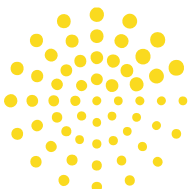


# Hard Work, Hard Realities: Suicide Prevention for Men in High-Risk Industries

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



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SIGNS OF SUICIDE  
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## What we set out to accomplish

This initiative sought to understand and highlight occupational stressors, rewards, and mental health concerns of men working in three high-risk, male-dominated industries: commercial fishing, mining/excavating, 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.

National data helps put these experiences into a broader context. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), mental health struggles affect 19.7% of 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. Within the three targeted industries for this study, the risks are even more pronounced. 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

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Mental Health. "Mental Illness." <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>

<sup>2</sup> 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))

<sup>3</sup> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. "About Commercial Fishing Safety." <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishing/about/index.html>

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 difficulty accessing clinical care, to financial limitations, and cultural attitudes and stigma that discourage men from seeking help. A small but meaningful share of the veteran workforce is employed in these industries, with approximately 6.5% in construction,<sup>10</sup> over half a percent in mining,<sup>11</sup> and 1.4% in agriculture and related industries,<sup>12</sup> including fishing.

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 to them 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

For this study, focus groups and individual interviews were the two methods used to collect qualitative data. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to gain insights from a smaller number of individuals and allows for detailed information gathering that cannot be gleaned through large-scale assessments. In contrast, quantitative research is standard practice when assessing the impact of mental health struggles across populations and can illuminate current state and significant

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<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> Room e, Amanda B., et al. "Beneath the Surface: Mental Health in Commercial Fisheries." National Library of Medicine. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40164540/>

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> Mine Safety and Health Administration. "The Mental Health Challenges Faced by Miners Due to Physical Labor." <https://mshasafetyservices.com/the-mental-health-challenges-by-miners-due-to-physical-labor/>

<sup>8</sup> 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>

<sup>9</sup> National Institute of Mental Health, "Men and Mental Health." <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/men-and-mental-health>

<sup>10</sup> The Home Builders Institute. "The Home Builders Institute (HBI) Construction Labor Market Report Fall 2025." [hbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Fall-2025-Final-Construction-Labor-Market-Report-Update.pdf](https://hbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Fall-2025-Final-Construction-Labor-Market-Report-Update.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Employment Situation of Veterans News Release." March 20, 2025. [www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.htm](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

trends. Quantitative data can reflect the sentiments of large populations and garner information from those who may be overlooked.

## **Focus Groups**

A focus group consists of a small set of approximately 6 to 12 people—brought together to discuss specific topics under the guidance of a trained moderator. The purpose of a focus group is to explore participants’ attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and motivations through interaction. Unlike surveys or structured interviews, focus groups allow for open-ended discussion, which can bring out deeper insights, shared understandings, and differing viewpoints among participants.

Focus groups were foundational to the analysis of the cultures across our three chosen industries: fishing, mining/excavating, and construction. Nearly 190 men across the three industries participated in focus groups and individual interviews. Each industry-specific focus group was designed to encourage men to describe their experiences, challenges, and needs in a way that felt comfortable. The presence of peers encouraged group discussion as there was a shared sense of lived experience and familiarity. Through descriptive comments and discussions, we were able to capture in detail the wide range of the participants’ personal histories.

Focus groups were conducted in person and were highly interactive. All material collected was confidential in that no identifying information was linked to specific men in any of the groups. There was no audio or videotaping of sessions to ensure anonymity and increase comfort levels. Facilitators clarified the information gathering goal prior to each session and made the clear distinction that these were not therapy groups. Mental health education training was provided as an awareness building tool in conjunction with each focus group.

We also conducted individual interviews, both in person and virtually, as part of our data collecting process. Interviewees were selected for various reasons, including leadership status, expertise at a national or industry level, or awareness of mental health or substance misuse resources provided in their respective industry.

## **Industry Overview & Findings**

### **I. THE FISHING INDUSTRY**

Commercial fishing in the United States has deep roots that stretch from Indigenous traditions to today’s highly managed, technology-driven industry. Throughout the

20th century, U.S. fisheries experienced major expansion, aided by motorized vessels, refrigeration, and industrial processing with technological advances that allowed fishers to travel farther and harvest more.

