

The Crane Report



COMPARATIVE NATIONAL RESPONSES - SOUTH KOREA AND THE UK Section-2

ABSTRACT

This section analyses suicide prevention strategies in South Korea and the United Kingdom. In South Korea, legislative and societal interventions, notably the Suicide Prevention Act, have demonstrably reduced suicide rates. By contrast, the UK, despite progressive policy initiatives and public awareness campaigns, continues to experience rising fatalities both nationally and within the construction industry. Our findings highlight differences in policy design, implementation, and cultural context, offering insight into effective preventive measures and their applicability to the UK construction sector.

Anthony Hegarty MSc

DSRM Risk & Crisis Management

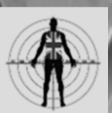
© 2025 Anthony Hegarty / DSRM. All rights reserved.

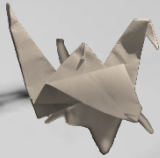
No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews or scholarly articles.



Section 2 – The Suicide Prevention Act

- How is suicide being prevented outside the UK?
- Is Suicide in UK Construction Rising?
- Why are South Korea's Suicide Numbers Falling?
- What Does South Korea's Suicide Prevention Act of 2011 Actually Do?
- Has the Act Worked?
- Does the UK Have Suicide Prevention Legislation?
- What Are the Pros of the Korean Model?
- What Are the Cons of the Korean Model?
- How Does the Korean Model Compare With the UK?
- Which Approach Works Best?
- Conclusion





We needed to understand how suicide was being prevented outside the UK, as well as within it. As South Korea has the largest suicide rate within the OECD nations, but with falling rates since 2011, we wanted to compare their strategy to how suicide is prevented in the UK.

Is Suicide in UK Construction Rising?

Over the past five years, suicide rates within the UK construction industry have shown a deeply concerning trend. According to research by Professor Billy Hare (Glasgow Caledonian University) and figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the suicide rate among construction workers rose from 26 per 100,000 in 2015 to 34 per 100,000 in 2021, with 507 deaths recorded that year.

Although the number of deaths rose slightly to 514 in 2022, the suicide rate fell to 31 per 100,000, driven by a 3.3% increase in the construction workforce to around 2.2 million workers. However, this broader figure conceals far more troubling statistics among certain groups: for example, labourers and ground workers experienced suicide rates as high as 78.18 per 100,000, although our investigation found that scaffolders and roofers have the highest rates of suicide (*based on England & Wales data*), and we explain this further in Section-8, Data Analysis.

While this report's focus is on 16 common trades within the UK construction industry, using data from England and Wales, we now have access to *national* suicide figures for both 2023 and 2024. Across England and Wales, rates have risen from 11.2 deaths per 100,000 in 2022, to 11.6 in 2023, and a provisional 11.9 in 2024. The raw construction-sector data reflects a similar upward trend. These statistics are explored in greater depth in Section-8.

Why are South Korea's Suicide Numbers Falling?

South Korea developed a concerning rate of suicides during and after the late 1990s Asian economic crash (1997~1998) (consider here Durkheim's Anomic category (Section-1)). At this time, suicide rates increased sharply.

By 2003, Korea had taken over other members of the OECD countries, and has maintained that leading position ever since. Like the UK, the highest risk group is men between 40 and 59 years.

However, there does not appear to be any remarkable rate within the construction industry.

Does South Korea's Suicide Prevention Act of 2011 Differ from the UK's Efforts?

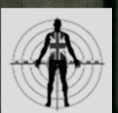
In recent years, South Korea and the United Kingdom have taken markedly different approaches to suicide prevention, both reflecting their legal, cultural, and public health systems.

South Korea's strategy is built around a centralised legal framework, the **Suicide Prevention Act of 2011**, while the UK relies on policy-driven, devolved public health strategies without a dedicated suicide prevention law.



To build an accurate picture of suicide within the construction industry, we need real stories. That is why we are inviting participation in the [Stage 2 Investigation](#); an anonymous survey open to anyone with insights into lives lost or saved. The findings will be made publicly available to support the development of more effective intervention strategies and targeted policies

We hope this also help in shaping more awareness so families, friends, and colleagues might recognise the warning signs and step in sooner.



What Does South Korea's Suicide Prevention Act of 2011 Actually Do?

South Korea's Act represents a turning point in the country's national mental health strategy. By legislating suicide prevention as a government responsibility, the Act required the creation of the Korea Suicide Prevention Center, introduced national and local prevention mandates, and enforced media reporting guidelines to avoid suicide contagion.

