

Facts about Suicide

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines suicide as the act of deliberately killing oneself. The causes of suicide are multifaceted, and suicide is often a result of different factors. International research has shown that the most important risk factors for suicide are previous suicide attempts and mental illnesses such as depression. Suicide is among the three most frequent causes of death in the world among 15-44-year-olds. Although suicide is generally rare in children under the age of 15, it is the second-most common cause of death in the age group 15-25 years in many countries.

Prevalence

The procedure for and the quality of the registration of suicide as a cause of death vary from country to country, and in a global context there is still uncertainty about the mortality rate of suicide. WHO estimates that globally, more than 700 000 people die by suicide, and that about 80 % of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries (WHO). Data from the United States show that the suicide rate was about 14 per 100 000 people in recent years (CDC). In China, the suicide rate was 8-9 per 100 000, while it was about 11 per 100 000 in Canada and 8 in Great Britain (WHO).

Between 1960s and 1980s, the suicide rate doubled in Norway, but since 1988 the rate has decreased, with some fluctuations. In the past 20 years, the suicide rate has stabilized at around 12-14 per 100 000 people. The rate is 2-3 times higher in men than women. This amounts to a total of 550 to 650 suicides every year, according to the Cause of Death Register. The most common suicide method is hanging, followed by poisoning, firearms, and jumping from high places.

The most important facts about suicide in Norway (2023)

- According to recent statistics, 693 people died by suicide in 2023 (14.1 per 100 000 people over 10 years old). Of these, 495 were men and 198 were women, which corresponds to a rate of 20.1 for men and 8.1 for women per 100 000 people over 10 years old.
- Suicide is the cause of death for 37 people (24 boys and 13 girls) in the age group of 10-19 years old in 2023, which corresponds to a rate of 7.1 per 100 000 boys, 4.1 per 100 000 girls and 5.6 per 100 100 young people of this age group.

- 228 people died by suicide in the age group of 20-39 years, 235 in 40-59 years, 149 in 60-79 years and 44 suicides among people at 80 years old and over.
- Hanging and strangulation were the most common methods for suicide in both men and women, with a total of 337 suicides (48.6 %) by these methods, including 253 men and 84 women. Poisoning was the second common method for suicide (98 suicides), followed by firearms and explosive materials (84 suicides).
- Among the 15 counties, Akershus had the highest absolute number of suicides with 92 suicides in 2023, which corresponded a rate of 14.5 per 100 000 people over the age of 10 years. This was followed by Rogaland with 67 suicides (15.5 per 100 000) and Vestland county with 64 suicides (11.1 per 100 000). Telemark county had the highest suicide rate (20.8 per 100 000 people over 10 years old), followed by Finnmark (19.4 per 100 000) and Troms county (14.9 per 100 000). Oslo had the lowest suicide rate (9.9 per 100 000 people of 10 years old and above).
- In 2023 September was the month with the highest number of suicide (71 suicides), followed by May and August (67 suicides in each). April had the lowest number of suicide deaths (45 suicides).

Table: Number of suicide according to gender and calendar year. Selected years 1970-2023

Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	329	396	510	585	659	548	548	533	549	596	646	664	623	693
Men	231	283	372	429	488	411	414	360	384	404	471	488	445	495
Women	98	113	138	156	171	137	134	173	165	192	175	176	178	198

More detailed statistics are available on the websites of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI) (<http://statistikkbank.fhi.no/dar/>) and the National Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (NSSF) (<https://www.med.uio.no/klinmed/forskning/sentre/nssf/kunnskapsressurser/statistikk-selvmoerd/>).

Risk factors

Risk factors can affect individuals or the environment and may be associated with an increased probability for negative events in the future. Suicidal behaviour is multifaceted and often the result of an interaction between multiple factors, from mental illness to socioeconomic factors.

Risk factors for suicide can affect everyone, but some groups of people are more inclined to be affected by risk factors than others. Risk factors may vary with age, gender or ethnic groups. They may occur in combination with each other and change over time. The following is a selection of important risk factors for suicide.

Individual risk factors

- Mental illness (especially depression, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, drug addiction disorders, and personality disorders)
- Previous suicide attempts or self-harm
- Somatic illness
- Socioeconomic difficulties
- Stressful life events (such as experiencing loss, violence, sexual assault, or other trauma)
- Family history of suicide or suicidal behavior
- Exposure to multiple risk factors

Environmental risk factors

- Access to suicide means that have a high risk of fatality when used (such as firearms, household products with high levels of toxicity, tall buildings and bridges, medicines that are poisonous when used for overdose)
- Exposure to negative social factors such as bullying, unemployment, and social isolation
- Dramatic and sensationalized reports of suicide in the mass media, with detailed descriptions of suicide methods and the time and place for concrete incidents of suicide.

References

WHO. WHO Mortality Database: Self-inflicted injuries. 2024.

<https://platform.who.int/mortality/themes/theme-details/topics/indicator-groups/indicator-group-details/MDB/self-inflicted-injuries>.

FHI. Dødsårsaksregisteret – statistikkbank. 2024. <http://statistikkbank.fhi.no/dar/>

CDC. Suicide and Self-inflicted Injury. 2021. www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm

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