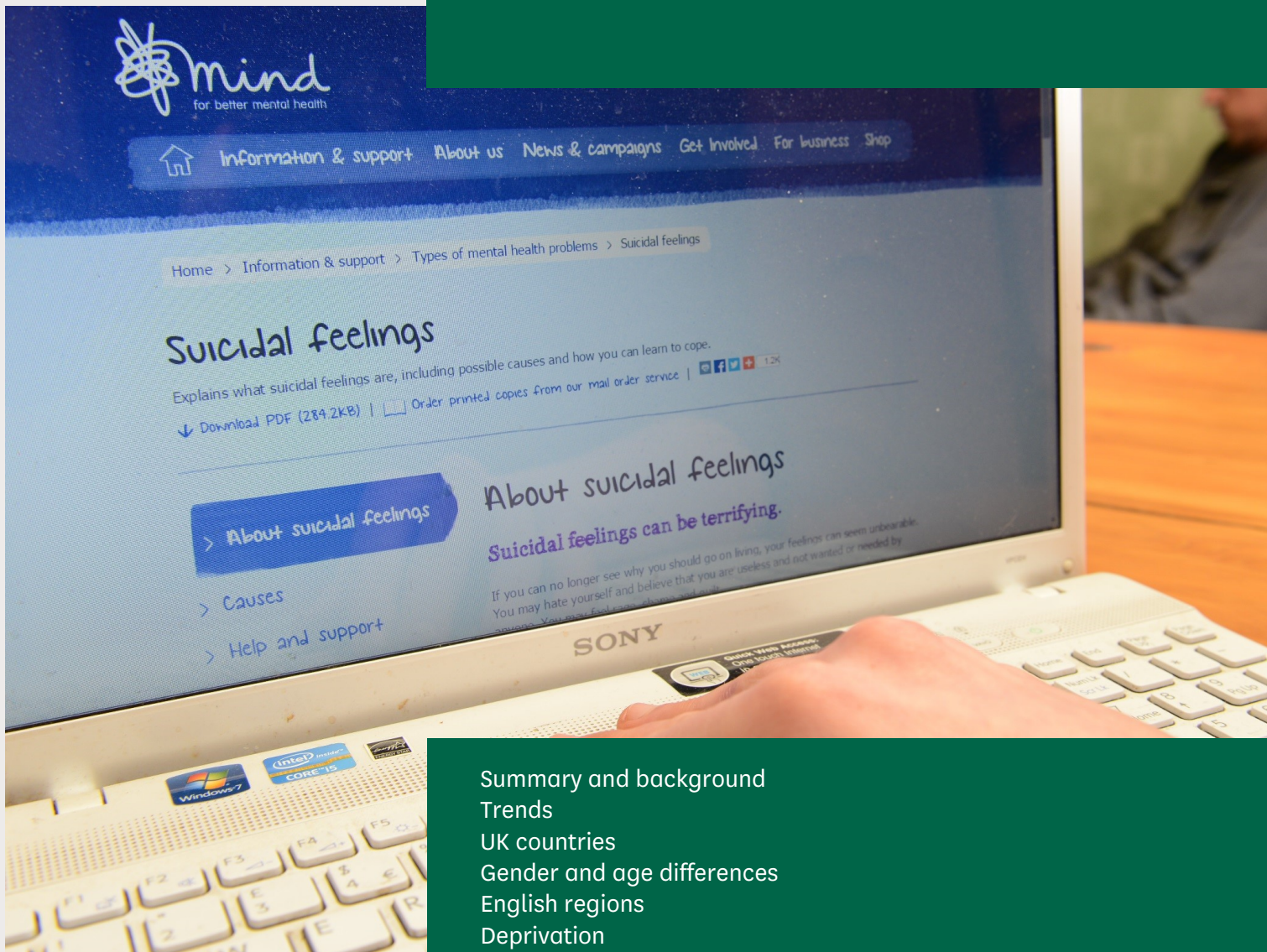


By Carl Baker

12 October 2021

Suicide: summary of statistics



Summary and background
Trends
UK countries
Gender and age differences
English regions
Deprivation
Suicide during the pandemic

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If you are affected by the themes of this briefing paper, you can contact The Samaritans on 116123 in the UK and Ireland.

If you are covering a suicide-related issue, please follow the [Samaritans' media guidelines on the reporting of suicide](#), due to the potentially damaging consequences of irresponsible reporting.

