Suicide Risk and Middle-Aged Men

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According to an analysis of data from the National Violent Death Reporting System, the four most common precipitating circumstances for suicides by 35- to 64-year-old men without a known substance abuse or mental health condition were intimate partner problems (58.3 percent), criminal/legal problems (50.7 percent), jobs/financial problems (22.5 percent), and health problems (13.5 percent). About half of the men in the study whose suicides were associated with criminal/legal or intimate partner problems had experienced these problems over an extended period, while for the other half these problems emerged only as an acute crisis.

About 41 percent of men studied who had legal problems had committed or attempted homicide prior to their death. The majority of the victims of these homicides and attempted homicides were family members or current/former intimate partners.

The study was designed to explore the difference between suicides triggered solely by an immediate crisis (e.g. a divorce or arrest) and those that involved both a crisis and a longer period of living with the problem (e.g. chronic disease or long-term unemployment). For men whose suicides were associated with criminal/legal problems or intimate partner problems, it was more common for a single crisis to have precipitated the death, while men whose suicides were associated with job/financial or health problems were more likely to die following both a recent crisis and a longer history of dealing with the problem.

The researchers suggest that “Understanding the context of these issues in men’s lives may be useful when developing suicide prevention programs or when assessing risk.”
