of the health of their teens.

In this research brief, we will look at some key mental health measurements statewide and by county. These are severe depression, sadness, suicide rates, ideation, and attempts. First, these are relevant because these conditions directly impact the welfare of Maryland's individuals and families. Second, these are relevant to this report, since it is important to explore to what extent these outcomes are correlated with family structure and marital status.

Figure 1, on the following page, shows the age-adjusted suicide rate for the United States and Maryland, 2010 versus 2021. While both increased over this time period, Maryland is in the enviable position of being consistently lower than the national average. In 2021, out of 50 states, only three had lower rates.

Figure 1: Age-Adjusted Suicide Rates per 100,000, 2010 versus 2021, United States versus Maryland, CDC (1)



Figures 2a and 2b show the rates of severe depression and frequent suicidal ideation for 2020 into 2023 combined, as documented by Mental Health America, based on over 4.5 million mental health screenings. Among those 18 and older, Maryland does better than the U.S. as a whole on both measures. For youth under 18, Maryland is close to the same as the U.S. on both.

Figure 2a: Severe Depression and Frequent Suicidal Ideation Rates per 100,000, 18 and Older, 2020-23 Combined, United States versus Maryland, Mental Health America

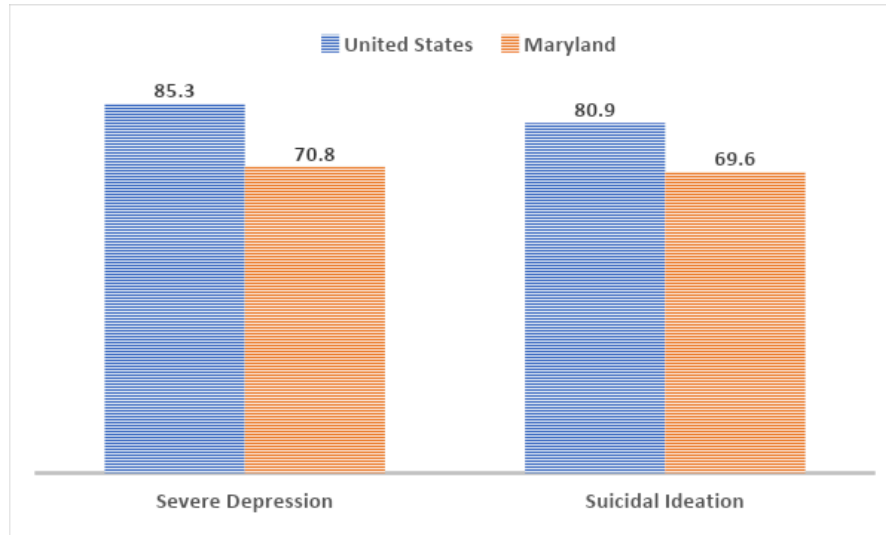


Figure 2b: Severe Depression and Frequent Suicidal Ideation Rates per 100,000, Younger than 18, 2020-23 Combined, United States versus Maryland, Mental Health America

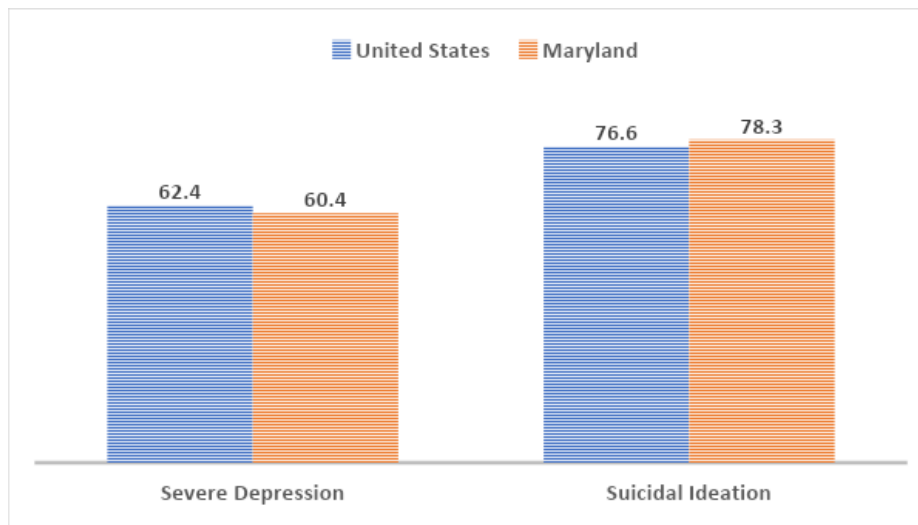


Table 1 provides this data by county. Separating rates by age is not possible at the county level through this data source. As with so much else in this report, there is a great deal of variation within the state. On the depression rates, Calvert is the highest at 139.33, and Somerset is the lowest at less than half that—60.72. On frequent suicidal ideation, Frederick is highest with 137.25, compared to the lowest (again) being Somerset at 52.05.

