

# Suicide among young people and adults in Ireland: How do they compare?



<sup>1</sup>National Suicide Research Foundation, <sup>2</sup>Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College Cork



## Background

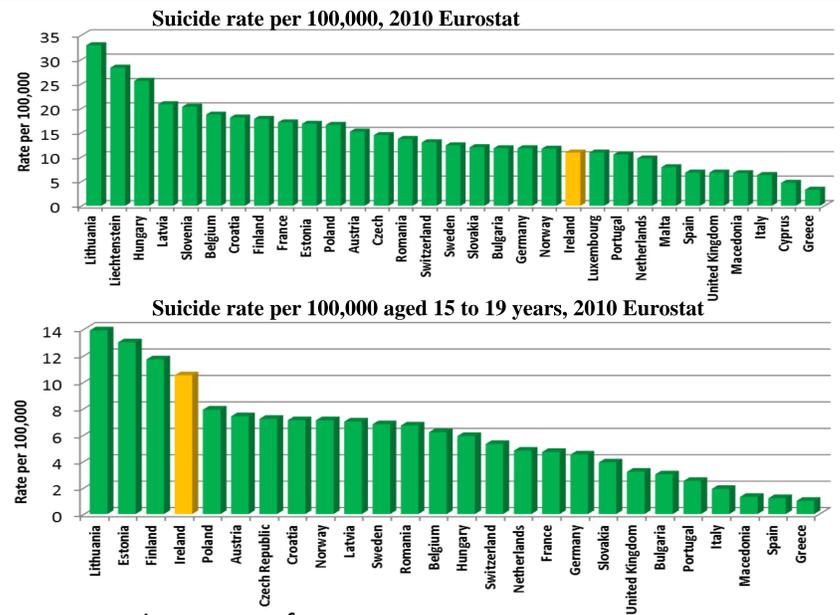


An estimated 804,000 suicide deaths occurred worldwide in 2012. Considering young people, the problem is even more pronounced, with suicide representing the second leading cause of death globally in 2012 (1).

According to the most recently available suicide mortality data for Europe, Irish overall rate is the 11th lowest, but Irish youth rate — 15-19 years — is the 4th highest among European countries in 2010 (2).

Suicide mortality in Ireland in 2010 (deaths per 100,000):  
all ages 11.00; 15-24 aged 14.4; 25-34 aged 12.3 (3).

Relatively few studies have focused on factors associated with suicide among young people, and even less studies have addressed differences and similarities between young people and adults.



## Aims

The overall aim of the study is to compare factors associated with completed suicide among young people and adults focusing on methods of suicide and clinical characteristics.

This specific objectives:

- 1) To identify demographic characteristics of individuals who died by suicide;
- 2) To investigate alcohol use before dying;
- 3) To examine drug use before dying;
- 4) To analyse methods of suicide;
- 5) To identify concurrent suicide methods (e.g. drugs and drowning).

## Methods

Psychological autopsy study including consecutive cases of suicide.

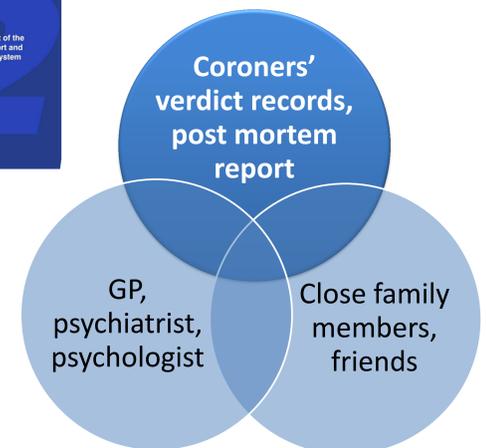
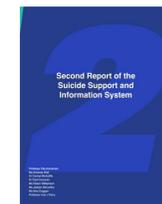
Data were collected as part of the *Suicide Support and Information System (SSIS)* (4).