Summary and background

This paper summarises data on suicide from the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) [Suicides in England and Wales/Suicides in the UK](#) datasets. At the time of writing this dataset includes data for England and Wales up to 2020 and data for Scotland and Northern Ireland up to 2018. Where other sources are used, they are noted in the text.

Most data on suicide is presented by the year that the death was **registered**. Because of the length of time it takes to complete a coroner's inquest, it can take months or sometimes years for a suicide to be registered. This means that the number of suicides registered in a year is not the same as the number occurring in that year.

In particular, this means that you cannot use figures for suicides registered in 2020 to make any claims about the pandemic. See the last section of this briefing for information on suicides occurring during the early stages of the pandemic.

The national statistics definition of suicide includes all deaths from intentional self-harm for people aged 10 and above, and deaths caused by injury or poisoning where the intent was undetermined for people aged 15 and above. More information is available [here](#).

For policy issues on suicide please see our briefing paper [Suicide Prevention: Policy and Strategy](#).

Trends

In 2020 there were 5,224 deaths registered in England and Wales where the cause was recorded as suicide. Relative to the size of the population, the suicide rate in England and Wales has declined by around 31% since 1981. However, most of this fall occurred before 2000. In 2018 and 2019 there was a statistically significant rise in the rate, but in 2020 the rate fell.

The two charts below show trends in suicide in England and Wales since 1981 in both number and rate. The rate takes into account changes in population size, which is very important for calculating changes over time. For example, while the number of suicides registered in 2020 was 11% higher than in 2005, the suicide rate was the same, because the population has risen.

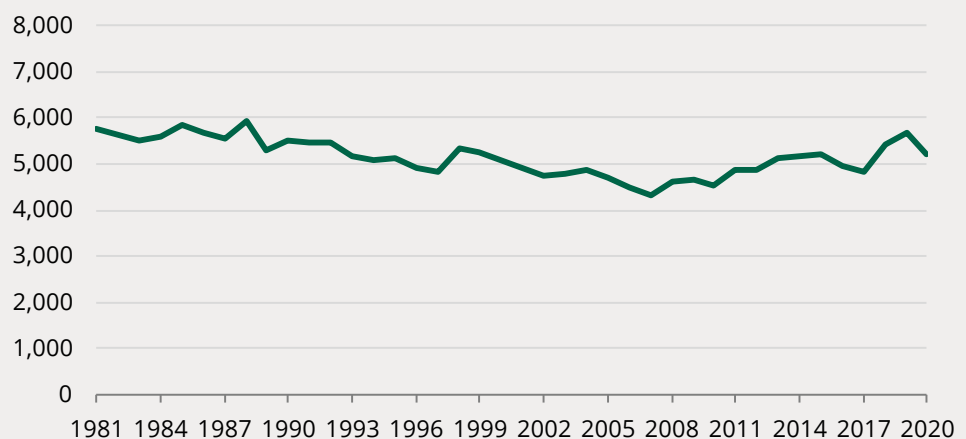
Data source

ONS, [Suicide in England and Wales, 2020 registrations](#)

Please see the summary on page 3 for information on sources, definitions, and limitations.

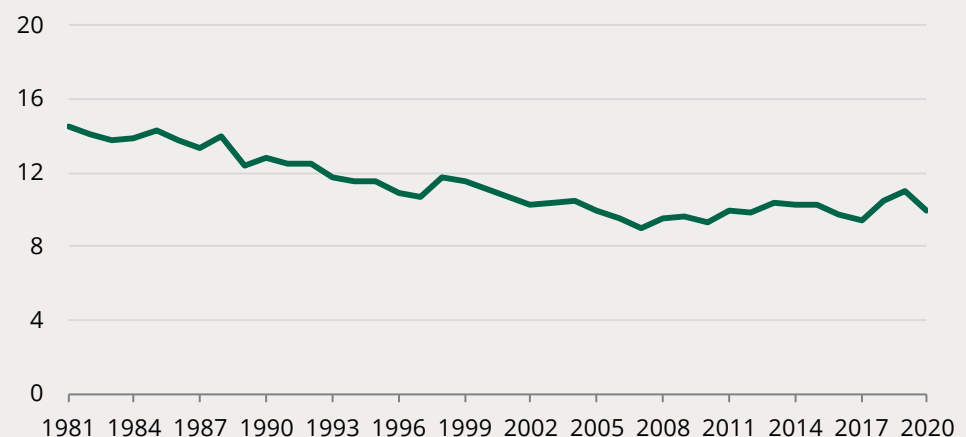
Suicides in England and Wales since 1981

