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SUICIDE PREVENTION IN FINLAND: ADVANCES AND PERSPECTIVES

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The suicide rate has been traditionally high compared to countries of the European Union. The rate increased during decades after second world war until the early 1990's. Moreover, the suicide rate has followed closely the alcohol consumption rate. A national suicide prevention project was carried out in the late 1980's, which had the intent to increase access to low-threshold services and specialized psychiatric care. Physicians and psychiatrists were educated in the recognition of depression at a time when novel antidepressants were introduced and secondary level services were deinstitutionalized.

Aims: The review the successfulness of efforts to decrease suicides in Finland in the light of scientific studies.

Results: The rate of suicide has decreased considerably and its association with the use of alcohol has weakened. Although the use of alcohol increased in the 1990's the rate continued to decrease. Two studies have linked the decrease in rate of suicide with the sale and use of antidepressants. This trend appears to be especially pronounced among men. Additionally, evidence shows that the replacement of hospital-based services with outpatient care has had a positive impact on suicide mortality of patients, who have received care in psychiatric hospitals. The decrease in suicide rate is associated with intensive outpatient care.

Conclusion: In the long run, the national suicide prevention project has been successful, although other factors, such as increase of standard of living and general wellbeing among citizens of Finland, have been likely contributors.