

Preliminary data from an ongoing statewide study

An Epidemic of White Death: A Canary in the Coal Mine?

An alarming national trend wreaks havoc in California's South Central Valley



Cause for Concern | Rising Regional Death Rates



For the first time in decades, we're seeing a decline in life expectancy across the United States

- In California's Central Valley, conditions are even more dire — especially in poorer counties like Kern, Tulare, Fresno and Kings.
- Residents in this region are suffering from multiple social stressors: unemployment, wage stagnation and high poverty rates.
- Among young (25-34) and middle-aged (40-64) whites across California, death rates are decreasing, but in the southern Central Valley, white death rates are increasing.
- Rising death rates in whites are driven by acts of despair: drug overdoses, chronic alcohol abuse, and suicide.

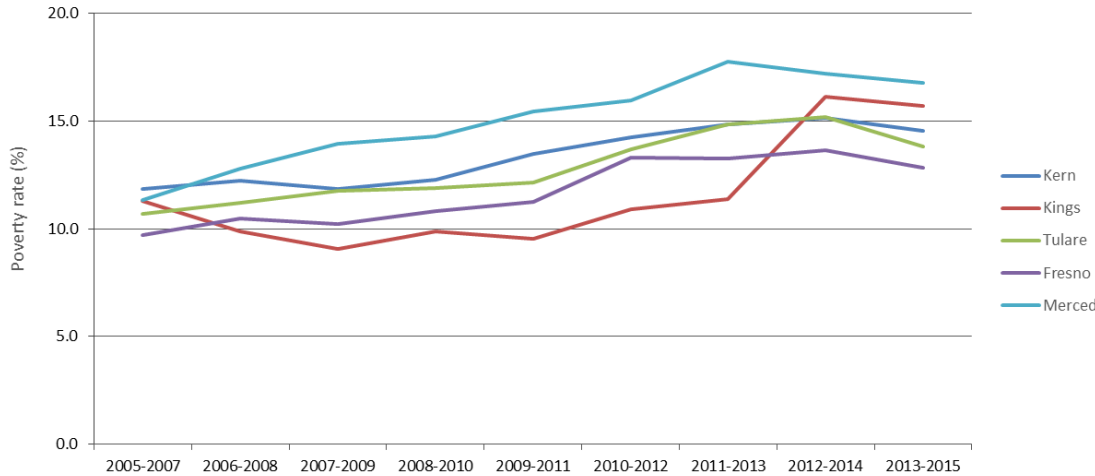


- Death rates from these “stress-related conditions” have climbed faster in the Southern Central Valley than they have statewide. Here are some examples:
 - In Fresno County, the rate at which middle-aged adults (ages 40-64 years) are dying from accidental drug poisoning has increased by 212.3% since the 1990s; and in Kern County it has increased 163.7% over the same period.
 - In Tulare County, the death rate from viral hepatitis has increased by 166.5% since the 1990s.
 - White women are being most affected. In Kern County, the rate at which young white men (ages 25-34 years) are dying from accidental drug overdoses has increased by 248% since the 1990s. Among women, the death rate appears to be rising faster.
 - In Kern County, suicides by hanging, strangulation and suffocation have increased by 133% since the 1990s.
- We cannot blame these deaths simply on the opioid epidemic. These are deaths of despair.

