

Study identifies accelerated risk pattern of suicide towards age 21

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(Medical Xpress)—Suicide risk patterns accelerate up to the age of 20 before moderately levelling off, according to a new report published in the *Cambridge Journal of Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*.

The study conducted by researchers from University College Dublin and St Vincent's University Hospital examined almost 12,000 suicide (and undetermined) deaths between the ages of 15 and 35 for Ireland and the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) between 2000 to 2006.

The study shows that males have a significant rate of increase in suicides up to [age 20](#), with a rate of increase of 94.6 cases per year before 20, compared with 23.7 cases per year after age 20. The differences for females was shown to be in the same direction but not statistically significant, with a rate of increase of 10.6 cases per year before age 20 and 5.7 cases per year after age 20.

The findings reveal that the current reporting of suicide in five-year age bands may conceal age-related periods of risk for suicide, and that this may have implications for [suicide prevention](#) programmes for young adults under age 21.

The study authors note that ageing in years towards 21 may simply coincide with the peak age of onset for major [psychiatric disorders](#) such as depression or psychosis in males. But that they are 'unable to explore this possibility due to the aggregation of data across age ranges of

possible confounds such as mental illness and alcohol use in the existing international data'.

"Our findings challenge current international practice in which suicide mortality is reported in 5-year age bands, in that such reporting may eclipse age-related risk factors for [suicide](#) such as that we have identified," said Professor Kevin Malone from the UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science, and St Vincent's University Hospital.

"We suggest that future reporting of national [suicide rates](#) in years, as opposed to 5-year age bands, will facilitate more in-depth research and understanding of possible age-related periods of increased [suicide risk](#) in young adults, where an epidemiological transition is apparent for young men before versus after age 21," added Professor Malone.

Provided by University College Dublin

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