

UK: Why 3,000 middle-aged men die by suicide each year?

September 21 2012

A new report, published today, provides an in-depth examination into why men from disadvantaged backgrounds in their 30s, 40s and 50s are at higher risk of suicide than the rest of society. Men from low socio-economic backgrounds living in deprived areas are ten times more likely to die by suicide than men from high socio-economic backgrounds living in the most affluent areas.

The report, commissioned by Samaritans, the helpline charity, explores the reasons for suicide beyond [mental health issues](#) in this group of men and calls for suicide to be addressed as a health and social inequality. Co-authored by [health economics](#) expert NUI Galway's Brendan Kennelly, the research, *Men and Suicide: Why it's a social issue*, reveals that in the UK and Ireland:

- Men compare themselves against a 'gold standard' which prizes power, control and invincibility. When they believe they aren't meeting this standard they feel a sense of shame, which can lead them to have [suicidal thoughts](#).
- Men in mid-life are now part of the 'buffer' generation, not sure whether to be like their older, more traditional, strong, silent, austere fathers or like their younger, more progressive, individualistic sons.
- The changing nature of the [labour market](#) over the last 60 years has affected working class men. With the decline of traditional male industries, they have lost not only their jobs but also a

source of masculine pride and identity.

- Men in mid-life remain overwhelming dependent on a female partner for [emotional support](#). But today men are less likely to have one life-long partner and more likely to live alone, without the social or emotional skills to fall back on.

According to Suzanne Costello, Director of Samaritans in Ireland: "It has been recently recognised that men in mid-life can no longer be ignored as a group at high risk of suicide. However, this report shows that it is men from low socio-economic backgrounds who desperately need help.

"Men are often criticised for being reluctant to talk about their problems and for not seeking help. With this in mind, we need to acknowledge that men are different to women and design services to meet their needs, so they can be more effective.

"The role of mental health problems in suicide is well-established and must not be ignored. But we also need to look at the economic and social inequalities that contribute to people wanting to take their own lives. Policy-makers and practitioners need to take forward our recommendations from the report as a matter of urgency."

Samaritans is calling on the Government, statutory services health, and relevant NGOs to recognise the heightened risk of suicide among disadvantaged men in mid-life, treating suicide as a health and [social inequality](#). There are six recommendations:

- Take on the challenge of tackling the gender and socio-economic inequalities in suicide risk.
- Suicide prevention policy and practice must take account of men's beliefs, concerns and context – in particular their views of what it is to 'be a man'.

- Recognise that for men in mid-life, loneliness is a very significant cause of their high risk of suicide, and help men to strengthen their social relationships.
- There must be explicit links between alcohol reduction and suicide prevention strategies; both must address the relationships between alcohol consumption, masculinity, deprivation and suicide.
- Support GPs to recognise signs of distress in men, and make sure that those from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to a range of support, not just medication alone.
- Provide leadership and accountability at local level, so there is action to prevent suicide.

Provided by National University of Ireland, Galway

Citation: UK: Why 3,000 middle-aged men die by suicide each year? (2012, September 21)
retrieved 19 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-09-uk-middle-aged-men-die-suicide.html>

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