Has globalisation changed national suicide rates?

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Globalisation is an expansive process, capable of changing social, economic, political, and cultural structures. The large-scale transformations involved globalisation have been noted as influencing a wide range of human illnesses and causes of death. The aims of this study were to examine whether globalisation has an influence on male and female suicide rates, as measured across time and between countries. A globalisation 'index' was developed to measure the level of globalisation in 35 countries from the year 1980 onwards. Time-series cross-country data (from 1980 onwards) was used to estimate the relationship between globalisation, ecological risk and protective factors, and age-standardised suicide rates in 35 countries. Data was obtained from the WHO Statistical Information System, the United Nations Data Service (UN Data), the World Development, Indicators (WDI), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (UNESCO), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Results of a fixed-effect regression analysis found that globalisation was directly related to male suicide rates, but had no significant effect on female suicide rates. The widespread changes associated with globalisation may have unsettled societies around the world by altering economic, social, and cultural regulatory mechanisms. The loss of these protective influences may increase the risk of suicide by creating a sense of insecurity, uncertainty, and 'anomie'. It appears that men are more affected by the societal changes associated with the globalisation process than women. These findings suggest that global social processes need to be included in population-level strategies for suicide prevention.

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