

Motherhood appears to protect against suicide

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Motherhood appears to protect against suicide, with increasing numbers of children associated with decreasing rates of death from suicide, found an article in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

The study, following 1 292 462 [women](#) in Taiwan over 20 years, was undertaken to confirm a hypothesis postulated by the renowned sociologist Emile Durkheim in 1897 that parenthood is protective against suicide. It found a 39% decrease in suicide-related mortality among women with two live births and a 60% decrease among women with three or more births compared to women with one child. The participants, who were followed until Dec. 31, 2007, gave birth between Jan. 1, 1978 and Dec. 31, 1987.

As the limited number of previous studies were conducted in developed countries with smaller sample sizes, this study is significant because of its large size and the number of deaths from suicides - 2252 - in the cohort.

In Taiwan, suicide is the eighth leading cause of death among men and the ninth among women and has been consistently increasing since 1999. Most Western countries have had a stable or decreasing suicide rate in the 1990s. The male to female ratio of suicide is often greater than 3:1 in Western countries, whereas it is 2:1 in Taiwan because of high suicide rates in women. In Western countries, rates of suicide among women have been decreasing while rates among men have been increasing.

"A clear tendency was found toward decreasing suicide rates with increasing number of children after controlling for age at first birth, marital status, years of schooling, and place of delivery," writes author Dr. Chun-Yuh Yang, Kaoshiung Medical University, Kaoshiung, Taiwan. "The protective effect of parity on risk of death from suicide was much stronger than previously reported estimates. Given that the women included in this study were young (the large majority of suicide-related deaths occurred before premenopausal age) and were among the youngest reported for any country, this finding is particularly noteworthy."

Having children may protect against [suicide](#) because children may increase a mother's feelings of self-worth. [Children](#) may also provide emotional and material support to a mother and provide her with a positive social role. As well, [motherhood](#) may enhance social networks and social support. The finding is in agreement with Durkheim's hypothesis.

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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