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State of New York
Department of Correctional Services

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Harriman Office Campus
Albany, New York 12226

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INMATE SUICIDE REPORT

1993

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Mario M. Cuomo
Governor



Thomas A. Coughlin III
Commissioner

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- * A total of 35 inmates committed suicide within DOCS facilities during the years 1986 through 1992. The inmates who committed suicide ranged in age from 17 to 61 years old (see page 1).
- * White inmates (N=17) committed suicide more often than Black (N=8) or Hispanic (N=10) inmates (see page 3).
- * The largest number of suicide victims had been incarcerated for robbery (N=9). Though drug offenders comprised nearly 30% of the inmate undercustody population for the years 1986-1992, only 1 inmate (2.9% of suicide cases) imprisoned for a drug offense committed suicide (see page 5).
- * Inmates sentenced from New York City experienced the highest number of suicides (N=21). However, inmates from upstate rural counties experienced the highest suicide rate (see page 9).
- * Most inmates (N=18, 51%) who committed suicide faced aggregate minimum sentences of 6 years or more. Only 29% of the inmate undercustody population had received minimum sentences of 6 years or longer (see page 11).
- * Most suicides (71%) occurred among inmates sentenced to maximum terms of 10 years or longer (see page 13).
- * The largest number of suicides were among inmates who had served less than 1 year incarceration. However, proportionately the greatest risk of suicide occurred among inmates who had served 5 years or longer; 37% of the suicides compared with 14% of the undercustody population had served at least 5 years (see page 15).
- * Thirty-two suicides occurred at maximum security facilities, 2 at medium security prisons, and 1 at a minimum security facility (see page 17).

INTRODUCTION

This report examines the 35 inmates who committed suicide within Department of Correctional Services facilities during the years 1986-1992. Selected demographic and legal history variables are profiled and comparisons are made between decedents and the end-of-year inmate undercustody population for the seven year study period. A 1989 suicide of a state inmate, transferred to a local jail for court proceedings, is not included in this study.

AGE

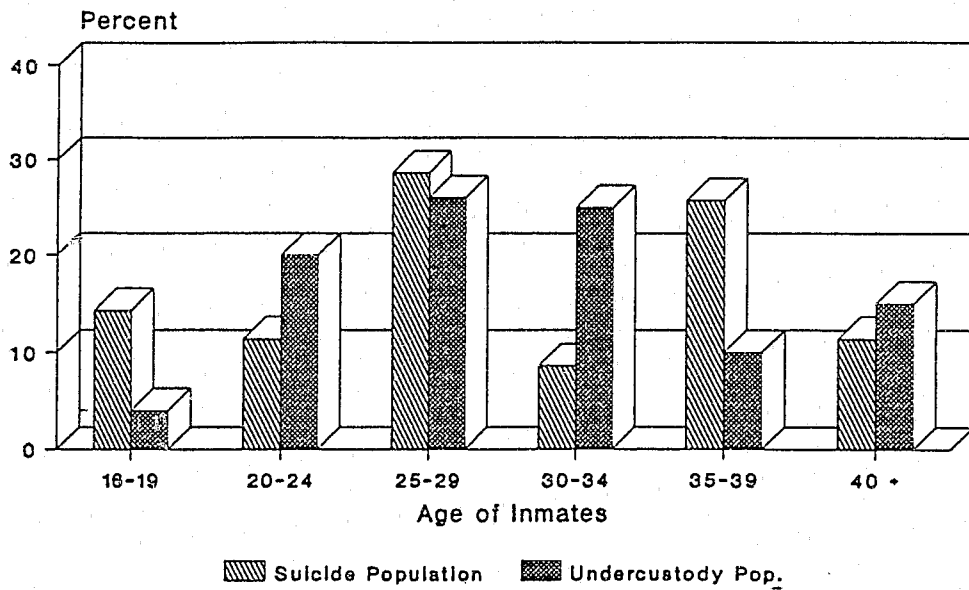
The largest number of suicide deaths (N=10, 28.6%) occurred among individuals in the 25-29 years of age category. The 35-39 age group had the next highest suicide totals (N=9, 25.7%). The youngest suicide victim was 17 years old while the oldest decedent was 61 years old. Table 1 shows the number of suicide deaths by age category for the 1986-1992 time period.

