

Attempted suicide in the young related to dramatically reduced life expectancy

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People who have been treated for attempted suicide or suicidal behaviour have a much shorter life expectancy and usually die of non-suicide-related causes, a new study from Karolinska Institutet and Umeå University published in the scientific journal *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* reports.

"Suicide is, of course, very common in this vulnerable patient group, but a deeper analysis shows that the excess mortality is largely attributable to non-psychiatric diseases," explains Jussi Jokinen, psychiatrist and professor at Umeå University and researcher at Karolinska Institutet's Department of Clinical Neuroscience. "We also found significant gender differences in [life](#) expectancy, especially in the younger patients."

Up to 18 years shorter life expectancy

The researchers studied over 185,000 individuals in care for self-harming behaviour between 1970 and 2010. Their results show that 20-year-old men, after their first attempted suicide, had a remaining life expectancy that was a full 18 years shorter than the rest of the population; the corresponding figure for women was 11 years. For 50-year-olds who had made their first [suicide attempt](#), the reduction in life expectancy for men and women was 10 and 8 years respectively. If the first suicide attempt was not made until the individual's 70s, the reduction in remaining life expectancy was about 4 years for both sexes.

By way of comparison, in Sweden in 2016, newborns have a life expectancy of 80.6 years (boys) and 84.1 years (girls). 50-year-olds have a remaining [life expectancy](#) of 31.9 years (men) and 34.9 years (women).

Reveal a lack of equal treatment

The study shows that actual suicide caused a smaller proportion of deaths in those who had been admitted into care for attempted [suicide](#) or self-harming behaviour. A more common cause of death was disease.

"Our results reveal a lack of equal treatment whereby psychiatric [patients](#) don't seem to receive the care they need," says principal

investigator Dr Rickard Ljung, docent at Karolinska Institutet's Institute of Environmental Medicine. "Our previous research has shown that [psychiatric patients](#) receive poorer treatment for their non-psychiatric disorders and diseases."

More information: J. Jokinen et al. Life expectancy after the first suicide attempt, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* (2017). DOI: [10.1111/acps.12842](https://doi.org/10.1111/acps.12842)

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