

# Murder, Suicide Rates Climb When Jobs Vanish and Economy Slows

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By Marthe Fourcade and Michelle Fay Cortez

July 8 (Bloomberg) -- Murders and suicides spike with unemployment, U.S. and European researchers said.

The scientists, who combed through almost four decades of European Union records, found that a 1 percent increase in joblessness brings about a 0.8 percent rise in suicide and murder rates. Government programs to help workers offer some protection, they wrote in the July 8 issue of [The Lancet](#).

The global economy is now in its deepest recession since World War II, with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development predicting the output of its 30 members will shrink 4.1 percent this year. The slump has pushed unemployment to its [highest since 1983](#) in the U.S. and the most in a decade in the 16 nations that use the euro.

"The effects of a financial crisis depend crucially on how governments chose to respond," lead researcher [David Stuckler](#) of [Oxford University](#) said in a telephone interview. "Financial crises cause significant hardships for many people, but they don't have to cost them their lives."

Stuckler, [Martin McKee](#) of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and colleagues said governments may be able to use the findings to help people better cope with the recession.

A bigger jump in joblessness made things worse, the researchers found. When the unemployment rate grew more than 3 percent, the increase in suicides was 4.5 percent.

## Silver Lining

In that scenario, the scientists also found a 28 percent surge in deaths from [alcohol abuse](#), a link that "lends support to the notion that short-term negative effects of unemployment mainly affect psychological distress," they wrote.

There was a silver lining: the scientists found that for every 1 percent gain in unemployment, the number of [road traffic accidents](#) dropped 1.4 percent, a development they explained by the fact that people tend to walk more than they drive when times are hard.

Also on the brighter side, the rise in unemployment didn't boost suicide rates in countries where governments spent at least \$190 per person on programs to help workers keep their jobs or train for a new one, according to Stuckler. The U.S. and the U.K. spend less than that, and countries in central and eastern Europe have weaker protection for workers, the researchers said.

"Some places have done much better than others, even with the same levels of unemployment," McKee said in an interview. "Those employment policies don't interfere with the benefit you get in road traffic accidents. You are getting a win-win situation."

## Tip of Iceberg

Stuckler cited the [New Deal](#), which U.S. President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) instituted in 1933 to help pull the U.S. out of the Great Depression.

"Death rates fell, even though many people learned about the Great Depression by hearing about bankers jumping out of windows," he said.

Suicides have claimed some prominent investors and executives in the last 12 months. German billionaire [Adolf Merckle](#) stepped in front of a train in January. [David Kellerman](#), chief financial officer of Freddie Mac in McLean, Virginia, hanged himself in April. U.K. investor [Kirk Stephenson](#) jumped in front of a train last September.

"The U.S. and the U.K. currently spend under \$190 to help workers get back into the workforce and retain jobs," Stuckler said. "So we would expect to see more rises in suicides in the U.S. and the U.K. than in countries that have better resourced active labor market programs."

Overall death did not increase when unemployment climbed, the researchers found. They noted that the increase in suicide and murder rates was for people aged under 65.

"Suicides are just the tip of the iceberg," Stuckler said. "We can't measure all the emotional distress. There is much more going on in the background in terms of human suffering."

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To contact the reporters on this story: [Marthe Fourcade](mailto:mfourcade@bloomberg.net) in Paris at [mfourcade@bloomberg.net](mailto:mfourcade@bloomberg.net); [Michelle Fay Cortez](mailto:mcortez@bloomberg.net) in London at [mcortez@bloomberg.net](mailto:mcortez@bloomberg.net)

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