Figure 1 compares the percentage of suicide deaths by age category to the total inmate undercustody population for the years 1986 to 1992. The five suicide deaths in the 16-19 years category were proportionately larger when compared to the number of 16-19 year old inmates in the undercustody population. The 35-39 age category also showed a proportionately higher number of suicides than might be expected from their number in the undercustody population.

TABLE 1
AGE OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

AGE OF INMATE	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
16-19	0 .0%	2 66.7%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	5 14.3%
20-24	1 33.3%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	4 11.4%
25-29	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	4 40.0%	1 100.0%	1 20.0%	2 22.2%	10 28.6%
30-34	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 22.2%	3 8.6%
35-39	1 33.3%	0 .0%	2 50.0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	3 60.0%	1 11.1%	9 25.7%
40 +	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 22.2%	4 11.4%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 1
Age of Suicide and
Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



RACE/ETHNICITY

Table 2 displays the number and percentage of suicide deaths according to the race/ethnicity of the victim. White inmates (N=17, 48.6%) committed suicide more often than Black (N=8, 22.9%) or Hispanic inmates (N=10, 28.6%).

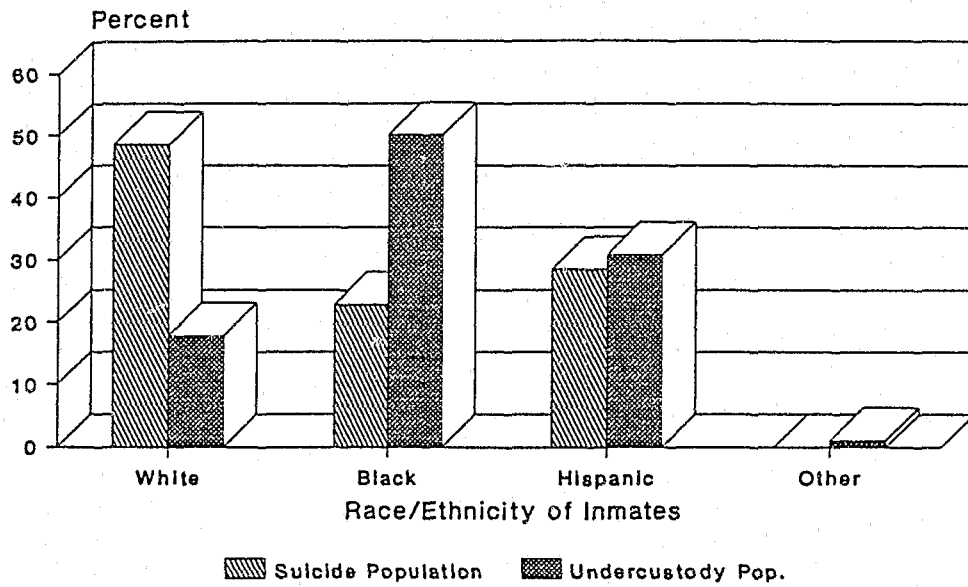
Disparity in the number of white inmates' deaths is more apparent after examination of race/ethnic make up of the undercustody population. Though only 17.9% of undercustody inmates during the 1986-1992 time period, white inmates committed 48.6% of the suicides (see Figure 2). The percentage of Hispanic inmate suicides approximates the percentage of Hispanic inmates in the 1986-1992 undercustody population. However, the suicide rate for Blacks was considerably lower; as indicated by a 50.2% representation in the undercustody population but only 22.9% of the inmate suicide population.

Inmates classified racially/ethnically as 'other' were approximately 1% of the undercustody population. Inmates of Native-American or Oriental heritage were placed in the 'other' group. There were no suicides in this group.

TABLE 2
RACE/ETHNICITY OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

RACE/ETHNICITY	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
WHITE	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	7 70.0%	1 100.0%	3 60.0%	4 44.4%	17 48.6%
BLACK	0 .0%	2 66.7%	1 25.0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	2 40.0%	2 22.2%	8 22.9%
HISPANIC	2 66.7%	1 33.3%	2 50.0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 33.3%	10 28.6%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 2
Race/Ethnicity of Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



