

SAMARITANS

4 Asks 4 A Safer Ireland

Samaritans Ireland

January 2020



Samaritans Ireland calls for your support on our

4 Asks 4 A Safer Ireland

- 1 Men:** A national, well-resourced plan to reach and support men at high risk of suicide.
- 2 Self-harm:** Everyone who self-harms should have access to support to help them identify and address the reasons for their distress, and to find alternative coping mechanisms.
- 3 Loneliness:** Support and develop social connections at an individual, familial, community and societal level to significantly reduce loneliness in Ireland.
- 4 Online safety:** Minimise harmful online content relating to suicide and self-harm, and maximise online opportunities to support and help people at risk of suicide and self-harm.

Suicide in the Republic of Ireland

Suicide kills three times more people than road accidents and is the leading cause of death of young people aged 15-24 and the third leading cause of death of men under 55.¹

While the suicide rate continues to fall in the Republic of Ireland, it remains a gender and social inequality issue. Overall, men are four times more likely to take their own lives than women, with men living in the most economically deprived areas being particularly vulnerable.¹

In 2018, 352 people in the Republic of Ireland took their own lives. Every single one of these deaths was a tragedy that devastated families, friends and communities.¹

Samaritans Ireland believes suicide is preventable, not inevitable, and it is our vision that fewer people die by suicide. Realising this vision is everyone's responsibility. In particular, politicians have a key role to play in saving lives by ensuring adequate supports and resources are made available for vulnerable people, and by keeping the issue of mental health and wellbeing to the forefront of their party's, and their own, policy work in the Dáil. Suicide prevention is a cross-party, inter-departmental responsibility. Only by working together on this issue can true progress be achieved.

Suicide and men

Fewer than 20% of men over the age of 18 who are experiencing mental health difficulties will seek help from a mental health professional, and less than 35% will speak to their GP during a tough period.² In particular, middle-aged men on low incomes have been the highest risk group for suicide for many years. Far too little is known about what really works to support these men when they are struggling.

In order to address this situation, we need a specific national plan, backed with proper funding, for reaching and supporting middle-age, low-income men. We need evidence-based services which are built on an understanding of how best to reach these men, and what they actually want, supporting them to deal with the full range of issues they are facing.

¹ Central Statistics Office (CSO) Vital Statistics Yearly Summary 2018. Please note, suicide refers to deaths where the underlying cause is intentional self-harm, but does not include events of undetermined intent.

² Atomik Research Survey (Samaritans Ireland). Unpublished. 2019

Self-harm in the Republic of Ireland

Self-harm is a sign of severe emotional distress. Although most people who self-harm do not go on to take their own lives, there is a strong correlation between self-harm and those people who do take their own lives. Men and members of the LGBTI+ community who have a history of self-harm are at a particularly high risk of suicide.³

Everyone who self-harms should have access to support to help them identify and address the reasons for their distress, and to find alternative coping mechanisms.

Levels of self-harm are rising among young people. There has been a 29% increase from 2007-2018 in reported cases of self-harm from persons aged 10-24, with a 6% overall increase between 2017-2018. Hospitals across the country were presented with 12,588 self-harm incidents in 2018.⁴ Unfortunately, this number is misleading as self-harm occurs at a much higher rate but is frequently un[der]reported.

According to the National Suicide Research Foundation, while 72% of people who presented to hospitals in 2018 were assessed by a member of the mental health team, there was considerable variation in recommended next care. This is likely due to variations in the availability of resources and services, but it also suggests that assessment and management procedures with respect to people who self-harm vary across the country. A streamlined approach is imperative to ensure the same level of care is provided to patients regardless of geographical location.

Loneliness

30% of Samaritans callers experience feelings of loneliness or isolation – this is the second most common reason why people reach out to Samaritans. Loneliness is not necessarily synonymous with isolation – studies show young people age 16-24 report feeling more lonely than older age groups despite the fact they are often surrounded by others.⁵ However, people who are isolated and withdrawn from others and don't have support networks to call upon in times of difficulty can be more vulnerable to suicide than those who are well-connected and have a stronger sense of connection to society. **Interventions focused on promoting social connections at an individual, familial, community and societal level should be supported and developed.** The **quality** of social contact is as important as the quantity of such contact.

Suicide, self-harm and online safety

Harmful content relating to suicide and self-harm is far too easily accessible online. **Samaritans want to see this content minimised, while opportunities for support and help online are maximised.** The Government should be leading international action to set out a framework for a suicide and self-harm safer internet.

Current proposals as laid out in the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill are a good first step in further regulation of the harmful content readily accessible online. It is important to not only block dangerous content and hold organisations allowing this content accountable, but to also actively teach people how to safely navigate the digital world and empower them to make smart decisions online. Without a comprehensive, international and multifaceted approach, vulnerable people will remain at risk to harmful content online.

³ BeLong To Youth Services, HSE, National Office of Suicide Prevention, Trinity College Dublin, GLEN. (2016). Dublin

⁴ National Self-Harm Registry Ireland Report 2018

⁵ Who feels lonely? The results of the world's largest loneliness study. BBC's Loneliness Project. 2018

SAMARITANS

Louise Hamra
Policy Officer
Samaritans Ireland
4-5 Usher's Court
Usher's Quay
Dublin 8, D08 Y223
Tel: +353 1 671 0071
E-mail: l.hamra@samaritans.org