

# Research finds risk of suicide and mental illness increases during recession

November 6 2015

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The economic recession of 2008 – 2010 was followed by increases in rates of suicide, suicide attempts, and mental illness, a PolicyBristol report from a team led by academics at the University of Bristol has found.

Funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), and in

collaboration with colleagues from the Universities of Manchester and Oxford, the researchers from the School of Social and Community Medicine used national mortality statistics, inquest reports of people dying by suicide and interviews with people affected by the recession, including 19 who had made [suicide attempts](#), to understand the ways in which the recession affected mental health and suicide.

David Gunnell, professor of epidemiology at the University of Bristol said: "Prior to the recession, rates of suicide in the UK were declining. Around the time of the recession, this decline reversed, and similar patterns were seen in other European countries and in North America. The greatest rise in the incidence of suicide appeared to be in young men.

"The consequences of recession on individuals – unemployment, the risk of losing a home, or financial difficulties caused by debt, wage cuts, demotions, reduced hours or disputes over benefits – are all likely to be important contributors to the rises."

Other research has explored impact of the [recession](#) on mental health, and has found the most vulnerable to problems such as job losses or debt are those with pre-existing mental health problems or past psychiatric illnesses. The Bristol researchers found many individuals who die by suicide in the context of employment or financial difficulties were not in contact with [mental health services](#) or their GP.

Professor Gunnell added: "These findings have a range of policy implications. It's important that in times of high unemployment appropriate investment is made in [labour market](#) programmes to support young people who are entering the labour market for the first time. Similarly, ensuring the provision of adequate welfare benefits could mitigate the impact of future recessions on [suicide risk](#).

"It's also vitally important that staff who come into contact with vulnerable individuals whose [mental health](#) is affected by economic difficulties are trained to recognise and respond to risk, and are properly informed about the places to steer people affected towards for appropriate help. Those agencies and organisations that provide advice services, such as the CAB and debt advice centres, must themselves be funded properly."

The research team now plan to pilot an intervention to reduce risk in people who are vulnerable as a result of financial problems, unemployment or problems accessing benefits.

**More information:** [www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/s...uicide-recession.pdf](http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/s...uicide-recession.pdf)

Provided by University of Bristol

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