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Depression, suicidality and loneliness: mental health and Australian men

Despite making up more than three quarters of deaths by suicide in Australia, a quarter of men say they would not seek help from anyone for mental health concerns, according to research released today by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

The latest *Ten to Men: the Australian Longitudinal Study of Male Health* report found mental ill-health remains high among Australian men. Up to 25% experienced a diagnosed mental health disorder in their lifetime, and 15% experienced a disorder in any 12-month period. However, just 25% of men with mental health concerns said they were likely to seek help from a mental health professional.

Dr Galina Daraganova, Executive Manager of Longitudinal Studies at AIFS, said psychiatric disorders ranged from mood disorders through to substance use disorders, with depression and anxiety being most common among Australian males.

“Among the younger cohort (boys 10-14 years old), anxiety was the most commonly reported mental health disorder – experienced by about 9 per cent of boys,” Dr Daraganova said.

“For young men and adults, depression was most common, steadily increasing in prevalence as men got older, from 7 per cent among 15-17 year-olds, to 13 per cent in adulthood (men aged less than 57 years).”

Findings also revealed a significant association between loneliness and experiences of depression and suicidality.

“Men who reported lacking close friends or relatives were around twice as likely to have thought about suicide in the past 12 months,” Dr Daraganova said.

With COVID-19 continuing to impact the way we live, work and socialise, AIFS Director Anne Hollonds said it was more important than ever for Australian men to be reaching out and seeking support when they needed it.

“We know loneliness is significantly associated with experiences of depression and suicidality among Australian men. And for many people, there may not have been a lonelier time than now,” Ms Hollonds said.

“Not being able to see our family or friends can take a huge mental toll, and the research suggests we need to be continuing to encourage and support men to seek help if they’re feeling lonely, anxious or depressed.”

While more than 80% of adult men in the study who had experienced depression, anxiety or suicidality in the past 12 months had been in contact with a GP during that time, around only 40% had been in contact with a mental health professional.

“This is very concerning and suggests that men may face a range of barriers to getting help when they’re experiencing poor mental health. Things like cost, wait times, stigma around mental health and fear that it will be seen as weakness to seek help, or to talk about feelings, may be potential barriers,” she said.



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Hollonds said that another key contributor to depression among Australian males was unemployment – with men ‘out of work, but looking’ two times more likely, and those out of the labour force four times more likely to have depression compared to those who were employed.

“Beyond just the economic fallout, the mental health impacts of this year’s COVID-19 job losses are likely to be significant and long-lasting.

“That’s why we need to encourage the men in our lives to share what they are experiencing and let them know that it’s **not** a sign of weakness – it’s a sign of strength – to open up about depression, anxiety or loneliness. Trusted family and friends can also help men to find the right mental health support services. We all need help sometimes, and that’s OK,” Ms Hollonds said.

Read the chapter, [Mental health of Australian males: depression, suicidality and loneliness](#), from the *Ten to Men* study’s latest report.

If you or anyone you know needs support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14, MensLine on 1300 78 99 78 or Kids Help Line on 1800 55 1800.

Other key findings from *Ten to Men*:

- Around 4% of Australian men reported that they were lonely (i.e. had no close friend).
- A significant proportion of men who experienced depression at a given point in time continued to experience it or relapsed. Of those with self-reported severe depression in 2013/14, 40% still reported experiencing severe depressive symptoms in 2015/16.
- Lifetime suicidal ideation was high, with around a fifth of young men and a quarter of adults reporting they had thought about harming themselves at some point in their lives. Around a tenth of young men and adults had made a suicide plan in their lifetime.
- Adult men said they would be least likely to seek help for an emotional problem from a phone helpline, with around 80% indicating they would be very unlikely or unlikely to seek help from this source.

About the study

Findings outlined above draw on data from the first two rounds of data collection for Ten to Men: the Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health (TTM). The survey involved a sample of almost 16,000 men and boys ranging in age from 10 – 57 years.

The first of its kind in Australia, the TTM study follows participants over time and aims to fill gaps in knowledge about why males on average have poorer health outcomes than females, and why certain groups of males have poorer health than males in general.

The study is being conducted by researchers at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Knowledge gained in the study will be used to improve programs and policies for male health in Australia.

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AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them. See aifs.gov.au for more.

AIFS recognises that each of the numbers reported here represents an individual, and acknowledges the devastating effects suicide and self-harm can have on people, their families, friends and communities.