

CO18: Teenage suicides

Definitions and methodology

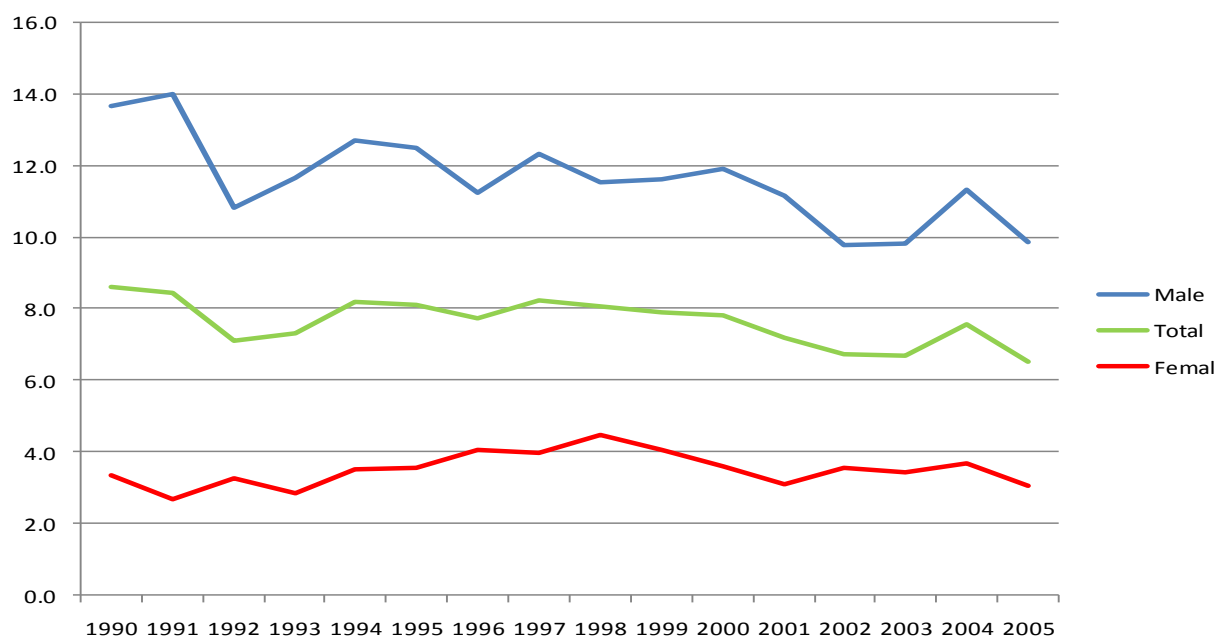
Data presented here on suicide rates of adolescents aged 15 to 19 are based on official registers on “causes of death” per person per year. The suicide rate reflects the number of teenage suicides per 100 000 of the population age group.

Key findings

There has been little change in average teenage suicide rates across the OECD in recent history, although the number of suicides among young men has declined since the early 1990s (Chart CO18.1). On average, teenage suicides amount to just below 7 deaths per 100 000 teenagers in 2005, with suicides much more likely among young men (about 10 per 100 000 male young men) than girls (just over 3 suicides per 100 000 young women).

Chart CO18.1: Suicide rates among 15-19 year olds per 100 000 of the population age group