VIOLENT FELONY OFFENSES

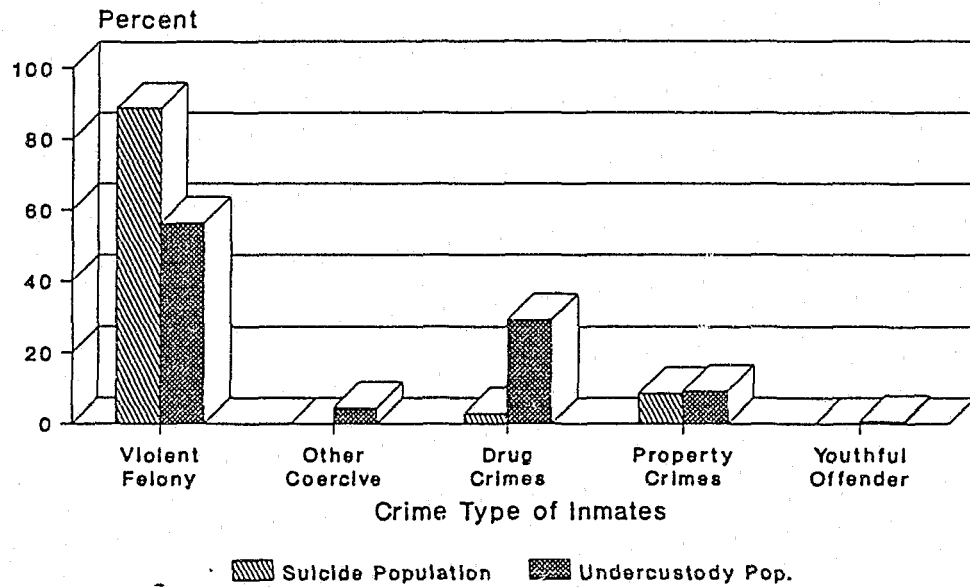
For discussion purposes and analysis, the total number of felony criminal offenses have been categorized into 5 groups: violent felony, other coercive, drug crimes, property crimes, and youthful offender status crimes.

More than 56% of the undercustody population for the years 1986 through 1992 were convicted for a violent felony offense. However, even a larger percentage (88.6%) of suicides were by inmates committed for violent felony offenses. Though only 1 suicide victim (2.9%) had been committed for a drug crime, 29.1% of the undercustody population had been convicted of a drug offense. The percentage of the suicide population and the undercustody population committed for property offenses were similar - 8.6% and 9.3% respectively. Table 3 outlines the suicide population commitment crime category and year of death. Figure 3 compares the commitment crime category for both suicide and undercustody population.

TABLE 3
COMMITMENT CRIME CATEGORY OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

CRIME CATEGORY	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
VIOLENT FELONY	3 100.0%	2 66.7%	2 50.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	4 80.0%	9 100.0%	31 88.6%
DRUG OFFENSES	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
PROPERTY/OTHER OFFENSES	0 .0%	1 33.3%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	3 8.6%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 3
Commitment Crime Category of Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



COMMITMENT CRIME

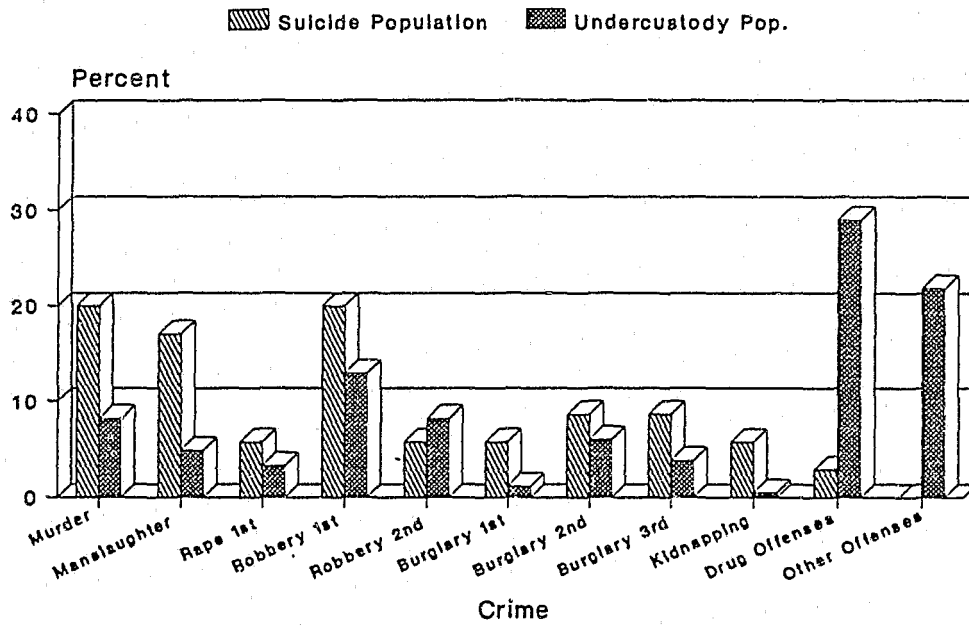
A large percentage of suicide victims had been incarcerated for serious felonies: murder (N=7, 20.0%), manslaughter (N=6, 17.1%), and 1st degree robbery (N=7, 20.0%). See Table 4 for specific commitment offenses for all suicide decedents for the 1986-1992 time period.