The industry continues to experience extremely high demand that translates to important income for their local areas. For the 22nd consecutive year, New Bedford, Massachusetts (the location of one of our focus groups) had the highest valued catch in the nation (88.4 million pounds was valued at \$443.2 million), with sea scallops making up the highest value of the catch.<sup>13</sup>

For this project we worked extensively with the Fishing Partnership (FP), a non-profit organization that supports fishermen and their communities throughout New England. The FP believes in creating a safe and supportive work environment that addresses mental health, suicide prevention, and opioid risk response in the same way that they address physical safety. Their community-based approach is centered around the use of Navigators, a group of women made up of spouses of fishermen, or women from fishing families, who provide a range of key services for men working in the industry. The Navigators are embedded in the fishing towns and deeply trusted by the community. The FP is intentional in its work to include the fishermen, their families, and communities in the port towns where they work and live. They do this by strengthening the social determinants of health in four areas of work life: fishery, gear, ports, and grounds.

## Our Findings in the Fishing Industry

**"Fishing is in my blood. It's church to me. I forget everything when I'm on the water."**

There were 72 fishermen from Massachusetts, Maine, and Rhode Island who participated in focus groups held in New England. While we spoke to a few women who also pursued fishing, it remains a male dominated occupation.

In talking with numerous men in the commercial fishing industry, it was clear that above all, the fishing industry is centered around families and community. Generational bonds lead men into the same careers as their fathers and grandfathers, and family-like bonds between crew members anchor them to their line of work. We heard many men talk about the strong sense of identity tied to being a fisherman:

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<sup>13</sup> National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fisheries of the United States, 2022. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Current Fishery Statistics No. 2022.

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/fisheries-united-states>

- “It’s the only job I’ve ever had. It’s who I am.”
- “I come from a fishing family. My father, grandfather – we always had boats.”
- “I grew up in a fishing family in Maine. 5<sup>th</sup> generation. Great grandfather was a fisherman.”
- “A bad day fishing is better than a good day working anywhere else.”

A career in the fishing industry has unique stressors and challenges. The day-to-day work of a fisherman demands extremely long hours; full days, weeks, or months spent on a boat at a time can foster feelings of isolation and loneliness. Injuries are common amongst fishermen, as are chronic and acute health problems exacerbated by their physical labor. This, combined with exhaustion, creates an environment where dangerous accidents can happen. The emotional demands are equally intense because these boats become their homes. Fishermen constantly face the risk of damaged or sunken ships during long hours at sea, which is a devastating personal and financial loss.

### **Role of Regulations**

Fishermen have seen major changes to their work over time. Environmental impacts such as warming ocean temperatures have drastically changed the waters. Government regulations put in place to combat those impacts add additional complications to their already intensive jobs.<sup>14</sup> All the participants in the focus groups cited government regulations as one of the most stressful aspects of their work. Despite public perception, it is not because they do not care about preserving the ocean. Many of these men believe that the decision makers creating regulations do not have enough of a working understanding of commercial fishing to be able to dictate how they do their jobs.

As one fisherman said, “Regulations and where they come from...It’s a top-down problem. These regulations are imposed upon by people who haven’t done the work. If people who made the regulations better understood – it’s academic versus being on the water.”

Tension arises when outside organizations or governments attempt to regulate the fishing industry or change existing laws around fishing. Fishermen often feel distrustful and misunderstood, while regulators and the public may view their concerns as selfishly motivated. These regulatory changes add significant stress, and often financial strain, to an occupation that is already physically and mentally

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<sup>14</sup> NOAA Fisheries. (2011). *Laws & Policies* | NOAA Fisheries. Noaa.gov; NOAA. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/laws-policies>

demanding. They identified:

- “Big swings in policy changes and regulation add to the stress.”
- “We used to fish 300 days a year. Now we get 30.”
- “Fishing opportunities are tied to regulations – each year we have to catch more fish, but the quotas shrink. Less fish means less money, so fish buyers go elsewhere and overseas.”

Many of the men described damaging stereotypes of fishermen that hurt the industry. Fishermen feel burdened by the public perception that they are uneducated individuals who can't get other work and are often incorrectly labeled as drug addicts. They said:

- “People think we rape and pillage the waters. They don't get how much we care and worry. We are stewards of the ocean.”
- “We do more than fishing – we are carpenters, mechanics, welders... when you're 30 miles offshore there is no one to call. You fix it yourself.”
- “The things my brother knows about the ocean environment you can't learn in a book.”
- “Fishermen are incredibly intelligent about their environment and what's going on around them. They constantly have to adapt to their environment to make a living. For example, if I see a flock of birds moving a certain way, I see that as an indication of wind impact on the water.”

### **Stress and Trauma in Fishing**

“You never catch up. Fatigue can be a chronic state during the season.”