Number of deaths by year of registration



Suicide in England and Wales since 1981

Age-standardised rate per 100,000 population, by year of registration

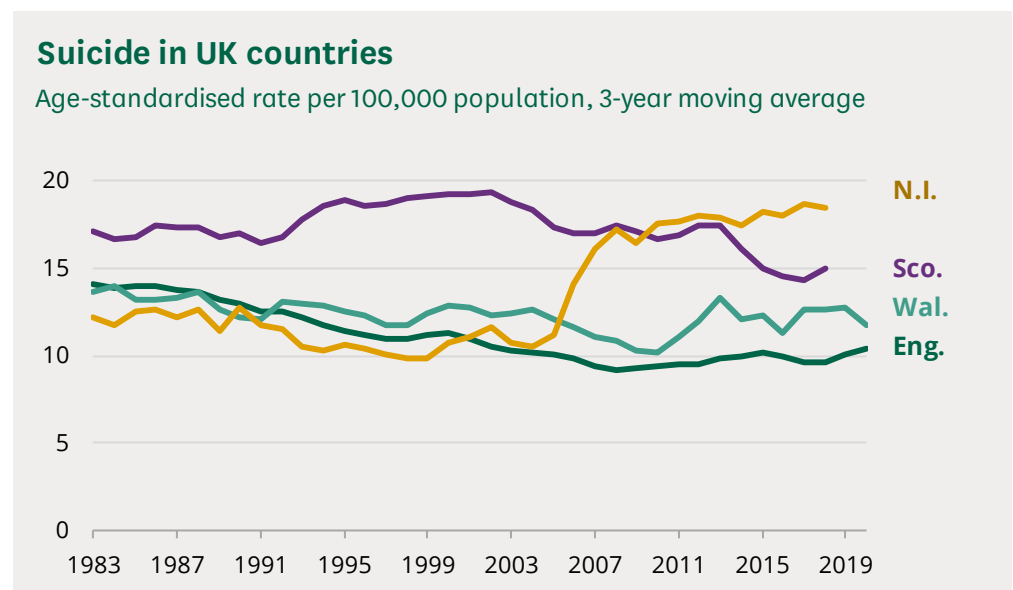


In July 2018, the standard of proof used to determine whether a death is suicide was lowered in England & Wales. You can read analysis of this change from ONS [here](#).

Remember (as noted on page 3) that data on suicides **registered** in 2020 does not give information on suicides **occurring** in 2020, because the average registration delay for suicide is over five months. Half of suicides registered in 2020 occurred in earlier years, as detailed in Table 15 of the [ONS data release](#). Please see the section on page 10 for available information on suicides occurring in 2020.

UK countries

The chart below shows trends in the suicide rate since 1983 in the four UK countries since the 1980s. Rates have been highest in Northern Ireland since 2009, as shown by the orange line on the chart below. However, recorded suicides in Northern Ireland [may be revised downward in the future](#) due to a review of death registration.¹ See section 5.3 of [this Northern Ireland Assembly briefing paper](#) for more.



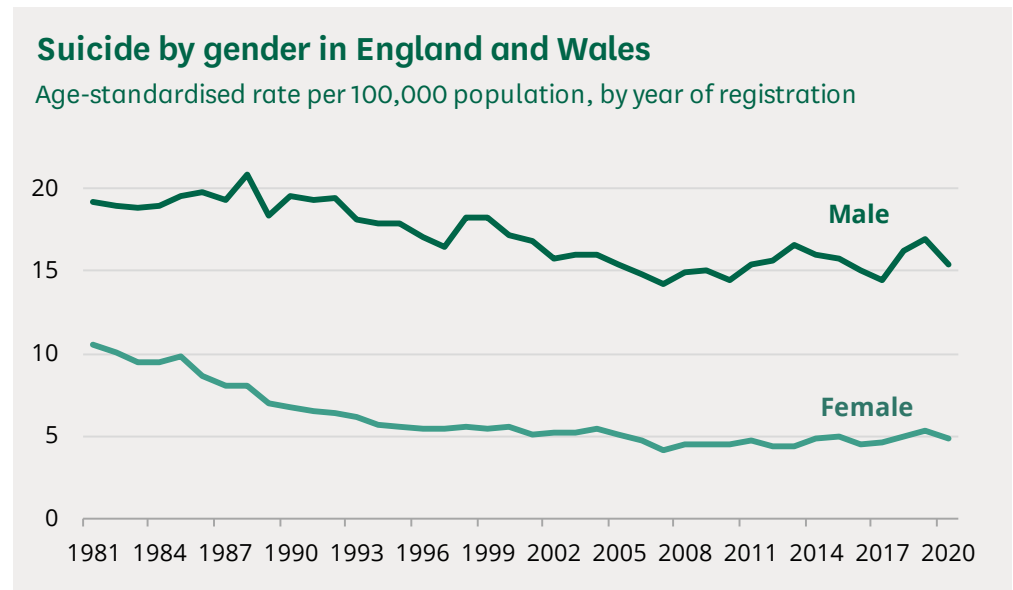
Data here is presented as a three-year average. Rates fluctuate from year to year, partly due to random variation. The three-year average makes it easier to see trends over time. 2019 and 2020 data for Scotland and Northern Ireland is not yet included in the ONS's UK-wide publications.