Figure 4 compares the commitment crimes for the suicide and undercustody population for the seven year study period. Only crimes committed by suicide victims are listed for comparison purposes; the remainder of the crime types are placed into the 'other offenses' category. The percentage of decedents convicted of murder, manslaughter, and robbery is proportionately higher than would be expected by the percentage of these crimes in the undercustody population. However, while 29.17% of the undercustody population most serious commitment offense was a drug crime, only 2.9% of the suicide population had been committed for a drug offense.

TABLE 4
COMMITMENT CRIME OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

CRIME	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
MURDER	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	2 20.0%	1 100.0%	2 40.0%	0 .0%	7 20.0%
MANSLAUGHTER 1ST	2 66.7%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	4 44.4%	6 17.1%
RAPE 1ST	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
ROBBERY 1ST	0 .0%	1 33.3%	1 25.0%	3 30.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	7 20.0%
ROBBERY 2ND	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
BURGLARY 1ST	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
BURGLARY 2ND	0 .0%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	3 8.6%
KIDNAPPING 1ST, 2ND	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 5.7%
DRUG OFFENSES	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
BURGLARY 3RD	0 .0%	1 33.3%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	3 8.6%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 4
Commitment Crime of Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



REGION OF COMMITMENT

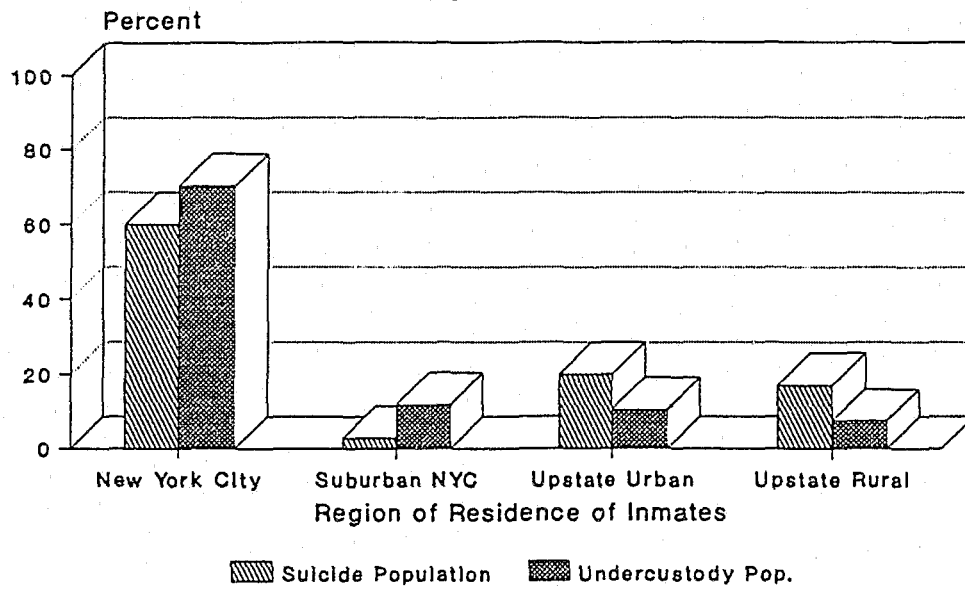
New York State counties are aggregated into four categories to show region of commitment. The New York City region consists of the five counties of Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, and Richmond. Nassau, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester make up the Suburban New York Region. Upstate Urban counties have a population center of 50,000 or more residents and are comprised of Albany, Broome, Erie, Monroe, Oneida, Onondaga, Rensselaer and Schenectady. The Upstate rural region contains the remaining counties of the state. The vast majority of the suicide population (N=21, 60.0%) and the undercustody population (70.2%) for the years 1986-1992 were sentenced from New York City.

