EENHEID VOOR ZELFMOORDONDERZOEK

UNIT FOR SUICIDE RESEARCH

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Is attempted suicide becoming more lethal?
Findings from a monitoring study of attempted suicide in Ghent, Belgium between 1987 and 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Attempted suicide constitutes a major public health problem due to its common occurrence and association with an increased risk of suicide. Epidemiological changes can have important consequences for treatment and prevention.

METHOD

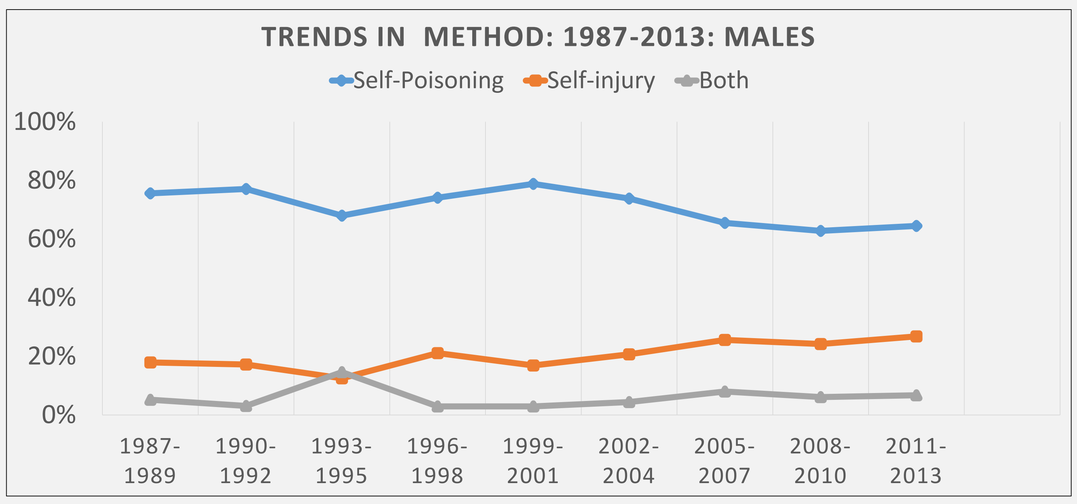
Sample: The data refer to all attempted suicide cases (n = 8.692) aged 15 years or more, presented to the A&E department of the University Hospital of Ghent and two general hospitals in Ghent for the 27-year period 1 January 1987 to 31 December 2013.

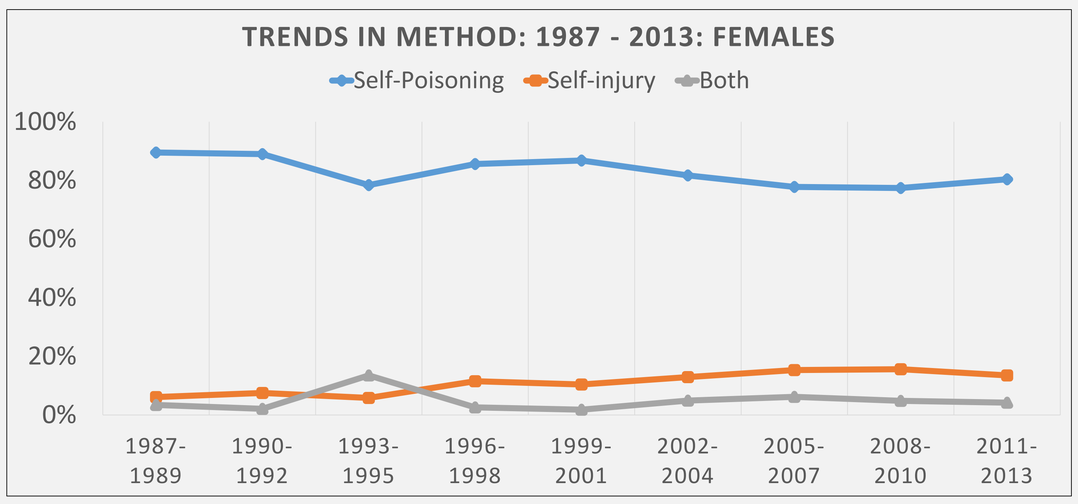
Assessment: By means of a standardized monitoring form trends, sociodemographics, and method related characteristics of all attempted suicide cases presented to the A&E departments of the participating hospitals were assessed.

Analyses: Statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS 22 and included chi square analyses (linear by linear association).

