

Members of the Common Council and Board of Public Works,

Suicide nets at Münster Terrace in Bern did not decrease the number of jumping suicides

We have analyzed suicides by jumping in Bern using data obtained from publications by Reisch & Michel (2005), Reisch et al., (2009), and police statistics reported in press releases.

Comparison of total suicides by jumping from bridges in Bern in the 11 years before and after installation of the suicide nets on the Muenster terrace reveals **NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE ON SUICIDES BY JUMPING** (t-test; $P = 0,194$). Comparison of alternative time series also fails to show any significant change (Fig. 1).

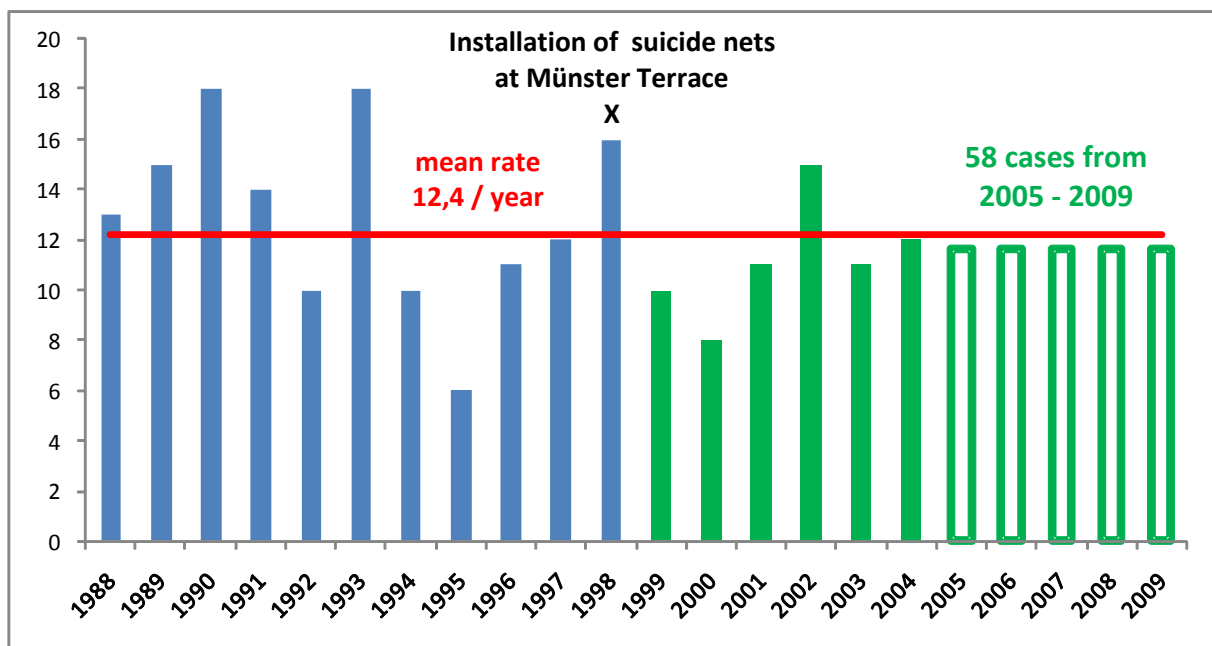


Figure 1. Suicides by jumping in Bern from 1998 – 2009. Suicide nets were installed at the Muenster Terrace in 1998 in the middle of the study period. Case numbers were derived from) for 1988 – 2002 (Reisch & Michel 2005), and 2003- 2004 (Reisch et al. 2007). Total case numbers from 2005 – 2009 were derived from police statistics as mentioned in 2009 press reports (Langenthaler Tagblatt; 2009) - because their annual distribution has not been reported a mean of 11.6 / year was used for plotting.

If there is no significant effect – why did T. Reisch & Michel report otherwise ?

To claim a significant decrease in suicides Reisch & Michel “predict” that data from 1995 – 1998 represents an ongoing trend, and that this trend will continue in the long-term. Of course there is no evidence for that, but that’s how they do it. They extrapolate data from 1995 – 1998 using a linear or logarithmic regression (which they even dare to call “conservative”) and calculate the difference between predicted and observed suicides. These differences are in fact highly significant, but the reason for this significant difference is not because of a significant decrease in suicides (there is none), but because the prediction is significantly flawed. (As a scientist I’m deeply disappointed about the fact that Cornell is willing to base their opinion on such a questionable study - I will not comment on possible motivations for such a highly unconventional approach).

