

**A review of the current statistics regarding an increase in unnatural deaths in South Africa after Covid-19**

With National Suicide Prevention Month starting on 1 September 2023, we delved into the current statistics available to us surrounding unnatural causes of death, of which suicide is a part.

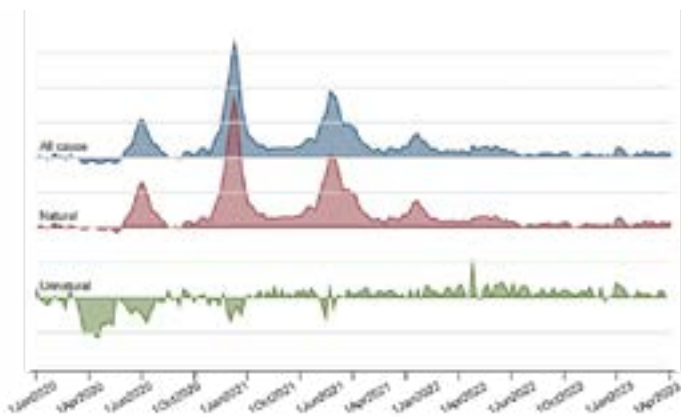
*It is important to note that the author of this article understands that labelling suicide and road accidents as 'self-inflicted' could be seen as insensitive given that the circumstances surrounding the cause of a suicide or a road accident are unknown. The context in which the terms are used is solely from the perspective of mortality statistics.*

**COVID-19**

South Africa has seen a significant increase in mortality rates since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In 2020 the country's mortality rate was 10.3 deaths per 1,000 people, up from 9.2 deaths per 1,000 people in 2019. This increase was driven by a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic that caused an estimated 90,000 deaths in South Africa in 2020.

**Overall mortality in South Africa (from 1 January 2020 to 1 April 2023)**

The below graph provided by Sanlam provides some insight into the overall mortality in South Africa:



As can be seen in the table, unnatural deaths (which includes suicide and road accidents) decreased in the 'hard' lockdown period and was also a minimal contributor to the overall mortality rate before the hard lockdown. However, since 1 January 2021 there has been an increase in unnatural deaths in South Africa, with natural causes still having a far greater impact on the overall cause of death in the country.

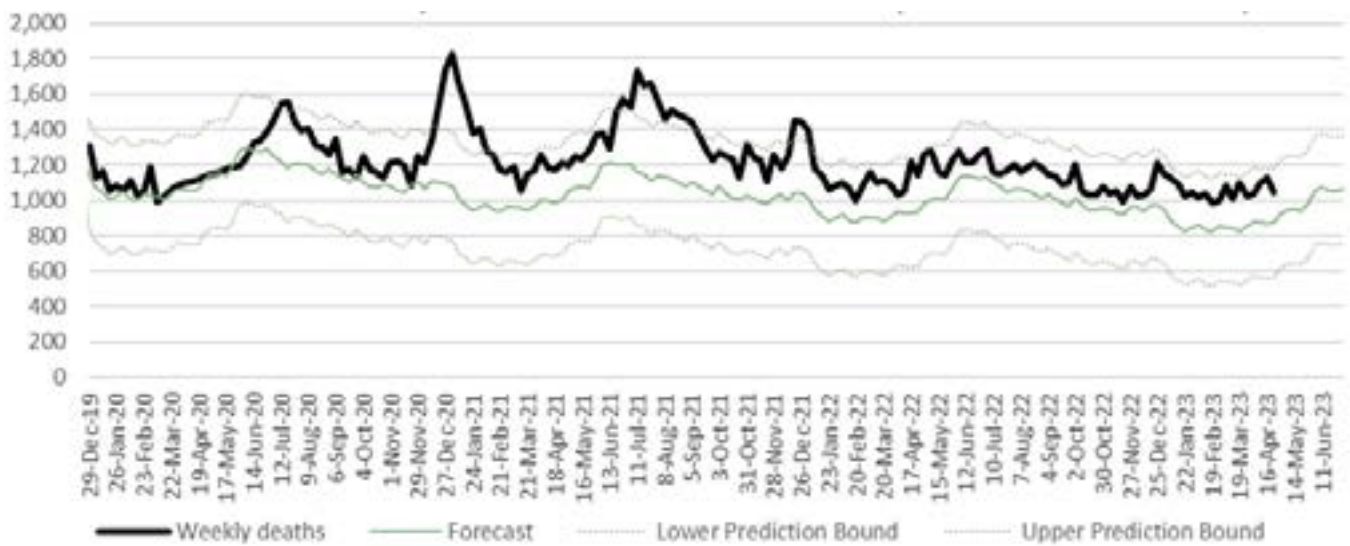
**South Africa's natural causes deaths for 20-39-year-olds**

The below data shows weekly figures for deaths from natural causes among 20-39-year-olds, for 29 December 2019 to 29 April 2023 (courtesy of Sanlam). As can be seen in the graph, since COVID-19 there has been a decrease in deaths in this age bracket, but the prediction is that there will be an increase in the coming months and years.



**MORTALITY RATES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

August 2023



### Overall suicide rate

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were an estimated 703,000 suicides world-wide in 2021. This means that there was an average of one suicide every 40 seconds.

The WHO also reports that suicide is the 10th leading cause of death globally. The number of suicides in a given year can vary depending on a number of factors, including the country, the age group, and the gender of the person who died.

Further facts regarding suicide include:

- + Suicide rates are higher in men than in women.
- + It is higher in older adults than in younger adults.
- + 77% of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries.
- + In South Africa, among 15-29-year-olds suicide is the fourth leading cause of death.
- + There is a seasonal pattern to suicide: it is most likely to occur during spring or early summer.

### South Africa's suicide rate

According to the WHO, South Africa has a suicide rate of 23.5 per 100,000 people, which means there are approximately 23 suicides for every 100,000 people in South Africa. This is the third-highest suicide rate in Africa, after Lesotho and Eswatini.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the high suicide rate in South Africa. These include:

- + Mental health problems: Problems such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia, are major risk factors for suicide.
- + Alcohol and drug abuse: Excessive drinking and substance abuse are also major risk factors for suicide.
- + Economic hardship: Hardships such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality can also increase the risk of suicide.
- + Trauma: Traumatic experiences, such as physical or sexual abuse, can also increase the risk of suicide.
- + COVID-19: The pandemic also led to an increase in suicide and accident rates in South Africa.

### Sector increases (since COVID-19)

The healthcare sector saw the largest increase in suicide rates, followed by the education sector. The manufacturing sector saw the largest increase in accident rates, followed by the retail sector. The data needs to be confirmed, but this was the most accurate data that we could obtain.

It is important to note that these are just averages, and the actual increase in suicide and accident rates may vary by specific industry or occupation.

### Important: Reviewing the figures and preparing for this article, it is clear that many people are struggling.

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, please reach out for help. There are many resources available, including:

- + **SADAG: 0800 567 567**
- + **Lifeline: 0861 322 322**
- + **The South African Depression and Anxiety Group website: <https://www.sadag.org/>**
- + **The Road Traffic Management Corporation website: <https://www.rtmc.co.za/>**

You are not alone. There is help available. If you have any questions, please contact:

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