

Suicide rate for people with epilepsy exceeds levels in general population

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Researchers at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control studied the prevalence of suicide among people with epilepsy compared to the population overall and estimated that the annual suicide mortality rate among those with epilepsy was 22 percent higher than in the general population. Results are online in the journal *Epilepsy and Behavior*.

This is the first study to estimate [suicide rates](#) among people with [epilepsy](#) in a large U.S. [general population](#). The researchers also investigated [suicide](#) risk factors specific to epilepsy.

The study, co-authored by Dale Hesdorffer, PhD, professor of Epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health, was based on data from the U.S. National Violent Death Reporting System, a multiple-state, population-based, surveillance system that collects information on violent deaths including suicide. From 2003 through 2011, the researchers identified 972 suicide cases with epilepsy and 81,529 suicide cases without epilepsy in 17 states among people 10 years old and older. They estimated their suicide rates, evaluated suicide risk among people with epilepsy, and investigated suicide risk factors specific to epilepsy by comparing those with and without epilepsy. In 16 of the 17 states providing continual data from 2005 through 2011, they also compared suicide trends in people with epilepsy and without epilepsy.

Compared with the non-epilepsy population, those with epilepsy were more likely to have died from suicide in houses, apartments, or

residential institutions—81 percent versus 76 percent, respectively—and were twice as likely to poison themselves (38 percent versus 17 percent). More people with epilepsy aged 40-49 died from suicide than comparably aged persons without epilepsy (29 percent vs. 22 percent). The proportion of suicides among those with epilepsy increased steadily from 2005 through 2010, peaking significantly in 2010 before falling.

"Of particular significance is what we learned about those 40 to 49 years old," said Dr. Hesdorffer. "Efforts for [suicide prevention](#) should target people with epilepsy in this age category specifically. Additional preventive efforts should include reducing the availability or exposure to poisons, especially at home, and supporting other evidence-based programs to reduce mental illness comorbidity associated with suicide."

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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