



## Letters

# Risk of suicide in twins: Authors' reply

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EDITOR—Population based studies from Denmark have shown that family ties, such as having both parents together, being married, and having young children,<sup>1</sup> are associated with a lower risk of suicide. Twins represent a unique and close relationship,<sup>2 3</sup> which made us hypothesise that twins have a lower suicide rate. Our 51 year follow up study of more than 20 000 twins confirmed this hypothesis, but this does not in itself shed any light on the causal mechanisms.

Voracek thinks that a lower intelligence level in twins may be the reason for the lower suicide rate. Setting aside concerns about drawing causal inferences, Voracek's argument also relies on the premise that twins have a lower IQ than singletons. New research on this topic, overcoming methodological problems in the older studies, indicates that this assumption does not hold.<sup>4</sup>

Verberne says that our observation could simply be due to correlation in cause of death within twin pairs. Correlation within twin pairs affects the estimation of the standard error (which is, however, not a problem in our study owing to low twin concordance for suicide), but it does not bias the point estimate,<sup>5</sup> and therefore this cannot be the explanation of our finding of a reduced suicide rate in twins.

Sack argues that the finding should be interpreted in a sociological context, and we agree that the aetiology of suicide is complex. We believe that it has to be sought in an interaction between biological, psychological, and social factors.

Additional authors are: Niels V Holm, consultant, and Axel Skytthe, senior scientist, both of the Danish Twin Registry.

## Footnotes

- Competing interests None declared.

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