“It's a physical burden, especially in the summer. It's a 7-day-a-week job; after 7 to 10 days working straight, I can get heart palpitations.”

While the fishermen we talked with conveyed appreciation of the professional fishing life, they also talked about significant stressors and the physical, mental, and emotional toll of the work. Occupation-related stressors included finding and keeping reliable crews, worrying about one's boat, the physicality of the work, and financial demands. One fisherman told us, “You worry about yourself, your crew, and your vessel all the time. You worry about things you can't control – the weather – if regulations go into effect.”

Men talked extensively about traumatic events such as men overboard, losing family members or crew members to overdoses, suicide, or accidents. One fisherman

described trauma as “being in a very bad situation where you’re close to dying, badly hurt, or seeing awful things.” Others described trauma in the following ways:

- “Trauma is cluttered thinking from seeing too many bad situations.”
- “I’m a child of European War Veterans and my father had PTSD. PTSD are emotions that reside in your head after the fact. What resides in your head...just let it go but you can’t. Tempers can flare.”
- “The impact of trauma is stunting; it’s the inability to get out of your own way.”
- “Trauma ripples through small circles in town.”

Some men describe harrowing experiences, such as losing crewmembers in the middle of the ocean or watching them experience injuries or acute health emergencies like strokes. Serious boating accidents or incidents, while not frequent, have a high chance of being traumatic to the men. In addition to a loss or potential loss of crew, the loss of their vessel can feel traumatic.

One fisherman talked about going overboard and nearly dying when he got caught up in rope. He did not realize the extent of the traumatic impact until he talked with fishermen in his community who had experienced similar situations. For him, the understanding, care, and insights he gained from talking with each of his fishermen peers supported and saved him.

The men routinely commented that it’s uncommon for fishermen to talk at length about their difficult experiences and feelings related to trauma or the high stress of their careers. One man described an understanding of what other fishermen may be carrying mentally and emotionally after having gone through similar experiences, saying, “Everything I’ve seen. Guys don’t talk about it. They know it but they don’t talk about it.”

### **Substance Misuse in Fishing**

While the stereotype of fishermen who are drug addicts and alcoholics is frustrating for many in their community, there was also genuine recognition and discussion about the significant impact of drug use. Some fishermen talked about the distinction between those who want to fish and those who have no other occupational choice, with the latter seen as more prone to drug use. One captain told us that fishermen supply boats with Narcan in case of an emergency.

Substance misuse is a common challenge in the fishing community. Injuries can often lead to men being prescribed painkillers that they can become reliant on. Some men talked about receiving large financial payouts after fishing contracts with

little guidance or education on how to manage large amounts of money. Some men report that this can lead to the money being spent on drugs or alcohol. Many of the men interviewed knew someone who had experienced a drug overdose. They said:

- “Being alone is the biggest thing as a scalloper. Young men can do drugs because they spend a lot of time alone and they make good money.”
- “Drugs are the biggest problem. It’s rampant. 60% of people on a wharf are stoned out of their mind. They make \$100k a year and have no way to spend it. It’s a huge problem that no one is addressing. There should be free rehab facilities.”
- “I think a lot of alcohol is used as pain management. It would help if we had better access to health care in this industry.”
- “Some boats are clean boats.”

Some fishermen attributed high levels of alcohol use to constant physical danger, stress and isolation, and the seasonal work cycle.

### **Suicide Risk in Fishing**

“When I was on a boat and feeling suicidal, I wouldn’t talk to the crew. They were older. There is a generational issue.”

“I know of three suicides. We know it’s dangerous. We might feel depressed, sad, hopeless but we have to get up, go to work, and fish.”

The fishermen we spoke with stated that suicidal ideation can happen due to the long periods of isolation. Some men talked about knowing someone who had died by suicide. The men described suicidal thoughts or events in the following ways:

- “When you’re dark and suicidal, you’re in your head about it; not talking with anyone.”
- “[I] know of suicides where [it’s] more like they didn’t care what happened, they knew the drugs or drinking were gonna kill them.”
- “Sometimes men will go out alone and get lonely and it’s hard.”
- “Seven, eight years ago, there was a suicide. No official postvention or response. A woman who worked at a store put up a memorial and everyone came there to talk, spend time together.”
- “One suicide happened 10 years ago. No one knew he was suicidal. It’s still a taboo topic.”

## **Sources of Resilience & What Would Help**

“Fishermen aren’t going to ask for help.”

“Fishermen might talk with other fishermen.”

When men were asked what gave them strength and fortitude during difficult times, they unanimously named family and friends. Family was defined as not only their traditional family members but also their ‘fishing families’ in their communities.

