

Preventing Suicide

Among Men in the Middle Years

Although men in the middle years—that is, men between the ages of 35 and 64—represent only 19 percent of the U.S. population,¹ they account for 38 percent of suicides in the country.² The percentage of suicides in this age group continues to increase. A greater awareness and a better understanding among health and behavioral health care providers, other professionals who work with people who may be suicidal, and the general public may help to reduce the risk of suicide among men in the middle years—and ultimately, to save more lives.

Key Points in Understanding Suicide among Men in the Middle Years

The following list includes some key points about suicide among men ages 35–64. The list was gathered by experts and practitioners in the field of suicide prevention.³

- The major risk factors for suicide that affect the general population—such as mental disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of access to effective behavioral health services, and access to lethal means—also affect men in the middle years.
- Cultural expectations about masculine identity and behavior can contribute to suicide risk among men in the middle years. These expectations may include being independent and competent, concealing emotions (especially emotions that imply helplessness or vulnerability), and being the family breadwinner—an identity that is challenged when a man is unable to provide for his family.
- Men receive less behavioral health treatment than women even though mental health and substance use disorders—especially depression—are major risk factors for suicide among men, too.
- Alcohol plays a larger role in suicide risk among men than among women.
- Firearms play a large role in suicide among men in the middle years.
- Middle-aged men with employment, financial, and/or legal problems are at a higher risk for suicide than women or younger men facing these issues.
- Men in lower income groups are at a greater risk for suicide than men in higher income groups.
- Veterans in the middle years have higher suicide rates than their peers who have not served in the military.
- Gay, bisexual, and transgender men in the middle years may be more at risk for suicide than other men of their age.

Recommendations for Suicide Prevention for Men in the Middle Years

Because men in the middle years are involved in so many aspects of society, opportunities for preventing suicide among this population are vast. In every arena—professionally, socially, personally—individuals have a potential role to play in promoting and contributing to the well-being of men in the middle years.

Behavioral health care and primary care providers have the capacity to play an especially important role in suicide prevention efforts:

- » Behavioral health care and primary care providers can incorporate into their practices a better understanding of the factors that put men in the middle years at risk for suicide and the recognition that depression presents differently in men than in women.
- » Primary care providers can actively encourage men to seek behavioral health care.
- » Behavioral health care and primary care providers can also use brief interventions, such as safety planning, which includes teaching men how to leverage their peer and social support networks, and counseling on reducing access to lethal means, especially firearms.

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. (2018). Annual estimates of the resident population by sex, age, race, and Hispanic origin for the United States and States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). WISQARS Fatal Injury Data Visualization Tool. Retrieved from: <https://wisqars-viz.cdc.gov:8006/>
- 3 Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2016). Preventing suicide among men in the middle years: Recommendations for suicide prevention programs. Waltham, MA: Education Development Center. Retrieved from <http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/preventing-suicide-men-middle-years>