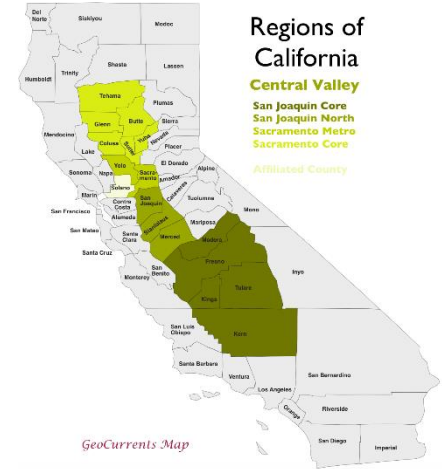
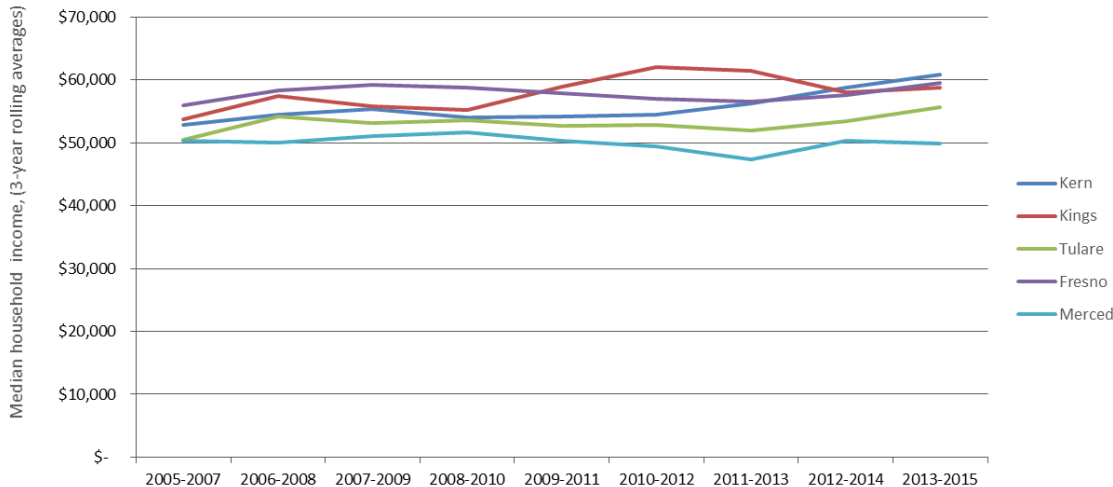
Poverty and Income | Impact in the Central Valley



Poverty Rate among middle-aged Whites (ages 40 – 64)



Median Household Income among middle-aged Whites (ages 40 – 64)

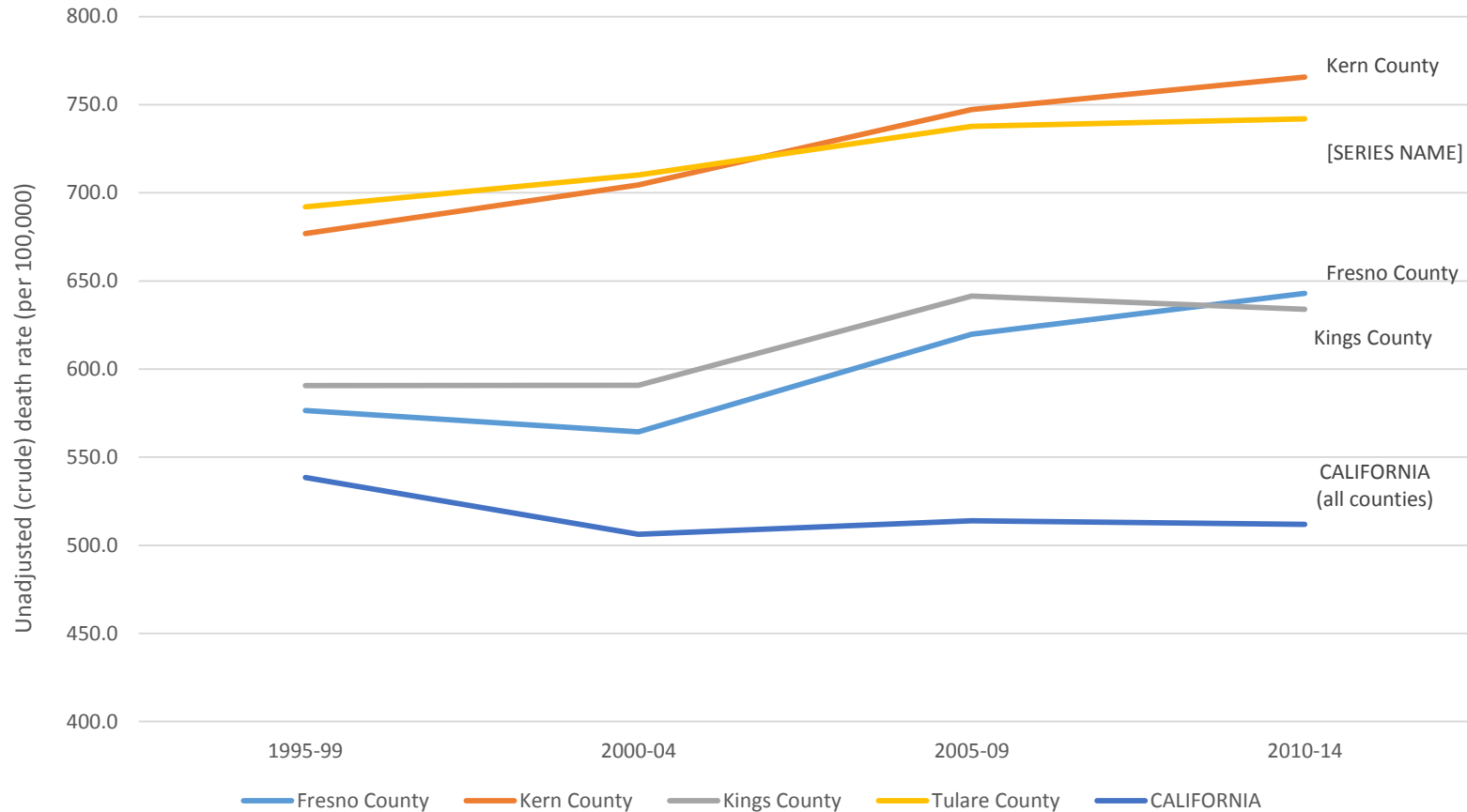
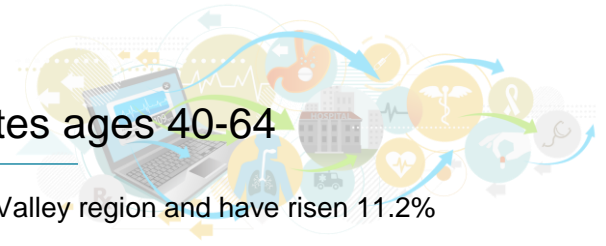


