

As suicide rates climb, older men are most vulnerable

November 15 2023, by Robin Foster



As U.S. suicide rates continue to rise, new government data shows older

men have become the most susceptible.

In a [report](#) published Wednesday, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found there were about 30 suicide deaths for every 100,000 men aged 55 and older in 2021. That number is more than double the overall rate of just over 14 suicide deaths for every 100,000 people that year.

The older a man, the greater his risk for suicide: Those 85 and older saw 56 suicide deaths for every 100,000 people, a statistic that surpassed any other age group.

Suicide is complex, [Dr. Yeates Conwell](#), a psychiatry professor at the University of Rochester, told *CNN*.

Five factors can fuel suicide risk—depression, disease, disability, disconnection and deadly means—and these [risk factors](#) can be "relatively more salient for [older adults](#)," he said.

"Imagine a Venn diagram with these five circles, each representing one of those 'Ds' that overlap. The more of the intersecting circles one is in, the greater the risk," said Conwell, who also leads a geriatric psychiatry program and co-directs the university's Center for the Study and Prevention of Suicide.

A combination of more physical illness and disability, along with more [social isolation](#) and more loss, leaves older adults more vulnerable to suicide, he explained.

Even so, [older women](#) seem less susceptible to suicide than their male peers.

While the suicide rate among older women has increased over the past

two decades, it still falls far below the rate among older men. There were about 6 [suicide deaths](#) for every 100,000 women 55 and older in 2021, according to the new report.

Firearms may be fueling this gender difference, experts say.

More than half of suicides involve guns, but firearms are an even more common method among [older men](#), used in at least three-quarters of suicides among men 65 and older in 2021, the report found.

Men are also more likely than women to own a gun, and seniors are more likely to have a gun in the household, according to a survey from [Pew Research Center](#). Not only that, but nearly all [suicide attempts](#) using guns are fatal, making them the most lethal means of suicide.

Men have a "greater comfort with and access to firearms," Conwell added, probably because they're more likely to have military training or hunting experience.

But men are also more vulnerable to a less tangible factor, Conwell noted.

"Older men in our society tend not to have the skills in developing and maintaining [close relationships](#) with as many other people as do women in our culture," he said. "There's too much identity tied up in one's work, so that is lost [after retirement]. And then there's the cultural script of what maleness means in in our culture, so men just won't admit or won't receive care for depression because of that sense that it's somehow not what a man does."

More information: If you or someone you love are experiencing suicidal thoughts, the [988](#) line can help.

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