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Study: suicide top student killer

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The leading cause of mortality in college students is suicide, a University of Virginia researcher found in a study released Nov. 2.

Alcohol-related incidents were the second major cause of death among students.

James Turner, executive director of the Elson Student Health Center at UVA, conducted the study by collecting data from 157 four-year institutions across the nation.

Turner studied the mortality

rates among students between the ages of 18 and 24.

He found that six in every 100,000 students committed suicide, while fewer than five in 100,000 students died from alcohol-related incidents.

"The thing that surprises everyone is that suicide is the most common cause of death among college students," Turner said.

Still, the rate of suicide was 47 percent lower among college students than among the general population of 18- to 24-year-olds, Turner said.

Similarly, alcohol-related deaths were 60 to 76 percent

lower among college students as compared to the same general population.

"Clearly there's something happening on college campuses preventing suicide," he said. "This is all speculative on my part, but I do know that we've set up very elaborate and effective counseling and medical help, which perhaps allow us to intervene to prevent some of these tragedies."

The study found that schools in rural areas have more alcohol-related vehicular deaths than schools in urban areas.

Males also had a higher rate of suicide than females, which

Turner attributed to the higher rate of suicide among men in general.

No differences were found between races in either alcohol-related deaths or suicides.

Turner said he hopes his research will help establish a baseline for future studies of college mortality.

He also wants to call attention to the importance of detecting and intervening in cases of major depression, even though media tends to focus on alcohol-related deaths among college students.