

# Under-reported suicides may be hiding or compounding the tragedy

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A new study has revealed that suicide figures may not be as accurate as they are reported, with key Western countries having a higher suicide rate than that reported in official figures, especially the UK.

New research from Bournemouth University challenges these official figures, with a series of Under-Reported Suicides (URS) potentially discovered through the study.

Professor Colin Pritchard, who led the study, explained, "The tragedy of suicide is double-edged, the loss of the person and the impact upon those around them. One problem is to determine the accuracy of suicide figures as even today stigma surrounding suicide remains. Through this study we wanted to get a more accurate picture of [suicide rates](#) in Western countries.

"Essentially, when a death occurs, coroners have to decide whether the death was suicide - which could be hurtful to the family - or whether it is an accident or give Open Verdict because they could not decide which. It is then categorized in World Health Organisation (WHO) stats as an Undetermined Death (UnD) and it is amongst UnD that under-reported [suicides](#) are more likely. As an UnD method of dying is very similar to how people kill themselves it is probably the source of underreported suicide."

The study analysed suicides, accidental deaths and UnD by age and sex and found that UK youth (15-24 years) suicides for both sexes, was the

same as the number of Undetermined Deaths at a ratio of 1:1, no other country had such a close link.

Moreover, the UK had a disproportionately higher UnD in every age band than any other country. Other countries with likely higher URS were Portugal, Switzerland whilst various countries had suspiciously high UnD for women or elderly people.

Professor Colin Pritchard continued, "The practical implications of these results means the problem of suicide is being over-looked, for example every year since 2001, the UK have had more people officially dying with a verdict of suicide than all who died during the 9/11 tragedy in the US - and this study suggests British suicide figures are even higher.

"Consequently it is easier to make 'hidden' cuts to the Mental Health services which compound these tragedies, when more accurate figures may suggest that money needs to be given to help those with mental health conditions that may lead to suicide in the future. Essentially, by under-reporting the number of suicides in this country, we are masking the loss from suicide and failing to prevent these family tragedies because of an inadequately resourced service."

**More information:** "Examining Undetermined and Accidental Deaths as a Source of 'Under-Reported-Suicide' by AG and Sex in Twenty Western Countries." *Community Mental Health Journal*, 51, 365-376.  
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Provided by Bournemouth University

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