

National Guidelines for Suicide Prevention – Men and Unemployment



Recent international research provides a serious challenge to the general approach to suicide research and prevention, particularly as it applies to men. Current policy and practice are not only unhelpful to many men, but may actually compound the difficulties that men face. Unemployment is a recognised factor in a large percentage of all suicides.

1 Acknowledging the significance of unemployment as a correlate of male suicide

Recent Australian research (2014) shows that unemployed men suicide at 4.62 times the rate of employed men.¹

Unemployment (in particular, for more than six months), early retirement, or homemaker status have been found to be associated with significantly increased suicide risk, independently of categorised psychiatric diagnosis. In addition, adverse psychosocial working conditions, such as monotonous work, increased responsibility and pronounced mental strain due to contact with work clients, significantly increased suicide risk as well, again independent of categorised psychiatric diagnosis (Schneider et al., 2011).

Employment and a positive modification of working conditions, may possibly be preventive to important adverse mental health outcomes, including suicidality (Schneider et al., 2011).

2 Recognising male unemployment as a social determinant associated with high rates of male suicide

Research from the United Kingdom has highlighted that,

...nations that invest in active labour market programmes reduce the risk of suicide'.⁵

There are now strong international calls for appropriate labour market policy AS suicide prevention.^{6,1}

3 Challenging the arbitrary assumed mental illness /male suicide nexus

It may be the case that common suicide prevention strategies, such as encouraging greater use of

mental health services by men and focusing on raising awareness of links between mental illness and suicide, are unlikely to lead to effective interventions for individuals.⁴

There are strong international calls to take suicide prevention for men out of the 'mental health paradigm'.⁷ Many unemployed men are likely to be highly stressed as a result of their circumstances. This should not be presumed to indicate a 'mental health disorder'.

4 The current approach of suicide research largely misses the mark for men

To date, research has been insufficient to explain why men, especially during middle age, are particularly vulnerable to taking their own lives. The shortcomings of prior studies include lack of longitudinal follow-up, failure to measure such factors as social integration and dimensional indicators of stress, over reliance on categorical measures of psychopathology, and a focus on proxy outcomes instead of death by suicide.⁸

5 Mitigating risk through ethical and responsible industry practices

There are concerns about service provision as it affects men who may be in distress.^{9,7}

'Targeted awareness campaigns are required to educate professionals who are likely to come into contact with individuals during suicidal crisis'.¹⁰

Service providers across employment and training sectors as well as health and community support sectors have a duty-of-care to ensure appropriate engagement with unemployed men as a precaution against further isolation of men who may be at risk of suicide.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A national program of policy and program development of appropriate evidence-based suicide prevention – and to distinguish prevention from other aspects of suicide/mental health work

PEAK suicide prevention/mental health bodies to develop appropriate policy and practice for suicide prevention

Federal and State mental health/suicide prevention bodies to develop appropriate policy and practice for suicide prevention

Corporate/Industry bodies to develop appropriate policy and practice for suicide prevention

Federal funding for a national Professional Development program

The Professional Development program should be an evidence-based program with topics such as details around the social context of unemployed men and latest research on gender difference as it applies to issues such as engagement, communication and learning styles etc

For a broad range of sectors and settings including:

- The Employment sector (both government funded and private) and the Training Industry generally
- Mental Health
- Academic Institutions
- Workplace (e.g. OH&S)

Federal funding for appropriate re-employment support for men

Ensure relevant budgets such as training and redundancy budgets are directed to evidence-based and accountable programs

Prepared by:

Anthony Smith, Dr John Ashfield &
Professor John Macdonald

Australian Institute of Male Health and Studies

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LINKS:

Suicide Fact Sheet

<http://aimhs.com.au/cms/index.php?page=facts-about-suicide>

Editorial Approaching Suicide as a Public Health Issue

<http://annals.org/article.aspx?articleid=1887035>

Information and Research – Men, Unemployment and Suicide 2014

http://aimhs.com.au/cms/index.php?page=articles#men_unemployment

Comment on Job Loss

<http://aimhs.com.au/cms/index.php?page=australian-job-losses>

Security industry – Unemployment and Recruitment

<http://www.securitysolutionsmagazine.biz/2014/08/29/the-security-industry-recruitment-and-unemployed-men/>