¹ Note also that the sharp increase between 2004 and 2006 in Northern Ireland coincides with a change to the Coroner's Service. See [this Northern Ireland Assembly research paper](#) for more information.

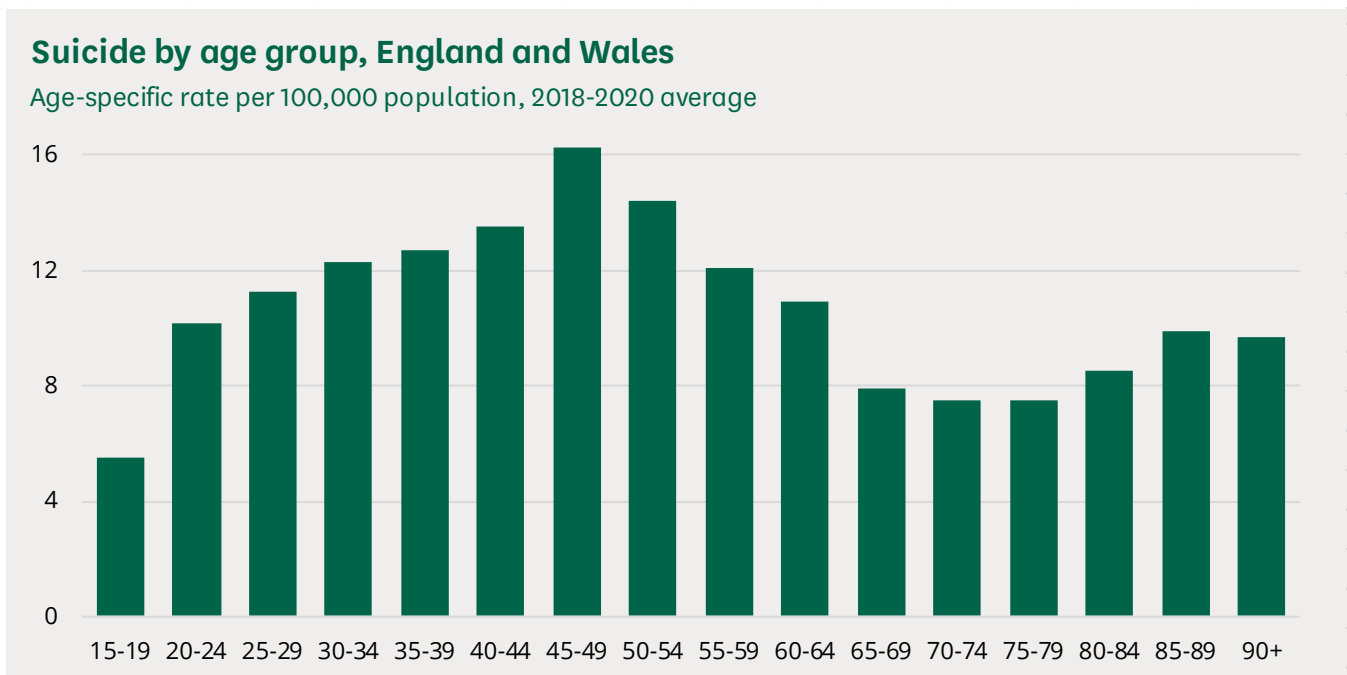
Gender and age differences

Suicide in England and Wales is three times more common among men than among women. The gap between genders has increased over time.

