

Risk factors for suicide

A Communities Matter factsheet

Here are some of the possible reasons why people are driven to think about taking their own life.

Sociological reasons

- Changing family structures
- Marriage breakdown
- Divorce
- Death of a spouse
- Living alone
- More people living in cities or big urban areas
- People living in rural areas with few supports

Other sociological factors

- Changing cultural values and religious or spiritual practices
- Issues about unemployment or employment
- Debt
- Alcohol and drug use issues
- Discrimination about sexuality, gender and identity
- No social connections – for example, refugees who don't know anyone in the new country
- Easy-to-obtain information on ways to die by suicide

Psychological reasons: mental ill-health

Depression is often associated with suicide. Many of those who die by suicide are mentally unwell. How people think can affect their risk for suicide.

They may be more at risk if they:

- have poor coping skills
- think too much in black and white or an 'all or nothing' way
- have low self-esteem
- feel everything is hopeless
- are impulsive
- suffer from stress
- have poor social supports.

Biological reasons: genetics

Some research suggests suicidal behaviour is partly influenced by our genetic makeup, that is, things about us that have been passed down from our parents and earlier generations. But this isn't always the case.

Biological reasons: physical illness

Some physical illnesses put people at a higher risk of suicide.

For example, someone is more at risk:

- if they have been diagnosed with a terminal illness
- if they suffer long-term pain.

If you feel someone's life is in danger, call emergency on 000.

If someone you know needs urgent crisis counselling, there are several free 24/7 telephone services including **Lifeline on 13 11 14** and the **Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467**.

And remember...

- Take all threats seriously
- Ask the person to tell you what is wrong
- Listen and offer support
- Remove anything that could be dangerous
- Don't leave the suicidal person alone
- Be positive and point out choices
- Don't promise confidentiality
- Get professional help.

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Suicide prevention for small towns and local communities