

SUICIDES AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS: THE ICELANDIC EXPERIENCE

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Introduction: Iceland has taken a significant economic toll following the recession starting in late 2008. Unemployment has risen sharply, personal and business bankruptcies too.

Aim: The aim of this paper is to examine the possible impact of the social consequences of the economic crisis on the suicide rate.

Methods: The Icelandic Bureau of Statistics publications, Causes of Death Register, Unemployment Statistics and Purchase Power Index, were utilized. The suicide rate is based on those between 16 and 90 years, per 100,000 inhabitants. The unemployment rate includes those 16-74 years old. Due to the small population size data are presented as three-year averages from 1981-2010.

Results: The unemployment rate during this period was 0.5-3.0% , with a slightly higher rate in the mid-nineties, until mid-2008, when it rose rapidly, peaking in 2010 at 8.1%. The suicide rate has declined, particularly during the last ten years, 13.4-16.5/100,000, with no signs of paralleling the unemployment increase from 2008 onwards. There is one exception, the region with the highest unemployment rate in the past 10 years. The suicide rate there has been high, rising sharply in the past three years. The sample size is small, so this must be interpreted with caution.

Conclusion: The suicide rate has been relatively stable in Iceland , and not affected by the current economic crisis. There are signs, though, that the region hardest hit by the unemployment is at a higher risk for suicides.