

Suicide in New Zealand's Construction Industry Workforce: Factors Identified in Coronial Reports

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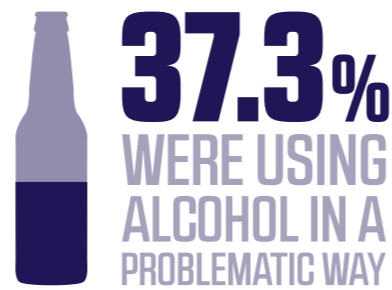
WHY

The purpose of the report is to help industry and government understand the factors associated with suicide in the construction industry and generate discussion around future prevention initiatives.

HOW

The study identified and analysed factors from 300 coroners' reports of construction workers who died by suicide between 2007 and 2017.

MAIN FINDINGS



GENERAL FINDINGS

- Almost all (99%) of the suicide cases of people who worked in the construction industry recorded over the ten-year period were men; reflecting the broader trends for male suicide in New Zealand and the fact that the industry is male dominated.
- The two age groups where suicide was more common are aged 20-24 (15%) and 45-49 (14%); a pattern similar to general suicide statistics for men in NZ.

WORK-RELATED FACTORS

- Coroners' reports recorded work-related factors in nearly a third (32.3%) of all cases.
- One in eight (13%) of all cases were experiencing some form of job insecurity or uncertain work situation
- People who were self-employed or business owners (11.3% of all cases) were twice as likely to have been impacted by work-related factors than employees of businesses.
- Work-related factors mentioned in the coroners' reports included stress related to running a business, job insecurity or uncertainty, pressure to deliver under tight deadlines, juggling responsibilities of multiple projects, and dealing with an injury or illness affecting their ability to work.

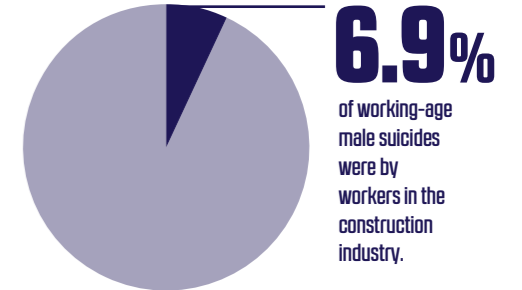
ADDITIONAL FINDINGS OF INTEREST

- More than a third (37.3%) of all the cases were using alcohol in a problematic way before and around the time of their death.
- A total of 15% (45 cases) had physical illness or injury mentioned in their files with 5.3% having illness or injury impacting their ability to work.
- 15.3% (46 cases) were reported to be engaged with the criminal justice system at the time they died.
- More than half (54.3%) of the sample were reported to be dealing with a relationship break-up or relationship problems with their romantic partner at the time they died.

Overall, the report identified no single driver of suicide in the construction industry. It found causes were always complex with a combination of personal and work-related factors contributing to workers' taking their lives.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In 2016, we learned that almost 7% of working-age male suicides in New Zealand were by workers in the construction industry, according to a report by the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. In 2018, a scoping study identified a need for more evidence to understand the phenomenon of suicide in the context of the construction industry (Bryson & Duncan, 2018). In response, Site Safe undertook this study, which was partly funded by Building Research Association (BRANZ) through the Building Research Levy.



“To lose 300 people to suicide in our industry over 10 years is devastating. It’s an employer’s responsibility to provide a safe environment for their workers and this includes protecting physical and mental wellbeing. There has been huge progress in workplace health and safety over the past twenty years, but we all need to play our part in shifting attitudes towards mental health.”

Brett Murray, Chief Executive of Site Safe

“The findings in this report outline some of the pressures on people working in the construction industry. These pressures aren’t unique to the construction industry, but the solutions can be found by getting the industry set-up to address these challenges and improve the mental health of its people.”

Shaun Robinson, Spokesperson for the Mental Health Foundation

WHAT IS SITE SAFE DOING NOW?

We have shared the findings of this report with government, industry leaders and our 6,000 member businesses. We are also working with key partner agencies to develop tools and resources focussing on prevention, promotion and support including:

- incorporating mental health and wellbeing information in our courses.
- working with external training providers around the provision of support and resources to assist businesses.