

# Men's Health Update

## Middle-Aged Men And Suicide

by Eileen Zeller

(NAPSA)—Many in the mental health community are particularly concerned by the marked increase in the suicide rate among those in their middle years—especially among men in that age group. While youths have the highest rate of suicide attempts, middle-aged adults have the highest number of deaths by suicide nationwide. Men are proportionately at higher risk: Nearly four of every five suicides in the U.S. are by men.

In response, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and its public and private partners, have been working to understand why the suicide rate for middle-aged men has risen so sharply and to develop suicide-prevention strategies aimed specifically at this population.

### Contributing Factors

Men who have lost their jobs, for example, are much more likely to attempt suicide. Lisa Capoccia, MPH, assistant manager of provider initiatives for SAMHSA's Suicide Prevention Resource Center, says researchers are working to determine just how much the economic downturn that occurred during the last decade contributed to the increase in the suicide rate.

In 2013, adults who were unemployed in the past year were substantially more likely than those who were employed full-time to have serious thoughts of suicide (7.0 percent vs. 3.0 percent) or attempt suicide (1.4 percent vs. 0.3 percent), according to SAMHSA's 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Other factors can contribute to suicide risk for middle-aged men, such as serious physical illness, intimate partner violence (IPV), financial problems, legal problems and major depression. So can the after effects of combat stress and trauma experienced by veterans.

Substance and alcohol abuse can also play a role. Experts believe that when people have a drinking disorder, they are eight times more likely to attempt to take their life. And substances can impair judgment, where decisions are made that might not happen in a sober state.

### Reducing Risk

Because of these and other factors, SAMHSA is leading efforts to



**Experts say if someone is thinking about suicide, listen without judging, show you care and make sure that person is safe and has support.**

identify and develop approaches that will help better identify middle-aged men who are at risk of suicide, and to promote protective measures and reduce risk factors.

This includes strategies such as increasing connectedness to family and peers, increasing access to physical and behavioral health care, providing continuity of care upon release from emergency departments or psychiatric hospitalization, and increasing awareness of SAMHSA's National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255).

Nearly half of people who die by suicide have seen a primary care physician within a month of their suicide and we know that men are more likely to see a primary care physician than a behavioral health provider. For that reason, SAMHSA is working on strategies to encourage greater access to care to both primary and behavioral health settings.

Increasing access to behavioral health care is particularly important in light of the fact that more than one-half of the 8.6 million adults aged 18 or older who had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year did not receive mental health services, according to the 2008 to 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

### Reach Out To Men

Connecting those at risk of suicide with the appropriate mental health services is crucial. SAMHSA, as well as groups such as the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, are working to ensure that more middle-aged men are getting appropriate help.

To learn more, visit [newsletter.samhsa.gov](http://newsletter.samhsa.gov).

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**Note to Editors:** September marks National Suicide Prevention Month; however, this article can be of interest to your readers at any time.