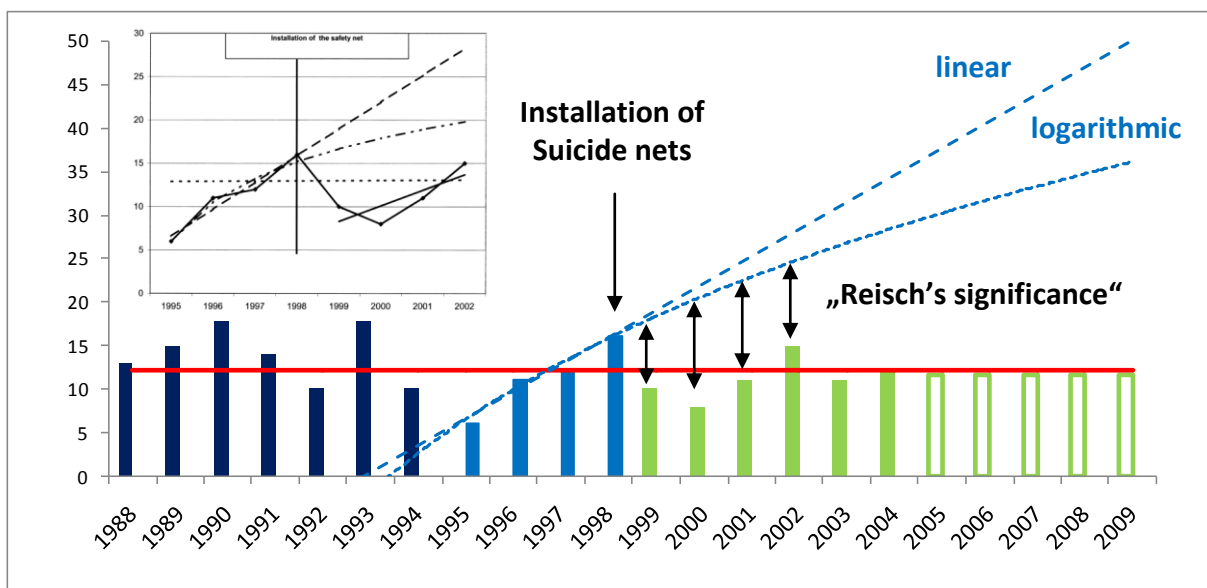


Figure2. Reisch’s fabrication of a significant decrease in suicides by jumping. Taking only data from 1995 – 1998 (■) Reisch & Michel (2005) extrapolate “expected” suicides assuming a linear or logarithmic regression. The differences between predicted and observed suicides are highly significant because the assumption for an ongoing trend based on data from 4 years is totally baseless.

After fabricating evidence for the false claim that nets were effective in preventing overall suicides by jumping, Reisch & Michel (2005) state that “we expected not only the number of suicides to decrease, but also the percentage of suicides by jumping in relation to other methods“. However, according to Reisch et al. (2010) **the percentage of suicide by jumping in relation to other methods has increased after installation of the suicide net at the Münster Terrace (Figure 3).**

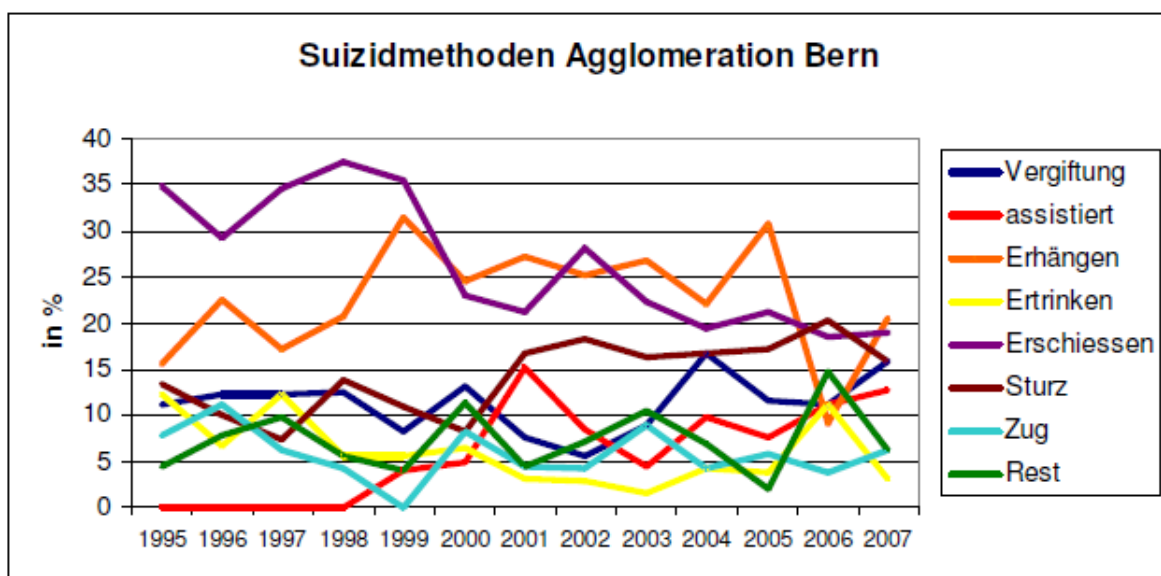


Figure 3: Means of suicide in the Bern area from 1995 – 2007 (in %); ■ poisoning, ■ assisted, ■ hanging, ■ drowning, ■ gunshot, ■ jumping (fall), ■ train, ■ other (from Reisch, 2010).