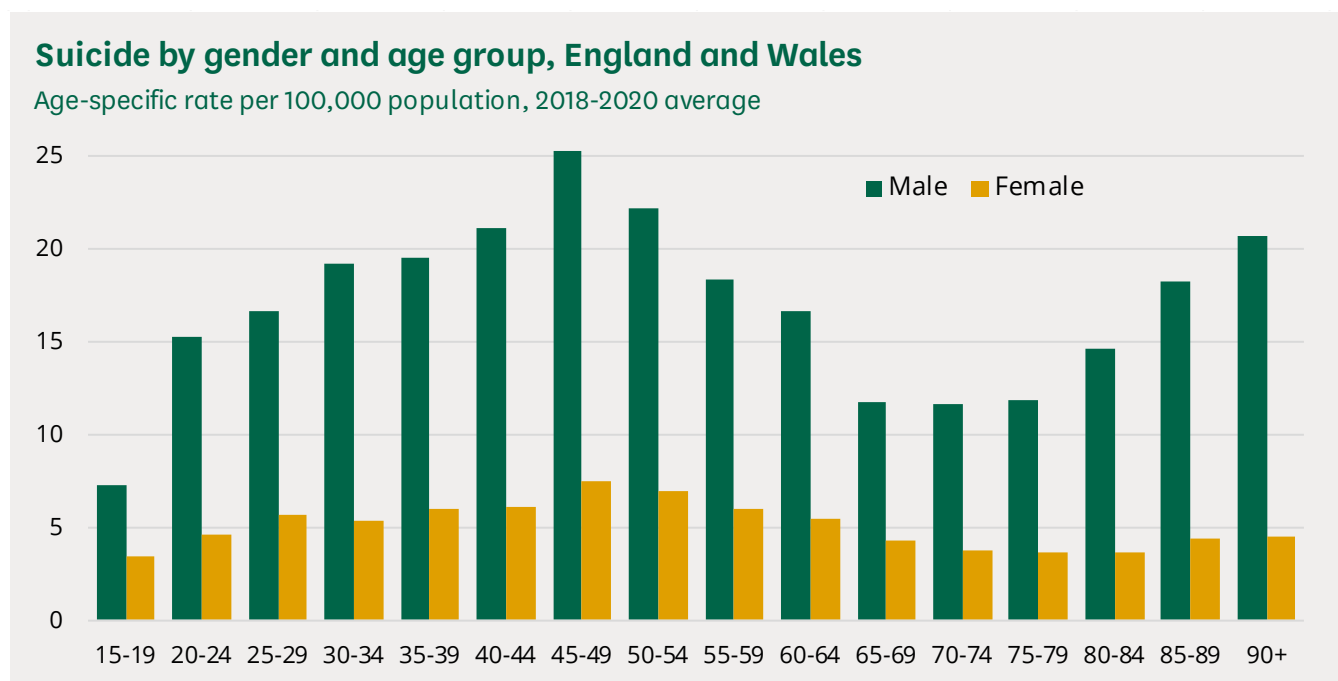
The chart below shows trends since 1981 for each gender. The suicide rate among women has approximately halved since 1981. By comparison, the rate among men has reduced by 20%.



Suicide in England and Wales is most common among people aged between 45 and 54. The chart below shows the 2018-2020 average for five-year age groups from age 15 upwards.



The chart below shows the same data, broken down additionally by gender. It shows that both men and women have a broadly similar age pattern in the risk of suicide. For example, age 45-49 has the highest rate in both genders. However, the gap between genders varies by age. For ages 15-19, the male rate is double the female rate – but for ages 80 and above, the male rate is four times the female rate.



Although the suicide rate is lower among younger age groups, this should be understood in the context of much lower mortality rates among young people. Among men aged 20-34, suicide was the [leading cause of death in England and Wales](#), accounting for one quarter of all deaths in that age group registered in 2020.

The graphic overlaid is a colour-coded heatmap showing trends in the suicide rate by age and gender since 1981. Higher values are shown with orange shading and lower values are shown with purple shading, and values at neither extreme are shown in white or off-white. Reading the graphic from left to right allows comparison between age groups in the same year. Reading from top to bottom allows comparison of a single age group over time.

The graphic shows that the most pronounced reductions in suicide rates were observed among older age groups (moving from orange to white and then to purple), while the rate has risen among people aged 45-64 over the last decade.

The graphic suggests some evidence for a ‘cohort effect’ – the younger group aged 20-39 at higher risk of suicide in the late 1990s is the same age group now aged 40-59 now experiencing higher risk.

