

Macroeconomic fluctuations and inequalities in suicide mortality: A register-based study in the countries of the Baltic Sea region, 2000-2015.

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ABSTRACT

Background and aims: In the 2000s, the Baltic countries experienced unprecedented credit driven economic growth that was followed by a deep recession. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of profound macroeconomic changes in 2000-2015 on suicide mortality in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in comparison to Finland, and to identify socioeconomic groups at excess risk.

Data and methods: Datasets originate from census based longitudinal mortality follow-up studies where information on population demographic and socioeconomic characteristics comes from censuses. Socioeconomic status was measured with educational level. Data were analyzed in 4 periods representing 1) moderate economic growth (2000-2003), 2) economic expansion (2004-2007), 3) recession (2008-2011), and 4) recovery (2012-2015). The analysis included men and women in the 35-74 age group. Age standardization was used to analyse mortality trends by educational level and Poisson regression was used to examine the magnitude of educational inequalities and its change.

Results: The preliminary results showed that overall suicide rates decreased in all countries between 2000 and 2015. In the Baltic countries (except for Lithuanian women) the largest decline occurred in 2004-2007 whereas in Finland, the decline was largest in 2012-2015. In 2004-2007, suicide rates decreased the most among low educated men in all countries but increased among low educated women, except for Estonia. In 2008-2011 or 2012-2015, suicide rates increased among high educated men but continued to fall among lower educated men in the Baltic countries whereas they increased among low educated women in all countries and among low educated men in Finland. Educational inequalities in suicide mortality generally increased during economic growth but decreased in recessionary period among men in the Baltic countries with less consistent pattern found for women and in Finland.

Conclusion: Suicide rates were sensitive to macroeconomic changes although the patterns differed by gender, educational level and country.