Among the most severely impacted regions of California is the San Joaquin Valley, a region facing difficult economic challenges.

We focus here on the four southernmost counties—**Kern County, Tulare County, Kings County, and Fresno County**—where median household income has been stagnant for the past decade and poverty rates have steadily risen

Highest Death Rates | Most dramatic among middle-aged whites ages 40-64

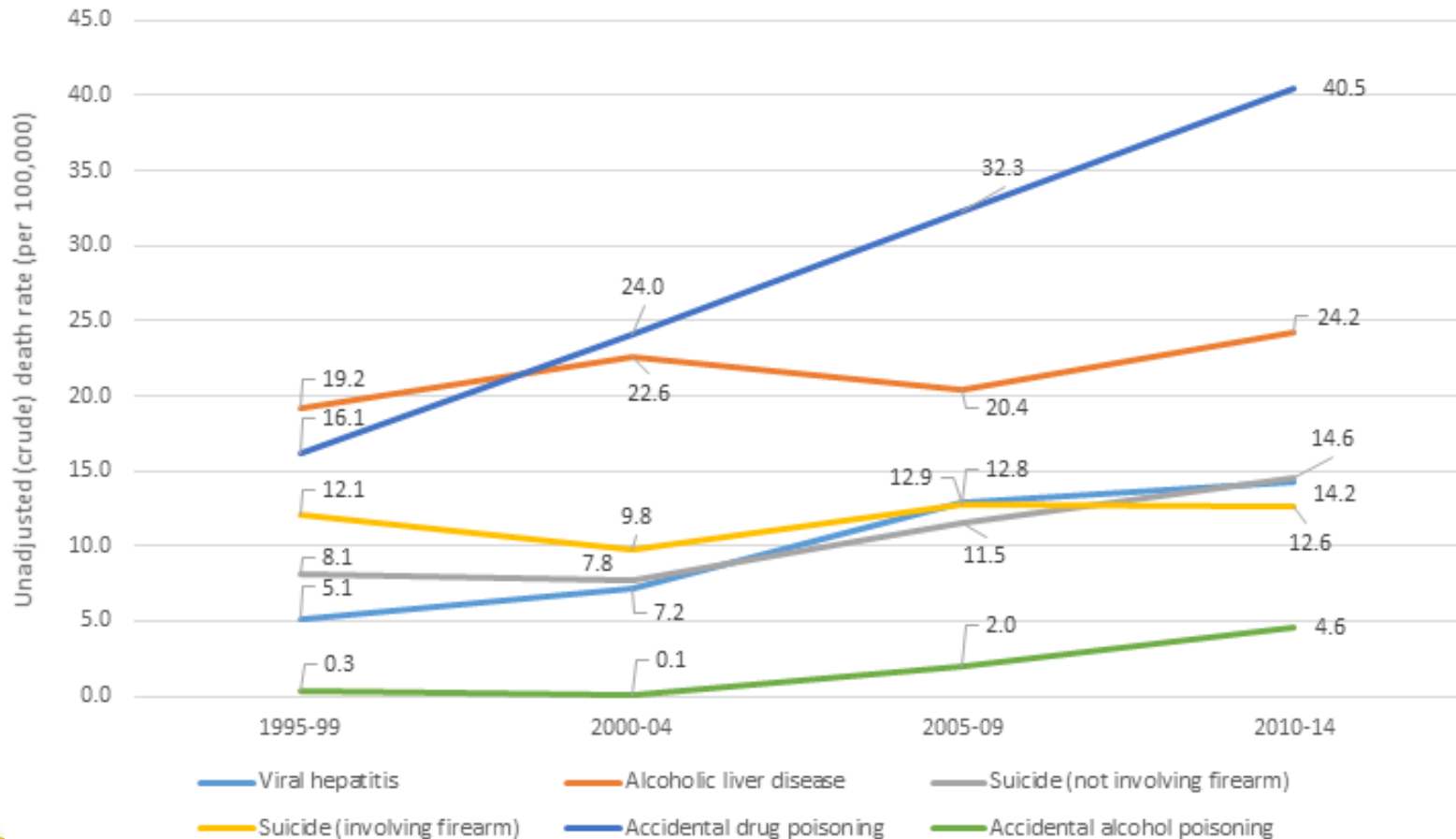
Death rates among middle-aged whites in Kern and Tulare are the highest in the South Central Valley region and have risen 11.2% since 1995.