Throughout our conversations, many fishermen said their deep passion and love for being on the water sustained them, even when the work was grueling. Nature brought them a sense of calm. Men described the importance of freedom that comes with fishing. When we asked the fishermen in our focus group what would help them, they talked about the need for accessible and affordable mental health support services in their community. A majority said they would only talk with other fishermen, but would consider a counselor who was in their community and understood fishing life. Financial support services and learning about managing money were also listed as a practical need that some would use. Countless men we spoke with expressed gratitude for the services offered by the Fishing Partnership, which includes Safety Training and securing insurance and health care services, saying in part, “I didn’t grow up with Safety. When I met the Fishing Partnership they asked about our drills. We didn’t have Man Overboard or drills like that, not until now.”

The men spoke of the insular nature of the fishing culture, where trust for outsiders is hard won. This can result in a guarded receptivity to non-fishermen, including counselors. However, a few fishermen talked about their positive experience when reaching out for mental health support, saying, “Men have a hard time getting help. I’m glad I asked for help, doors opened for me.”

The relationship between commercial fishermen in New England and the Coast Guard is evolving in positive and much needed ways. While the Coast Guard responds to all emergencies on a vessel, there is growing awareness that the crisis may not only be physical or boat related, but due to a mental health situation or overdose. Rather than being seen as policing the water and having an antagonistic relationship, the Coast Guard in New England is working to build a more collaborative relationship with fishermen and their families on shore.

## **How Fishermen Describe Themselves**

- Hardworking, Dedicated, Independent

- Loyal - we stick up for each other
- Tough, Relentless, Self-sufficient, Resilient
- Belligerent, Salty, Transparent
- Scientist, Intelligent, and mindful on the future
- Exhausted
- Trustworthy, Kind, Emotional, Courageous
- Determination, Drive, and maintaining safety
- *"No one does it for you"* mentality
- Leaders who bring the team home safely and with pay

### **Fishermen Wives and Spouses: A Critical Role in Commercial Fishing**

Wives and spouses of fishermen have played a vital role in various aspects of the fishing world, from supporting the wellbeing of the men to taking an active role in advocating for communities and the environment. An example of this is the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association (GFWA), a local non-profit organization in Gloucester, Massachusetts with the oldest fishing port in the United States. The GFWA assists active and retired fishermen and their families and has advocated for the concerns of the fishing industry at local, state, and federal levels. Additionally, The Women of Fishing Families, based in Chatham, Massachusetts, is a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to supporting Cape Cod fishing families by providing an active support network, community assistance funds, and fisheries education. In Maine, Monique Coombs, Director of Community Programs for the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA), is a strong advocate for the Fishing Community and has written extensively about the role of wives in supporting the mental health of their fishermen husbands.



### **Fishing Spotlight: Industry Champions & Positive Change**

Making help available is the first step to connecting the fishermen to resources. Champion organizations are finding success by offering tools that fit easily into the everyday work of fishermen.

## **Captain Clint Prindle, Coast Guard First District Law Enforcement and Security Mission Manager**

Captain Prindle is an advocate for addressing mental distress at sea, including overdoses and suicidality. Describing the change in perspective over time, he noted “I saw a lot of addiction. I don’t think we cared about the fishermen and fishing community then in the way we do now. Our job was to go onto the boat and check that everything was in compliance. Now, we work to catch someone on a boat in a crisis before they jump so we don’t have to look for a body.”

## **Deb Kelsey, Fishing Partnership Navigator**

Deb is training through the Fishermen First Responders to be the first points of contact for other fishermen learning about overdoses. They’ve trained hundreds of fishermen to understand the scope of the opioid crisis in their area, recognize the signs of overdose, and safely administer Narcan. Deb, the wife of a fisherman, started directly at the waterfronts, where she’d ask the crews if they knew about Narcan. Many would share about family members or friends who died from opioid misuse, and breaking the stigma around substance misuse is still a key element of this education. Narcan is widely available on boats in the Cape Cod area due to this work.

## **The Shaw Fund for Mariners’ Children**

The Shaw Fund for Mariners’ Children is a private foundation that has been dedicated for over 150 years to supporting New England fishermen and others who work at sea. Established in 1853, The Shaw Fund provides financial assistance referral services to mariner families residing in Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire, including short-term financial assistance at times of illness or injury. In February 2026, seven lives were lost aboard a fishing vessel that sank in Gloucester. The Shaw Fund worked with the Fishing Partnership to provide financial assistance to family members.

