

SUICIDE AND SELF-HARM IN AUSTRALIA

Differentiating and understanding suicide, attempted suicide and non-fatal self-harm in Australia (and beyond): a conceptual map

SUICIDE DEATHS

MALES

FEMALES

SELF-HARM

RATES

The majority of suicide deaths are of adult men. Males account for at least 75% of suicides in Australia – 2,292 of 3,027 total suicide deaths in 2015.¹

Suicide is generally considered to be significantly under-reported in Australia (and internationally).²

Suicide rates are higher among rural and remote males.³

LETHALITY

Many men who kill themselves do so at their first attempt.⁴

Suicide attempts are more lethal in men.⁵ This includes choice of methods, how lethally methods are used,⁶ and intentionality.⁷

Men are more likely to use guns,^{8,9} and to use them lethally.¹⁰

Men are more likely to hang themselves.^{11,12}

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

For both lethal and non-lethal suicide attempts, men are more likely than women to have alcohol and other drug problems.^{13,14}

Alcohol use disorders are very common in suicide,¹⁵ particularly among men.¹⁶

Alcohol intoxication increases suicide risk,¹⁷ sometimes by increasing method lethality.^{18,19,20}

HEALTH CARE

Men have lower overall rates of contact with the formal health care system, including primary health care²¹ and mental health services.²²

Males are often not well served by health/mental health, welfare, or social services.^{23,24}

Contact with mental health services prior to suicide is much less common among men than women.²⁵

Many men who suicide have no psychiatric history or known mental disorder.²⁴

The duration of the suicidal process is much shorter in men than in women, limiting the opportunities for intervention.²⁶

OVERLAP

Although there is some overlap between people who attempt suicide and those who complete suicide, these groups are characterised by significant demographic and clinical differences.^{27,28}

Although people who intentionally self-harm (including incomplete suicide attempts) have an elevated risk of going on to kill themselves, the majority do not do so.^{29,30}

RATES

The majority of non-fatal self-harm incidents, including suicide attempts, involve women and girls.³¹

Compared with males, a larger proportion of females make a non-fatal suicide attempt.³²

Females have higher rates of reported non-fatal suicidal behaviour,³³ but not as much higher as generally thought.³⁴ They are more likely to seek help for their injuries,³⁵ and more likely to be hospitalised.³⁶

Females accounted for 63% of hospitalised self-harm cases in Australia in 2010-11 (16,314 female and 9,748 male cases).³⁷

LETHALITY

Intentional self-harm is not necessarily a suicide attempt.³⁸

Although females attempt suicide at higher rates, they are more likely to use methods that are less likely to be lethal.^{39,40}

Women tend to have higher rates of poisoning and drug-overdoses, which are often not fatal.^{41,42}

In Australia, there are almost twice as many hospitalisations due to poisoning for women as there are for men: 13,892 vs 7,124 (2010-2011).⁴³

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

Alcohol problems contribute to both lethal and non-lethal suicide attempts by women.^{44,45}

HEALTH CARE

The majority of those who self-harm or attempt but do not complete suicide, and then come in contact with health services, are female.^{46,47}

This is particularly the case for hospitalisations related to poisoning.⁴⁸

Women are more likely than men to use services for mental health problems.^{49,50}

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