

New research provides insight into high suicide rate in rural areas

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Newly published research around alarming suicide rates in regional areas provides an important insight into the issue.

The research team from Monash Rural Health (MRH) studied four Victorian communities to look for common links. It found several common factors in towns with lower suicide rates, including seeking out help and [positive attitudes](#) to mental illness.

While the disproportionate rate between suicides in country and city is

well documented, this latest research, published in *Qualitative Health Research*, looked at the reasons why. The study chose four small rural towns with populations under 4000 – two with high suicide rates and two with lower rates. Scoping research found suicide rates in rural areas have increased up to 12-fold in some demographics over a 30-year period in towns of this size.

The research formed part of Dr Jessica Collins's doctoral studies with MRH. According to Dr Collins, although the patterns and mechanisms of rural suicide were well documented, they remained "poorly understood".

Research colleague and MRH Senior Research Fellow, Dr Bernadette Ward, said the research found there were several factors associated with lower suicide rates in the towns, including positive attitudes to mental illness and seeking help.

"High perceptions of community safety were also important," she said. "Also the ability of town residents to work together in difficult times, and to change and accept the values and goals of young people, particularly when there were high levels of social support and attendance at community events.

"This is not to say that residents within low suicide towns didn't experience difference but instead their perceptions of community were much stronger than those seen in towns with higher suicide rates."

Dr Ward said the findings of this study supported previous findings that physical environment, climate, housing and employment influenced wellbeing. Dr Collins said it was the first time this research 'model' had been tested in an in-depth way.

"A great deal of reporting around rural suicide puts all rural communities

into one bucket when they are all very different," she said. "While access to health and mental health services in particular is very important in promoting mental wellbeing, understanding the differences rather than the similarities provided insights to what drives the disproportionately high rates of suicide and poor mental health outcomes."

One of the things Dr Collins found in the two towns with the lowest [suicide rates](#) was that they had created facilities and activities for youth. Dr Collins said the results showed that suicide in rural areas remained a complicated issue needing continued and close research.

Provided by Monash University

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