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## **II. THE MINING/EXCAVATION INDUSTRY**

Mining is a specialized activity focused on the extraction of valuable minerals or materials such as coal, metals, and gemstones from beneath the Earth’s surface. Mining often involves complex processes and machinery. Excavation is a broader term for its sister industry that encompasses the process of digging, moving, and

removing earth or rock for various purposes. Excavation can be connected to construction, archaeology, and environmental restoration. Within the Excavation industry, certain roles are considered to fall under the construction umbrella, adding to the fluidity between these occupational groups.

Mining operations are typically conducted at sites rich in the targeted resources, whereas excavation activities can be found in a wide range of settings, such as construction sites for buildings and roads and highways. The techniques used in mining often include drilling, blasting, and ore processing to extract and refine valuable minerals or metals. In contrast, excavation techniques might involve more simple processes like trenching, digging, and dredging, depending on the project's scale and purpose.

In the early 1900s, mining became increasingly mechanized with industrial and technological growth. Mining towns flourished, but the industry also became notorious for dangerous working conditions, prompting early labor organizing and safety reforms. The 20th century saw major labor struggles as miners organized for better wages and safer conditions. Disasters such as the Monongah Mining Disaster in 1907, one of the deadliest in U.S. history, highlighted the need for regulation and helped shape modern mine safety laws. Federal laws such as the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 sought to regulate mining practices and require land restoration. Mining and excavation added approximately \$81 billion to the United States economy in 2024. Yet it remains an industry whose daily practices are not widely discussed and innovations not recognized.

### **Role of Regulations**

As with commercial fishing, regulatory oversight for mining is typically stringent, with the goal of protecting workers and considering potential environmental and social impacts. It involves multiple layers of local, national, and sometimes international laws and agreements. Excavation projects, while also regulated, may face a different set of standards and permits, especially when they involve urban development, infrastructure, or cultural heritage sites.

### **Health & Medical Complications**

Health challenges in the mining and excavation industry have long been recognized and, while often tied to coal mining, the medical impact of excavation can also be significant. During several interviews with Carol Nixon, a research health scientist at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Occupational

Health & Safety, she described the three major types of physical and medical illness related to mining and excavation:

1. Hearing loss<sup>15</sup> can be the result of a reluctance to using protective wear;
2. Cancer or black lung<sup>16</sup> can be caused by exposure to silica in quarries or certain types of rocks; and
3. Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD)<sup>17</sup>[3] can be caused by chronic strain, depending on the type of mining.

## Our Findings in the Mining/Excavation Industry

**“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.”**

For this project, 54 men participated in focus groups at an excavation company. Participants ranged from early 20s to 60s with some nearing retirement.

Many men in the focus groups described taking pride in their work, which largely creates roads and public structures by gathering and moving critical materials for the projects. While knowing that their work is essential to daily life, they spoke of feeling ‘invisible’ in their work; people make use of roads and buildings and have no appreciation of the long hours and hard work that creates this infrastructure. This invisibility was related to a perceived lack of respect in public perception, which might impact their professional esteem. When asked what kept them in the excavation industry, nearly all the men mentioned the monetary compensation and benefits, including health insurance, job security, overtime pay, and the potential of a pension. The men at this excavation company also perceived it as a better place to work than other companies or corporate environments.

### Stressors and Mental Health Challenges in Mining and Excavation

When asked about the most stressful aspects of their jobs in excavation, the men referenced:

- An isolated work environment due to working 10 to 12 hours per day alone in a

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<sup>15</sup> “Occupational Noise Exposure - Hearing Loss in Construction | Occupational Safety and Health Administration.” [www.osha.gov/noise/construction](http://www.osha.gov/noise/construction).

<sup>16</sup> Cruel, Synclaire. “Construction Workers at Increased Risk for Life-Threatening Lung Disease, Study Finds.” *Duke Department of Family Medicine and Community Health*, 20 Apr. 2023. [fmch.duke.edu/news/construction-workers-increased-risk-life-threatening-lung-disease-study-finds](http://fmch.duke.edu/news/construction-workers-increased-risk-life-threatening-lung-disease-study-finds).

<sup>17</sup> CDC. “CDC - Mining Topic - Ergonomics and MSD Prevention - NIOSH.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 8 Mar. 2019. [archive.cdc.gov/www\\_cdc\\_gov/niosh/mining/topics/ErgonomicsandMSDPrevention.html](http://archive.cdc.gov/www_cdc_gov/niosh/mining/topics/ErgonomicsandMSDPrevention.html).

truck or running machinery. There are often two men monitoring safety for the whole site;

- How the difficult work-life balance impacts their families;
- The tremendously long hours (more than 70+ hours per week);
- The inability to take time off;
- A “voluntold” culture of working extended and double shifts and on Saturdays; and
- A perceived inconsistency of the reality of working in the company versus the stated company values (e.g., family first).

