

# Suicide rates among young Scottish men fall by over 40 percent

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In the 1980s and 90s, Scotland was known for its alarmingly high suicide rate. But since 2000, suicide rates have fallen sharply. A study published in the online open access journal *BMC Public Health* found this reduction is associated with a significant drop in hangings as a means of suicide.

Dr Cameron Stark led the research team from the Department of Public Health, NHS Highland. The research team based the analysis on routinely collected information for the period 1980-2004 from the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS). The data showed a 42% reduction in suicide rates among 15-29 year old men, from 42.5/100,000 in 2000 to 24.5/100 000 in 2004, There were no significant changes in trend in any other male age group in the period reviewed.

The fall in suicide rate among young men may be the result of this particular cohort changing their preferred method of suicide, namely hanging, to less fatal self-harm methods such as poisoning.

“If younger age groups move away from hanging, then a reduction in death rates could occur with no actual change in levels of suicidal behaviour,” warns Dr Stark. “It is encouraging that deaths from other methods in young men have not increased, but we need to review the statistics carefully for non-fatalities before we can be really sure about a true decrease in self-harming behaviour, rather than just a change in method preference.”

Numerous suicide prevention policy initiatives have been implemented by the Scottish government, focussing on social exclusion and deprivation. Since 2001, the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing has launched 'Choose Life' (the Scottish suicide prevention strategy), the 'See Me' anti-stigma programme, 'Breathing Space' (a confidential telephone helpline targeted at young men), and the development of a recovery-oriented mental health programme, the Scottish Recovery Network.

“It is tempting to associate the lower suicide rate in younger men, and to an extent in younger women, with these initiatives,” says Stark, “For instance, 'Choose Life' has requested the media not to report the method of suicide in their reports, but the reduction in cases of hanging seems to pre-date this appeal. We need to do more work before a definite link between rates and initiatives can be drawn.”

Source: BioMed Central

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