Author's response to reviews

Title: Reduction in young male suicide rates in Scotland

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Response to Referees

General Points

All the comments were helpful. The main issues raised were the lack of a clear focus for the paper with no explicit statement of the hypothesis we tested, the need for statistical analysis, and the over-large number of graphs. We have responded by:

Refocusing on the initial intention for the paper, the apparent decrease in rates in young men, and our hypothesis that this might be associated with a decrease in hanging. We agree that we had included too much extraneous material, and are grateful to the referees for their advice on this. We think the paper is much improved as a result.

We have used a joinpoint analysis to test for changes in trend.

Removing the information on inequalities, and much of the coverage of method by age group, has allowed a large reduction in the number of graphs.

Response to Specific Points

Reviewer One: Jane Pirkis

Statistical significance: We have used the joinpoint technique to identify points where the trends changed significantly. This has improved the paper, we feel, and we are grateful for the advice.

Title of the paper: We agree with this point, and have re-written the paper to re-focus on the initial purpose of the paper.

Number of Figures: We have reduced the number of figures as requested.
Methods: We have added a note that methods of suicide were identified from the death certificate information. We agree that this is a helpful addition for international readers. We have also added a description of the joinpoint method.

Interpretation: We take the point about the focus on young men. As the referees had different views on how we should deal with this, we have excluded material not directly related to the argument. We have developed the cohort idea a little further, but as we are working on a study producing an age-period-cohort analysis, we did not want to include too much material that will be required in this new project, as this would be tiresome for future readers.

Reviewer Two: Paul S Yip

Age Groups: We note the point about age groups. The information was described in this way as it has been used in some documents in Scotland in relation to younger suicide, and we felt it was useful to be consistent. Rates for 15-24 year olds are published routinely by the General Registrar for Scotland in their annual on-line publication of vital event tables. We have added a reference to their site for interested readers.

Hanging: The question of why hanging has increased is an important one, but we do not think we can answer it with our data. We have added a reference to a paper on hanging in England. England has experienced a similar rise, and the paper by Professor Gunnell and colleagues explores it in more detail.

Over-speculative conclusion: We have shortened the conclusion and limited the ideas advanced.

Reviewer Three: Gernot Sonneck

Title: We had attempted to follow the form suggested in the journal's Guidance for Authors, but we accept the point made, and we have altered the title as suggested.

Statistical analysis and hypothesis: We have refocused the paper on the initial idea for the study, and have undertaken a joinpoint analysis. We agree that this has improved the paper.