
Rising Suicide Risks Among U.S. Health Care Workers: The Need for Mental Health Support



Health care professionals face significant emotional demands as they routinely engage in stressful tasks, caring for severely ill individuals and managing heavy workloads.

A new study, published very recently in JAMA, estimated the annual rate of suicide among health care workers in the United States. Compared with the general population, physicians tend to live longer and have healthier lives. However, this new study revealed that relative to non-health care workers, registered nurses, health technicians, and health care support workers in the U.S. were at increased risk of suicide.

The researchers from Columbia University and various other U.S. institutions conducted an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Mortality Disparities in American Communities. Their study focused on the causes of death, which encompassed suicide and other factors, among approximately 1.84 million employed adults in the U.S. This dataset covered observations made between 2008 and 2019.

Suicide risks of physicians, registered nurses, other health care—diagnosing or treating practitioners, health technicians, health care support workers, and social/behavioural health workers were compared with non-health care workers.

The data showed significant disparities in annual suicide rates per 100,000 person-years among various occupational groups. This ranged from 21.4 for health care support workers, to 16 for registered nurses, to 15.6 for health technicians, to 13.1 for physicians, compared with 12.6 for non-health care workers.

The suicide rates for social and behavioural health workers as well as professions including dentists or physician assistants had a notably lower suicide rate of 10.01 and 7.6 per 100,000 person-years, respectively.

Overall, the results are consistent with evidence that health care workers are at a higher risk for mental health problems and long-term work absences due to mental disorders.

This important study has been released at a time when health care workers are preparing to strike due to burnout and staffing shortages.

Corey Feist, co-founder and chief executive officer of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation, said, "We both have burnout driving the health care workforce to leave, and we have this compounding mental health crisis that is making the environment untenable".

"Over 20% of the physicians in this country are experiencing depression yet they have ramifications if they take care of themselves".

The study also revealed that health care work was more strongly associated with suicide risk among female than male workers. Therefore, future research should investigate potential factors related to gender that could help explain this outcome, including gender differences in work roles, job satisfaction, and occupational stress.

The present analysis highlights that leaders need to re-evaluate their wellness programmes to ensure their employees have a supportive and accessible pathway to mental health treatment. It is important to ameliorate work-related factors that contribute to mental health risks among health care workers and to identify a range of workplace mental health interventions.

Source: [CNN](#)

Image Credit: [iStock](#)

Published on : Wed, 27 Sep 2023