

## **Overview of Deaths by Suicide in Devon**

*Trigger warning – this report contains details of suicide statistics and methods which some readers may find difficult or distressing. If you are affected by any of the issues raised, please contact the Samaritans, Tel: 116 123 or via [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)*

The report is for professionals and other interested parties and aims to inform work on suicide prevention by providing an overview of deaths by suicide and undetermined injury among Devon residents, registered during the calendar years 2021 to 2023.

Deaths by suicide and undetermined injury are only registered after an inquest has taken place and therefore not all deaths will have occurred during this time period. A death is considered a suicide only when a coroner at an inquest has concluded that the person intentionally took their own life. Deaths by undetermined injury are where the coroner at inquest reaches an open or narrative verdict because the intention of the person is uncertain. Only open and narrative verdicts which are considered deaths by undetermined injury are included. Deaths of Devon residents are included in this audit whether they died in Devon or elsewhere in the country. This report uses the term suicide to refer to both suicide and undetermined injury deaths.

### **Data sources and definitions**

Deaths included in this analysis have been sourced from Office for National Statistics published data, and from the Primary Care Mortality Database using the International Classification of Diseases (ICD10) codes X60-X84 (age 10+ only) and Y10-Y34 (age 15+ only), registered in the respective years. This is in line with the definitions used in the Public Health Outcomes Framework.

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### **Suicide Numbers and Rates**

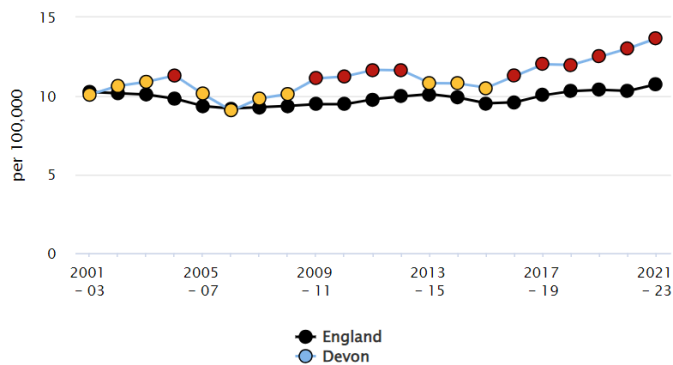
Between 2021 and 2023, there were 293 (2020-22, 277) registered suicide deaths in Devon. This represents an average of around 8 deaths a month. In Devon there were 95 suicide deaths registered in 2021, 107 in 2022, and 91 in 2023.

The data for 2021-23 show that Devon has a suicide rate of 13.7 per 100,000 population (2020-22, 13.0) and this is statistically significantly higher than the England rate of 10.7 per 100,000 population (2020-22, 10.3).

### **Suicide Trends**

Figure 1 shows that the rate in Devon has increased for the last three reported periods, with the rate per 100,000 going from 12.0 in 2018-20, to 13.7 in 2021-23.

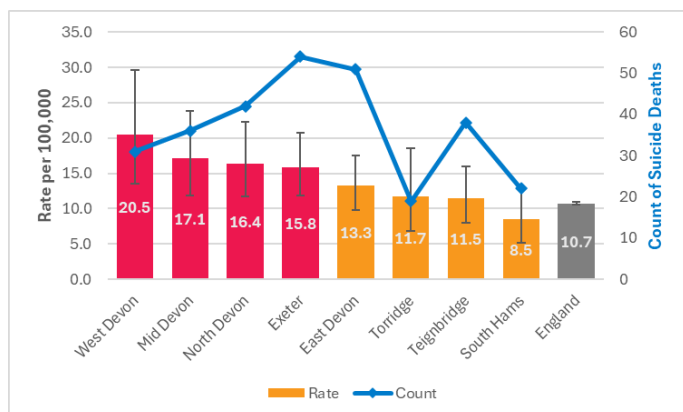
**Figure 1: Trends in suicide rates, England and Devon.**



The red circles on the graph indicate where Devon has a statistically worse rate than England, and yellow circles indicate a statistically similar rate to England.

At district level within Devon, West Devon has the highest district suicide rate at 20.5 per 100,000. West Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon and Exeter all have rates that are significantly worse than England, with the remaining districts being statistically similar to England. These are shown in Figure 2 below, and are represented as red for worse, orange for similar, and the count of suicide deaths for each district is also shown by the markers on the blue line.