Table 1: Severe Depression and Suicidal Ideation Rates per 100,000, 2020-23 Combined, All Ages Combined, Mental Health America

COUNTIES	<u>Severe Depression</u>	<u>Frequent Suicidal Ideation</u>
Allegany	130.94	113.08
Anne Arundel	102.26	99.41
Baltimore (Co.)	121.35	107.81
Baltimore City (2)	N/A	N/A
Calvert	114.81	139.33
Caroline	136.43	130.22
Carroll	101.53	102.82
Cecil	113.19	110.28
Charles	125.09	98.50
Dorchester	112.60	109.38
Frederick	137.25	123.67
Garrett	134.73	115.01
Harford	128.78	122.19
Howard	124.64	107.74
Kent	91.64	66.65
Montgomery	116.44	100.62
Prince George's	107.75	99.53
Queen Anne's	82.53	88.87
St. Mary's	128.18	132.66
Somerset	52.05	60.72
Talbot	80.49	72.44
Washington	120.91	115.85
Wicomico	120.48	121.43
Worcester	109.97	125.14

Not surprisingly, the rates for frequent suicidal ideation and severe depression are correlated powerfully with one another at .813 (with 1.0 being perfect), chance of error less than .001. However, neither is significantly correlated with any of the marital statuses of people in the population (married, divorced, separated, widowed, or never married), the percentage of married households overall or with children under the age of 18, percentages of children living in different types of households, and so on. Certainly, depression and suicidal ideation impacts

families in which people are struggling with these serious problems, but marital status is not correlated with them at the county level so far as we could find given our range of variables here.

High School Students: Sadness and Suicidal Ideation & Plans

The YRBS has several questions that deal with suicide and sadness. The three tracked here are “during the past 12 months, did you”: “ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?,” “ever seriously consider attempting suicide?,” “make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?” Figures 3a-3b compare Maryland with the United States on these three items over time.

Figure 3a: Percentages Felt Sad or Hopeless in Past 12 Months, 2011-21, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS

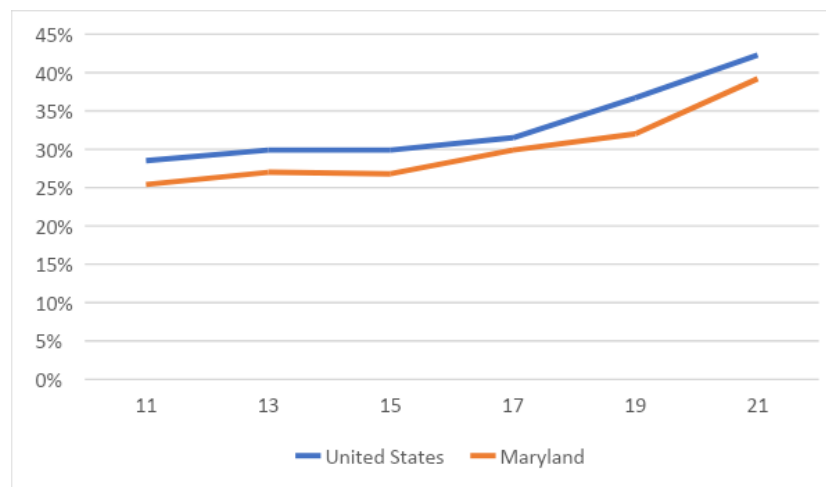


Figure 3b: Percentages Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide in Past 12 Months, 2011-21, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS

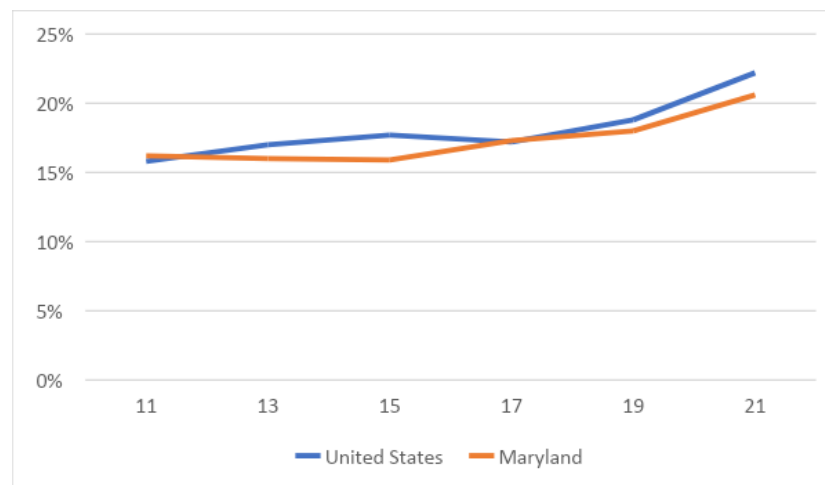
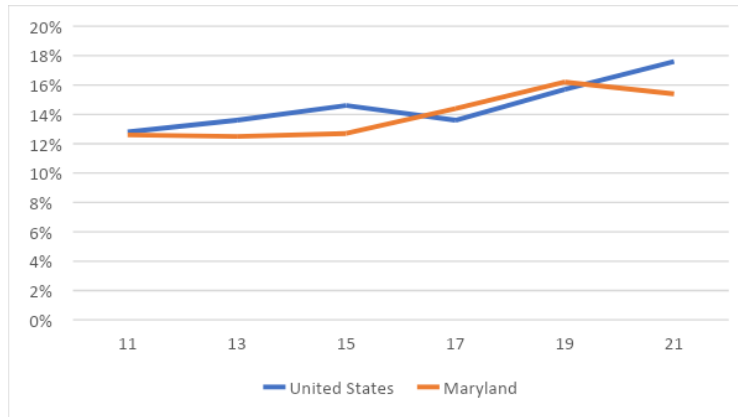


