

Deliberate Self Harm / Suicide attempts and Suicide

Definition, terminology, reliability of data

Ella Arensman and Ann Palmer

Issues in relation to terminology to indicate non-fatal suicidal / self harming behaviour

- Different terms are used interchangeably, e.g. *Parasuicide, Suicide Attempts, Deliberate Self Harm, Self Harm*
- Overall, more diversity with regard to terminology than with regard to definitions

Frequently used definition to indicate non-fatal suicidal / self harming behaviour

“An act with non-fatal outcome, in which an individual deliberately initiates a non-habitual behaviour that, without intervention from others, will cause self harm, or deliberately ingests a substance in excess of the prescribed or generally recognized therapeutic dosage, and which is aimed at realising changes which the subject desired via the actual or expected physical consequences”
(WHO/EURO, 1986)

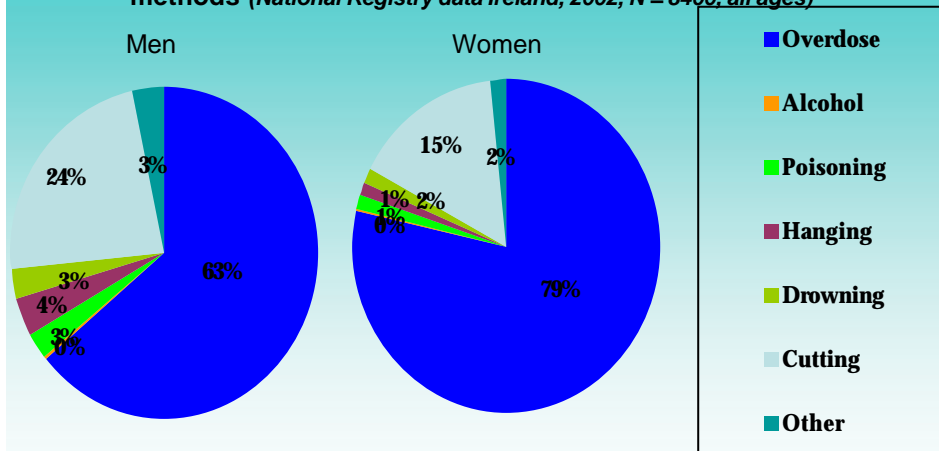
*Initially, the term: “**Parasuicide**” was used to indicate this behaviour, according to Kreitman (1969)*

Different perspectives

“Terms such as deliberate self harm, self-injury or self poisoning ... neglect the very real association that exists between attempted suicide and completed suicide”
(Kreitman, 1969)

*“**Parasuicide** is a subcategory of attempted suicide characterised by low levels of intention to die, while **Attempted Suicide** is a more specific subcategory of parasuicide characterised by a strong intention to die”*
(Bille-Brahe et al., 1994)

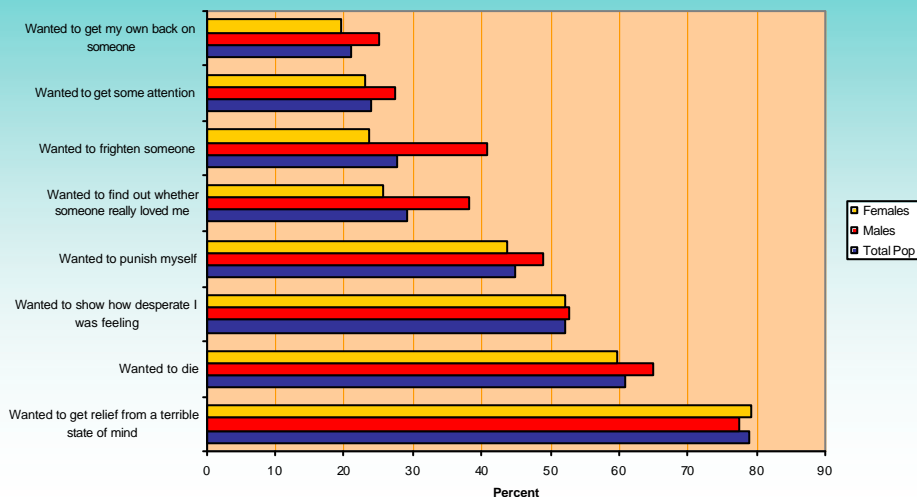
Heterogeneity with regard to methods of non-fatal suicidal / self harming behaviour, ranging from low lethal to highly lethal methods *(National Registry data Ireland, 2002, N = 8400, all ages)*



Alcohol was involved in 46% and 39% of male and female episodes, respectively

Heterogeneity with regard to motives related to non-fatal suicidal / self harming behaviour, ranging from wish to die to wanting to get some attention

