

Mental health in Europe – a poor prognosis for men?

EMHF Fact sheet

- One in four Europeans will be affected by mental illness at some point in their lives
- Four of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide are mental illnesses – depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and obsessive compulsive disorder
- Yet European politicians do not take mental health seriously. Indeed, many countries spend less than 3% of their health budget on mental health provision
- According to a recent WHO report, many people with mental health problems do not get the treatment they need
 - of an estimated 33 million who suffer from depression each year, only about 18% obtain the correct treatment
 - 36–45% of the 6.6 million people in the WHO European region with schizophrenia are untreated
 - 66% of adults thought to misuse or be dependent on alcohol are untreated
- Within the EU in any 1 week, around 59 million people are estimated to be affected by depression to such an extent that their work, family or social life suffers
- A recent survey reveals that the prevalence of depression in Western Europe is almost 9%. The condition is particularly prevalent in urban areas. (in Eastern Europe, depression may be more common in rural communities)
- Although there appears to be a degree of variability between countries, the survey found a prevalence of around 10% for women and 7% for men
- More women than men attempt to commit suicide each year, but fewer ‘succeed’. Suicide rates – in the UK, at least – have halved among women since the early 1980s
- However, rates of suicide among men have risen dramatically. Many more men than women now take their own lives each year. In the UK, the differential between men and women in suicide rates is almost fourfold: 12 per population of 100,000 for males, compared with 3 per 100,000 for females
- Other ways of understanding the impact of suicide on men in the UK:
 - more young men die by their own hand than in traffic accidents
 - men are over 30 times more likely to commit suicide than die from heroin or AIDS
- Figures for the UK are by no means the worst. Men in Eastern Europe are up to seven times more likely to kill themselves than in the UK. Even in Western European countries such as Germany, France and Sweden, suicide rates are approximately twice as high

Suicide rates per population of 100,000 in selected countries, by sex and year

Country	Year	Male	Females
Belarus	1999	61	10
Lithuania	1999	74	14
France	1997	28	10
Germany	1998	22	7
Sweden	1996	20	9

- Men tend to choose final, violent methods for their suicide – hanging, crashing vehicles, shootings and leaping from buildings are, comparatively, common. Women are more likely to use methods, such as drug overdoses, that are potentially ‘treatable’
- Men and women from minority groups are even more likely to be depressed and to attempt suicide. For example, surveys from the UK of gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women reveal that between 10% and 50% have tried to kill themselves
- Various explanations for the higher suicide rates among men have been proposed. Among other things, commentators have blamed the difficulty that men traditionally have in communicating their emotions. The inability of traditional gender roles to adapt to the significant changes currently taking place in the world has also received much attention

Sources

1. WHO. The World Health Report 2001. Mental Health; New understanding: new hope. Summary accessed at <http://www.hda-online.org.uk/html/hdt1101/international.html>
2. Ayuso-Mateos JL et al. Br J Psychiatry 2001 Oct;179:308–316

The EMHF: tackling inequalities in men’s health across Europe

The EMHF is an independent, non-profit-making, non-governmental organisation that aims to raise the profile of men’s health at both a pan-European level and within individual countries. It encourages Europe-wide national, local and regional organisations (both governmental and non-governmental) to include men’s issues in their health policies and practices. It also aims to improve delivery of health services to men and to influence men’s health-related behaviours.

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