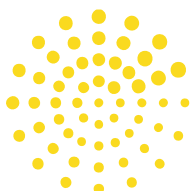




# **Hard Work, Hard Realities: Suicide Prevention for Men in High-Risk Industries**

*Informing Industry-Specific Solutions  
to Men's Mental Health Challenges*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**SOS**  
SIGNS OF SUICIDE  
A service of Riverside Community Care

**HARRY'S**

## What We Set Out to Do

This initiative seeks to understand, explain, highlight, and raise awareness of occupational hardships, stressors, rewards, and mental health concerns directly from men working in three male-dominated industries: commercial fishing, mining/excavation, and construction. These fields have fostered workplace cultures that value toughness, grit, and emotional stoicism, which can discourage men from seeking help for mental health or substance-related challenges—even when distress is severe.

The central goal of this study was to better understand the work environments within these industries that are among the highest risk for mental health conditions and substance use disorder. The following findings emerged from the perspectives that were shared:

- *Many participants felt invisible, despite the essential, and very dangerous, nature of their work;*
- *The participants' labor puts food on the table and builds the roads, buildings, and infrastructure that society relies on every day, but they ultimately felt their needs were not recognized; and*
- *To meaningfully reduce stigma and improve help-seeking, it is essential to identify mental health, suicide prevention, and substance misuse resources that men in these industries will be more inclined to use.*

Fishermen, miners, and construction workers face unique job-related stressors, stereotypes, and barriers to care. Yet despite their elevated risk, there has been little first-hand data capturing their lived experiences, occupation-related challenges, sources of resilience, and unmet needs, which are often overlooked. This study has provided a window into those personal experiences through qualitative research techniques.

National data helps put these experiences into a broader context. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), mental health struggles affect nearly one in five working-aged men (18–64) in the U.S. each year.<sup>1</sup> This includes all diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorders, ranging from mild to severe. Suicide rates in construction are four times the national average;<sup>2</sup> commercial fishing has a fatality rate 40 times higher than average;<sup>3</sup> and mining is identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as one of the top five occupations at highest risk for suicide.<sup>4</sup> Across all three sectors, rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), psychological distress, and substance misuse far exceed population norms.<sup>5 6 7</sup> According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), 79% of U.S. suicide deaths are male.<sup>8</sup> NIMH cites that treatment rates for men are lower compared to women.<sup>9</sup> The reasons for this can vary from access to clinical support, to financial limitations

*“The roads don’t just appear. You’re driving around but you don’t think of the people who don’t see their kids so the road can be there.”*



and cultural attitudes and stigma that discourage men from help-seeking.

This study generated invaluable insights to guide effective, industry-specific interventions. We believe that resources developed from authentic conversations will resonate more strongly among men in these industries and that using language that feels relatable and credible will result in increased comfort in seeking help. These insights also inform the development of systemic, sustainable, and measurable approaches that can reach men where they are.

## Methodology

Nearly 190 men across the three industries participated in focus groups and individual interviews, which were the two methods for collecting qualitative data for this study. This research approach provided the opportunity to gain more specific insights and detailed information from a smaller number of individuals.

## Key Learnings Across the Three Industries

A feeling of being part of an invisible workforce was a theme that emerged across all three industries. Those who work in these industries have a crucial impact on our food supply, infrastructure, and built environment. Yet many described feeling misunderstood by the public, disconnected from decisionmakers, and stereotyped in ways that diminished the complexity and skill of their roles. That sense of invisibility intersected with workplace stress and low engagement with non-workplace mental health resources. There is an accumulation of occupational stress and trauma that exists without clear cultural pathways to process it.

In fishing especially, men described near-death incidents, losses at sea, overdoses, and suicide within their communities. In construction, there were examples of employee suicide that had a lasting impact on coworkers. In mining and excavation, while trauma tended to center more on equipment-related accidents and occupational illnesses, the emotional toll of workers being isolated was evident. In every industry, men acknowledged stress and hardship, yet many described a norm of bottling it up, pushing through, or deflecting through humor.

Substance use challenges surfaced as both a coping mechanism and a workplace risk factor across all three industries.

At the same time, the study revealed that the strong bonds the men developed with each other represented an important source of resilience in the workplace. Pride, loyalty, protectiveness, and dedication were attributes they saw in themselves and recognized in one another. Across industries, family was also a motivating factor for work, and a meaningful protective factor, even as financial responsibility created additional stress.



*“We spend a lot of time together, more than with family, so we notice a lot of things and when someone is having a hard time.”*



*“You worry about yourself, your crew, and your vessel all the time. You worry about things you can’t control.”*

**For these reasons, suicide prevention and mental health strategies will not succeed in these industries if they are not customized to their particular needs.** Mental health and suicide prevention interventions must be designed to reflect the culture of each workforce and delivered within the communities. It should be offered in locations and times that align with industry work shifts. Construction, an industry that has steadily addressed suicide prevention over the past several years, offers a helpful template. When mental health support is incorporated in the work environment, engagement can increase.

Government and industry-specific regulations also shape the environment in which these workforces operate. For construction and excavation, safety protocols and equipment standards are intended to protect the workers while there is an increasing focus on environmental protection. In commercial fishing, regulations center on protecting the ocean and preventing overfishing, while national agencies provide services and standards to protect fishermen at sea.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are intended to guide industry-specific action at the individual and systemic levels:

- **Incorporate or expand peer support trainings** to help reduce stigma that often prevents workers from speaking about their stress, substance misuse, or emotional challenges, including mental health literacy and suicide prevention trainings that are tailored to each industry;
- **Build on the bonds between workers** to create a culture that encourages men to seek support;
- **Raise awareness about employee assistance programs** and mental health resources;
- **Develop financial literacy training** to help workers make sound financial decisions (particularly relevant in the fishing industry, which can require a major capital investment); and
- **Provide counseling and support** for workers after a suicide or overdose to help them process the loss.

Real change will depend on how these strategies are carried forward in the environments where this work takes place.

## Endnotes

- 1 National Institute of Mental Health. "Mental Illness." <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>
- 2 Sussell, Aaron, et. al., "Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation – National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7250a2.htm#:~:text=Suicide%20Rates%20by%20Major%20Industry,8.9\)%20\(Table%202\)](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7250a2.htm#:~:text=Suicide%20Rates%20by%20Major%20Industry,8.9)%20(Table%202))
- 3 National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. "About Commercial Fishing Safety." <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishing/about/index.html>
- 4 Peterson, Cora, et al., "Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation – National Violent Death Reporting System, 32 States, 2016." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6903a1.htm>
- 5 Roome, Amanda B., et al., "Beneath the Surface: Mental Health in Commercial Fisheries." National Library of Medicine. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40164540/>
- 6 Andrew, Arena F., et al., "Mental health in the construction industry: vulnerabilities and psychosocial risks among diverse workers." *Current Psychology*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12144-026-09121-6>
- 7 Mine Safety and Health Administration. "The Mental Health Challenges Faced by Miners Due to Physical Labor." <https://mshasafety.com/the-mental-health-challenges-by-miners-due-to-physical-labor/>
- 8 National Alliance on Mental Illness. "Mental Health By the Numbers." <https://www.nami.org/mental-health-by-the-numbers/#:~:text=79%25%20of%20people%20who%20die,Reflects%20sex%20reported%20at%20death>
- 9 National Institute of Mental Health. "Men and Mental Health." <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/men-and-mental-health>

Cover Photo: Joel Woods, Commercial Fisherman and Photographer



[sossignsof suicide.org](https://sossignsof suicide.org)