

MENTAL HEALTH

Economic crisis prompts rise in suicides and mental ill health

Recessions are bad for you, especially if you're a man aged 25-44. That's the conclusion of a systematic review of studies into the effects on health of the 2008 banking meltdown.

The financial crisis saw rises in suicide rates, particularly among men, and mental health problems, especially among women.

Researchers in London and California analysed 41 reports on the impact on health from 2008-2015, many focusing on Spain and Greece.

One survey reported 846 more suicides among men and 155 among women in England from 2008-10 than trends would predict. Another showed that by the end of 2012, the male suicide rate was 57% higher in Ireland than if the trend before the economic crisis had continued.

1,001

Number of suicides that were above trend predictions in England in 2008-10

The results revealed a different picture on mortality, with overall death rates unaffected, possibly because people lead healthier lifestyles during economic difficulty.

The researchers called for mechanisms to 'mitigate the adverse effects of the crisis'.

In a linked editorial, University of Liverpool researchers say that while recessions can harm health, governments can make things worse. 'It is critical to distinguish between health effects of recessions and the effect of policy responses to recession.'

+ *Parmar D et al (2016) Health outcomes during the 2008 financial crisis in Europe: systematic literature review. BMJ. doi: 10.1136/bmj.i4588*

**Taking vitamin D could halve the risk of asthma attacks**

Cochrane library research has found that giving a daily oral vitamin D supplement to people with mild to moderate asthma reduced the risk of severe attacks requiring hospital admission or emergency department attendance from 6% to about 3%.

They analysed seven trials involving 435 children, and two studies involving 658 adults, all of which lasted for between 6 and 12 months. Participants were ethnically diverse, coming from Canada, India, Japan, Poland, the UK and the US. Most continued to take their usual asthma medication while taking part in the trials.

The researchers also discovered vitamin D supplements reduced the rate of asthma attacks that required treatment with steroids.

Lead author Professor Adrian Martineau from the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research

at Queen Mary, University of London, said: 'We found taking a vitamin D supplement in addition to standard asthma treatment significantly reduced the risk of severe asthma attacks, without causing side effects.'

'Caution is warranted as the findings relating to severe asthma attacks come from just three trials. Most of the patients enrolled in these studies were adults with mild or moderate asthma.'

Asthma affects about 300 million people worldwide, with low blood levels of vitamin D linked to enhanced risk of attack. Supplements could be used to reduce upper respiratory infections, such as the common cold, which can exacerbate the condition.

+ *Martineau AR et al (2016) Vitamin D for the management of asthma. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD011511.pub2*