

UK recession may be to blame for over 1,000 suicides in England

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A paper published in the *British Medical Journal* today suggests that over 1000 people have committed suicide due to the 2008-2010 economic recession in the UK (846 men and 155 women).

Suicides began to rise in the UK in 2008 following 20 years of decline - suicides rose 8% among men and 9% among women in 2008, compared to 2007. And even though suicides did begin to fall in 2010 figures were still above the 2007 averages.

Previous studies have concluded that unemployment does increase the risk of [suicide](#) and non-fatal self-harm but while suicides tend to increase during economic downturns, the strength of this association varies from country to country.

Authors therefore from the University of Liverpool, University of Cambridge and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine tested the [hypothesis](#) that the UK regions experiencing the greatest rises in unemployment have seen the largest increase in suicides.

They took data on suicides from the National Clinical and [Health Outcomes](#) Database (NCHOD) covering the years 2000 – 2010 where data was available for 93 regions, and unemployment statistics were taken from the number of people claiming benefits from the Office of National Statistics.

The authors calculated the number of excess suicides attributable to the

financial crisis by looking at the total number which were over and above historical trends.

They estimate that 846 more male suicides and 155 more female suicides took place between 2008 to 2010 than would have been expected if previous trends had continued. Between 2000 and 2010 each annual 10% increase in the number of unemployed was associated with a 1.4% increase in the number of male suicides.

The number of unemployed men rose on average across the UK's regions by 25.6% each year in 2008 – 2010 which was associated with a yearly increase in male suicides of 3.6%, corresponding to 329 additional suicides, attributable to unemployment, between 2008 and 2010.

The authors say that the study cannot prove that the association between job losses and suicides is causal yet these findings can explain why there was a small reduction in suicides in 2010, following a slight recovery in male employment.

The authors say that the analysis has several implications for those seeking to protect the most vulnerable in the ongoing [economic recession](#) and "although the initial economic shock of the recession does increase suicide risk, policies that promote re-employment may reverse this trend". They conclude with a suggestion of further research to "understand the reasons why suicides have risen recently among women, given the absence of an association with their employment" and that the pressing issues of unemployment and the economic recovery poses a danger that "the human cost of continued high levels of [unemployment](#) will outweigh the purported benefits of budget cuts".

Provided by British Medical Journal

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