

Evidence of midlife suicide among females in Western society

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New research from the University of Warwick documents modern international evidence of a midlife peak in suicide risk.

The [pattern](#) is particularly marked among females, and within the English-speaking countries. In many nations it also holds for males. Middle-aged people now commit [suicide](#) at almost twice the rate of individuals in their 30s or 60s.

Researchers Andrew Oswald and Ahmed Tohamy point out that the midlife-crisis pattern is consistent with mounting evidence of other kinds. The now-regular wellbeing surveys by the UK Office for National Statistics, for example, reveal that happiness is lowest among those close to 50 years old. Similar evidence is emerging for other European nations and the United States.

The authors examine information on 28 countries. They point out that suicide research has typically focused on males, and that it is often wrongly believed by the public that suicide is mainly a problem of the young.

"Suicide among the middle-aged, in the richest and safest societies ever known in human history, is a major paradox and public-policy concern. Not only does it matter in itself—it is also a marker of a wider phenomenon of midlife distress. What is it that is going wrong in people's lives around the late 40s, when individuals tend to be prosperous, still healthy, and at the height of their powers?" said Andrew

Oswald, a professor of economics and behavioural science at Warwick.

The authors consider the theory, due originally to the psychologist Elliott Jaques in the 1960s, that in the middle of life a human being eventually becomes cognizant of their own mortality. The midlife patterns may also relate to dashed aspirations, the authors believe, or it might even be deeply biological in some way not currently understood. The authors point out that some recent research has found [evidence](#) of a psychological midlife low in great apes. "It may be that humans have an innate tendency to a midlife low," said Andrew Oswald.

Provided by University of Warwick

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