Figure 5 on the next page compares the region of residence for both the suicide and undercustody population. Proportionately fewer inmates from New York City commit suicide than would be expected from the percentage of inmates incarcerated from that region; and proportionately even fewer inmates from the New York City suburban counties committed suicide. Conversely, Upstate urban counties and Upstate rural counties showed a much higher number of suicide victims than might be expected from their numbers in the undercustody population. In particular, inmates from Upstate rural counties comprised 7.5% of the undercustody population for the years 1986-1992 but 17.1% of the deceased were from the Upstate rural region.

TABLE 5
REGION OF RESIDENCE OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

REGION	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
NEW YORK CITY	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	3 30.0%	1 100.0%	2 40.0%	5 55.6%	21 60.0%
SUBURBAN NEWYORK	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
UPSTATE URBAN	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	4 40.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	2 22.2%	7 20.0%
UPSTATE RURAL	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 30.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	2 22.2%	6 17.1%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 5
Region of Residence of Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



AGGREGATE MINIMUM SENTENCE

Inmates sentenced to prison in New York State receive an indeterminate sentence comprised of a minimum and maximum number of years. The aggregate minimum sentence results from the combination of all sentences an inmate receives and is the shortest period of time the inmate must serve prior to review by the parole board. Minimum sentence reduction may be granted only to inmates who successfully complete the Shock Incarceration Program.

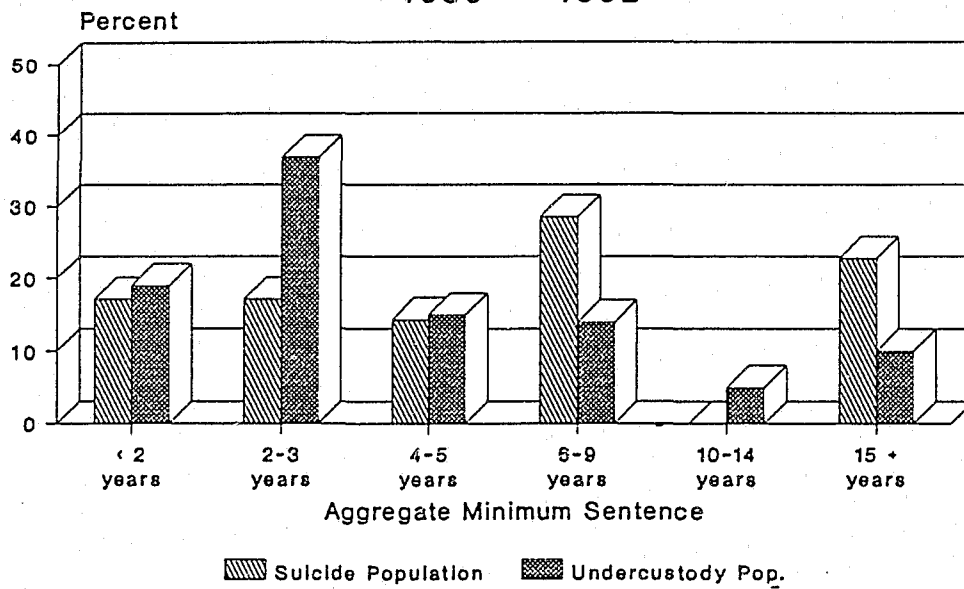
Table 6 categorizes the aggregate minimum sentence of suicide victims for the seven year study period. Of the inmates who committed suicide 34% were sentenced to less than 4 years, 43% were sentenced from 4 years to less than 10 years, and 23% were facing a minimum sentence of at least 15 years.

Figure 6 compares the suicide population to the undercustody population for the 1986-1992 time span. The graph shows that while nearly half of the suicide population (N=17, 48.5%) had received a minimum sentence of less than six years, this was considerably less than the 71% of the undercustody population who received a minimum sentence of less than 6 years. Figure 6 reveals that inmates receiving minimum sentences of less than 6 years were less likely to commit suicide than inmates receiving longer minimum sentences.

TABLE 6
AGGREGATE MINIMUM SENTENCE OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

MINIMUM SENTENCE	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
12-17 MONTHS	1 33.3%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 5.7%
18-23 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 50.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 40.0%	0 .0%	4 11.4%
24-35 MONTHS	0 .0%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 5.7%
36-47 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	4 11.4%
48-71 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 33.3%	5 14.3%
72-119 MONTHS	1 33.3%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	3 30.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	5 55.6%	10 28.6%
180-239 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	2 5.7%
240 + MONTHS	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 30.0%	1 100.0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	6 17.1%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 6
Aggregate Minimum Sentence of Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



AGGREGATE MAXIMUM SENTENCE

Upon sentence to prison, inmates receive a minimum and maximum number of years of incarceration. The aggregate maximum sentence is the total number of years an inmate could serve from the combination of all commitment crimes. Most inmates are released by parole from prison prior to the expiration of their maximum sentence. However through the circumstances surrounding the commitment crime and/or poor institutional adjustment may result in some inmates serving a period of time considerably longer than their minimum sentence.