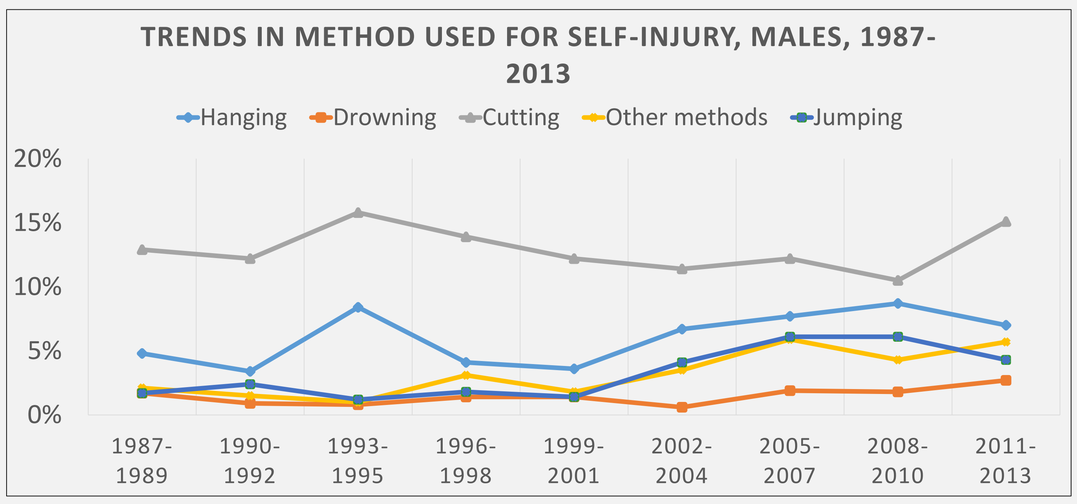
RESULTS

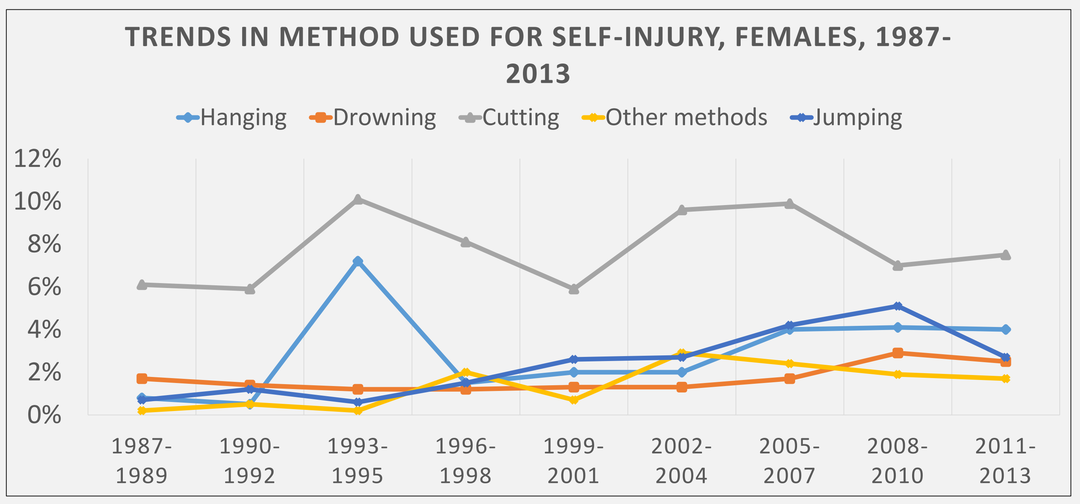
During the 26-year study period, the monitoring system reported 8.692 episodes of attempted suicide in individuals aged 15 years and older, including 4.863 (56.0%) females. Self-poisoning (n= 6.804; 78,3%) was involved more commonly than self-injury (n= 1.279; 14.7%) or the use of both methods (n=459; 5.3%). Significant more males than females (19.8% vs 10.7%) used only self-injury.





Among males (χ^2 for trend= 25.36, p < .001) and females (χ^2 for trend= 37.17, p < .001) the proportion of episodes involving self-poisoning decreased. Numbers of episodes of self-injury increased among both genders (males: χ^2 for trend= 26.85, p < .001; females: χ^2 for trend = 47.78, p < .001).





Over the 26-year study period, there was an increase in the use of **hanging** (**M**: χ^2 for trend = 7.94, p < .01; **F**: χ^2 for trend = 10.93, p < .01), **jumping** (**M**: χ^2 for trend = 26.53, p < .001; **F**: χ^2 for trend = 29.11, p < .001) and the use of **other violent methods** (**M**: χ^2 for trend = 25.73, p < .001; **F** χ^2 for trend = 15.98, p < .001), the latter including use of firearms, jumping before a moving object or other traffic related injury.

Self-injury using a sharp object (i.e. cutting) was the most commonly used violent method without statistically significant changes over time. **Cutting** was most common between 15-24 years and decreased with increasing age (χ^2 for trend = 23.57, p < .001). Significantly more males (9.9%) than females (5.0%) used cutting as method. Hanging was most common between 15-19 years and 50-59 years and significant more frequent among males (4.8%) than among females (2.0%). Drowning was most commonly used by people aged 65 and older. Jumping was most common between 15-19 years, and significantly more males (2.8%) than females (2.0%) used this method.

CONCLUSION

Using data from A&E departments in major general hospitals this long-term monitoring study of the occurrence and characteristics of attempted suicide shows decreasing rates of attempted suicide, however with significantly increasing use of self-injurious methods. The relative increase in self-injury, as indicated by the current findings, poses an additional challenge to prevention, as it appears to be difficult or even impossible to restrict access to involved methods such as cutting, hanging and jumping from heights.