

Gap between Scottish and English suicide rates widens

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A new study has revealed the widening gap in suicide rates between Scotland and England & Wales due to a large extent to the number of young Scottish men taking their lives.

The research, carried out by the Universities of Manchester and Edinburgh and the Medical Research Council Social and Public Health Sciences Unit in Glasgow, examined [suicide](#) rates north and south of the border between 1960 and 2008.

The team found that the suicide rate in both men and women was in fact lower in Scotland until around 1968 when it overtook the rate in [England & Wales](#). Suicides among men continued to rise on both sides of the border until the early 1990s when rates in England & Wales began to fall and the gap between north and south widened markedly.

"Our research reveals that the suicide rate in Scotland compared to that in England & Wales has three distinct phases," said joint lead researcher Dr Roger Webb, from The University of Manchester's Centre for Suicide Prevention.

"Up until the late 1960s, the suicide rate in England was always higher than that in Scotland, but around 1968 the rates 'crossed over' with Scotland having the higher rate in both genders. In phase two, between 1969 and 1991, the rates remained steadily higher in Scotland than in England, but from 1992 onwards we see a third phase where the suicide mortality [gap](#) between the two countries widened markedly."

The study, published online by The British Journal of Psychiatry today (Thursday), looked at suicide trends by gender and by age group (15-44, 45-64 and 65-plus years), as well as method of suicide.

Dr Webb said: "The research clearly indicates that much of the divergence in the national [suicide rates](#) has been driven by a marked increase in risk among Scottish young adults, especially males, and deaths by hanging in this group in particular. Our analyses also suggest that the difference in risk over time between countries is unlikely to be explained by cause of death classification differences.

"However, one of the key changes in methods used during the study period was the marked increase in suicide by hanging, particularly among young men in Scotland. This is of particular concern as hanging has high case fatality and is difficult to prevent, except within institutional settings. It has been proposed that a public information campaign about hanging would be the most useful way to tackle the increase of suicide deaths by this method."

Joint lead researcher Professor Stephen Platt, from the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Population Health Sciences, added: "This study adds to our understanding about patterns of suicide in Great Britain by producing sound evidence on divergences in long-term trends in Scotland compared to England & Wales. In a future companion paper we will suggest explanations for the persisting higher rate of suicide in [Scotland](#)."

More information: 'Trends in national suicide rates for Scotland and for England & Wales, 1960-2008,' *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

Provided by University of Manchester

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