

# Researchers find no immediate increase in rates of suicide globally during first 15 months of the pandemic

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Dr. Eve Griffin, CEO of the National Suicide Research Foundation, says that the economic measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic by several countries, including Ireland, were critical in providing families and individuals with ongoing support during that time. Credit: Ruben Martinez (UCC TV)

A new study published by researchers in the School of Public Health at University College Cork and the National Suicide Research Foundation has shown that there was no increase in suicide rates in the initial months

of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [systematic review](#), [published](#) in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, reviewed data from more than 25 countries, across four of the six World Health Organization (WHO) regions.

It found that there was no increase in rates of suicide between two time periods, before (prior to February 2020) and during (from March 2020 to June 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic. The pooled suicide rate in the studied period before the pandemic was 11.38 per 100,000 and in the period during the pandemic was 10.65 per 100,000.

Despite concerns about the potential negative effects of the pandemic on suicide risk factors such as [mental health issues](#), [domestic violence](#), and financial stressors, a range of factors may have served as protective effects to the risk of suicide during this period—including the economic supports provided by many governments to mitigate temporary business closures, boosts in mental health care (including telehealth), and a strengthening of community and family bonds during this time.

Longer-term studies are needed to monitor trends of suicide in the post-pandemic period. This study highlights the need for high-quality and timely data on suicide deaths worldwide, to inform adequate suicide prevention and support.

Dr. Ana Paula da Cunha Varella, School of Public Health at UCC, and lead researcher of the study said, "As we consider the strategies that helped to protect mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, our study not only sheds light on mental health outcomes during crises but also emphasizes the critical need for improved suicide data reporting. Enhanced surveillance systems, including [real-time](#) monitoring, are essential to better understand the impact of preventive efforts and to guide more effective strategies for suicide prevention."

Dr. Zubair Kabir, senior lecturer, School of Public Health at UCC and senior researcher of the study, said, "The underlying message of this study profoundly reminds us of mental health support services that are crucially important during public health emergencies, including pandemics. Unfortunately, the study findings cannot be generalizable to low-and [middle-income countries](#) (LMIC), as we did not identify quality peer-reviewed articles relevant to our research question- this signals the need for real-world-data informing policy makers in LMIC to generate real-world-evidence."

Dr. Eve Griffin, [chief executive officer](#), National Suicide Research Foundation, said, "There is an opportunity to reflect on what worked well in terms of providing mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the economic measures put in place by several countries, including Ireland, were critical in providing families and individuals with ongoing support during that time. Despite this, we know that engagement with mental health services increased during the pandemic, therefore the longer-term impacts of the pandemic need to be monitored."

**More information:** Ana Paula da Cunha Varella et al, Suicide rates before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-024-02617-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-024-02617-1)

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