Suicide in the Northern Territory, 1981–2002

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Abstract

Objective:

Design:
Retrospective descriptive analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics death registration data and data from the NT Coroner’s Office.

Setting and participants:
All residents of the NT who completed suicide between 1981 and 2002.

Main outcome measures:
Changes in the age-adjusted and age- and sex-specific rates of suicide in Indigenous and non-Indigenous NT residents over time; prior diagnosis of mental illness and use of alcohol or other drugs by those completing suicide.

Results:
The age-adjusted suicide rate in the NT increased significantly between 1981 and 2002 (P < 0.001). Over this period, the rates among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous male populations increased by 800% (P < 0.05) and 30% (P > 0.05), respectively. Indigenous males aged under 45 years and non-Indigenous males aged 65 years and over were most at risk. In the Top End, a history of diagnosed mental illness was present in 49% of suicide cases, and misuse of alcohol or other drugs around the time of death was associated with 72% of suicide cases.

Conclusion:
Our study highlights the rising rate of suicide in the NT and suggests that suicide prevention initiatives need to specifically target Indigenous and non-Indigenous males in the age groups most at risk.