



Suicide prevention for older adults

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- We live longer and are healthier than previous generations
- Increase in the number of persons 80+ and 90+
- Aging can bring positive changes to mental health
 - Previous experiences provide strategies for coping
 - Increased emotional regulation
 - Personality maturity



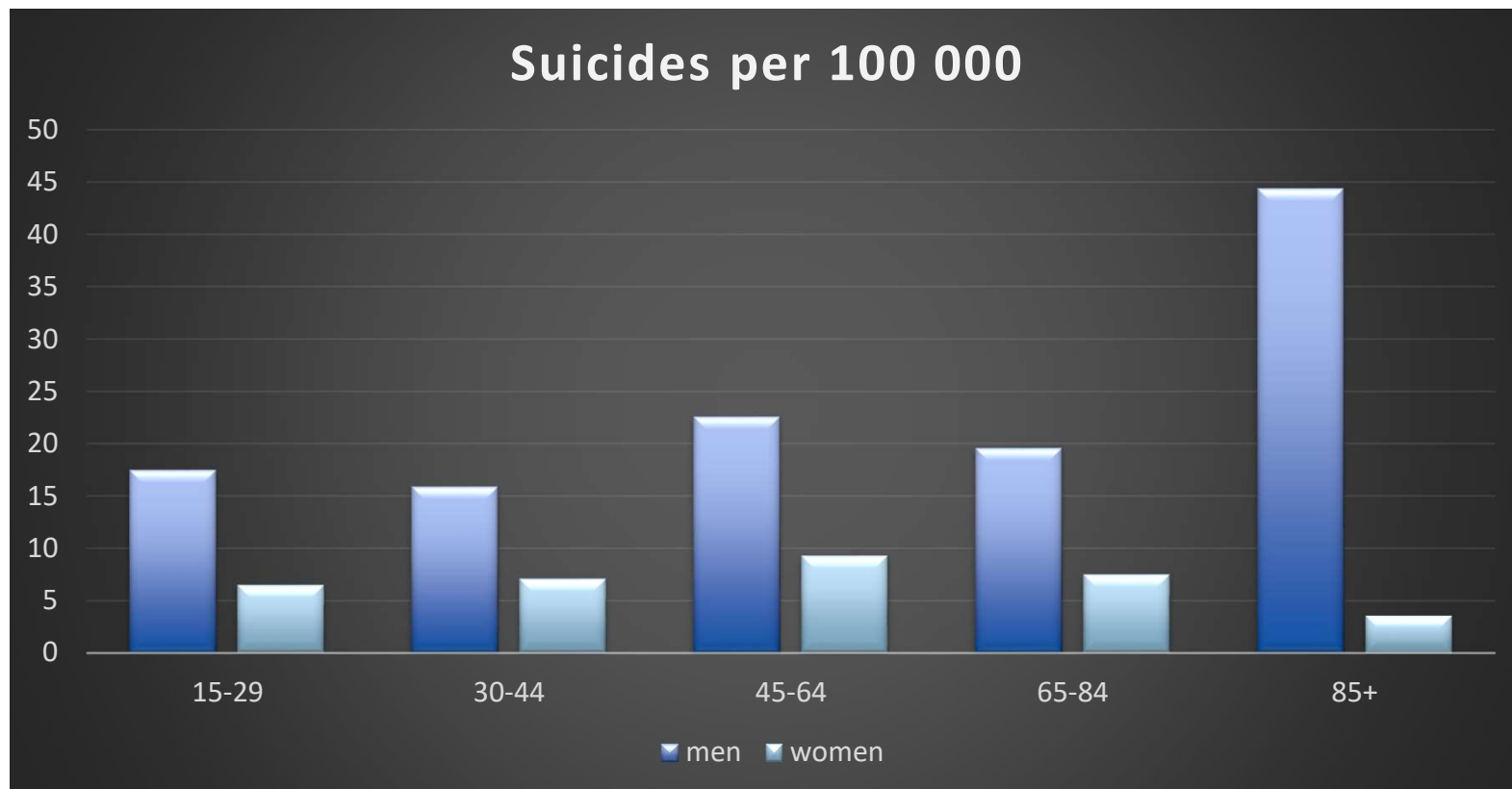
But....

Longer lives mean that we live longer with illness.

