

The Society of Actuaries in Ireland

New Study Highlights True Impact of Suicide, Road Traffic Accidents and Breast Cancer on Irish Mortality

Suicide, Road Traffic Accidents and Breast Cancer Amongst Biggest Killers in Ireland

Male 'Years Lost' Due to Accidental/Violent Deaths Greater than 'Years Lost' because of all Cancer Deaths

A recent report by the Society of Actuaries in Ireland has highlighted the major impact of suicide, road traffic accidents and breast cancer on Irish mortality.

The report analysed the impact of different diseases and causes of death on Irish health. The report investigated the impact of these different causes using a 'years lost' analysis. This analysis counts the number of years of normal life expectancy lost as a result of death. For example, if male life expectancy is 77 years, a male dying at age 50 will lose 27 years of normal life expectancy. Deaths at younger ages will lose more years of normal life expectancy.

In the case of males, the report shows that the three big killers are circulatory diseases, accidental/violent deaths and cancer. Tony Jeffery, Chairman of the Society of Actuaries working party commented that the high impact of suicide and road traffic accidents is not so obvious using more traditional mortality measures. "Surprisingly, the number of 'years lost' because of accidental/violent deaths (made up mostly of road traffic accidents and suicides) are greater than the 'years lost' because of all cancer deaths. Accidental/violent deaths accounted for almost 1 in 4 of all male life years lost in 1996."

The report also noted that Ireland has one of the worst suicide rates among developed countries for young males. The graph on suicide rates shows that while Ireland has similar average rate to other countries, we have the highest suicide rate for young males. The report also highlights that Ireland's alarming suicide rate has increased sharply over the last ten years.

In the case of females, cancer and circulatory diseases are the two main causes of 'years lost' due to premature death. Irish mortality rates from breast cancer compare poorly to other developed countries and breast cancer results in more 'years lost' than all other cancer types. Cancer accounts for 1 in 3 of female life 'years lost'.

The report also analysed trends in Irish mortality rates over the last 40 years and, although our experience compares poorly to other developed countries, it has nonetheless improved dramatically over the period. Life expectancy for males has increased by four years and life expectancy for females has increased by five years. Eamonn Heffernan,

President of the Society of Actuaries, cautioned that the implications for pension provision should be considered in the light of the increases in life expectancy. "More money may need to be set aside by the State, by employers and by individuals to fund the cost of paying pensions for longer. Otherwise pension expectations may have to be lowered."

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Society of Actuaries in Ireland

The Society of Actuaries in Ireland is the professional body for actuaries practising in Ireland, many of whom work in the pensions and life assurance industries. The Society aims to develop the role and understanding of the actuarial profession and to enhance its reputation, in particular for serving the public interest.