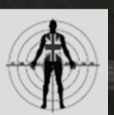
It also facilitated the restriction of common suicide methods, such as surveillance at high-risk bridges, tighter control over pesticides; and expanded postvention services for bereaved families and suicide attempt survivors.

Korea's **Suicide Prevention Act 2011** required local authorities to implement prevention measures such as CCTV and restricting "**access to means**."

A telephone for emergencies is placed on Mapo Bridge in Seoul.

Such is the **unified national sentiment to eradicate suicide**, a statue of a man comforting a young person is placed to dissuade suicides on Mapo Bridge, a *common site for suicides*, over the Han River in Seoul.

South Korea has recorded the highest suicide rate among members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development since 2003.

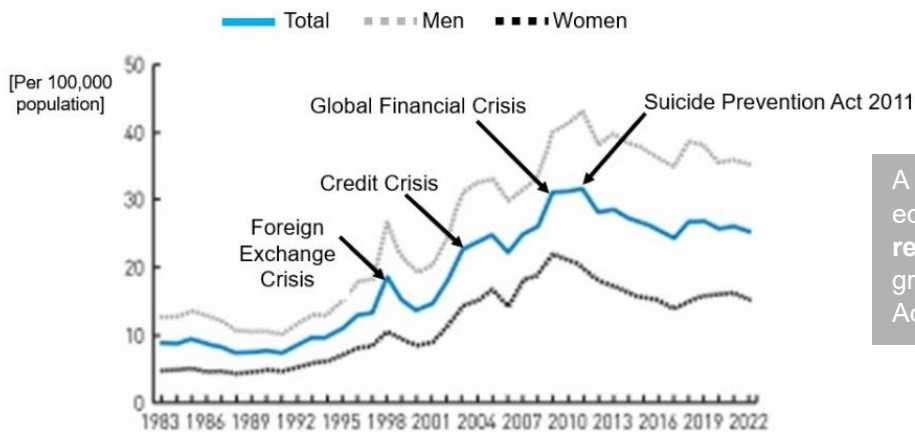




Has the Act Worked?

Korea's suicide data shows a clear relationship with financial hardship, yet despite other economic downturns since the contagion of the global financial crisis hit the country in about 2009, the suicide numbers appear to have fallen in line with the implementation of the act.

[Fig. III-24] Suicide Rate by Gender, 1983 - 2022



Source: Statistics Korea – Korean Social Trends 2023

A spike in suicides during economic downturns (**anomic response**), followed by a gradual decline after the 2011 Act was introduced.

Whilst South Korea has an unemployment benefits system, it does not compare in generosity with the UK system, and has strict access criteria, as well as time limitations.

The national health care system can only be described as world class.



Does the UK Have Suicide Prevention Legislation?



In contrast to South Korea, the UK's approach is non-legislative although well structured, with separate suicide prevention strategies for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

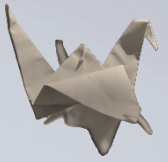


Responsibility lies primarily with local authorities, which are legally obligated to manage public health under laws like the [Health and Social Care Act 2012](#).

Charities such as The Samaritans and Papyrus play a major role in service delivery, while national policies focus on awareness, early intervention, and high-risk populations, particularly middle-aged men, prisoners, and young people.

A number of UK charities work specifically for construction workers and we will examine those later in this report's Section-9, Boxed In.





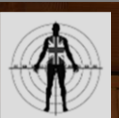
What Are the Pros of the Korean Model?

The pros of the Korean model lie in its legal clarity and national cohesion. Suicide is treated not only as a public health issue, but also as a matter of state responsibility, backed by legislation and a central authority. This ensures accountability, consistency, and funding.

The mandatory media guidelines, for example, have had a demonstrable effect in reducing the 'copycat' suicides previously seen after high-profile celebrity deaths. Furthermore, the law gives momentum to suicide prevention by obligating action across multiple government levels.

What Are the Cons of the Korean Model?

However, the Korean system's top-down approach may risk bureaucratic inflexibility, and despite legal enforcement, stigmas around mental illness persist. Moreover, while suicide rates have fallen overall, South Korea still has the highest suicide rate among OECD countries, suggesting that legal frameworks must be supported by deeper cultural and economic changes, particularly for the elderly and unemployed.



How Does the Korean Model Compare With the UK?

