

Newly separated most at risk of suicidal thoughts

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Credit: Lloyd Morgan on flickr

Men and women are most likely to have suicidal thoughts within a year of a marriage or de-facto relationship breakup, new ANU research has found.

The vulnerability may be due to the trauma of the breakup, along with subsequent changes in social networks affecting people's sense of

belonging, said lead author of the study Dr Philip Batterham, from the ANU Centre for Mental Health Research.

"The prevalence of suicidal thoughts among recently separated men and women is three times higher than for those who remain married, or in de-facto relationships," he said.

He said the study highlights the need for governments and health services to better target [mental health services](#) to people who have recently separated from a marriage or a relationship.

"It is important to intervene early, to reduce suicidal thoughts and suicidal behaviours, before they end up as a suicide," he said.

Dr Batterham's study began in 2000 and has looked at more than 6,600 people aged between 20 and 64 from Canberra and nearby Queanbeyan. The study investigated whether periods before and after a relationship breakup presented increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Follow up interviews will continue every four years, until 2020.

Results found the period up to four years before a separation was also a time of increased risk. However, suicidal thoughts were more prevalent after a relationship break up.

Suicidal thoughts and behaviour were most common among people aged in their 20s, and lowest for those in their 60s. The 20s age group also reported a higher number of more recent and impending separations.

Rates of [suicidal thoughts](#) began to fall gradually among those in their second year of separation. After five years or more after separation, the risk further declined, but remained 'significantly elevated, Batterham said.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Centre for Mental Health Research and the Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Wellbeing at the Australian National University, with support from a number of other Australian researchers linked through the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention.

Findings are to be published in the June edition of *Social Science & Medicine*.

Provided by Australian National University

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