**Figure 2: Suicide Rates and Counts by Devon Districts**

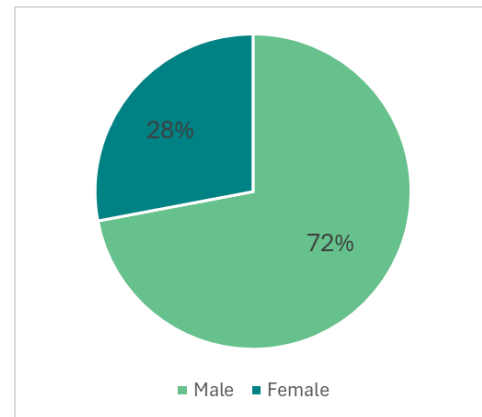


## Sex

Of the 293 suicide deaths registered between 2021 and 2023, 72% (211 deaths) were in men, and 28% (82

deaths) were in women, this is in line with the proportions seen nationally.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Male and Female suicide deaths in Devon, 2021-23.**

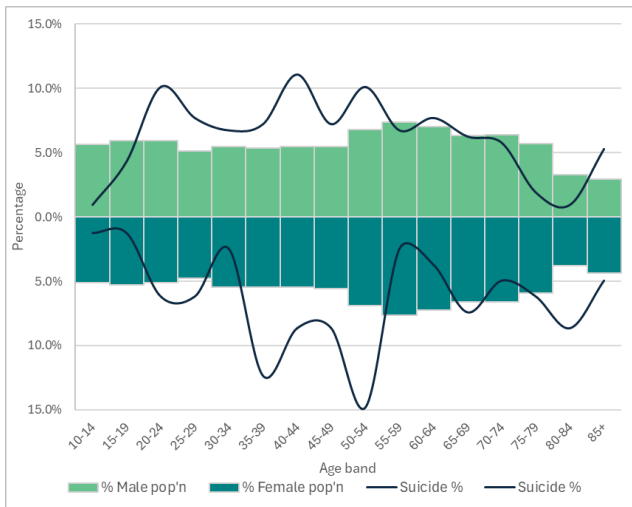


The male suicide rate for 2021-23 is 20.4 per 100,000 (2020-22, 19.8) and this is statistically significantly higher than the England rate of 16.4 (2020-22, 15.8). The female suicide rate for 2021-23 is 7.3 per 100,000 (2020-22, 6.7) which is also significantly higher than the England rate of 5.4 (2020-22, 5.2).

## Ages

Figure 4 shows the percentage distribution of suicide deaths by sex and age band compared to the percentage distribution of the population of Devon. For both sexes, we usually see the highest percentages of deaths fall within the middle ages. For the 2021-23 period, the highest percentage of deaths were for 50-54 year olds in women (14.8% of female deaths) and for 40-44 year olds in men (11.1% of male deaths).

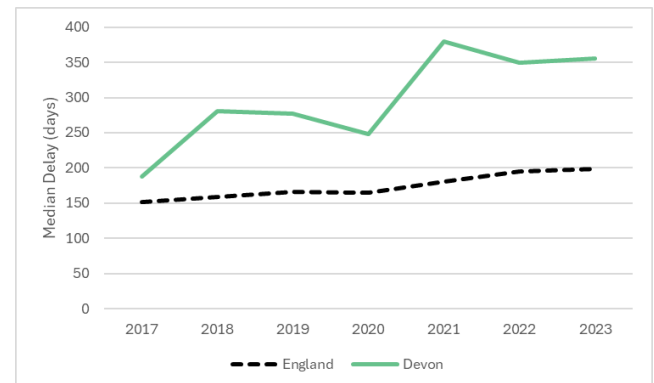
**Figure 4: Percentage of suicide deaths by sex and age band (2021-23)**



## Registration Delays

Reported suicide figures are based on the number of suicide deaths registered in each calendar year, rather than the date on which the death occurred. The difference between these dates is known as the registration delay. The Covid pandemic affected the ability of the coroners to carry out inquests, the impact of this is still ongoing and there are currently higher average registration delays than pre-pandemic. In England, the median registration delay for deaths registered in 2023 was 199 days (195 days in 2022), this is the longest delay since 2001. In Devon the median registration delay in 2023 was 355 days (349 in 2022). See Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Trend in Median Registration delays for suicide deaths**



## Place of Death

53% of the suicide deaths in Devon occurred at home, and 34% occurred elsewhere, as shown in Table 1. Note that place of death can be different from the place of the suicide attempt.

