England and Wales

Suicide rates per million 15 to 19 year olds

Latest figure: 95 suicides where death was recorded as by intentional self-harm, and a further 30 deaths by undetermined intent of 15 to 19 year olds in 2012, a combined five-year average rate of 36.7 per million 15 to 19 year olds.

Trend: The five-year combined average rate among 15 to 19 year olds has been steadily declining for more than a decade, and has decreased by 26 per cent since 1985 (from 49.5 per million to 36.7).

However, the five-year average suicide rate, for cases where deaths were recorded as by intentional self-harm, has recently been on the rise, up 15 per cent since 2009. It is worth noting that for the third year running ChildLine has also seen an increase in the number of counselling sessions where suicidal feelings or self-harm were the main concern (see Indicator 7 for details).

Key messages

- There were 164 suicides of 15 to 19 year olds in the UK in 2012.
- Suicides of 15 to 19 year olds in England and Wales have decreased since the 1980s, whereas in Northern Ireland they have increased. In Scotland they have been decreasing since 2003, but are still higher than in the early 1980s.
- Northern Ireland has the highest suicide rate for 10 to 14 year olds, followed by Scotland and then England and Wales. However caution must be taken before drawing any conclusions from this, due to the very small numbers involved.

Why is this measure important?

Information on the number of suicides* is an important measure of the safety of children and young people. Suicide may often be the result of a combination of other factors, such as abuse, neglect, family problems or mental health issues.

Tracking the numbers of children and young people who take their own lives shows the number of children who feel there is no way out of their problems and for whom the right help is not there. It therefore shows a subset of the preventable deaths of children. The National Statistics definition of suicide includes deaths given an underlying cause of intentional self-harm (labelled on the graphs below as suicides) or an injury/poisoning of undetermined intent. For over 15s deaths of undetermined intent are seen as cases where the harm was self-inflicted, but there was insufficient evidence to prove that the deceased deliberately intended to kill themselves. However, this cannot be applied to younger children due to the possibility that these deaths were caused by unverifiable accidents, neglect or abuse, therefore the suicide data for 10 to 14 year olds only uses deaths coded under “intentional self-harm”.

What are the limitations of the data?

Data on suicides from mortality statistics is affected by difficulties in recording a suicide where intent is unclear. In relation to children in particular, there may be difficulties in recording a death either as a suicide or as an accident. Data on attempted suicides is not reflected in these statistics. The numbers of child suicides are also relatively small, meaning a small change in the number of deaths has a significant impact on rates. We have tried to compensate for this by looking at five-year averages. Finally, data is published with the age band 15 to 19 years, so data for under 18s is not readily available.

Data availability and comparability

Statistics on child suicides come from mortality data. Mortality data coded consistently under the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) is available for all UK nations. Historical data is available for all UK nations and consistent recording methods allow comparison over time within each nation. However, differences in the death registration systems used in each nation may have an impact on the comparability of the data between nations. Also, as data is published for England and Wales combined it has not been possible to calculate and compare separate rates for the two nations.

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*For 15 to 19 year olds data drawn from deaths recorded under the codes of “intentional self-harm” (from 2001: X60-X84 and Y87.0, pre-2001: E950-E959) and “event of undetermined intent” (from 2001: Y10-Y34, Y87.2; pre-2001: E980-E989). For 10 to 14 year olds, data drawn from deaths recorded under the codes of “intentional self-harm” only.
Northern Ireland

Suicide rates per million 15 to 19 year olds

Latest figure: 12 suicides where death was recorded as by intentional self-harm, and a further two deaths by undetermined intent of 15 to 19 year olds in 2012, a five-year average combined rate of 156.8 per million 15 to 19 year olds.

Trend: The five-year combined average rate among 15 to 19 year olds has increased by 250 per cent since 1985 (from 44.8 per million to 156.8). However it should be noted that the numbers involved for Northern Ireland are small, meaning a small change in the number of deaths has a significant impact on rates.

Scotland

Suicide rates per million 15 to 19 year olds

Latest figure: 18 suicides where death was recorded as by intentional self-harm, and a further seven deaths by undetermined intent of 15 to 19 year olds in 2012, a five-year average combined rate of 97.4 per million 15 to 19 year olds.

Trend: The five-year combined average rate among 15 to 19 year olds has increased by 48 per cent since 1985 (from 66 per million to 97.4). However, average rates have been on the decline since 2002. The start of this decline coincides with the Scottish Government’s Choose Life suicide prevention strategy and plan, which was launched in 2002. Again, it should be noted that the numbers involved for Scotland are small, meaning a small change in the number of deaths has a significant impact on rates.
UK comparison
Over the last 30 years the number of suicides among 15 to 19 year olds has decreased in England and Wales whereas it has increased significantly (by 250 per cent) in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, the five-year average rate in 2012 was 48 per cent higher than 1985, but the rate has been on a downward trend since 2002. For 10 to 14 year olds the rate has remained relatively stable in England and Wales, has increased in Scotland (though has decreased in the last four years) and has increased significantly (by 216 per cent) in Northern Ireland. However it should be noted that the numbers involved for Northern Ireland and Scotland are small, meaning a small change in the number of deaths has a significant impact on rates.

Latest figure: 12 suicides of 10 to 14 year olds where death was recorded as by intentional self-harm. The five-year average rate was 17.6 per million 10 to 14 year olds in Northern Ireland, 6.1 per million in Scotland, and 1.7 per million in England and Wales.

Trend: Since 1981 the rate of suicides recorded as deaths by intentional self-harm of 10 to 14 year olds has remained relatively stable in England and Wales, has increased in Scotland (although it has been on the decline for the last four years) and has increased significantly (by 216 per cent) in Northern Ireland. However it should be noted that the numbers involved for Northern Ireland and Scotland are small, meaning a small change in the number of deaths has a significant impact on rates.

Data sources
England and Wales: ONS – Mortality Statistics: Deaths Registered in England and Wales (Series DR) (various years) (Historical data provided to NSPCC).
Scotland: General Register Office for Scotland – Vital Events data (Data provided to NSPCC).
Northern Ireland: NISRA – Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Reports (various years).