Table 7 shows the aggregate maximum sentence faced by the suicide population for the 1986-1992 time period. A majority (57%) of the inmates could have served at least 15 years prior to release. Four inmates who committed suicide had maximum sentences of only three years, the shortest maximum sentence that a judge can assign.

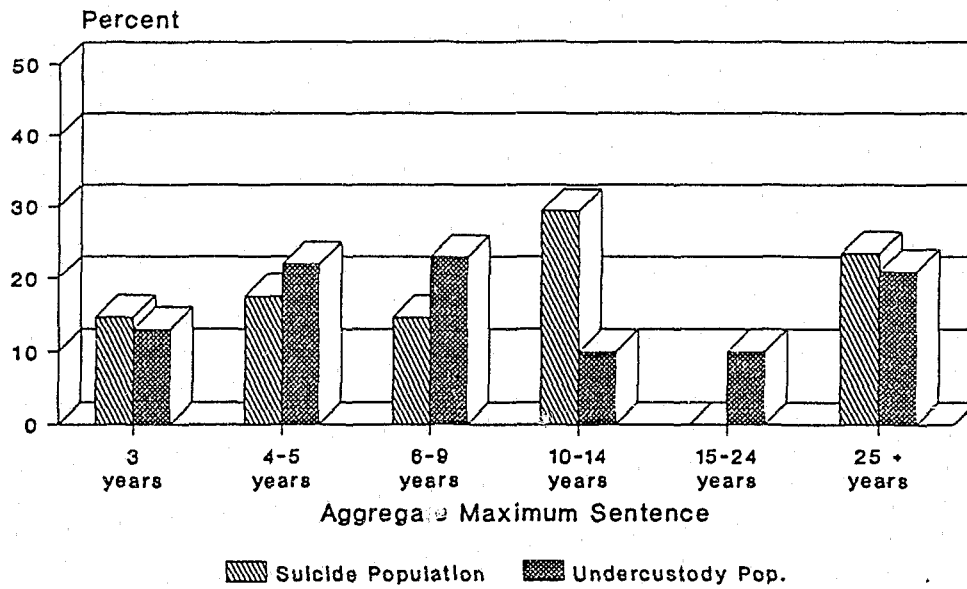
Figure 7 compares the aggregate maximum sentence of the suicide and undercustody population.

Proportionately, the largest percentage of suicides occurred among inmates serving maximum sentences of 10-14 years; and, to a lesser degree among inmates serving maximum sentences of 3 years and to those serving 25 years or more.

TABLE 7
AGGREGATE MAXIMUM SENTENCE OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

MAXIMUM SENTENCE	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
36 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 50.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 40.0%	0 .0%	4 11.4%
37-53 MONTHS	0 .0%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
54-71 MONTHS	0 .0%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
72-95 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 30.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	3 8.6%
108-143 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	2 22.2%	4 11.4%
144-179 MONTHS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
180-299 MONTHS	2 66.7%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	4 40.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	5 55.6%	12 34.3%
LIFE MAXIMUM	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	2 20.0%	1 100.0%	2 40.0%	1 11.1%	8 22.9%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 7
Aggregate Maximum Sentence of Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