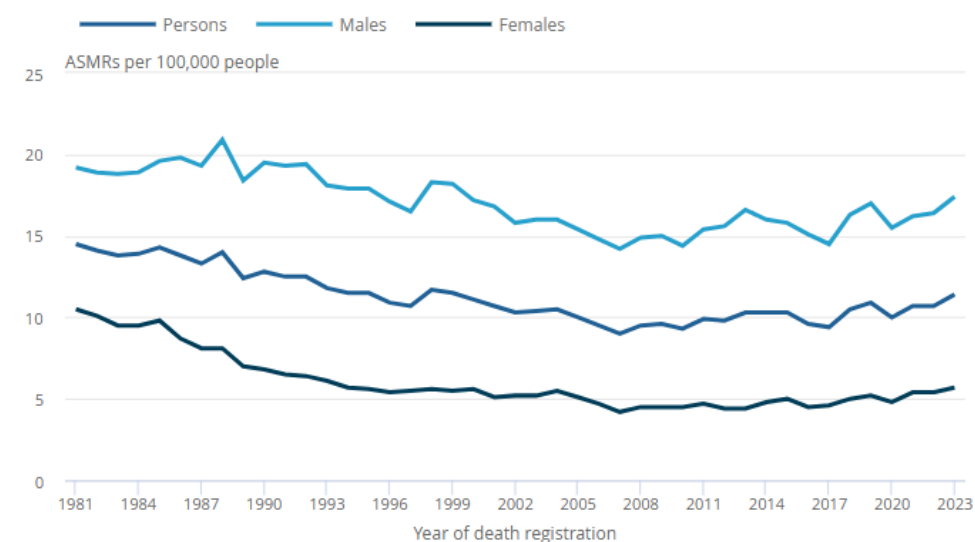
The UK model, by contrast, benefits from flexibility, community engagement, and strong charity involvement. Scotland's strategy, for instance, is internationally respected for its focus on lived experience and grassroots action.

However, without legal mandates, the UK system can suffer from inconsistency, variable funding, and limited national coordination. Media guidelines are voluntary, and suicide prevention is one of many competing priorities within overstretched local authority budgets.

Despite decades of strategy documents, suicide rates in the UK have continued to rise, particularly among young people and men in deprived areas.

Figure 1: Suicide rates registered in 2023 increased

Age-standardised suicide rates by sex, England and Wales, registered between 1981 and 2023





So, Which Approach Works Best?

In essence, South Korea's strength lies in legal force and national coherence, while the UK's system relies on collaboration, decentralisation, and voluntary guidance. The Korean model may be more suited to rapid, uniform implementation, especially in crisis, while the UK's approach may encourage longer-term community-based resilience.

However, current trends suggest that a purely policy-driven model may not be enough in the face of rising mental health needs, economic pressures, and shifting social dynamics.

Section Conclusion

While neither system is flawless, South Korea's legislative approach appears to have had a more tangible impact on suicide reduction in recent years. The UK's rising suicide rates may point to the need for stronger national leadership, legal mandates, or a hybrid model that blends local autonomy with clearer statutory obligations.

Each country's experience offers valuable insights, not only into suicide prevention, but also into how societies treat mental health, vulnerability, and public responsibility.





Investigation Stage 2 / Stage 3 - We Request Your Support

Roadmap of the Investigation

Stage 1 – Desk-Based Investigation

Analysis of existing literature, statistics, international models, cultural influences, and industry narratives. (*This document.*)

Stage 2 – Survey of Experiences

In an online [survey](https://www.dsrmrisk.com/survey) we are asking you to promote across the sector, designed to capture personal testimonies: what contributed to lives lost, and what brought others back from the brink. <https://www.dsrmrisk.com/survey>

Stage 3 – Industry Collaboration

Structured dialogues with construction firms, unions, and industry bodies to explore their views on root causes and the adequacy of current responses. We invite your input, thoughts, ideas, and what you see as solutions...***just a few lines*** - ***“What do you think is the problem?”*** (This phase is currently running in parallel with Stage 2)

Please send your thoughts to: contact@dsrmrisk.com (Anonymous is Okay)

Stage 4 – Expanded Data

Incorporation of data from Scotland and Northern Ireland (*not currently included in official ONS reporting*), alongside further refinement of UK-wide analysis.

Together, these stages aim to provide both evidence and lived experience, enabling a clearer understanding of risk and more effective prevention strategies.

Stage 4 will be the Final Crane Report.

