

Sociologist Reports: Teen Suicides Tripled In Decade

By John Dash

Males commit suicide. Females try suicide "in non-lethal means four times as often." And the suicide rate among young people has tripled over the past decade.

Those are the conclusions of studies done by Dr. Robert Davis, a sociologist at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, who was in Rochester recently at the invitation of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries.

Interviewed prior to his talk at a special dinner, Dr. Davis said that three distinct pressures are laid on teenagers, pressures which could contribute to suicide. He described them as: competitive pressure, through the educational process, which is especially prevalent in Japan and West Germany, though not the norm here; the pressure of adolescence itself, "the pressure of the rites of passage," and the pressure of peers and parent-child relations.

Of the last, Dr. Davis said "the father is the key value." Often in suicide, he said, the background reveals "nothing but a pathological lack of a strong father-figure."

The social and economic upheavals of the past two decades have also upped the ante for a rise in the teen suicide rate, he said.

He said that suicide, particularly among black teenagers, is less likely when there is a sense of upward mobility, "moving toward a higher standard of living."

However, he said, if that sense is reversed, or if there is a sense of immobility, that situation could either contribute to homicide or suicide.

Dr. Davis contends that suicide occurs when the individual suffers "a sense of disjuncture," and it is in strengthening that "web of social contacts which buffer" the individual, as a corrective to the rising suicide rate.

He said suicide rates are lower in "old metropolitan" centers, particularly in the South, than they are in such cities as New York or Chicago. He cited the abiding sense of familiarity with one's surroundings, family, and friends in southern cities as a source of well being. "The more folk-oriented, the less suicide," he said.



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Brezhnev: No Quick Changes Seen



By Liz Schvetchuk
NC News Service

The death of Soviet President and Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev is unlikely to bring any quick changes in Soviet policy regarding religion, human rights or relations with the West, experts and diplomatic officials predicted upon his death Nov. 10.

Brezhnev, 75, held the reins of power in the Soviet Union for 18 years.

Regarding religious freedom and human rights in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc satellite nations, Brezhnev "certainly didn't help matters any," said Father Casimir Pugevicius, executive director of Lithuanian American Catholic Services, a New York-based human rights organization. He said that after the 1980 Olympic games in Moscow, the U.S.S.R. tightened its grip over religious expression and human rights activity — demonstrated by the internal exile of dissident Andrew Sakharov, the exile or imprisonment of members of the Helsinki accords Moscow monitoring committee, which reviewed Soviet adherence to the Helsinki accords on human rights, repression of the Church, and other steps.

Father Pugevicius said he fears that the selection of Yuri Andropov, former KGB (secret police) director, as Soviet leader would again "spell a crackdown on any human rights" in Lithuania and elsewhere. The priest said this before Andropov was chosen.

Sister Ann Gillen, executive director of the Chicago National Inter-Religious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, said, "One is always hopeful but I don't know anyone who can give you hard and fast predictions." A member of the Sisters of the Holy Child, she agreed with Father Pugevicius that "things in the last few months have gotten worse."

Robert J. Pranger, adjunct professor of international politics and a Soviet affairs specialist at Georgetown University in Washington, said Brezhnev's death will not affect Soviet policy to the extent that Stalin's death did.

Pope John Paul II was among world leaders sending condolences to the Soviet Union. The pope expressed his remarks in a telegram to Vasily Kuznetsove, first vice president of the Soviet presidium. "On the occasion of the grave mourning that has struck the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with the death of the president of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet Republic, Mr. Leonid Brezhnev, who played an important role also in international life and relations, I express to your excellency my deep condolences, in assuring you of particular thought for the memory of the illustrious deceased."

President Reagan wrote in a letter to the Soviet government: "President Brezhnev was one of the world's most important figures for nearly two decades. May I ask you to convey our sympathies to his family."

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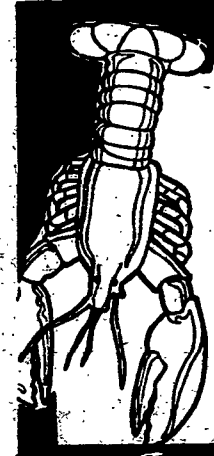
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