

A generation may be at higher risk of suicide - researchers



A generation of UK men born in the 1960s and 1970s may be more likely to take their own lives because of attitudes around the role of men at the time, Samaritans researchers have said.

Suicide rates are now highest in middle-age men, after years of falling rates in young people.

Academics said this may be due to a generation of at risk people ageing.

They warned that recent declines in the suicide rate in the over 50s may soon be reversed as this generation ages.

A report by the charity said: "In the last eight years suicides in younger men have reduced, while for men in their mid-years there has been an increase."

Prof Rory O'Connor, from the University of Stirling, suggested the shift could be partially explained by an ageing generation of at-risk people.

"The data would suggest it is the same group of people.

"We think of young people 20 years ago and the societal expectations of what is a successful man or a successful contributor to society, the expectations were particularly high.

"And with the change in the male role, being less well defined now than it was 20 years ago, men have great difficulty responding to the challenge of how we define ourselves as men."

Prof Stephen Platt, from the University of Edinburgh, said if "a group of people has a higher suicide rate, say in 15 to 19-year-olds, it carries that [higher risk] on through life".

He expressed concern that recent declines in the over 50s suicide rate would be reversed "as the cohort gets older" and warned against "complacency" in dealing with suicide in that age group.

Inequality

The theory was discussed at the launch of a report by the Samaritans into suicide in middle-aged men.

It said there was a huge gulf in the rate between people in the poorest and richest parts of society, with the most deprived areas having by far the highest rates.

The report said such men were part of a "buffer generation" between strong and silent fathers and progressive sons and "struggled to cope" with changes in society.

A sense of shame and defeat "especially for working class men" in not having a job or providing for the family, a reluctance to talk about emotions and a greater tendency to turn to drink and drugs were also cited as reasons.

Prof Platt said: "Men are often criticised for being reluctant to talk about their problems and for not seeking help.

"With this in mind, we need to acknowledge that men are different to women and design services to meet their needs."

The Department of Health in England has recently launched a new strategy to target suicide.

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