

## Press Release

### The impact of suicide bereavement on family members in Ireland

Health professionals are advised to prioritise assessment of mental health and physical health problems among people bereaved by suicide, based on new research conducted by the National Suicide Research Foundation and the School of Public Health, University College Cork.

The studies, recently published in *BMC Public Health* and *BMJ Open*, involved a systematic review and mixed methods research exploring the health effects of suicide bereavement and family members' subsequent support needs. Key findings based on the research include:

- Among family members bereaved by suicide, 24%, 18% and 27% had elevated levels of depression, anxiety and stress, respectively. They experienced other psychological problems including, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, intrusive images, nightmares and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Family members bereaved by suicide were at an increased risk of a number of adverse physical health conditions, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease (CVD). They also experienced more physical health complaints, physical illnesses and physical pain.
- Considering these health difficulties, family members expressed a need for adequate formal and informal support. Challenges faced by these family members included difficulties accessing formal support services due to grief reactions, being unsure where to access such support and not having the financial means to pay for such support.

Ms Ailbhe Spillane, who conducted this research, states that: ***“Since we now know the main physical and mental health problems experienced after suicide bereavement, we need to prioritise high quality support services, without restricting such services because of financial constraints”***.

Professor Ella Arensman also stated that: ***“this research underlines the importance of increasing awareness among health and mental health professionals to prioritise assessment and early identification of mental health and physical health problems among people bereaved by suicide”***.

The research provides an evidence base for *Connecting for Life*, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide, 2015-2020.

The research was conducted as part of PhD research within the HRB Structured Population and Health Services Research Education: SPHeRE.

***Please, find below the full references and links to the publications:***

Spillane A, Larkin C, Corcoran P, Matvienko-Sikar K, Riordan F, Arensman E. [Physical and psychosomatic health outcomes in people bereaved by suicide compared to people bereaved by other modes of death: a systematic review](#). *BMC Public Health*. 2017, 17:939.

Spillane A, Larkin C, Corcoran P, Matvienko-Sikar K, Arensman E. [What are the physical and psychological health effects of suicide bereavement on family members? An observational and interview mixed-methods study in Ireland](#). *BMJ Open* 2018; 8(1).

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**Note:** Journalists reporting on this press release are advised to include information on relevant helplines and websites along with any coverage:

- Suicide Support and Information website: [www.suicidesupportandinformation.ie](http://www.suicidesupportandinformation.ie)
- The Psychological Society of Ireland: [www.psihq.ie](http://www.psihq.ie) (website)
- Samaritans: 116 123 (free phone); text message (standard text rates apply: 087 2609090); email: [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)
- [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie); 1800 804848 (free phone); email: [supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie)

**The National Suicide Research Foundation is in receipt of funding from the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention and the Health Research Board Ireland. The NSRF's research is linked to Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020.**