These roles have high demands, both on the employees’ time and their physical wellbeing. Many of them report that their jobs are hard on their families due to being away for long hours with very little flexibility or time off. They commonly describe working early mornings and late nights on very little sleep, and how these schedules “catch up to you” or “wear you down.” As the men described, “I tell my kids I love them in the morning and that I will see them tomorrow and go to work.”

Overwhelmingly, these men stated that one of the most important things was to have a more flexible schedule. They specifically wanted more time off during peak season and more time with their families. The lack of control over one’s schedule, and the need to also work overtime to increase income and provide for their families, creates significant stress for the men we heard from. From their perspective, the opportunity to protect some evenings or a weekend day would boost their connection to their family.

The impact of shift work was also significant in this occupational group. For this reason, one focus group was conducted at 6 a.m. while another was at 10:30 p.m. to accommodate night shift workers’ schedules. Night shifts consisted of maintenance professionals and mechanics. Many of the men described perceived injustices towards the “third shift” workers, or those who work through the night. Their schedules are inflexible, they are afforded little time off, and they feel their work gets very little appreciation. They described feeling overlooked and taken for granted because of their hours and proudly voiced, “Without us on the 3rd shift, the plant doesn’t run.” The demands on the night shift are particularly hard and stressful with fix-it-now expectations.

Some aspects of the job that contributed to a sense of feeling disrespected were a lack of appreciation, too much focus on what didn’t get done, poor and inconsistent communication from management, and feeling disconnected from other shift workers.

The impact of night shift on families was also deemed significant as it affects sleep schedules and interferes with the amount of time spent with one's spouse, kids, and other loved ones. One man told us, "I barely see my family and kids." Another said, "My job takes away from family time."

### **Mental Health, Trauma, and Substance Use in Mining and Excavation**

When asked about trauma in mining, we did not hear about occupation-related deaths, overdoses, or suicidality as we did in fishing, but rather heard mainly of accidents related to the use of large-scale excavation equipment.

In one focus group, we had a lengthy discussion about a dangerous accident involving one of the truck drivers. He described an experience where his truck started to tip over the berm<sup>18</sup> after the ground let go from under it. During this incident, the truck driver did not suffer injuries, and recalls he was offered support through an EAP (Employee Assistance Plan) service. He does not recall that anyone else on the site who witnessed the incident was offered support. Further, there was no larger support offered on site; the men who were present during this accident said that if support or help was offered on site they may have taken advantage of it. The men recalled that there were small policy changes in safety after the incident.

While some men said they were aware of substance use at other companies they worked at, they did not perceive it as a problem at their current job or work sites.

### **Physical Health Challenges in Mining and Excavation**

Most of the men we spoke to talked about the physical toll of their work in excavation, including chronic pain, headaches, and loud noises for extended periods of time. Ear protection or headphones are worn routinely by men operating large trucks and vehicles to protect their hearing, but other issues are not addressed. Managing and caring for these health challenges presents its own set of issues. Many men have some knowledge about their EAPs, but don't know how to use them and some struggle to access health care services. In a physical job prone to chronic health issues and injuries, there was an acknowledgment among the participants that some used alcohol or pain medications to cope with physical pain or other stressors.

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<sup>18</sup> A berm in excavation is a raised barrier made of compacted soil or other materials, designed to control water runoff, prevent erosion, and ensure safety during excavation activities.

## **Suicide Risk in Mining**

When asked about suicide deaths in their profession, a few men said that they knew of a suicide in their lives but not necessarily in the workplace. There was no known suicide at their current company. One participant mentioned that, at a prior excavation company, a truck driver accidentally ran someone over and, in that situation, counseling was offered to the driver of the truck.

## **Mental Health Resources**

Mental health resources also are not talked about often and seem to be very little known by the employees. Suicide prevention numbers are posted inside construction vehicles, but some men don't know what the numbers are for. Some acknowledged that their organization gives a yearly mental health talk, but the topics are not discussed consistently. Resources described as generic are posted in communal areas, and the men did not have a sense of how often they were utilized. There is a gap in mental health literacy for this group and while they sometimes acknowledged steps made by their companies, they felt that the mental health information did not resonate with employees who might have needed them. Several men noted that it was hard to find someone who would understand their field's specific challenges.

