

PRESS RELEASE

RECENT PUBLICATION 'SELF-HARM AMONG THE HOMELESS POPULATION IN IRELAND: A NATIONAL REGISTRY-BASED STUDY OF INCIDENCE AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS'

On January 17th 2018, a new publication examining patterns of self-harm among the homeless population in Ireland was published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*. This was a collaborative study between the National Suicide Research Foundation and the HSE Department of Public Health (Cork and Kerry).

The study examined self-harm among the homeless population, using data from the National Self-Harm Registry Ireland for the period 2010-2014.

Main findings

- The rate of self-harm presenting to hospital emergency departments between 2010 and 2014 was 30 times higher among the homeless population compared with those living at a fixed residence. Although the homeless population made up approximately 0.1% of the total population in Ireland, they accounted for 3.9% of all presentations of self-harm in the study period.
- Those who were homeless at presentation to hospital were more likely to be male, and to present with highly lethal methods of self-harm. Use of street drugs in intentional overdose was higher in this group. There was a greater risk of presenting with repeated acts of self-harm among the homeless.
- The impact of self-harm among the homeless was higher in urban centres than elsewhere in the country. Almost three quarters of self-harm presentations among the homeless were among people living in Dublin City or Cork City.
- The overall number of annual self-harm presentations in the homeless increased from 305 in 2010 to 513 in 2014. The visibly homeless population increased by 64% between 2011 and 2016; this is likely to account for some of the increase in overall number of self-harm presentations during the study period.

Implications and recommendations

The findings indicate that the homeless are a particularly vulnerable population, and enhanced efforts to prevent self-harm among this group are required. In line with Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide – *Connecting for Life, 2015-2020* – targeted interventions such as improved provision of primary care and mental health services for the homeless, and increased availability of evidence-based psychosocial interventions for this group are required. Other recommended measures include:

- Cross-sectoral changes to health and housing policy to prevent homelessness and enhance access to appropriate care;
- Enhanced training for healthcare and community-based professionals to increase awareness of self-harm and related mental health and social issues;
- Population level interventions to reduce excessive use of alcohol and illicit drugs

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- The article may be accessed here: [http://www.jad-journal.com/article/S0165-0327\(17\)32079-7/abstract](http://www.jad-journal.com/article/S0165-0327(17)32079-7/abstract)
 - Suicide reporting guidelines can be found here: <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/samaritans-work-ireland/media-guidelines-ireland>
 - Journalists reporting on this event are advised to include information on relevant help lines and websites: Samaritans: 116 123; Childline: 1800 66 66 66; www.aware.ie; www.yourmentalhealth.ie; ie.reachout.com
 - For further information, please contact the NSRF offices | 021-420 5551 | info@nsrf.ie