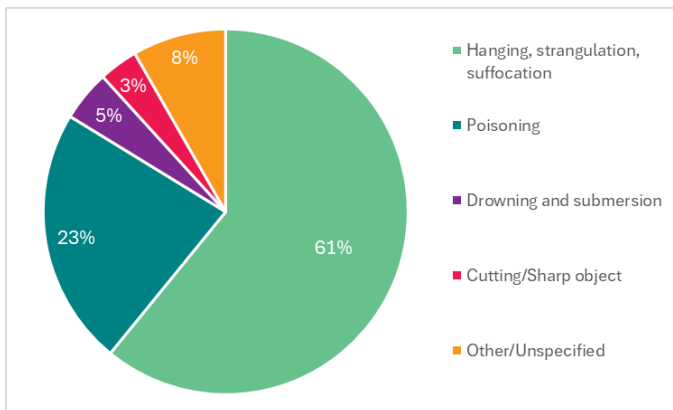
**Table 1: Suicides by Place of death (2021-23)**

	% of Deaths
Home	53%
Public Place/Other	34%
Place of care	13%

## Method

Hanging/suffocation is the most common method used (61% of deaths in 2021-23) followed by poisoning (19%), see figure 6. These are the most common methods for both men and women and is similar to the picture seen nationally. For Devon in 2021-23 these two methods accounted for 83% of male suicide deaths and 86% of female suicide deaths.

**Figure 6: Percentage of Suicide deaths by Method**

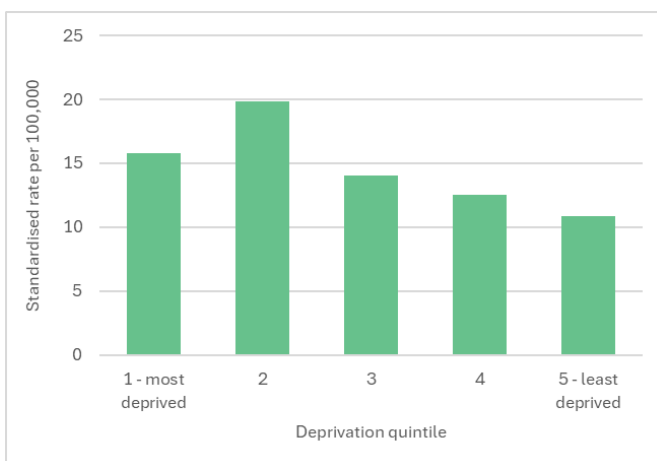


## Deprivation

A rapid evidence review of eighteen studies from the UK and Republic of Ireland found that there was a strong association between area level deprivation and suicidal behaviour, where suicidal behaviour increased as deprivation increased (Samaritans, 2017).

Figure 7 shows the suicide rate for Devon is higher in the more deprived areas than the least deprived.

**Figure 7: Suicide rate by deprivation quintile 2021-23**



## Real time suspected suicide surveillance

Public Health Devon collaborate with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), and colleagues in Plymouth & Torbay Public Health teams, to commission a Real Time suspected Suicide Surveillance (RTSS) system for

the county of Devon. Data is collated by the Police who are usually the first agency to know about any potential suicide, and shared with the Suicide Response and Data Manager to ensure timely support is offered for the bereaved or those impacted by a death e.g. witnesses & bystanders, and to identify potential clusters and novel methods. This data is shared with a group of key stakeholders to ensure effective immediate response when appropriate as well as identification via monthly meetings of any additional prevention activity that may be beneficial.

Note that only a coroner can conclude the verdict of a death at inquest, hence the use of the term 'suspected suicide'. There can often be a significant time delay between receiving a notification through Real Time Suicide Surveillance (RTSS) and receiving a coroner's conclusion at inquest, which is why the RTSS function is important in preventing further deaths.

## Further Information

More information on collaborative working in Devon on suicide prevention, including the suicide prevention strategy and action plan is available at: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/adult-social-care/independent-living/health-and-wellbeing/suicide-prevention-in-devon/how-we-work/>

## References

Samaritans (2017) Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Suicidal Behaviour. Available from [https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Socioeconomic\\_disadvantage\\_and\\_suicidal\\_behaviour\\_-\\_Full.pdf](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Socioeconomic_disadvantage_and_suicidal_behaviour_-_Full.pdf)