

Research explores the other side of that dreaded trip to the Vet

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A new paper published this month in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* is the first to explore the association between euthanasia-administration frequency and an established depressed mood and suicide risk in veterinarians.

"Veterinarians experience up to four times the risk of suicide than the general population," says lead author Dr Monique Crane. "It is generally believed that the key contributor to this behavior is the [euthanasia](#) of

animals."

The project, sampling 540 Australia-registered veterinarians ranging in age from 23 to 74, represents a special research collaboration.

The authors include registered psychologist (Crane) whose research focuses on occupational mental health and resilience; a former veterinarian now medical researcher based at the Australian School of Advanced Medicine (Professor Jacqueline Phillips); and a research Masters student (Lily Tran).

The three authors share a common interest in the welfare of medical professionals and identification of veterinarians as a high risk population.

"Our results found that the more euthanasia performed in a typical week, the greater the risk of [depressed feelings](#)," says Phillips.

"While this might initially sound alarming, euthanasia frequency actually only explained a very small amount of the variance in [depressed mood](#). This indicates that the performance of euthanasia is a very minor player in depression experienced by veterinarians and other factors are likely to make much more of a contribution."

With regards to [suicide-risk](#), a greater amount of euthanasia performed in a typical week actually reduced the risk of suicide in depressed veterinarians. Thus, rather than contributing to greater suicide-risk in depressed veterinarians, the highly frequent (>11 in a typical week) performance of euthanasia may be a protective factor against suicide risk in depressed veterinarians.

"Our work highlights that the relationships between performing euthanasia, depression and suicide-risk is more complex than previously

anticipated, and that strategies used by veterinarians to manage the emotional impact of euthanasia are generally effective (e.g., emotional distancing)," says Crane.

"Our work also indicates that there are therefore other very important factors that are critical determinants of wellbeing in [veterinarians](#), which is part of our ongoing research."

More information: "The Distinct Role of Performing Euthanasia on Depression and Suicide in Veterinarians," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Lily Tran, Monique F. Crane, and Jacqueline K. Phillips Online First Publication, March 17, 2014.

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