

Press release

Schwedischer Forschungsrat - The Swedish Research Council

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Research results
Medicine
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Suicidal behavior more common among construction workers

Male construction workers have a 50 percent higher risk of suicide attempts and suicide. This is shown in a study conducted at the University of Gothenburg. The findings confirm that suicidal behavior is more common among men in professions with low educational requirements.

The study, published in the journal BMC Public Health, is based on registry data covering 1,542,665 Swedish men of working age. It focuses on suicide and suicide attempts in relation to the occupation the men held the year prior to the event.

The men were included in the study through conscription data and had no prior history of suicidal behavior. During the study period from 2002 to 2019, when the men were aged 25–65, just over two percent experienced at least one suicidal event, including 31,797 suicide attempts and 5,526 suicides.

Construction a risk industry

The researchers at the University of Gothenburg have previously shown that the workplace atmosphere in the construction industry is characterized by a macho culture and the stigmatization of mental illness. This study shows that the risk of suicidal behavior is fifty percent greater among men working in construction professions in Sweden, compared to the overall group of men included in the study.

"The construction industry is physically very demanding and stressful, which is perceived to have a negative effect on both physical and mental wellbeing. Our previous research also highlighted long-term pain as a factor that can lead to the overconsumption of alcohol and painkillers," says Maria Åberg, Professor of General Medicine at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, who is co-author of the study.

Low control

Among working men, the risk of suicidal behavior was highest in professions with low educational requirements. This group includes, for example, cleaners, sanitation workers, newspaper delivery workers, fast food workers, factory workers, and salespeople. Men in such professions had a sixty percent greater risk of suicidal acts.

"Men working in service and care professions often have high work-related stress and less control over their work situation. While this can lead to mental illness, there is also research suggesting that there may be a selection of mentally vulnerable individuals into these professions," says Jenny Nyberg, Associate Professor of Public Health at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, who is the study's lead author.

-The highest risk of suicidal behavior was seen in the group of men who did not work at all, where the risk was more than doubled compared to all men in the study.

-The lowest risk of suicidal behavior was seen among men working as managers within sales and marketing. Among highly educated men, such as engineers and researchers, the risk of suicidal behavior was halved compared to all men included in the study.

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