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Suicide Pattern

Every year in the United States, between 15,000 and 20,000 persons commit suicide. Every year, twice that number try to take their own lives, but fail. From this great number of cases, statisticians have been able to construct a fairly definite pattern of self-destruction.

For no established reason, suicidal attempts are most prevalent during the late spring and summer. June annually brings the heaviest toll, December the lightest. The first day of the month, when the bills come in, is chosen most often. The likeliest day of the week for suicide is Monday, the likeliest hour of the day, six or seven o'clock in the evening.

Last week, more facts similar to these were available in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. After studying the cases of 1,147 would-be suicides in Boston City hospital, Dr. Merrill Moore, a Harvard University psychiatrist, reported in a *Journal* article that:

- Poison was the most commonly selected agent for suicide. Ordinary illuminating gas was next.

- Few persons attempted suicide on a full stomach.

- Married women tried suicide most often, followed by unmarried women, married men and unmarried men, in that order (but annually, about three times as many men as women succeed in killing themselves). Few widowed persons and still fewer divorced ones attempted suicide.

Among 266 Boston hospital patients who could be persuaded to give reasons for their actions, men most commonly blamed financial difficulties. Women most commonly blamed domestic difficulties and emotional dissatisfaction. Like all mind specialists, Dr. Moore thought that suicide could be brought on by any one of these specific troubles, by ill health or simply by the feeling of an individual that he "didn't count" in the scheme of things.

As preventives of suicides, Dr. Moore praised the love-lorn and personal-problem columns of newspapers because they answered the need of perplexed individuals for somebody to talk with about their problems. For others interested in saving any would-be suicide from death, the psychiatrist suggested talking with him quietly, or taking him out to dinner, "a simple action, yet one that has been known to save a life."