

# UK teen suicide rates on the decline

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Suicide rates in those aged 10-19 in the UK declined by 28% in the seven year period from 1997-2003, shows a study published today in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. The study, carried out by researchers at the University of Manchester, showed that the decline was particularly marked in young males, where rates declined by 35%.

Despite the decline, however, suicide remains more common among young males than young females. For every one adolescent female (aged 15-19 years) who commits suicide in the UK, there are three adolescent males, the study revealed.

The research, which was carried out as part of the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness, showed that there were 1,722 adolescent and juvenile deaths by suicide in the UK between 1997 and 2003, which represents 4% of all suicides in that time period. The majority of young people were aged 15-19 (93% of the sample), and overall, the most common methods of suicide were hanging, followed by self-poisoning.

"Between 1997 and 2003, we found that suicide rates fell significantly, although we can only speculate on what factors may have contributed to the decline," said Dr Kirsten Windfuhr, from the Centre for Suicide Prevention at the University of Manchester. "Although changes to antidepressant prescribing may have been one factor contributing to changing suicide rates, it is likely that a combination of factors, both clinical and socio-economic, will have contributed to the decrease in suicide rates. Suicide is a rare event, and is, thankfully, rarer still among

children and adolescents. However, it is still one of the leading causes of death among young people and continued monitoring of recent suicide trends is important."

Over the seven year period, only 14% of young people who committed suicide were in contact with mental health services in the year prior to their death, compared to 26% in adults. Again, there was a marked difference between males and females, with 20% of young females in contact with mental health services compared to only 12% of young males.

"The low rate of service contact in young males is particularly interesting. Young men currently have the highest rates of suicide in the UK, and yet they are least likely to seek help," said Windfuhr. "Further research is needed to identify the specific risk factors associated with young suicide, and a multi-agency approach including health, social and education services may be the most effective strategy for preventing suicide in young people. In particular, research should be focused on the barriers which prevent young males from seeking help."

Source: Wiley

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