

Suicide and White Men in Hackney and the City



The mental health charity SANE has announced initial findings from a study into suicide and white men commissioned by NHS City & Hackney.

White men are known to be a high-risk group for suicide in City and Hackney, as they are elsewhere.

In this area, 'white men' includes diverse groups: Turkish and Kurdish men who have recently moved to the United Kingdom, men of central European origin whose parents may have been born here and men whose family has been native to the country for hundreds of years.

Stephen Hardisty, Joint Mental Health Commissioning Manager for NHS City & Hackney, described the study as "an important piece of work."

He said:

"For me the report evoked a deep sense of sadness for these vulnerable people in our local communities. As demonstrated these people are clearly isolated, troubled and desperate with apparently an inability to express their feelings and seek help. It is this aspect of the report that captured my attention the most."

Outi Horne, SANE's Research Manager, said:

"We reviewed recent relevant research literature, analysed information from SANE's helpline and email services and interviewed local community groups' representatives. Now we'll work with them and NHS City & Hackney on how best to introduce and deliver suicide prevention activities."

Findings can be summarised together in these key statements:

When suicidal, white men find it hard to connect with other people.

- It is difficult for them to express themselves and feel understood or accepted
- They experience anger, fear and anxiety as well as low mood and/or depression; many have paranoid thoughts
- Their relationships are often strained and a source of confusion; they are "caught between the two extremes of problems with people and being lonely"

Suicidal thoughts and behaviour are associated with finding difficulty in communicating with treatment professionals and others.

- They feel seeking help would be futile or anticipate negative consequences
- Some simply don't know how to access relevant services.

White men are particularly vulnerable to suicidal behaviour after events that have harmed their social support networks such as divorce, death of a partner or imprisonment.

- These affect white men more than other ethnic groups
- They are also more likely to become suicidal when diagnosed with schizophrenia: the illness itself can reduce connection with others through stigma-related social isolation and through its symptoms.

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Many suicidal white men feel 'stuck in the unpleasant present', that their life is not progressing and that they either have no future or it has nothing positive to offer.

- Suicidal people find it hard to imagine any future, while social and economic deprivation can mean fewer alternatives for escaping problematic situations
- Recurring mental illness can create a sense of "going around in circles" rather than progressing towards health and happiness
- Repeated treatment failures can lead to a sense of having exhausted all possibilities for improvement.

SANE recently announced two new projects relating to suicide. One, a groundbreaking major study, focuses on personal experience. Its aim is to develop new insights into suicide, enabling the public as well as professionals to understand better and respond more effectively.

Families, partners and friends of those individuals at risk are often best placed to help prevent suicides, yet their role is largely overlooked in suicide prevention policy and remains unsupported by research. The three-year research project, A New Focus for Suicide Prevention: Harnessing Personal Experience, is supported by a grant of £387,282 from the Big Lottery Fund.

A study into the experience of suicidal feelings, funded by the James Wentworth-Stanley Memorial Fund, aims to know what it is like to feel suicidal. Recruitment for participants will start in March.

SANE provides practical and specialist help to meet the challenge of mental illness:

SERVICES: Providing emotional support, care and information for people with mental health problems, their carers and families, through dedicated, specialist Services: SANEline; SANEmail & askTheSite; Discussion Board; Caller Care and Befriending

RESEARCH: Investigating the causes, nature and impact of mental health problems through rigorous neuroscientific, psychological and social research

CAMPAIGNING: Raising awareness; combating stigma; educating and working to improve mental health services (disseminating service user experiences and research findings).