

# STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE – REVIEW OF SUICIDE DEATH STATISTICS IN NORTHERN IRELAND (2015-2020)



9:30am Thursday 26 May 2022

## Review of Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland and release of new data series 2015 – 2020

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has today published findings from the review of suicide statistics in Northern Ireland, which was undertaken in conjunction with the Coroner's Service for Northern Ireland (CSNI). The review strictly relates to how findings are coded for reporting and statistical purposes, with the outcome of a downward revision to the previously reported rate of suicide deaths in Northern Ireland since 2015. There has been no change to the coroner's findings shared with family members, or to the cause of death as recorded on the death certificate.

### Review of Statistics

The review, which has been independently observed by the UK Statistics Authority's Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), began in 2020. The review was initiated following a notable fall in suicide numbers among registrations in 2019 (reported in June 2020) which had been subject to increased quality checks of source data compared with previous years. It was observed that prior to 2019 the number of deaths of undetermined intent had been increasing. This was primarily driven by an increase in the number of drug-related deaths, but was also linked to the information on intent captured via the CSNI system and subsequently the coding of cause of death by NISRA. In short, there had not been enough detail available to allow reliable coding of intent with the result that a number of cases between 2015 and 2018 were coded as deaths of undetermined intent and therefore fall within the official definition of suicide as opposed to accidental, which are outside the definition.

Initially the review involved revisiting the individual cases where the cause of death was drug related and the intent had been coded as undetermined. In the process of reviewing these

cases it became apparent that other deaths of undetermined intent should also be reviewed so the work was expanded to include deaths registered in 2020.

The main outcome of the review is that the majority of cases previously coded as undetermined intent have been reviewed by a coroner and deemed accidental and recoded as such, which excludes them from the official suicide definition.

Out of the 467 cases reviewed, 84 per cent moved into accidental cause of death categories which fall outside the suicide definition, thus resulting in a downward revision of the number of suicide deaths in NI between 2015 and 2020.

The extent of the downward revision in the number of suicide deaths from previously published figures is almost 30 per cent in each of the years 2015-2017, 23 per cent in 2018 and 17 per cent in 2020.

Northern Ireland has moved from having the highest rate in the UK based on previously published figures (18-19 per 100,000 next to Scotland at 13-16 per 100,000) to having a lower rate than Scotland in the last few years following the review. For the latest year 2020, NI is 13.3 per 100,000 compared with Scotland 15.0. E&W is lower at 10.0 in 2020.

The review of suicide statistics conducted by NISRA and CSNI marks a major revision to this important statistical series and has a notable impact on suicide rates compared with other nations. It should be noted, though, that despite revision downwards in overall statistical numbers due to the removal of accidental drug deaths, the drive to reduce deaths by suicide remains paramount to all relevant authorities. This remains the key overarching message - that one death by suicide is one too many.

In order to safeguard the accuracy of future statistical reporting a number of measures have been taken. These include improvements to the record management system in CSNI where intention now has to be recorded along with cause of death; closer working relations between all parties involved in the information capture, processing and reporting of suicide deaths; increased quality assurance checks at each stage; increased documentation of processes; and a focus on the importance of establishing intent integrated into training for newly appointed coroners.

Time series data on suicide deaths in Northern Ireland

In addition to the outcome of the review itself, NISRA has released a set of tables giving a revised time series (2015-2020) of the number of suicide deaths in Northern Ireland. The main findings include:

- There were 219 suicides registered in NI in 2020. This is an increase of 14 (7 per cent) since 2019, but represents a fall of 17 (7 per cent) on the 2018 figure.
- The age-standardised suicide death rate in NI increased from 12.4 deaths per 100,000 in 2019 to 13.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2020 (19.6 and 7.1 deaths per 100,000 for males and females respectively).
- Belfast Trust had the highest suicide rate at 18.8 deaths per 100,000 in 2020, followed by Southern Trust (14.2 deaths per 100,000). Northern Trust had the lowest suicide rate in 2020 at 9.4 deaths per 100,000.
- Northern Ireland's most deprived areas had a suicide rate that was almost twice that of the least deprived areas in 2020 (19.7 deaths per 100,000 in the most deprived areas, 10.8 per 100,000 in the least deprived).

**NISRA**

**May 2022**

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The official UK definition of suicide encompasses deaths due to external causes relating to intentional self-harm AND of undetermined intent. It does not include deaths where the outcome was deemed accidental.

2. Statistics on suicide deaths registered in Northern Ireland can be found at:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/cause-death/suicide-deaths>

3. Suicide deaths are defined using the UK definition which includes deaths from self-inflicted Injury as well as events of undetermined Intent. The ICD-10 codes used to define the suicide figures are shown below:

**ICD-10 - X60-X84, Y87.0, Description - Self-inflicted Injury,  
Notes - Persons aged 10 years and above**

**ICD-10 - Y10-Y34, Y87.2 - Description - Events of Undetermined Intent,  
Notes - Persons aged 15 years and above**

Further background information on the processes involved in the production of suicide statistics can be found in the user guide on the NISRA website:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/cause-death/suicide-deaths>

4. Due to a change in burden of proof relating to suicide deaths in 2018, in addition to the work carried out as part of the review and the changes in the ongoing processes relating to the production of suicide statistics, there is a necessary break in the time series beginning in 2015. Meaning that data pre-2015 should not be directly compared with data from 2015 onwards.

5. Information on the areas of deprivation is taken from the Northern Ireland Multiple deprivation measures (NIMDM 2017) and can be found at:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivationmeasure-2017-nimdm2017>

6. An explanation video of the Review has been produced and can be found at:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/review-suicide-statistics-northern-ireland>

7. All media queries to Department of Finance Press Office at [dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk) or on Tel: 028 90816724. The Executive Information Service operates an out of hours service For Media Enquiries Only between 1800hrs and 0800hrs Monday to Friday and at weekends and public holidays. The duty press officer can be contacted on 028 9037 8110.

7. Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from NISRA Customer Services at:

Telephone: +44 (0)300 200 7836

E-mail: [demography@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:demography@nisra.gov.uk)

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