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Social inclusion affects elderly suicide mortality.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: National attitudes towards the elderly and their association with elderly **suicide** mortality in 26 European countries were assessed, and Eastern and Western European countries compared.

METHODS: For each country, mean age-adjusted, gender-specific elderly **suicide** rates in the last five years for which data had been available were obtained from the WHO European Mortality Database. Questions about citizens' attitudes towards the elderly were taken from the European Social Survey. Correlations between attitudes and **suicide** rates were analyzed using Pearson's test. Differences between mean scores for Western and Eastern European attitudes were calculated, and data on labor-market exit ages were obtained from the EUROSTAT database.

RESULTS: Perception of the elderly as having higher status, recognition of their economic contribution and higher moral standards, and friendly feelings towards and admiration of them are inversely correlated with **suicide** mortality. **Suicide** rates are lower in countries where the elderly live with their families more often. Elderly **suicide** mortality and labor-market exit age are inversely correlated. In Eastern European countries, elderly people's status and economic contribution are seen as less important. Western Europeans regard the elderly with more admiration, consider them more friendly and more often have elderly relatives in the family. The data also show gender differences.

CONCLUSIONS: Society's attitudes influence elderly **suicide** mortality; attitudes towards the elderly are more favorable among Western European citizens; and extended labor-market inclusion of the elderly is a **suicide-protective** factor.

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