Suicide rate by age group in England and Wales since 1981: heat map

Age-specific rate per 100,000 population by year of registration

Key: Higher rate Lower rate

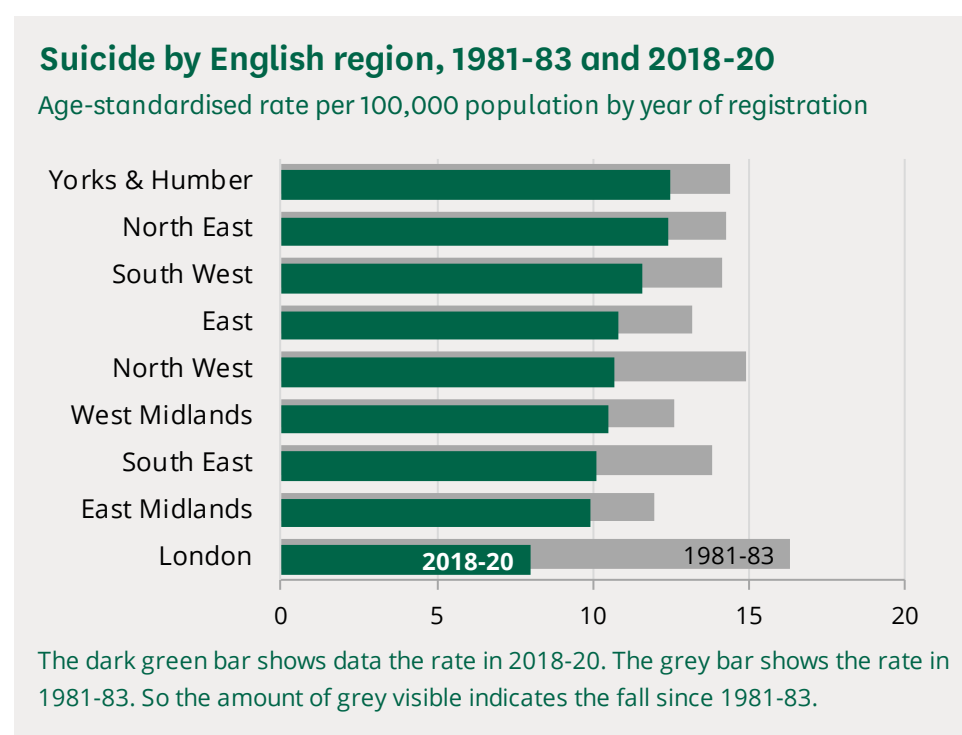
	Age group															
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90+
1981	4.6	9.2	12.1	12.1	13.6	15.6	16.7	19.1	19.2	18.4	18.6	19.6	19.9	18.9	16.4	19.7
1982	3.6	8.9	12.3	12.2	12.9	15.0	17.6	17.3	19.3	16.9	18.7	19.6	19.3	20.2	20.2	11.9
1983	3.8	8.8	11.0	11.6	13.8	15.2	16.2	17.4	17.8	17.7	18.3	18.3	20.1	18.2	18.9	12.3
1984	4.1	8.5	11.1	12.2	13.9	15.4	17.5	18.0	17.8	17.5	16.8	18.3	19.5	20.2	14.6	12.5
1985	4.3	9.8	11.5	13.4	12.9	16.0	17.4	17.3	18.4	18.8	19.3	18.8	20.2	20.3	16.0	10.8
1986	4.7	10.5	11.7	12.9	13.1	14.0	15.8	17.5	16.0	17.7	17.2	18.6	20.6	20.8	14.5	13.7
1987	5.5	11.5	11.5	13.7	13.2	13.9	16.4	14.9	15.6	16.8	15.9	16.2	15.3	18.9	17.1	14.6
1988	6.3	13.0	12.4	14.8	16.0	15.3	14.5	15.7	15.7	14.7	15.4	17.5	20.1	21.7	19.9	12.6
1989	6.0	12.4	12.8	13.8	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.4	14.9	12.3	12.6	12.7	16.3	16.7	17.3	11.5
1990	5.7	13.9	14.5	13.2	15.3	15.0	15.4	14.1	13.2	12.5	13.4	13.2	14.5	15.8	18.3	10.7
1991	6.1	13.0	13.8	15.0	15.8	15.3	16.3	14.5	12.9	11.4	11.3	10.8	13.1	15.8	16.6	11.2
1992	5.3	13.8	14.1	14.0	15.0	15.3	15.8	14.1	13.2	12.5	11.6	13.2	12.1	14.3	12.4	15.2
1993	5.0	14.3	13.6	12.9	13.8	15.0	14.4	13.4	12.9	10.1	11.4	9.8	12.6	14.1	16.3	13.0
1994	4.8	13.5	14.6	14.8	13.0	13.3	11.7	13.3	10.9	11.0	10.4	10.6	12.3	15.3	18.2	13.0
1995	4.8	13.1	14.8	14.1	14.3	16.7	12.3	13.2	11.7	10.3	9.2	9.2	11.5	13.4	14.6	10.1
1996	5.6	11.8	14.0	15.3	12.9	14.4	13.1	11.1	11.2	8.5	8.5	10.6	10.3	13.3	14.4	9.8
1997	5.5	13.4	14.0	13.7	13.4	12.9	13.9	11.3	10.8	9.3	8.3	9.2	9.4	11.1	13.7	11.5
