

Mental ill-health major contributor to Australian youth suicide

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The majority of young Australians who died by suicide between 2006 and 2015 had either a diagnosed or a likely mental health disorder, yet more than two-thirds were not in contact with mental health services at

the time of their deaths, an analysis of coronial records by Orygen researchers has found.

The study team examined the demographic, social and clinical characteristics of young Australians aged 10-24 years who died by suicide between 2006 and 2015, by reviewing data stored in the National Coronial Information System. Their analysis, published today in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, revealed that 73 percent of these [young people](#) experienced [mental health difficulties](#), prior self-harm or substance misuse at the time of their deaths.

Additionally, the data showed that the majority (73.5 percent) of the 3365 young Australians who died by suicide were male. Almost 40 percent of the young people were not engaged in study or work, and 40 percent lived in the bottom-most socio-economic disadvantaged areas of Australia.

Lead author of the study, Ms Nicole Hill, now with Telethon Kids Institute, said young people who die by suicide experience multiple demographic, clinical and social risk factors such as a history of mental ill-health, past suicidal behavior, economic disadvantage and a history of adversity.

"But to date, the key drivers of youth suicide have not been investigated on a nationwide scale," Ms Hill said. "This analysis puts mental-ill health in the spotlight as a significant target for service reform in youth suicide prevention."

Associate Professor Jo Robinson, who leads Orygen's suicide prevention research, said despite significant investment in prevention, the number of youth suicides had not substantially decreased and there were fears rates would increase as Australia heads into recession.

"We clearly need to address the role of mental illness in youth suicides in this country," Associate Professor Robinson said. "The fact that so many of the young people who have died by suicide had a diagnosed, or probable, mental health problem, and many had sought help for their mental health yet were not in contact with services at the time of their death, is extremely concerning.

"There are [tragic consequences](#) for missing obvious opportunities to intervene early to support and treat young people with mental health challenges."

Ms Hill said suicide was complex and access to services was only part of the solution.

"We also need to be thinking about other ways we can support young people and ways in which they can support themselves and each other," she said.

"We must continue to reach young people in school settings, and identify other settings—such as tertiary education, workplaces and online—that would be suitable for [suicide](#) prevention activities."

More information: Nicole TM Hill et al. Suicide by young Australians, 2006–2015: a cross-sectional analysis of national coronial data, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2020). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50876](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50876)

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