When asked about mental health resources, the benefits from respective unions were mentioned with knowledge that there is treatment for substance misuse and support for families. Some were aware of the company's EAP.

## **Sources of Resilience & What Would Help**

Where do these men find strength to tackle these difficult jobs every day? Many of them say it's their loved ones. These roles often come with competitive pay and good benefits, which are essential in supporting children and families. These roles can often also come with stability, pensions, and overtime opportunities. Some men have access to union benefits, which sometimes include mental health support.

The men do report positive strategies for dealing with the stressors of the job. Many said joking and socializing with their coworkers benefited their mental health. There are special bonds that can be forged between men of the same shifts who share long, isolating hours. Many of them said that the men had similar values: showing up and doing quality work, having a good work ethic and positive attitude, and looking out for each other. These are qualities that they all strove to demonstrate and respected in each other. Others reported using exercise, outdoor activity, or vacation for stress relief.

When asked what would help them experience less stress or better manage stress at work, the responses varied:

- More time off and flexible work schedules;
- Verbal appreciation of their hard work, especially on a long day or following an unexpected demand; and
- New equipment.

#### **How Miners and Excavators Describe Themselves**

- Good work ethic
- Hardworking – focused on the job
- Positive attitude
- Joking with each other to get through the day
- Loyal
- Tough
- Mentally strong – working through pain and loneliness



### **Mining/Excavating Spotlight: Industry Champions & Positive Change**

**Carol Nixon, Ph.D., research health scientist, National Institute for Occupational Health & Safety, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

Dr. Nixon is a research health scientist who has studied and published on topics related to health equity and the health of miners. She is an advocate for advancing Total Worker Health across industries such as mining, excavation, and construction. Dr. Nixon was involved in this study, particularly as we led focus groups in the excavation field, and had keen insights into the ways in which work culture and mental health could be addressed more systemically.

**Bruce Reynolds, director of safety and compliance, Western Industrial Resources Corp. Arizona**

Bruce Reynolds has been an avid advocate for addressing addiction in the mining industry by increasing visibility and raising awareness about the risk of overdose and suicide. He is committed to increasing safety in the mining industry through

collaboration among workers and understanding the impact of physical and mental health safety risks. He also serves as a liaison to regulatory agencies so that safety and protection are considered from a standardized perspective.

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### III. THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The commercial construction industry in the United States has evolved through several major eras, each shaped by economic forces, technological change, and shifting national priorities. While New York, Chicago, and other major cities had explosive growth in the late 1900s, suburbanization expanded development through the demand for shopping centers, office parks, schools, and hospitals. Highways and infrastructure projects reshaped the built environment and supported new commercial corridors, which created jobs in both construction and excavation.

The U.S. construction sector overall reached nearly \$2 trillion in market size by 2023, with continued growth expected through 2027.<sup>19</sup> Total annual U.S. construction spending reached \$2.2 trillion in 2024, with 8.2 million workers employed across the industry.<sup>20</sup>

Key trends in the construction industry have shaped the type of buildings constructed and the workforce. For example, a hybrid work schedule has reduced demand for traditional office buildings, shifting investment toward warehouses, data centers, and advanced manufacturing facilities. Additionally, labor shortages and rising material costs have created new challenges for contractors. Clean-energy projects are driving requirements as they create new commercial opportunities. The daily work of men in construction varies. In addition to the physical labor of climbing, lifting, and managing heavy materials, these men also need the skills and focus to operate large machines like cranes and forklifts. These everyday tasks are performed on strict schedules within tightly organized project plans designed to keep the work running smoothly and efficiently. Foremen carry the additional task of overseeing the projects while managing the team and any interpersonal issues that arise.

Due to the physical nature of the work, construction workers are at a high risk of

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<sup>19</sup> "Topic: Construction Industry in the U.S." Statista, <https://www.statista.com/topics/974/construction/?srsltid=AfmBOoqs9qRBMT-o7sGUrjTVYt6MA7jszOzi20sFHhy6ctP-CyN8rJrE>

<sup>20</sup> "U.S. Construction Industry Facts, Stats & Trends." Construction Coverage, [constructioncoverage.com/data/us-construction-spending](https://www.constructioncoverage.com/data/us-construction-spending)

getting injured on the job. They are required to have laser-sharp judgement and clarity as even momentary lapses could cause dangerous accidents involving large equipment or expensive materials. Safety is paramount in this industry, and safety professionals are key to ensuring that the required precautions are taken to protect every worker.<sup>21</sup>