Information analysed in this study comes primarily from Coroners' records. Variables examined are: standard socio-demographic characteristics, characteristics of the suicidal act, suicide notes, cause of death, main suicide method, additional methods and toxicology, in particular alcohol and drugs.

Sample: 121 suicide cases in Cork county (2008-2012).

Comparison between young people aged 15-24 (n=61) and adults aged 25-34 (n=60).

Statistical analysis: Pearson's  $\chi^2$  tests and binary logistic regression.

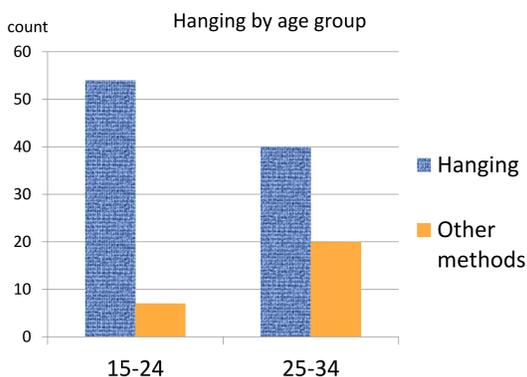


Sources of information of the SSIS

## Results

**Suicide methods:** young people are more likely to die by hanging, than adults ( $\chi^2=8.33$ ;  $p=0.004$ ).

Among adults both hanging and self-poisoning were most prevalent.

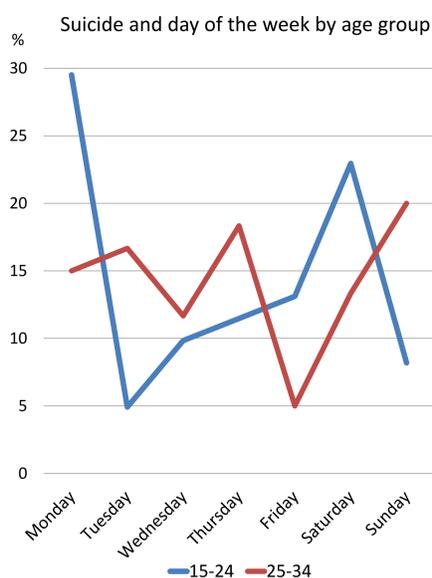


**Substance abuse:** a similar proportion of young people and adults had a history of alcohol and drug abuse (74.2%, 61.5% respectively) ( $\chi^2=3.73$ ;  $p$ -value >0.05).

**Substance use – either alcohol or drugs – at the time of death:**

- overall rate 79.5%: 74.6% among young people and 86.2% among adults.
- 77.4% of those for whom drugs and alcohol were a secondary suicide method: 73.7% among young people and 67.3% among adults.

No statistical differences between young people and adults on substance use at the time of death ( $\chi^2=2.86$ ;  $p$ -value >0.05).



**Suicide method, day of the week and drug use:** young people who died between Saturday and Monday were more likely to die by hanging, than adults ( $p=0.012$ ; OR: 6.95).

Individuals who had drugs in their toxicology were less likely to die by hanging ( $p=0.012$ ; OR: 0.3).

## Conclusion

Overall, young people who died by suicide are more similar than different from adults in terms of the studied socio-demographic and clinical characteristics. Strategies to reduce alcohol and restrict access to means may be applied to those at risk of suicide in both age groups. Further exploration of public health approaches addressing hanging as method of suicide in young people and intentional drug overdose in adults, as well as the connection with alcohol and drug use are needed.

## Acknowledgements

The research leading to these results has received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007-2013/ under REA grant agreement n°316795.

## References

1. World Health Organization (2014). Preventing suicide: A global imperative.
2. Eurostat. Death due to suicide (2014). <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>
3. Central Statistic Office (2014). Suicide Statistics 2010. <http://www.cso.ie>
4. Arensman E. et al. (2013). Second report of the suicide support and information system.