

## Occupations and Suicide Risk

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A meta-analysis of 34 studies found that people in occupations requiring a lower level of skill are more at risk of suicide than people in jobs requiring a higher level of skill. People in the lowest occupational skill categories (such as hotel and office cleaners, sanitation workers, food preparation assistants, and unskilled laborers in mining, manufacturing, construction, and transportation) have a significantly higher suicide risk than people in semi-skilled or skilled occupations.

The majority of studies included in the meta-analysis were conducted in the United States, Canada, and Europe. The authors consolidated the nine occupational categories from the International Standard Classification of Occupations into four skill groups, which were found to be correlated with suicide risk by skill level – people in the group whose jobs required the least skills were at the greatest risk for suicide and those in the group whose jobs required the most skills at the lowest risk of suicide. Reasons for this, the authors speculate, may include socio-economic factors affecting many low-skilled workers: less education, lower income, and reduced availability of health care. However, some more skilled categories also showed an elevated suicide risk, possibly due to their inclusion of professionals with access to lethal means (such as farmers, medical professionals, and police). Managers were found to have the lowest risk of suicide.

The authors suggest that their meta-analysis demonstrates a need for prevention efforts directed at people in lower skilled occupations “particularly as these individuals may have limited access to the economic, social and health resources (as likely buffering or protective influences) available to those in higher skilled occupations.” They also caution that more research is needed to confirm the correlation of occupation by skill level with suicide risk as well as to determine the cause of the elevated risk associated with jobs requiring lower levels of skill.

Note: Military occupations were excluded from this analysis.

Milner, A., Spittal, M.J., Pirkis, J., & LaMontagne, A.D. (2013). Suicide by occupation: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 203(6): 409-416.

SPRC Commentary



# Suicide Prevention Resource Center

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Steps can be taken in the workplace to help protect against suicide. For ideas, see SPRC's [The Role of Managers in Preventing Suicide \[1\]](#) and [The Role of Co-workers in Preventing Suicide \[2\]](#).

## Links within this resource

[1] [http://www.sprc.org/library\\_resources/items/role-managers-preventing-suicide-sprc-customized-information-series](http://www.sprc.org/library_resources/items/role-managers-preventing-suicide-sprc-customized-information-series)

[2] <http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/role-co-workers-preventing-suicide-sprc-customized-information-series>

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