Stress-related Deaths | South Central Valley sees dramatic increase among middle-aged whites ages 40-64



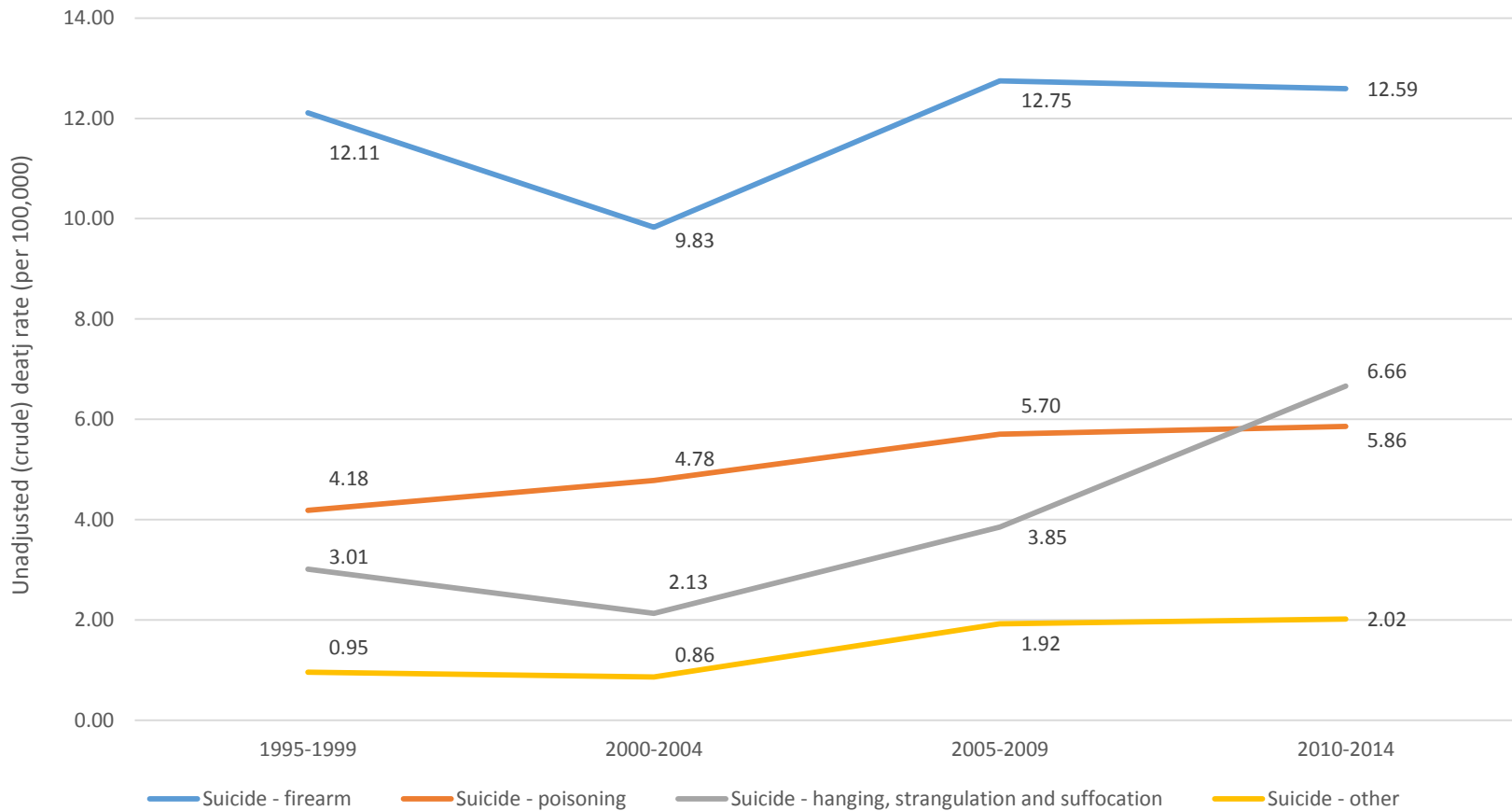
Diseases, injuries, and deaths that occur when people become depressed, turn to tobacco, drugs, or alcohol for relief, or commit suicide in desperation represent stress-related conditions. It is these causes of death that appear to be driving increasing death rates for middle age whites, particularly in communities struggling with economic challenges. Fatal drug overdoses have increased by 151%, viral hepatitis by 180%. Alcohol poisoning has increased 15-fold. **These increases far exceed state averages.**



