Safety Measures to Prevent Railway Suicides and Trespassing Accidents

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A systematic review of the literature on railway suicides and trespassing accidents found that despite more than 35 years of research, there is still little evidence to support the effectiveness of many prevention measures.

In an effort to identify evidence-based measures to reduce railway suicide and trespass accidents, the authors reviewed 139 publications on railway suicide or trespass published between 1978 and 2014. Among those, 58% addressed suicide only, 19% addressed both suicide and trespass, 17% addressed trespass only, and 6% addressed rail crossings or other types of accidents. Most of the published literature focused on both behavioral and engineering measures (53%), while fewer publications examined behavioral or engineering measures independently (28% and 19% respectively). The authors found two main strategies with empirical support from multiple studies: (1) the use of fencing and other physical barriers, and (2) appropriate media reporting on suicide to reduce contagion.

Future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of other educational, engineering, and enforcement-based safety measures to reduce deaths associated with railway suicides and trespassing accidents.