1998	6.1	15.0	16.7	17.4	14.3	14.4	14.4	12.5	11.6	9.6	10.0	7.8	10.3	10.8	11.3	12.6
1999	5.5	12.3	15.3	15.6	15.3	14.5	13.9	12.3	11.4	10.0	9.7	9.9	11.0	11.8	15.0	10.3
2000	5.3	12.5	14.9	14.4	15.1	13.3	14.6	12.0	11.8	8.5	8.9	9.7	9.8	10.0	15.2	10.4
2001	5.6	10.3	12.9	14.4	13.8	13.0	14.0	12.7	11.8	9.4	8.0	9.2	10.1	9.5	12.8	12.3
2002	4.6	10.0	13.6	13.8	14.2	13.4	13.3	11.9	10.8	8.3	8.6	7.9	7.9	9.4	13.4	11.7
2003	4.2	10.6	12.0	14.2	14.1	14.2	13.0	12.1	10.6	9.1	7.2	8.6	10.2	9.7	10.1	14.2
2004	4.7	9.3	11.9	13.1	14.3	13.9	13.3	13.1	10.8	8.7	9.5	8.2	9.6	11.2	13.1	15.7
2005	4.2	8.6	10.0	13.0	14.0	13.6	14.3	13.0	10.8	9.3	7.8	7.4	7.1	10.5	12.5	13.5
2006	3.5	7.8	9.5	11.4	13.3	12.6	13.1	12.7	11.9	9.7	8.1	7.2	7.9	9.1	9.9	10.0
2007	3.6	7.4	8.9	12.2	12.9	12.5	11.6	11.6	10.6	8.8	7.5	6.1	7.5	9.8	9.6	7.1
2008	3.7	8.8	10.0	11.7	13.0	14.1	12.6	12.8	11.3	8.6	7.4	7.4	6.9	9.6	8.0	9.0
2009	3.7	8.2	10.9	10.0	13.9	14.2	13.4	12.7	11.8	8.7	7.4	6.8	7.8	9.4	9.2	9.1
2010	3.1	8.6	8.2	10.2	12.6	13.3	12.7	12.7	12.0	9.8	6.9	7.1	7.6	9.2	8.1	10.5
2011	4.0	8.6	9.3	10.3	13.1	15.4	14.3	15.0	11.7	9.2	7.2	7.9	7.4	9.0	9.8	8.4
2012	3.6	8.5	10.1	10.9	12.9	14.9	15.3	14.2	12.2	8.9	7.3	6.7	6.6	8.1	9.5	9.5
2013	3.9	8.3	8.6	10.7	13.9	15.3	15.7	14.8	13.9	10.6	7.5	7.7	7.7	9.0	11.6	11.1
2014	4.6	8.4	9.6	10.6	11.9	15.3	15.8	15.8	12.6	9.9	8.0	8.3	8.0	8.9	10.6	8.4
2015	5.5	8.9	9.7	11.3	11.9	13.9	14.6	14.3	13.4	11.0	8.4	7.9	7.7	9.5	10.1	12.3
2016	4.8	9.5	9.7	10.9	11.0	14.2	13.8	14.1	12.7	9.1	7.6	6.5	6.1	8.2	8.5	11.2
2017	5.4	7.8	9.6	10.6	11.0	13.2	14.7	13.0	11.4	9.3	8.0	6.7	7.8	6.3	9.9	8.8
2018	5.9	10.4	10.8	11.9	11.8	13.9	17.2	14.5	11.3	10.5	8.0	6.9	8.2	9.7	11.0	10.8
2019	5.7	11.0	12.4	13.0	13.1	14.7	16.1	14.9	13.1	11.5	7.8	8.3	7.6	8.4	9.2	8.0
2020	4.9	9.1	10.6	11.9	13.1	12.0	15.5	13.9	11.9	10.8	8.0	7.3	6.6	7.5	9.5	10.3

