

US foreclosures drive up suicide rate: Middle-aged adults especially vulnerable

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Credit: David Wagner/public domain

The recent U.S. foreclosure crisis contributed significantly to the nation's jump in suicides, independent of other economic factors associated with the Great Recession, according to a study by Dartmouth and Purdue professors publishing Monday.

The [study](#), publishing in the June issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* and available online now, is the first to ever show a correlation between foreclosure and [suicide rates](#).

The authors analyzed state-level foreclosure and suicide rates from 2005 to 2010. During that period, the U.S. suicide rate increased nearly 13 percent, and annual home foreclosures hit a record 2.9 million (in 2010).

"It seems that foreclosures affect suicide rates in two ways," said co-author [Jason Houle](#), assistant professor of sociology at Dartmouth College. "The loss of a home clearly impacts individuals and families, and can arouse feelings of loss, shame, or regret. At the same time, rising foreclosure rates affect entire communities because they're associated with a number of community level resources and stresses, including an increase in crime, abandoned homes, and a sense of insecurity."

The effects of foreclosures on suicides were strongest among adults 46 to 64 years old, who also experienced the highest increase in suicide rates during the recessionary period.

"Foreclosures are a unique suicide risk among the middle-aged," Houle said. "Middle-aged adults are more likely to own homes and have a higher risk of home foreclosure. They're also nearing retirement age, so losing assets at that stage in life is likely to have a profound effect on mental health and well-being."

Houle's co-author is Michael Light, assistant professor of sociology at Purdue University.

While other studies have shown links between economic cycles and suicide rates, this is the first to look specifically at [foreclosures](#).

Provided by Dartmouth College

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