Suicides by Method | Sharp increases in South Central Valley since 1995



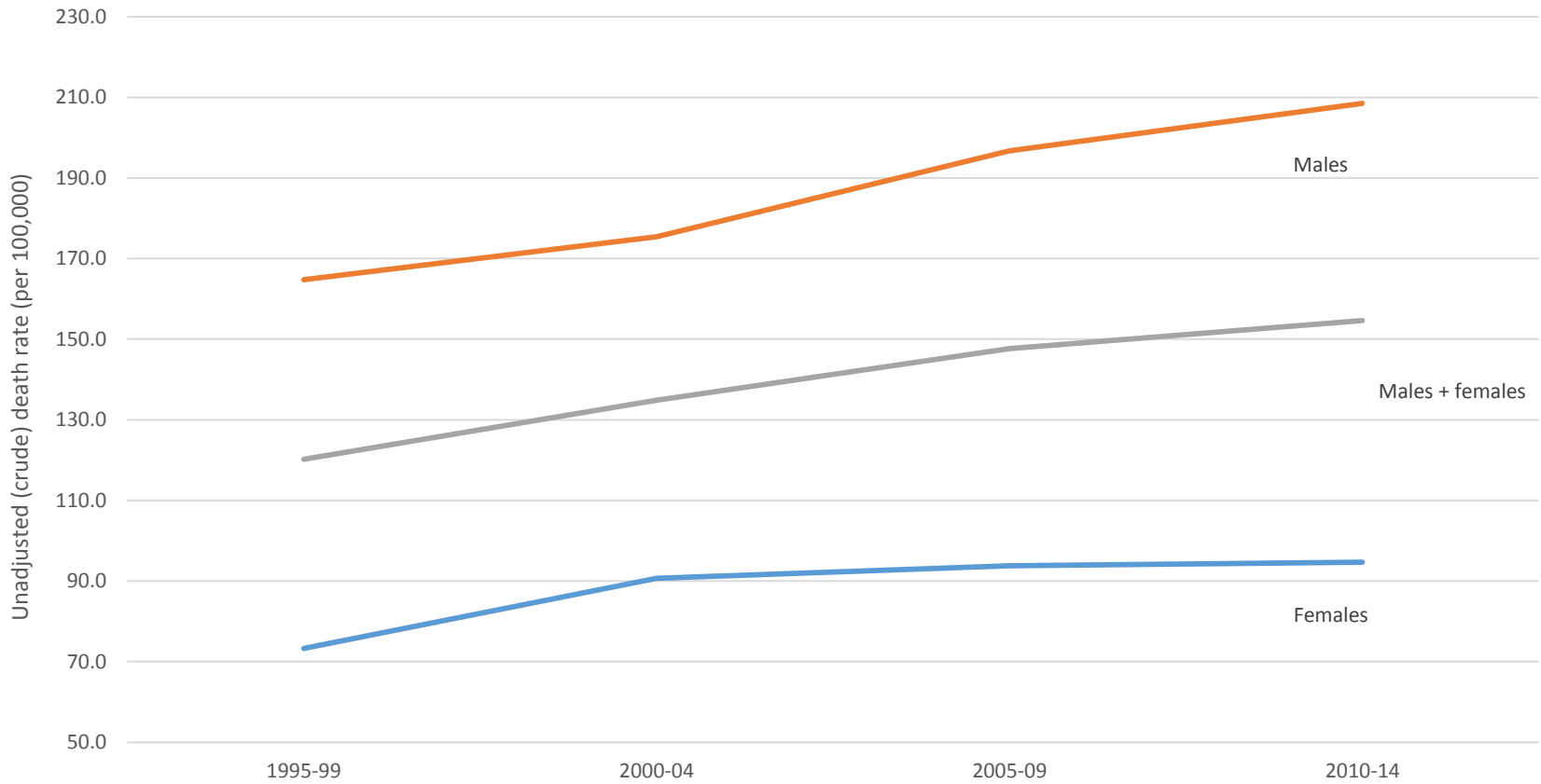
Persistent economic stresses can invoke stress, anxiety, depression, and despair. The suicide rate in the southern Central Valley has increased sharply since 1995. The uptick has been most pronounced for suicides involving hanging, strangulation, or suffocation, which increased by 121.3% in the region and by 133.1% in Kern and Tulare counties.