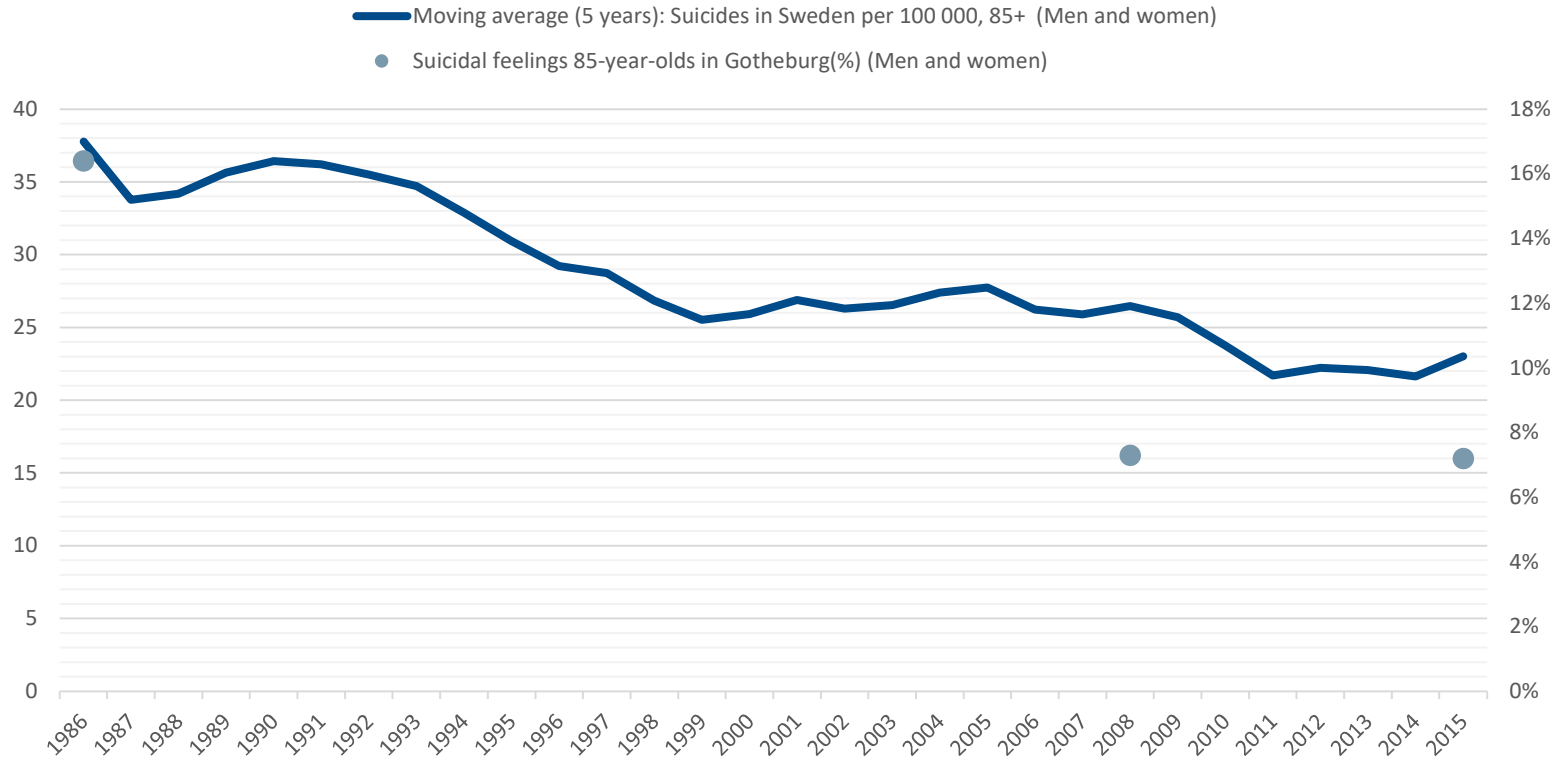
Our wellbeing is influenced by our capability for doing things that we consider meaningful.



Suicide rates in Sweden 2020



Time trends in Sweden 1986-2015



Reports from the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare and the Board of Public Health



- Older adults are less likely to get specialized mental health care.
- Older adults with mental illhealth are less likely to get psychological treatment.



Suicide prevention in older adults: What do we know?

- Only 8 relevant studies (and one of these rated low quality)
- Outcomes
 - suicidal ideation: n=6
 - Suicidförsök: n=1
 - Suicide: n=1
- Setting
 - North America n=5
 - Asia n=3
 - NO STUDIES SET IN EUROPE!

Wallace et al. Gerontol Soc Work 2021



Why do we need specialized suicide prevention programs for older adults?

Comorbid physical illness and functional disability.

