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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE LETHALITY OF SUICIDE METHODS AND THEIR RELATION TO SUICIDE RATES

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Aims: For developing suicide prevention interventions, epidemiologic, socio-economic and demographic factors influencing suicide rates are of high interest. One considerable factor in this respect is gender, as in most countries male suicide rates are much higher than female suicide rates with a global average male/female ratio of 3.6:1. The present study seeks to contribute to the clarification of the question what underlies the different suicide rates of men and women by analyzing gender-specific lethality of suicide methods.

Method: Data on completed (fatal) and attempted (non-fatal) suicides from 2000 to 2004 were collected in two cities in the region of Bavaria, Germany. This data sample offers the opportunity to compare data of suicidal acts including completed as well as attempted suicides of the same region during the same time. The lethality for each suicide method was estimated by dividing the number of fatal episodes by the total episodes and then related to gender and age.

Results: Lethality per method was higher for men than for women; significant differences could be shown for the majority of methods. Regarding age, lethality rising with age could be shown. Still, in higher age groups, differences in lethality between men and women were significant.

Conclusion: Results stress the importance of gender-specific suicide prevention. Male-specific suicide-prevention should be concerned with improving access to and treatment of men under risk for suicidal behaviour. Addressing the problem through multifaceted programs therefore is a promising approach.