

It could be dangerous living in Ambridge

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With a risk of traumatic death far higher than the national average, rural life may not be so idyllic in Ambridge, the fictitious village in the BBC radio series, *The Archers*, finds research in the Christmas issue published in the *British Medical Journal* today.

However, the study also shows that the overall mortality rate in Ambridge is slightly lower than the country as a whole, so characters should not worry unduly. Those who do not perish in a hideous accident have a good chance of living for a long time.

The author, Rob Stepney, wanted to investigate whether *The Archers* was any more true to life (and [death](#)) than TV soap operas. Established research has concluded that characters in *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* have a higher [risk](#) of death than bomb disposal experts and racing drivers.

Could life on a radio soap opera be safer wondered Stepney? He reviewed deaths, childbirth and episodes of serious illness over a 20 year period in the series (1991 to September 2011).

Of the 15 deaths recorded in Ambridge over the 20 years, nine were of male characters and six of female characters. This equates to a mortality rate of 7.8 per 1,000 population per year for men compared with 8.5 per 1,000 in England and Wales mid-way through the study period. For women in Ambridge, the mortality rate was 5.2 deaths per 1,000 compared with 5.8 per 1,000 nationally.

However the chance of accidental death or suicide in Ambridge is worryingly high. During the study period there was a road traffic accident, a death when a tractor overturned, Nigel Pargetter fell from a roof, and there was a suicide from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

These figures translate into 27% of the total mortality in Ambridge. But in real life, in the year 2000, accidents accounted for only 4% of deaths in men.

To compensate for the 15 deaths in the past 20 years, 13 children have been born to the 115 characters. The annual live birth rate in Ambridge in 1992-2011 was 5.6 per 1,000 compared with 11.4 per 1,000 in England and Wales.

Access to healthcare appears to be good in Ambridge, however. One character, Elizabeth Archer, who was born with a heart defect, recently had a life-saving implant operation. She was lucky as nationally fewer than 100 such implants were carried out in 2009.

In conclusion, Stepney says that, if characters in *The Archers* steer clear of accidents, Ambridge appears to be a safe place to live.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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