

Very low suicide rates for islanders

Men more likely to commit suicide in Newfoundland and Labrador

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By Nadya Bell,

The island of Newfoundland has one of the lowest suicide rates in Canada, but Labrador's suicide rate well exceeds the national average.

Data released by the N.L. Centre for Health Information links information from the medical examiner and vital statistics suicide rates. The information was published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry.

From 1997 to 2001, 186 males and 39 females in the province committed suicide, according to the centre's information. That means, for every five men that committed suicide, only one woman did.

Men were more likely to die from suicide using violent means, like a firearm or hanging, while women's deaths were most often due to poisoning.

The average number of deaths due to suicide each year in the province was 45, or almost one person a week. Suicide rates during the period of study did not change significantly.

The overall suicide rate among Newfoundlanders was still significantly lower than the Canadian average. There was 9.5 suicide deaths per 100,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador, while the overall suicide rate for the country in the first year of the study was 12.3.

Don MacDonald, the director of research and evaluation at the centre for health information said the numbers for Newfoundland and Labrador add up to one of the lowest rates in the country.

But Labrador has a suicide rate more than three times higher than the island, with 27 suicides per 100,000 people, compared to 8.5 suicides for the island.

Suicide was also three times less likely among married people than those without a partner - either single, separated, widowed or divorced.

Of the different factors that were identified by the study as predisposing someone

to suicide, psychiatric disorders were by far the highest, being identified in more than 60 per cent of the cases.

Geoff Chaulk, executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador division of the Canadian Mental Health Association said even the province's low suicide rate is too high.

Suicide is about ending emotional pain, Chaulk said, and people with psychiatric disorders are often unable or unwilling to get the help they need because of the social stigma and shame associated with their illness.

The centre for health information is working on updating the data to include numbers from 2002 - 2006, so larger trends in suicides in the province can be understood.

nbell@thetelegram.com

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