Note that small differences from year to year or between age groups are unlikely to be statistically significant.

English regions

In 2018-2020 the suicide rate was higher in the Yorkshire & Humber and the North East than in other English regions. London had the lowest rate. The suicide rate has fallen in all regions since 1981-1983, but the fall has been larger in some regions – especially London – than others.

The chart below shows the rate in 2018-20 (green bar) and in 1981-83 (grey bar). This means that the amount of the grey bar that is visible at the end of the green bar indicates the size of the fall since 1981. For example, in the North East the rate was 14.3 per 100,000 in 1981-83 and was 12.4 in 2018-20 – a fall of 13%, so only a little grey is visible. In London the rate fell from 16.3 in 1981-83 to 8.0 in 2018-20 – a fall of 51%, so a large proportion of the grey bar is visible.

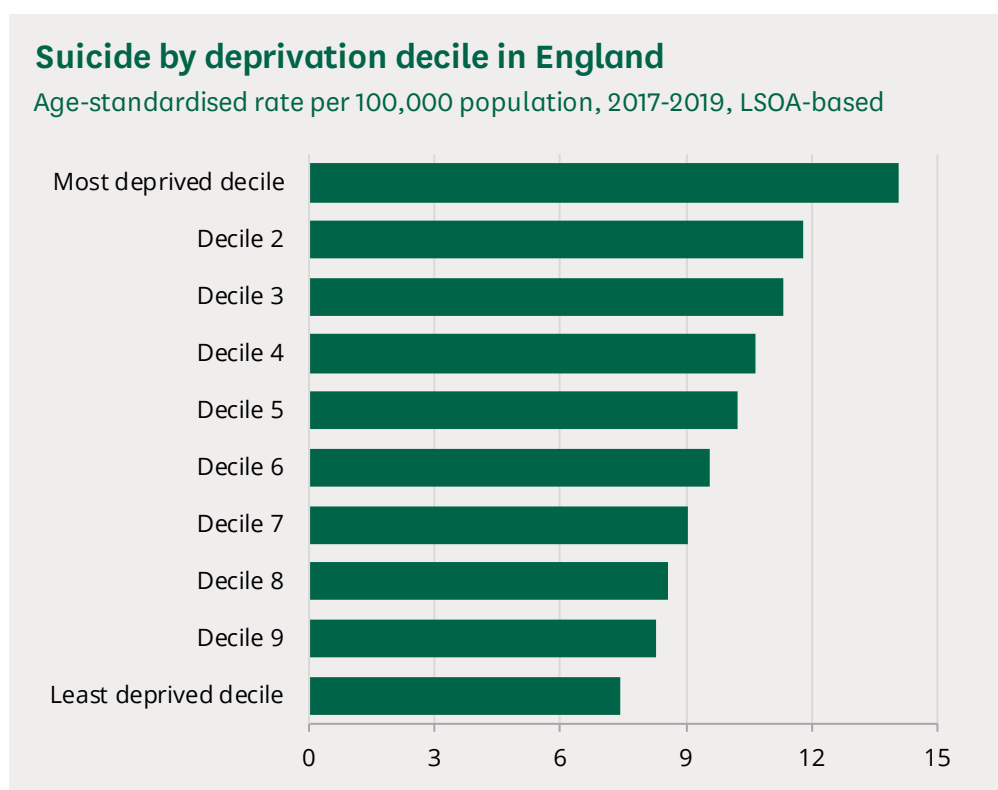


Data on suicide by local authority is available from ONS [here](#).

Deprivation

People living in the most deprived areas of England have a higher risk of suicide than those living in the least deprived areas. The suicide rate in the most deprived 10% of areas ('decile') in 2017-2019 was 14.1 per 100,000, which is almost double the rate of 7.4 in the least deprived decile.

The chart below shows the suicide rate broken down by deprivation in England, with areas split up into 10% chunks ('deciles') based on how deprived they are. You can find out more about what deprivation means and how it is measured [here](#).



Source: Public Health England, [Public Health Profiles](#)

Suicide during the pandemic

As noted above, data on suicides registered in 2020 cannot tell us about suicides occurring in 2020, because of registration delays.

However, in September 2021 [ONS released analysis of the number of suicides that occurred in England and Wales between April and July 2020](#) – roughly corresponding with the first national lockdown.

The data shows that the suicide rate was lower in Apr-Jul 2020 than in recent years. The rate per was 9.2 per 100,000 population – down from 11.3 in the same period of 2019. This was mainly driven by a fall in male suicides, with female suicides showing no statistically significant change on previous years.

ONS say that the difference between 2020 and previous years was largest in April.

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