*Unweighted OECD average, 1990-2005**

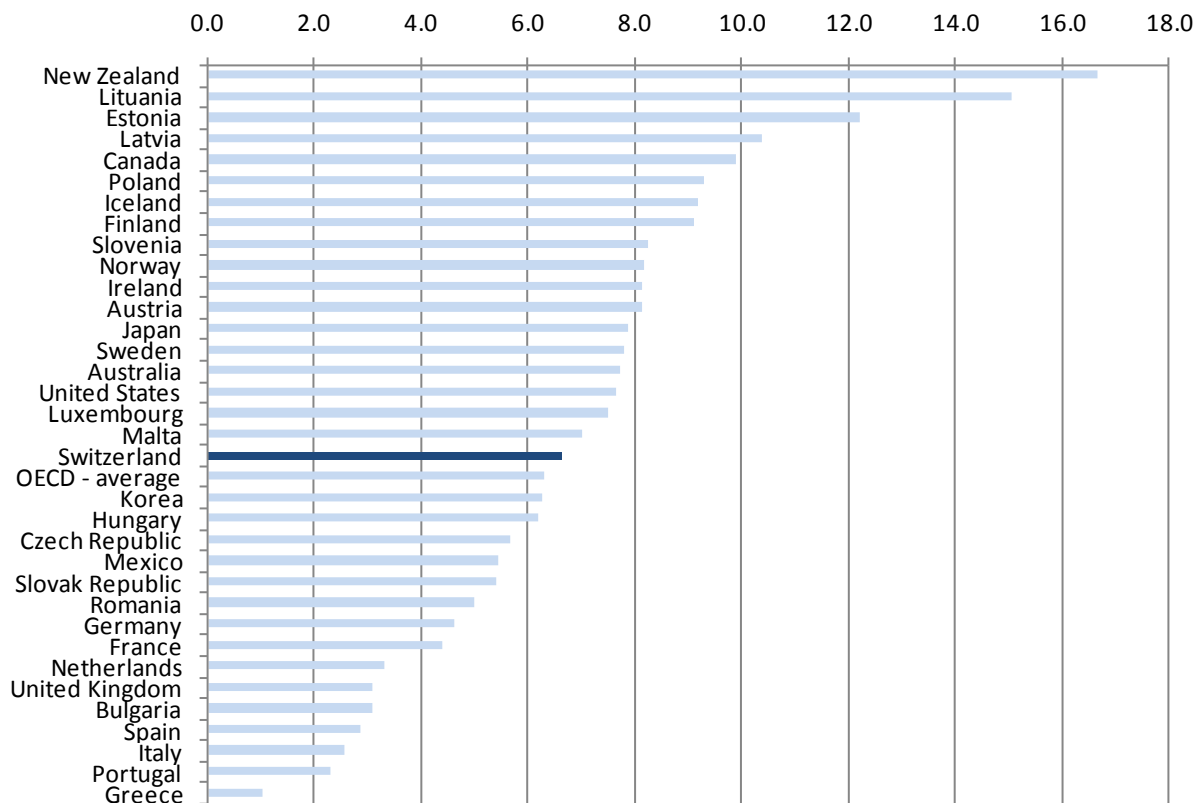


* or latest year, Australia, Italy and Portugal: 2003; Canada, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden: 2004.
 Source: WHO mortality database

Other relevant indicators: CO13 Young people not in education or employment; CO17 Substance abuse by young people.

Chart CO18.2 shows there is considerable variation in teenage suicide rates across countries. At 20 suicides per 100 000 teenagers, suicide rates in New Zealand and the Baltic countries are much higher than elsewhere. By contrast at less than 4 suicides per 100 000 young people, suicide rates are lowest in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece.

Chart CO18.2 Suicides among 15-19 year olds per 100 000 of the population age group, 2005*