These data suggest that the installation of the suicide nets at the Muenster Terrace in Bern failed to prevent suicides by jumping, due to displacement to other locations, and somehow resulted in a higher percentage of suicides committed using this particular method.

Suicides by jumping in Bern increased to 1 case / month in 2009.

At the beginning of 2009 there was an alarming increase in suicides by jumping from Bern's bridges. With almost one case per month, vertical nets were installed in fall 2009 on two of the five bridges identified as suicide hotspots (Kirchenfeldbrücke and Kornhausbrücke). (We were unable to obtain the actual distribution of bridge suicides during that time, apart from the 58 cases for 1995 – 1999, however, the Cornell committee which recently visited Bern may be willing to share those numbers with you). Replacement of these temporary fences by horizontal nets at a cost of 4 Million Franken (5 million \$) is scheduled for the beginning of 2013, if approved by Bern's Parliament and ratified by the public (this vote is scheduled for September 2012) [Der Bund; 2009-10-09; 2011-04-29]



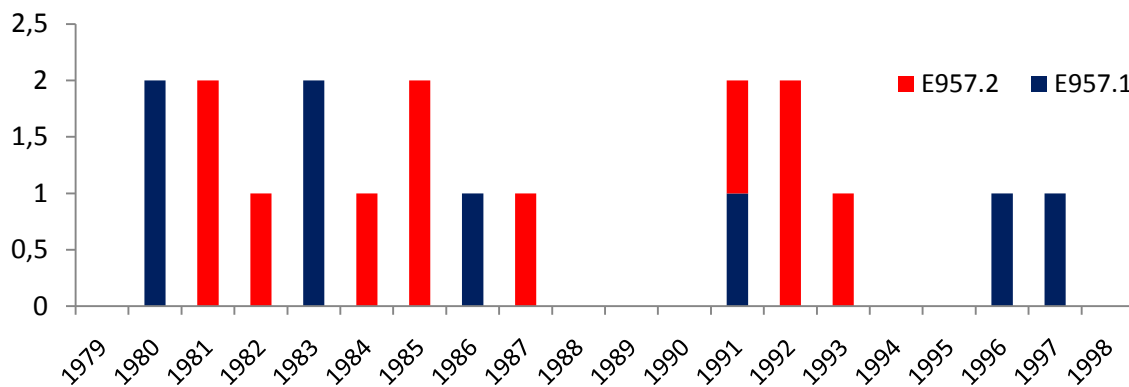
Figure 5: Fence at the Kornhausbrücke in Bern. The sign reads “every climbing at the safety fence is strictly prohibited” [source: Der Bund; 2011-04-28]

All available data indicate that the suicide nets at the Münster Terrace in Bern have been unsuccessful in preventing suicides due to displacement to other locations.

Similar displacement can be expected to occur in Ithaca given its unique situation.

While the discussion has mainly focused on bridge suicides only, the question has remained unanswered how many suicides actually occur from the bridges versus the cliffs. We have obtained Mortality data for Tompkins County for 1979 – 1998, which according to ICD-9 distinguish between jumping from man-made structures like bridges (E957.1) and natural sites like cliffs (E.957.2).

These data indicate that 8 suicides from 1979 – 1998 occurred from the bridges while the majority 11 suicides occurred from the cliffs.



In summary we conclude that:

- 1. There is no evidence for the effectiveness of suicide barriers (fences/nets) at the Münster Terrace in Bern (in agreement with the July 2010 Toronto study).**
- 2. Alleged evidence for the effectiveness of suicide nets in Bern is based on fabricated differences between predicted (unconventionally extrapolated) and observed suicides.**
- 3. Installation of suicide nets in Bern did not result in a lower prevalence of suicide by jumping.**
- 4. Suicide barriers show no long-term beneficial effect on reducing jumping incidents at nearby sites.**
- 5. Jumping suicides from bridges as opposed to cliffs represent only a minor percentage of jumping suicides in Ithaca.**

If there are any questions regarding this research feel free to contact me.

Regards,

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& the members of **Ithaca is FENCES**

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Death statistics were obtained from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, www.cdc.gov) using the Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research (CDC Wonder, <http://wonder.cdc.gov>)