Younger Adults Impacted in Kern | Increased death rates among young white adults (ages 25-34)



In Kern County, death rates have also increased among young people. The all-cause mortality rate among whites ages 25-34 years increased by 29% between 1995-1999 and 2010-2014. Most of the increase in this age group occurred among men.



Alarming | California State vs Central Valley Counties



The overall white death rate for ages 40-64 was 512 per 100,000 from 2010-2014.

In the **four California counties** from the study (**shown in red**), the overall white death rate was almost 40% higher during the same period. That difference appears to be growing rapidly and is stunning health experts.

512 deaths / 100,000 people
White death rate for ages 40 – 64 from 2010 – 2014



708 deaths / 100,000 people (almost 40% higher)
White death rate for ages 40 – 64 in Fresno, Kings, Kern and Tulare from 2010 – 2014



DEATHS: All Causes

The Central Valley Region | Building Healthy Communities



The California Endowment continues to support grassroots community efforts to improve health outcomes through its 10-year, \$1 billion place-based initiative called Building Healthy Communities (BHC). Three of the 14 BHC sites are located in the San Joaquin Valley.

California is stronger when we stand as one and work together to reweave our tattered social compact. Access to high-quality affordable healthcare is a crucial cornerstone of that social compact. The shocking statistics from this preliminary data are driven by chronic stress. And chronic stress is driven by the policies that decision makers have created. And these policies are as lethal as any knife or any gun:

• **CHRONIC DISEASE**

- More predictable trends in the Central Valley, such as rising death rates from diabetes, speak to the obesity epidemic and continued challenges in accessing health care.
- Deaths from chronic lung disease have decreased elsewhere in California but increased by 36% and 32% among middle-aged whites since 1995 in Kern and Tulare counties, respectively.

• **HEALTH ACCESS**

- Residents have had the highest rates of participation in the Affordable Care Act in California
- Need medical home for primary care and chronic disease
- Need behavioral health services to address stress-related disease

• **ECONOMIC STRESS**

- Health burden from suicides and substance abuse are stress-related
 - Stagnant incomes, low wages, unemployment, rising poverty rates, and poor opportunities for education
 - Policies to improve state and local economy, as well as social mobility, are important to alter these health trends.

Questions?



Learn more at www.buildinghealthycommunities.org #ChangeTheOdds

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