

Some aspects on suicide statistics

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One way to get information about suicide and the spreading in the world is to look at the WHO home-page or to study the Injury Chart book for the year 2000 or later.

There you will find e.g. this map



Suicide mortality rates (per 100 000 population) in WHO regions, 2000												
Africa		Americas		South-East Asia		Europe		Eastern Mediterranean		Western Pacific		
LMIC	HIC	LMIC	LMIC	India	Other LMIC	HIC	LMIC	HIC	LMIC	HIC	China	Other LMIC
4.3	11.6	5.6	13.6	5.9	12.9	28.2	3.2	4.9	17.4	23.0	6.6	

HIC, High-income countries; LMIC, Low- and middle-income countries.

Source: WHO Internet

As you can see there is information about the mortality rates for more or less every part of the world. The question is if the picture gives a correct picture of the magnitude of the problem in the world.

Let's look at a table from the same source.

Suicide mortality rates (per 100 000 population) in WHO regions by age group and sex, 2000

Age group (years)	World			Africa		Americas		South-East Asia		Europe		Eastern Mediterranean		Western Pacific	
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
All ages	13.5	19.6	21.2	6.5	2.1	12.6	3.3	13.6	8.2	35.0	8.3	5.0	4.8	19.6	21.2
0-4	—	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
5-14	1.8	1.1	1.1	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.6	3.1	4.6	1.6	.42	0.8	1.8	1.1	1.1
15-29	13.9	14.6	22.5	6.4	1.7	13.6	4.0	16.8	14.4	30.0	5.7	7.5	8.5	14.6	22.5
30-44	17.0	19.0	23.2	11.3	4.7	17.1	4.3	18.5	10.0	46.8	8.1	7.4	6.0	19.0	23.2
45-59	20.5	28.8	25.1	17.7	3.7	18.8	4.9	23.2	5.7	52.0	11.3	8.0	4.3	28.8	25.1
60-69	26.4	52.7	39.0	22.2	7.9	19.1	4.2	21.5	4.1	47.6	12.9	11.2	5.1	52.7	39.0
70-79	36.6	89.2	61.0	32.5	7.4	28.5	4.4	29.4	8.3	48.2	15.4	9.5	7.5	89.2	61.0
≥ 80	48.6	112.8	84.2	19.9	9.3	50.0	5.7	47.5	22.0	72.9	22.5	11.0	19.8	112.8	84.2

NA, Not applicable.

Notice that the rate for men has a peak in age 45-49 in Europe and another in the higher age groups while the figures for the World have no such peak in the middle aged men.

Magnitude of the problem

We also usually state that Suicide is among the top 20 leading causes of death globally for all ages. Every year, nearly one million people die from suicide.

Most of the information we have looked at is based on reports from different countries. The statistics come from information on the cause of death statistics and the death certificates.

This information is then generally coded accordingly to The International Classification of Diseases and health related problem. Many countries but not all use the latest revision of ICD - the 10 revision. Suicide is then coded as X60 – X84 depending on suicide method.

But the question is if what we have seen above give the right picture of the problem.

If you study the notes in the source to the graphs you will find that for some countries there are no figures for the number of suicides. Instead an estimation of the real amount have been done. This maybe is the best way to do it but there is a risk that it can be wrong.

Are there more difficulties to take into account? Yes there is.

Definition

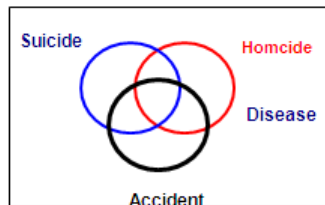
Lets look at the definition of suicide that are used.

“Suicide is defined as “a death arising from an act inflicted upon oneself with the intent to kill oneself”.

Of special interest is that there shall be an intent to kill oneself. More about that further on.

Sometimes it can be very difficult to know if a person has killed themselves or what has happened It can look like this

Undetermined cases



The graph shows that the diff diagnosis can be suicide, homicide, accident or a disease.

For that reason a new way to classify such cases was introduced in ICD 8rev.- the so called undetermined intent.

This was “a section for events, where viable information is insufficient to make a distinction between accident, self-harm, and assault. It was called “Event of undetermined intent” (Y10 – Y34 In ICD 10)

The idea was that this group should be as little as possible. Instead it became - at least in Sweden - rather big.

This is how it looks like in Sweden.

Year	Suicide	Unclear.	%
2004	833	172	17
2005	835	200	19
2006	817	190	19
2007	801	225	22
2008	855	199	19

Source: Cause of death Statistics in Sweden 2004 – 2008, Statistics Sweden

When we look at the magnitude of suicides we have to take these cases into account as some studies have shown that a lot of these cases probably can be suicides.

Intent

As can be seen in the definition above there should be an intent to kill oneself if the case should be reported as suicide. How to find out this? Is it done?

In Sweden the police should be involved in all suicide cases. In other countries it can be a coroner. A police report is written where the police report the circumstances, findings and so on. Often some people near the deceased will be heard. The police have very little time to investigate these cases. For that reason the police report often is not sufficient to establish the intent. Not all suicide cases have left a suicide note.

For that reason it is necessary to do not only an ordinary autopsy but a verbal autopsy.

A verbal autopsy is a method of finding out the cause of a death based on an interview with next of kin or other caregivers or someone else that have information about the death.

The question is if this really is done in all countries of the world? Probably not. So is the picture we have seen above taking all the problems shown here into account worthless?

My recommendation is that you shall use the statistics but be aware of how it has been done and how it can be used.