

SUICIDE IN DIFFERENT POLITICAL SYSTEMS - SUICIDE RATES IN MAGDEBURG/GERMANY IN A TWO-PERIOD ANALYSIS

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Introduction: As German reunification took place in 1990 Eastern Germany as a former socialist country (GDR) became part of democratic Germany. It underwent dramatic changes influencing all parts of society.

Objectives: Our objective was to analyse all suicides in the Eastern German City Magdeburg based on all relevant police files.

Aims: Little is known about the former GDR and its suicide rates since no official data existed. Our aim was to investigate differences in suicide rates by age and sex in one city of the former GDR before and after reunification.

Methods: As part of GDR-time the period 1985 - 1989 (A) and as post-reunification time the period 1999 - 2004 (B) were analysed. Basis of our investigation were all police files. Absolute suicide numbers were counted. Suicide rates were calculated per 100.000 persons, sex and year. Different age structures became comparable by using the old standard population of Europe (WHO 1976).

Results: We identified 470 suicides in period A and 206 suicides in period B. For both sexes suicide rates were significantly higher in period A and increased with age. Women had generally lower suicide rates. Age-standardized rates show a reduction for males of about 50 % and for females of two thirds in comparison of the two periods.

Conclusions: Suicide rates decreased in our analysed city dramatically. Women in general and particularly elder groups have lower suicide rates and thus benefited most. There are various contributing factors such as positive changes in health care and social support.