(CASE study, Irish Sample, N=333, 15-17 yrs, 2004)



Multiple motives reported

- For example CASE study: 61% reported “wish to die”. However, none of the participants reported this motive as a single motive
- Often contradictory motives reported by one individual, e.g, “wish to die” in combination with “wanting to get some attention”
- Indication for ***ambivalence***

Proposal

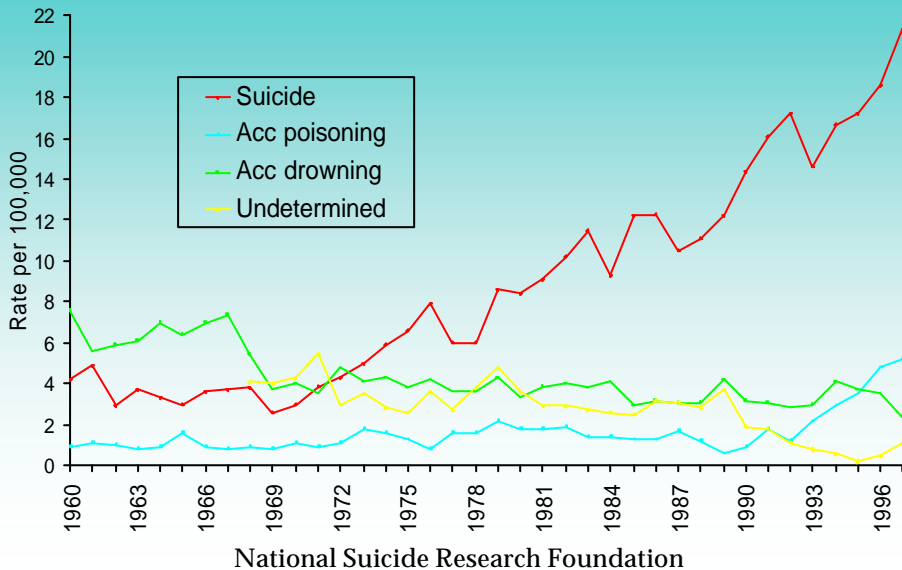
- Definition according to WHO/EURO (1986)
Advantages:
 - Representative samples (no selective populations, e.g. those with / without wish to die)
 - Possibility for comparison with most other European countries
- Term: “Deliberate Self Harm”
Advantages:
 - Taking into account the heterogeneity of reported motives
 - Enabling a distinction between accidental and self inflicted injuries (as opposed to Self Harm)

Reliability suicide statistics

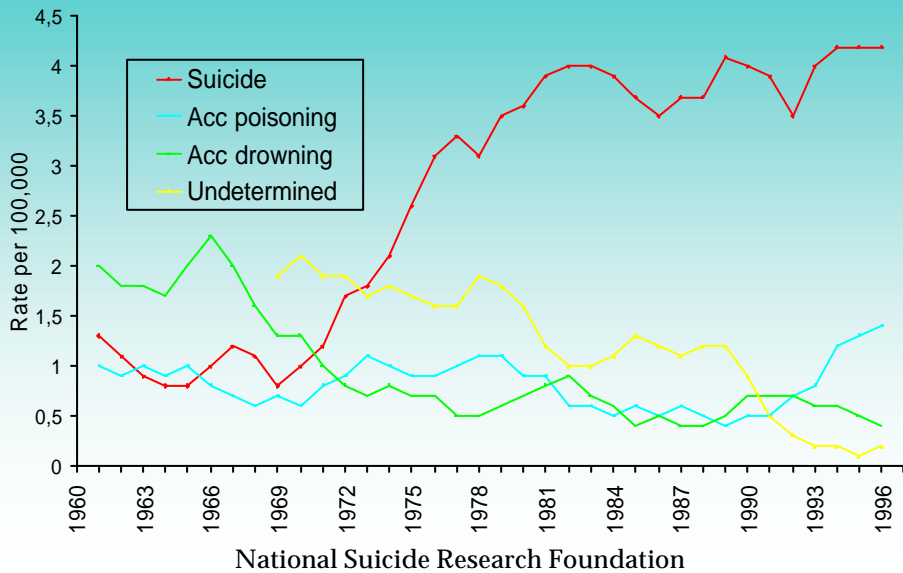
Factors influencing the reliability

- Different recording systems
- Misclassification, e.g. undetermined death, accidental drowning, single road traffic accidents

Irish male rate of suicide, accidental poisoning, drowning and undetermined death, 1960-1997



Irish female rate of suicide, accidental poisoning, drowning and undetermined death, 1960-1997



Proposal

- Comparison recording systems
- Definition and prevalence of undetermined death
- Prevalence of other causes of mortality, e.g. accidental drowning, accidental poisoning, single road traffic accidents