

Children of 'The Troubles' more prone to suicide

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People who grew up in the worst years of 'The Troubles ' are more prone to suicide in Northern Ireland, according to new research carried out at Queen's University Belfast.

The research, which examined death registration data over the last 40 years, found that the highest suicide rate is for men aged 35-44 (41 per 100,000 by 2010) followed closely by the 25-34 and 45-54 [age groups](#). The findings showed that children who grew up in the worst years of violence between 1969 and 1977-78 are the cohort which now has the highest [suicide rates](#) and the most rapidly increasing rates of all age groups.

The study found that the overall rate of suicide for both men and women in Northern Ireland doubled in the decade following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, rising from 8.6 per 100,000 of the population in 1998 to 16 per 100,000 by 2010. Suicide rates for men went from 13 per 100,000 of the population in 1997 to 24 per 100,000 by 2008; for women the increase was from a rate of 3.9 to 7.3 over the same period.

Speaking about his research, Professor Mike Tomlinson, from the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at Queen's, said: "The rise in suicide rates in the decade from 1998 to 2008 coincide with the move from conflict to peace in Northern Ireland. The increase in suicide rates can be attributed to a complex range of social and [psychological factors](#). These include the growth in [social isolation](#), [poor](#)

[mental health](#) arising from the experience of conflict, and the greater [political stability](#) of the past decade. The transition to peace means that cultures of externalised aggression are no longer socially approved or politically acceptable. Violence and aggression have become more internalised instead. We seem to have adjusted to peace by means of mass medication with anti-depressants, alcohol and non-[prescription drugs](#), the consumption of which has risen dramatically in the period of peace."

The research also compared hospital presentations resulting from self-harming in nine cities across Britain, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. It found that Derry had the highest rate of such presentations, with 611 per 100,000 of the population in 2009, while Dublin, had a rate of 352 presentations in the same year. The self harm rate in Derry was higher than that of Manchester, Leeds, Oxford, Limerick, Cork, Galway and Waterford.

Professor Tomlinson said: "During the 1970s and 1980s, the suicide rate rose steadily up to a rate of 10 per 100,000, low by international standards. It then fell slightly over a ten year period. The puzzle is, why have we seen such a dramatic increase in the rate since 1998? What this research reveals for the first time is that the age groups with the highest suicide rates are the cohort who were children during the worst years of violence. Those born and growing up in the conflict experienced no other social context until the late 1990s. There are clear indications from the research that this cohort not only has the highest suicide rate but also the most rapidly increasing rate when compared with other age groups.

"Northern Ireland's suicide prevention strategy has so far made little impact on the upward trend. It may well be missing the target by over-emphasizing interventions with younger age groups and failing to focus on those who experienced the worst of the violence."

More information: [iss.sagepub.com/content/early/...
80912443579.abstract](https://iss.sagepub.com/content/early/.../80912443579.abstract)

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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