Figure 3c: Percentages Who Made a Suicide Plan in Past 12 Months, 2011-21, High School Students, United States versus Maryland, YRBS



As we can see, all three worsened over this time period, nationally and in Maryland. And though mostly a bit lower, Maryland levels were not dramatically different from national ones. It is sad to consider so many young people struggling with thoughts like this, and know it is increasing. Table 2 shows these percentages for 2018-19 by county (3).

Table 2: Percentages Expressing Being Sad and Hopeless, Making Suicide Plans, or Seriously Considering Attempting Suicide, In Past 12 Months, High School Students, YRBS, 2018-19

COUNTIES	<u>Felt Sad or Hopeless</u>	<u>Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide</u>	<u>Made A Suicide Plan</u>
Allegany	34.3%	20.5%	15.6%
Anne Arundel	32.0%	18.6%	17.1%
Baltimore (Co.)	33.7%	17.1%	16.4%
Baltimore City	31.6%	18.4%	19.5%
Calvert	31.9%	17.8%	14.0%
Caroline	31.1%	18.7%	15.1%
Carroll	28.6%	17.5%	14.0%
Cecil	34.4%	18.0%	15.2%
Charles	32.0%	20.5%	18.8%
Dorchester	32.9%	20.9%	18.4%
Frederick	31.2%	16.9%	14.2%
Garrett	30.5%	22.7%	19.2%
Harford	30.6%	17.8%	14.0%
Howard	28.4%	16.5%	15.9%
Kent	36.0%	22.6%	20.8%
Montgomery	31.5%	16.7%	13.8%
Prince George's	34.2%	19.0%	18.7%
Queen Anne's	29.2%	18.7%	13.9%
St. Mary's	33.6%	20.8%	16.4%
Somerset	30.4%	20.5%	17.2%
Talbot	27.8%	18.2%	15.4%
Washington	34.2%	19.8%	15.8%
Wicomico	30.5%	19.6%	16.9%
Worcester	29.8%	18.9%	16.2%

As Table 3 shows, there are significant negative correlations between the percentages of children in married couple families and all three of these negative outcomes measured in the YRBS (4). Although this is only suggestive, it does seem that this relationship is worthy of further exploration and attention. These are critical negative outcomes with high school kids, they have been getting worse, and whether or not children benefit from being part of a married couple family may make a significant difference in kids' susceptibility to suicidal ideation, and to frequently struggling with sadness or hopelessness.

Table 3: Correlations Between the Three YRBS County Measures in Table 11, and County Percentages for Children in Families Living with Married Couples, from 2021 ACS 5 Year Estimates.

<u>Felt Sad or Hopeless</u>	<u>Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide</u>	<u>Made A Suicide Plan</u>
-.422; Sig. .04	-.495; Sig. .01	-.684; Sig. <.001)

Conclusion

Steady increases in measured sadness or hopelessness, suicidal ideations, and plans, among Maryland high school students ought to be a matter of pressing and serious concern. Efforts to improve these should especially target schools and counties where the problems are worse, though obviously the welfare of all Maryland youth matters. The role of children enjoying the benefits of living in families headed by married couples should not be ignored or lightly dismissed. Not only does the latter appear to have a direct impact, but having two committed parents in the home almost certainly mediates the impact of other forces driving up these distressing percentages.

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Endnotes

- (1) This is CDC data, provided in easy-to-use format by KFF.
<https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/suicide-rate/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>. Given the raw numbers of suicides (for example, just 620 state-wide in Maryland in 2021—see <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-rates-by-state.html>), rates in counties with less population are unreliable and often not provided in easy-to-access ways. Thus, there is no county table here.
- (2) Baltimore City is completely excluded from these county figures provided by Mental Health America. They are not lumped in with Baltimore County or any other county.
- (3) Again, this school year was chosen as it corresponds best with the 2021 ACS 5-year estimates; see below.
- (4) As we have already noted, the percentage of African American is negatively and significantly correlated with the percentage of children in families living with married couples (see footnote #43 from full *The State of The Maryland Family Report*). Percent African American was also significantly and positively correlated with having made a suicide plan (.549; Sig. .005). So this correlation was re-analyzed using linear regression to control for percent African American. The association was still negative and significant (Beta = -.547; Sig .006).