

# Suicide and The Workplace

## CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON SUICIDE



### Background

According to the International Labour Organization, 57% of global citizens 15 years and older are employed, meaning we often spend more waking time working each week than we do with our families. Workplaces both hold a huge potential to provide supportive structures for mental health, but research is also showing that some workplace hazards can negatively impact mental health and safety. Co-workers are often in a position to notice changes in behaviour or mood of someone who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts; they are often trusted peers who can intervene and support. Workers may also help businesses to inform and change practices where workplace hazards negatively impact mental health and safety.

A co-worker's suicide death leaves a lasting impact that few managers are prepared to respond to. As our data regarding workplace suicide emerges, we see global trends emerging. That is, male-dominated industries, such as construction and extraction, farming and agriculture, public safety and first responders, manufacturing, and transportation often have suicide rates well-above their country's national averages. In addition, medical-related occupations such as physicians, veterinarians, nursing and midwifery, and paramedics also have an elevated risk. Finally, people who work in media, sport, and creative occupations also seem to have an elevated risk for suicide and suicidal intensity.

Increasingly, companies, labour unions and professional associations are taking action to make suicide prevention a health and safety priority for their workforces. Some countries such as the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and UK even have standards or guides for workplace suicide prevention. Most of these strategies centre on a responsive, comprehensive, and sustained approach that is integrated into the organization's health and safety culture.

**The IASP Suicide and The Workplace Special Interest Group suggests we change the narrative around workplace suicide to both see the workplace as a very suitable venue for suicide prevention and intervention but also acknowledge that the workplace at times can be a risk and/or cause of suicide.**

### Statistics

# 58%

More than half (58%) of global suicides occurred before the age of 50.



There is growing recognition of the links between work or working conditions and suicide. Unmanaged psychosocial hazards and exposures in the workplace has been linked to work-related suicides.



Research have shown that work-related suicides account for 10-13% of all suicides.

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### How Can We Do More

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Workplace leaders can begin to build a workplace suicide prevention strategy by seeking first to understand their workforce. Leaders should assess their workplace for potential hazards that could increase risks of suicide. A growing body of research provides evidence of associations between working conditions and suicide, with conditions such as unmanageable workloads, bullying, insecure work, exposure to trauma, chronic stress, workplace sexual harassment and work intensification related to elevated rates of suicide.

By listening to workers and their experiences around despair, distress, help-seeking, help-giving, and suicide bereavement, leaders and stakeholders can develop more robust and culturally responsive initiatives.

Leaders need to be bold and champion the effort by declaring, “this is why suicide prevention matters to our mission, and this is why it matters to me.” By modeling confidence and openness with the topic, they demonstrate that suicide prevention matters, and that the topic is safe to talk about.

Some approaches can include training programs, a workplace communication strategy that validates people’s lived experience with suicide, peer support, mental health services, self-care empowerment, and crisis response plans. If your workplace has a training programme or communicates about mental health challenges, consider taking part.

### Resources

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Additional workplace suicide prevention and postvention resources include:

- [Preventing suicide at work: information for employers, managers, and employees \(WHO\)](#)
- [Suicide Prevention at Work](#)
- [Work-related Suicide: A Discussion Paper](#)
- [Workplace Suicide Prevention](#)
- [International Crisis Resources](#)
- [A Manager’s Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace](#)
- [Supporting someone in the workplace at risk of suicide](#)
- [Work-related suicide: Evolving understandings of etiology & intervention](#)

### Take Action

Pledge to make suicide prevention a health and safety priority at work.

Build your knowledge around workplace suicide prevention and access resources.

Raise awareness about mental health and suicide prevention.

Consider providing suicide prevention trainings at your workplace.

Encourage early intervention and help-seeking behaviours at your workplace.