

# Economic uncertainty sparks suicide

October 10 2016

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Credit: University of Portsmouth

Younger and older males in the USA are more likely to commit suicide at times of increased policy-related economic uncertainty, according to a new study.

The research – carried out by Dr Nikolaos Antonakakis, Visiting Fellow at the University of Portsmouth's Business School and Associate Professor at Webster Vienna University, and Professor Rangan Gupta from the University of Pretoria – looked at suicide mortality in the US over the period 1950-2013, taking account of other socioeconomic factors that influence suicide mortality.

While it has long been recognised that periods of economic uncertainty,

characterised by increased unemployment and lower economic activity, are associated with increased suicide rates, the research is the first to examine the impact of policy-related economic uncertainty on suicide mortality.

Although they found particular impacts in younger and older males, the female population across all ages was found to be resilient to policy-related economic uncertainty.

The researchers recommend that the US government provide information for the general public that communicates clearly that the government is working hard to minimise uncertainty, and that counselling services are available for vulnerable people, particularly younger and older males.

Dr Antonakakis said: "Economic uncertainty is unavoidable. As our results show, it is higher uncertainty that tends to cause increases in suicide rates.

"At times of uncertainty, this means government must not only ensure that it is making strong efforts to ensure lower levels of uncertainty. It must also actively and clearly communicate this in information for the public generally, and younger and older males particularly.

"At the same time, the US government should also ensure that appropriate counselling services are available for vulnerable people, and also communicate this clearly.

"The bottom line of our analysis is that uncertainty should be kept within bounds and attempts to do so must be well-publicised. Of course, at the same time, the importance of other predictors in affecting [suicide rates](#) like unemployment and growth slowdown cannot be ignored, but these variables are likely to improve with reduction in economic policy

uncertainty."

The research is published in *Social Indicators Research*.

**More information:** Nikolaos Antonakakis et al. Is Economic Policy Uncertainty Related to Suicide Rates? Evidence from the United States, *Social Indicators Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s11205-016-1384-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1384-4)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: Economic uncertainty sparks suicide (2016, October 10) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-10-economic-uncertainty-suicide.html>

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