

Railway suicides cluster near mental hospitals: study

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Railway suicides in Austria are suspiciously clustered near psychiatric hospitals, scientists reported Wednesday.

More than 1,100 people in Austria took their own lives from 1998 to 2009 by laying on the tracks or hurling themselves in front of oncoming trains, they noted in a study published in *Royal Society Open Science*.

Using [statistical methods](#), public data and Google Maps, the researchers plotted each death to within a kilometre (0.6 miles) of where it occurred.

They identified 15 suicide "hotspots" accounting for less than one percent of track length but 17 percent of railway suicides.

"We looked for factors that were associated with those hotspots," said Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, senior author of the study and a researcher at the suicide research unit in the University of Vienna.

"What we found is that they are associated with a density of psychiatric institutions," he told AFP.

If confirmed, the results suggest mental facilities should be "structurally separated" from railway tracks or located at a safe distance.

Niederkrotenthaler acknowledged that a surer method of verifying the link would be to check police and medical records to see if persons committing suicide had a history of mental illness, or ever resided in a

psychiatric institution.

More than a million people kill themselves around the world every year, according to the World Health Organization.

In Western countries, [suicide](#) ranks consistently among the top three causes of death among young people.

Suicide is not only tragic for those who take their lives, but wreaks havoc on families and communities too, the researchers note.

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