

# Public awareness campaign lowers male suicides in German city

September 30 2010, By Sharyn Alden

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A recent study revealed that men might connect strongly to publicity campaigns about depression and suicide, particularly when they have options for anonymous help. In Regensburg, Germany, a two-year intervention campaign resulted in a marked drop in male suicides.

When the study began in 1998, the [suicide](#) rate for men in the German city was 34 per 100,000, significantly higher than the nation's average rate of 14. In 2007, the male suicide rate in the city was 22 per 100,000.

Regensburg is a partner of the German Alliance Against Depression, a community-based pilot project initiated in Nuremberg with the German Research Network on Depression and Suicide. When the alliance formed in 2003, Regensburg had the highest rate of depression and suicide in all of Germany, according to the researchers.

The study examined suicide rates between 1998 and 2007 — five years before and five years after the start of the community-wide intervention. The authors looked in Regensburg, other control regions in Germany and areas without depression-awareness programs.

Bettina Huebner-Liebermann, at the psychiatry and psychotherapy department at the University of Regensburg, led the study, which appears online in the September-October issue of the journal *General Hospital Psychiatry*.

The prevention program included (1) distribution of posters and flyers

throughout the community, for instance in malls, (2) radio, television, newspaper and magazine ads, (3) presentations at continuing medical education events (4) training workshops for community professionals police and firefighters, teachers and pharmacists and (5) self-help groups for relatives of those with depression.

Huebner-Liebermann said, “It is crucial to combine education of general practitioners who focus on male depression with [media messages](#) for the general public as well as information at shopping malls.”

Paula Clayton, M.D., medical director for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, said, “It is very impressive that they were able to lower the male suicide rates in the first year of the study. However, the rate drifted back up even though intervention continued. Similar studies have only lowered female [suicide rates](#), so this is encouraging.”

She noted that her foundation has billboard campaigns in several U.S. cities. “Studies show that people visit the advertised Web site, but they don’t fill out the questionnaire, and we have no data on whether they visit their physician. Still, public awareness campaigns seem to be important.”

While no simple answer exists to prevent suicide, the recent study might offer some clues.

“The study indicated that their anonymous telephone consultation hour with three male psychiatrists reached mainly men,” Clayton said. “This may be one of the keys to providing men with anonymous consultations as a first step.”

**More information:** Huebner-Liebermann B, et al. Reducing suicides through an alliance against depression? *Gen Hosp Psych* 32(5), 2010.

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