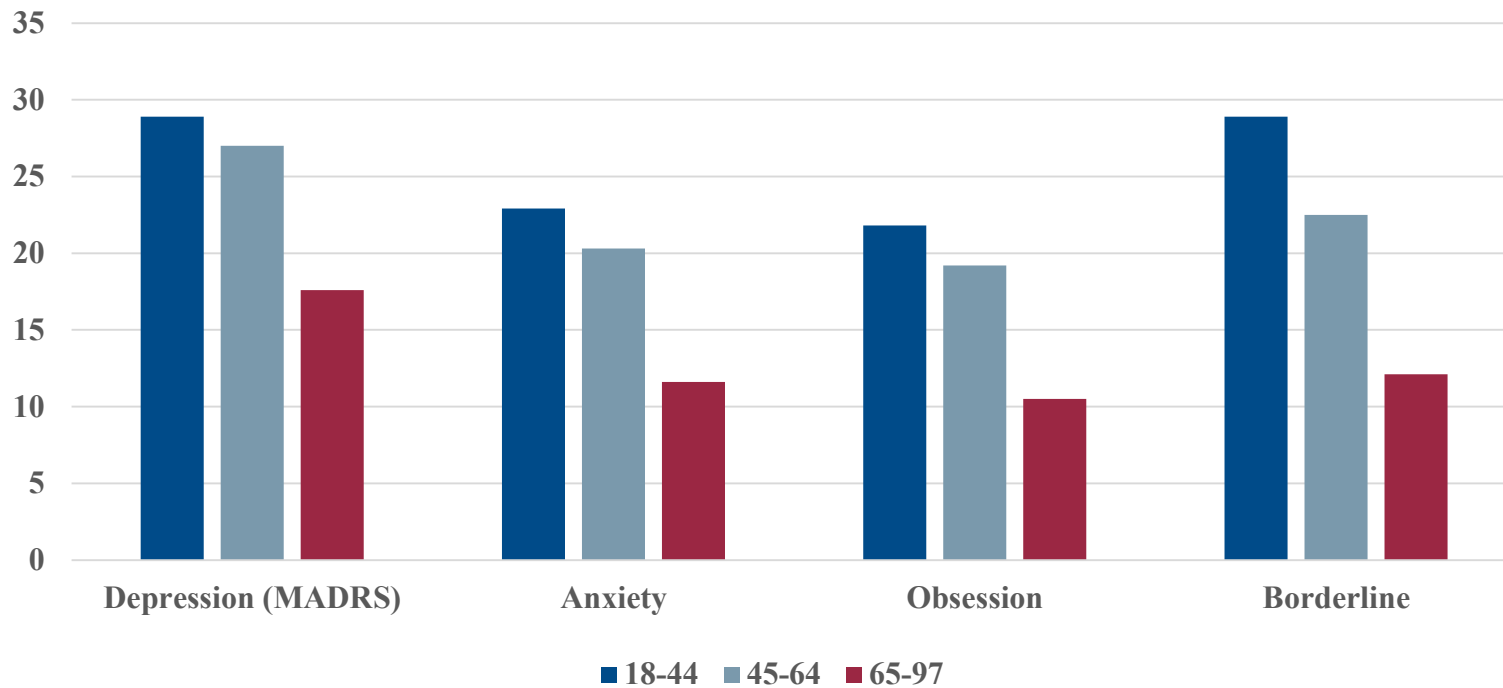
Higher suicide intent.

Less severe affective psychopathology.

Cognitive decline.



Mean self-rated symptom scores (CPRS) in suicide attempters, by age group



Wiktorsson, et al. Am J Geriatric Psych 2021



Cognitive performance in suicide attempters (70+) and a MADRS-matched population-based comparison group

- Suicide attempters had lower MMSE scores than depressed comparison persons in the population.
- They showed poorer performance on tests of pentagon drawing and abstract thinking.
- Cognition was NOT improved in attempters at one year follow up, despite significant improvement in MADRS scores.



Primary Care

- Two high quality cluster randomized studies set in the US, PROSPECT and IMPACT
(Bruce, et al.2004, Alexopoulos et al 2009)
- Optimization of depression treatment
 - Follow-up of depressive symptoms and side effects of pharmacological treatment.
 - Problem solving therapy/Interpersonal therapy offered for those who preferred a psychosocial intervention.



Short psychotherapeutic interventions

- **Small studies, but promising results**
- **RCT: Problem adaptation therapy (PATH) vs supportive therapy** for persons (60+) with depression.
 - Decreased suicidal thoughts after 12 weeks

Kiossos, et al. 2013

- **WellPATH app**
 - 12-week psychotherapy intervention (CRISP - Cognitive Reappraisal Intervention for Suicide Prevention)
 - Participants: middle-aged and older adults after their discharge from a suicide-related hospitalization.
 - Outcome: Decreased suicidal ideation at 3-6 month follow-up.

Kiossos, et al. 2021



Community based interventions

- Quasi experimental Japanese studies set in regions with high suicide rates (Oyama, et al. 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010; Ono 2013)
- Interventions included
 - Group activities for older adults
 - Gatekeeper training
 - Depression screening
- Better results for women, and for rural areas.



Suicide in Sweden 75+

- Country of birth outside of the Nordic region was associated with increased suicide risk.
- Differential risks associated with previous occupation.
 - Lower risk in women, and higher risk in men with low income occupations.



Alcohol use disorder in suicide attempters (70+) and a population-based comparison group

	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)
Men	45%	8%	9.5 (4.0-22.8)
Women	11%	1%	12.2 (2.6-59.5)

Morin et al.
Am J Ger Psych 2013



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