Suicide mortality in Ukraine

Short Report

Suicide mortality at time of armed conflict in Ukraine

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The purpose of this review is to explore the dynamics of suicide mortality rates in Ukraine during an ongoing armed conflict between 2014 and 2015. Suicide mortality data were obtained by reviewing annual analytical releases from the State Service for Emergent Situations of Ukraine and annual release of Russian Federal Service of State Statistics. Suicide mortality in mainland Ukraine and in the Crimea region demonstrated a mild decrease, whereas suicide mortality in the regions directly involved in the armed conflict demonstrated a prominent decrease. The results of this review support Durkheim theory. The limitation of this review includes general concern about quality of data at time of armed conflict in the country.

Introduction

Armed conflict in Ukraine started at the beginning of 2014 and continues until now. As an outcome of ‘Euromaidan’ revolution the new government proclaimed a goal of stronger integration with the European Union. Several provinces in the South (Autonomous Republic of Crimea) and East (Donetsk and Lugansk) of the country with a high proportion of Russian-origin population and a strong level of economic integration with Russia started the process of disintegration from the Ukraine mainland. In March 2014, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was incorporated as a part of Russia despite disagreement from the Ukrainian government and Western countries. The process of disintegration from Ukraine and its incorporation as a part of Russia went mostly without significant armed action involving civilians. Soon after that the Eastern provinces of Ukraine which included Donetsk and Lugansk started a similar disintegration movement which resulted in an armed conflict on Eastern Ukraine territories between the mainland Ukraine on one side and parts of Donetsk and Lugansk provinces on the other side.
According to Durkheim’s theory, suicide mortality during armed conflicts and wars is expected to decrease. Nevertheless, historically there is limited evidence supporting the theory mainly due to unavailability or poor quality of data. The purpose of this review is to test Durkheim’s theory and to explore the dynamics of suicide mortality rates in Ukraine during ongoing armed conflict of 2014–15.

Methods


Results

We observed a trend of decreasing suicide mortality rates in mainland Ukraine and all other parts of the country considered in this analysis since the start of the armed conflict (see table 1). Suicide mortality in mainland Ukraine and in the Crimea region demonstrated a mild decrease, whereas suicide mortality in the regions directly involved in the armed conflict demonstrated a prominent decrease (especially in Lugansk province).

Discussion

The results of this overview support Durkheim’s theory, which explains the decline of suicide rates during wars and civil conflicts by rising collective sentiments, stimulation of spirit and concentrating activity toward a single end.2 We observed decrease in suicide rates in territories belonging to both sides of the conflict but it was more prominent in the parts of the country actively involved in the armed actions. It is unclear why the decrease of suicide mortality rates was significantly higher in Lugansk province compared with Donetsk province. One possible explanation may include misclassification of suicide with accidental or undetermined death. While interpreting the data one should keep in mind the limitation of this overview which is related to a general concern about the quality of data at the time of the said armed conflict in the country. Therefore, subsequent monitoring of the data is required to prove the outcome of this observation. It is also important to remember that worsening socioeconomic situation in the country is a risk factor for an increase of suicide mortality in the future.3 In taking a long-term perspective, suicide prevention interventions at national level are likely to be required.

Table 1 Trends of suicide mortality in Ukraine before and during the armed conflict (per 100 000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014a</th>
<th>2014a vs. 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>−2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimea</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>−1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donetsk provincea</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>−4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lugansk provinceb</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>−17.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a: The year when armed conflict started.
b: Provinces directly involved in the armed conflict.

Conflicts of interest: None declared.

Key points

- Suicide mortality rates in Ukraine decreased after armed conflict started.
- Most prominent decrease observed in regions directly involved in armed conflict.
- This outcome supports Durkheim theory.

References