

Male desire to be strong and protect family key to preventing suicides: study

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Masculine ideals of strength coupled with strong family ties can help men combat depression and overcome thoughts of suicide, according to University of British Columbia research.

In a study to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Social Science and Medicine*, UBC researchers John Oliffe and John Ogradniczuk looked at how men's ideas of masculinity served or hindered them during bouts of severe depression. Their findings shed light on risk factors and prevention strategies for suicide.

The authors analyzed qualitative data from interviews with 38 men between 24 and 50 years of age living in Vancouver and Prince George. The participants were self-identified or were formally diagnosed with depression.

The study suggests that men can best counter [suicidal thoughts](#) by connecting with others - namely intimate partners and family - to regain some stability and to secure emotional support from others.

“Support from friends and connecting to other things including spirituality is often the conduit to men seeking professional help to overcome the suicidal thoughts that can accompany severe depression” says lead author Oliffe, an associate professor in the School of Nursing.

Men die by suicide at least three times more than women although it is women who are diagnosed at twice the rate of men for [depression](#). Men

aged 20-29 have the highest rate of suicide. Statistics Canada reports that in 2003, the last year for which data is available, more than 2,900 men committed suicide.

The investigators found that most study participants expressed a strong commitment to their families and turned away from [suicide](#) for the hurt and trauma it would cause loved ones.

“Here, men’s strong sense of masculine roles and responsibility as a provider and protector enables men to hold on while seeking support to regain some self-control,” says Oliffe.

But Ogrodniczuk says the “stoic warrior” ideal also presents a downside that can lead [men](#) to shut down and look for escape. In these situations, study participants chose to mute their feelings or disconnect from others. They often overused alcohol and other drugs.

“Instead of finding respite from their emotional, mental and physical pain, self-harm emerged as the most common outcome of these actions,” says Ogrodniczuk, an associate professor in the Dept. of Psychiatry.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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