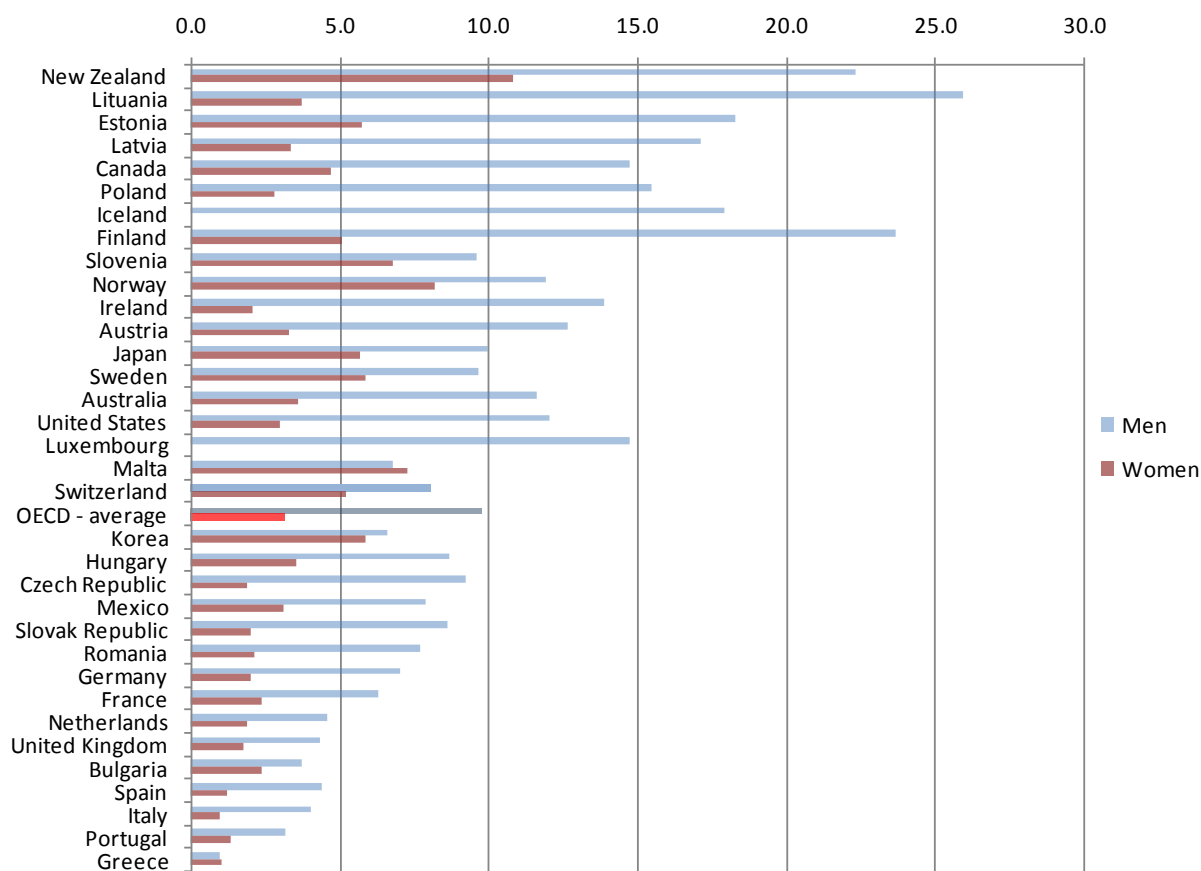


Source: WHO mortality database

Notes: * or latest year, Australia, Italy and Portugal: 2003; Canada, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden: 2004; Austria, Finland, Greece, Japan, Korea: 2006.

Overall suicide rates for young people have changed little over time, and while suicide rates for young men have declined (see above), suicides remain a predominantly male phenomenon. On average, for each young woman who commits suicide there are about three young men who take their own life. This ratio is considerably higher in Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania and Luxembourg, where for each young female suicide there are at least six suicides amongst young men (Chart CO18.3). By contrast, in Greece, Malta and Korea gender differences in suicide rates among young people are relatively small.

Chart CO18.3 Suicides among 15-19 year olds per 100 000 of the population group by gender, 2005*



Notes: * or latest year, Australia, Italy and Portugal: 2003; Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania and Sweden: 2004; Austria, Finland, Greece, Japan, Korea and Slovenia: 2006.
 Source: WHO mortality database

Comparability and data issues

The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) provides a cross-national framework for the recording of the causes of death. Nevertheless, the comparability of suicide data between countries could be affected by a number of reporting criteria, including: the establishment of a death person's intention to kill him or herself; the authority responsible for completing the death certificate, the need to carry out a forensic examination of the corpse, and possible provisions on the confidentiality on the cause of death. Suicide data should thus be interpreted with care, although comparability issues should not be exaggerated: Sainsbury and Jenkins (1982) show that errors in the reporting of suicides are random.

Sources and further reading: WHO mortality database; Sainsbury P. and J.S. Jenkins (1982), "The accuracy of officially reported suicide statistics for purposes of epidemiological research", *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 36: 43-48; OECD (2009), *Society at a Glance 2009*.