TIME SERVED

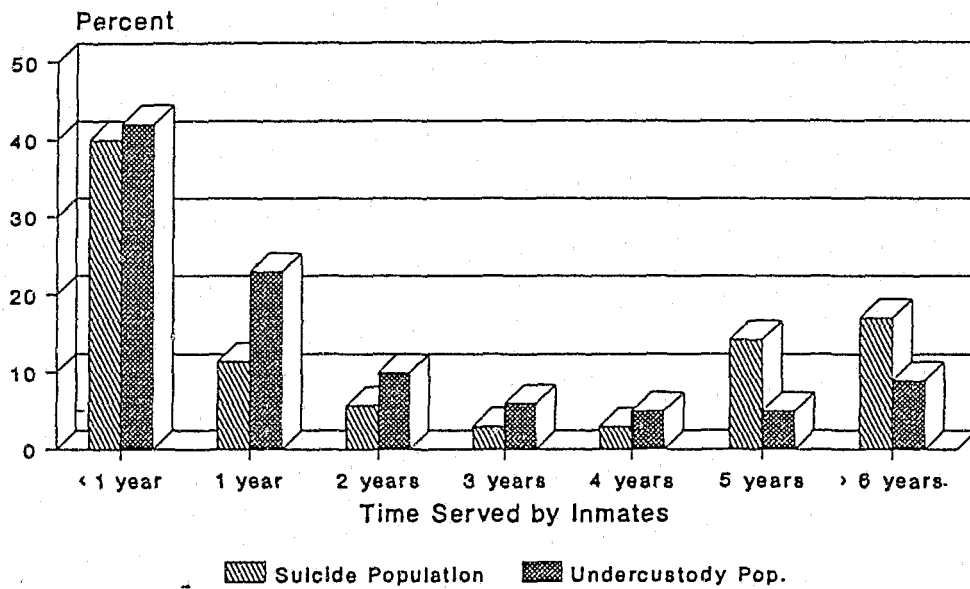
Table 8 shows the amount of time decedents had served in prison prior to their death. By far the largest number of suicides (N=14, 40%) occurred before an inmate had served one year. The number of suicides declined markedly for years 1 through 4. However after 5 years, the number increased again.

Figure 8 clarifies the analysis by comparing time served for the suicide and undercustody population. Though a large number and percent of suicides occurred within the first year of incarceration, the percentage of the undercustody population who had served less than a year was slightly larger. Proportionately, inmates were slightly less likely to commit suicide within the first year of incarceration. After 5 years of incarceration, inmates were more likely to commit suicide when the suicide population was compared to the undercustody population.

TABLE 8
TIME SERVED IN PRISON BY DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

TIME SERVED	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
< ONE YEAR	1 33.3%	3 100.0%	2 50.0%	4 40.0%	0 .0%	2 40.0%	2 22.2%	14 40.0%
ONE YEAR	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	1 10.0%	1 100.0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	4 11.4%
TWO YEARS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
THREE YEARS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
FOUR YEARS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	1 2.9%
FIVE YEARS	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	3 33.3%	5 14.3%
6-10 YEARS	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	6 17.1%
11-15 YEARS	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	2 5.7%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 8
Time Served in Prison by Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992



SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

A review of inmate suicides at maximum security prisons shows that the largest number of suicides occurred at Attica (N=7) and Elmira (N=7), followed by Auburn, Great Meadow, and Sing Sing facilities with 3 suicides apiece.

The Department, in conjunction with the Office of Mental Health which provides mental health services at the facilities, has concentrated most mental health unit beds and staff at maximum security prisons. Most of the suicide victims had a history of mental illness and/or prior suicide ideation and had been assigned to maximum security facilities. As a result, 32 suicides occurred at maximum security prisons, 2 at medium security facilities, and 1 at a minimum security facility. All suicide victims were male and the majority of deaths were attributed to asphyxiation due to hanging (32 hanging, 1 drug overdose, 1 cutting, 1 other).

TABLE 9
SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AND PRISON OF DECEDENTS AND YEAR OF DEATH
1986 - 1992

PRISON	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
MAXIMUM SECURITY								
ATTICA	1 33.3%	0 .0%	3 75.0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	7 20.0%
AUBURN	0 .0%	1 33.3%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 11.1%	3 8.6%
CLINTON	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 5.7%
COXSACKIE	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
DOWNSTATE	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
ELMIRA	0 .0%	2 66.7%	0 .0%	2 20.0%	0 .0%	2 40.0%	1 11.1%	7 20.0%
GREAT MEADOW	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	2 22.2%	3 8.6%
GREEN HAVEN	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 10.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
SING SING	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 100.0%	0 .0%	2 22.2%	3 8.6%
SOUTHPORT	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
SULLIVAN	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	1 11.1%	2 5.7%
MEDIUM SECURITY								
ADIRONDACK	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 25.0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
CAYUGA	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 20.0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
MINIMUM SECURITY								
QUEENSBORO	1 33.3%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1 2.9%
TOTAL	3 100.0%	3 100.0%	4 100.0%	10 100.0%	1 100.0%	5 100.0%	9 100.0%	35 100.0%

Figure 9
Security Classification by Suicide
and Undercustody Population
1986 - 1992

