



Suicide References in Top Songs in the United States from 2010-2019



Priya Gearin, Terrance Dolan, & Sabina Grech

Background

The portrayal of suicide in popular media has been a major focus in recent years. Studies have investigated whether there is a link between such portrayals and suicidal behaviors in adolescents and young adults. While television is widely studied, popular music and its depiction of suicide has received less attention.

Objective

To determine the relationship between suicide references in songs over the last decade.

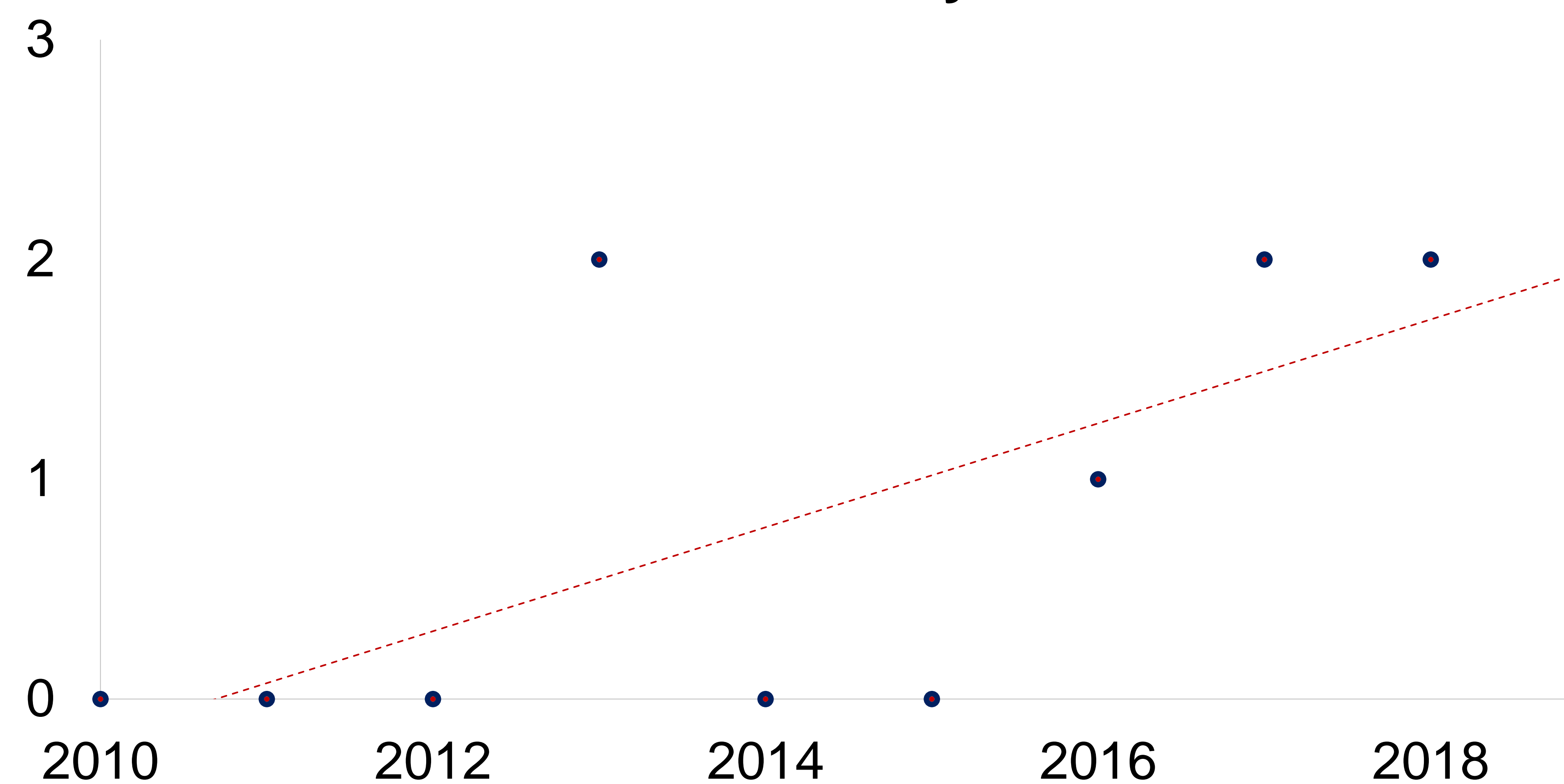
Methods

- The top 50 songs from the year-end Billboard Hot 100 Songs charts from 2010-2019 were examined.
- Song lyrics were analyzed for presence or absence of suicide reference (N=500). Presence of a suicide reference included thoughts of wishing to be dead or direct mention of suicide or suicidal behavior.
- Regression analysis was performed to explore the relationship between suicide references in songs over time.

Results

- Among the top 50 songs per year, the number of songs with suicide references per year ranged from 0 to 3.
- Regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between suicide references over time ($R^2 = 0.52$, slope = 0.24, $p = 0.02$).

Number of Top 50 Songs with Suicide References by Year



Song Lyrics with Suicide References

- “Maybe I should kill myself”
- “Yeah, I think about the end just way too much/... I’ve been thinkin’ too much/Help me”
- “All my friends are dead/Push me to the edge/... I might blow my brain out”
- “I don’t wanna be alive/I just wanna die today”
- “Now I’m just better off dead”
- “Suicide if you ever try to let go, uh/I’m sad, I know”
- “Now I’m drinkin’ again, 80 proof in my veins/...lookin over the edge/...Now I’m a goner”

Other Findings

- One song made the top 50 for both 2018 and 2019
- In 2017, one of the songs was titled after the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, “1-800-273-8255”

Discussion

- Given the increase in suicide references in popular music over time, it may be useful to discuss the depictions of suicide in music with adolescent patients.
- Further research may investigate correlation between music exposure and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in adolescents.
- Additional areas of study: assessing suicide content in music videos, exploring potential protective effect of music in adolescents, analyzing genres of music.

References

- Association Between the Release of Netflix’s *13 Reasons Why* and Suicide Rates in the United States: An Interrupted Time Series Analysis. Bridge, Jeffrey A. et al. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 2019.
- Billboard Year-End Charts: Hot 100 Songs, 2010-2019
- Investigating harmful and helpful effects of watching season 2 of *13 Reasons Why*: Results of a two-wave U.S. panel survey. Arendt, Florian et al. *Soc Sci Med* 232:489-498, 2019.