Organizations like the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP) provide resources and are working to break down the stigmas surrounding mental health and substance abuse in the industry. There's a growing emphasis on open conversations about mental health, with resources available to help employers and coworkers talk about these vital issues. In fact, OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) has joined the efforts to include mental health under the umbrella of workplace safety and recommend suicide prevention training. The CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has emphasized installing comprehensive workplace supports and policies to address injury prevention and reduce occupational hazards that can lead to injuries and subsequent opioid use, such as minimizing slip and fall hazards, assessing ergonomics for repetitive work, and training employees on safe lifting techniques. Implementing return-to-work and stay-at-work programs for injured employees and those recovering from substance use disorder or mental health conditions helps provide support and maintain employment.<sup>22</sup>

## Our Findings in the Construction Industry

**“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.”**

There were 62 men in construction who participated in focus groups across several construction sites in the Boston area. Through our conversations, the below themes were consistent.

### Negative Stigma

“The guys who make the decisions don't understand the details of this work.”

Public perception of construction workers can vary. One man told us, “On one hand they see hard working people and on the other hand they see guys with dirt all over us.” They acknowledged that negative stigma persists around their jobs, with some

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<sup>21</sup> OSHA. “Construction Industry | Occupational Safety and Health Administration.” 2024. [www.osha.gov/construction](https://www.osha.gov/construction)

<sup>22</sup> “Opioid Use and Mental Health in the Construction Industry: The Importance of Workplace Supports.” *Askearn.org*, 2024. [askearn.org/page/opioid-use-and-mental-health-in-construction](https://askearn.org/page/opioid-use-and-mental-health-in-construction)

reporting that they were not allowed to walk through a restaurant or lobby to use a restroom. Their respect for each other, however, is deep. They described their fellow industry men as tough, sincere, loyal, and hardworking. They have immense grit and pride in their work, and many described this pride as the main sentiment that keeps them in the industry.

### **Stressors in Construction**

Men involved in our focus groups reported that some of their biggest stressors were factors out of their control. Inclement weather prevents their work from moving forward, which can add undue stress on projects. There is a reported disconnect between on-the-ground employees and senior leadership promising clients deadlines that the construction team feels are unrealistic.

### **Mental Health and Substance Use Challenges in Construction**

Mental health struggles often reveal themselves through changes in behavior, such as not following safety guidelines. Other changes in behavior include decreased social interactions, irritability, decreased quality of work, less focus, and not showing up for a job. Mental health was talked about more openly at the company with which we spoke. The men, including laborers who were contracted for specific building projects, said that mental health is talked about more openly compared to 10 years ago.

Substance misuse and recovery are talked about more openly with many unions and EAPs provide recovery coach services during the workday. Nearly all of the interviewed participants noticed the impact of substances on their worksites. Alcohol is prevalent, and opiates and Adderall were mentioned. Some mentioned that marijuana was so widely used it was quietly accepted within the culture of the men.

The effects of the substances are clear in day-to-day work. Men can experience lapses in judgement, leave the worksites, or fall asleep on the job. The jobs have enormous health and safety requirements, and men under the influence at work are breaking these safety protocols. While the men clarified that most of their peers were hardworking and not abusing substances, we did hear reports of men who struggled with addiction and left their jobs. While a very rare occurrence, one group did report experiencing an employee overdose in a worksite bathroom. Safety staff were able to administer Narcan and stabilize the employee, but the situation did have a lasting impact on the men who were present at the time, including the responding safety professional. They said:

- “It’s tough to see people at the stage where they are in denial.”
- “There are definitely a lot of guys in recovery – you hear them mention it.”

Suicide is a topic acknowledged and discussed among the men at this company, with the suicide of an employee reported in 2025 at an off-site, non-work location. In response, the organization implemented postvention support (the specific resources needed after a suicide) and made counselors available. Many men expressed guilt, shock, sadness, and felt that they could have done more to prevent the death.

The men acknowledged the support of company management after the death. Mental health resources were very visible in posters and signs and included direct instructions on where to go for help. Employees agreed these steps were helpful and appreciated as they began to recover from the incident.

### **Evolution of Mental Health Resources**

According to the men we spoke with, the attitude about mental health among their peers and the attitude toward help-seeking at their organization has evolved in a positive direction. Mental health resources are often talked about and posted on job sites, including materials provided by various unions, including carpenters, ironworkers, and laborers.

### **Peer Support**

For this study, 52 men participated in four focus groups as well as individual leadership and stakeholder interviews. In the company, 83 men have been trained as Peer Supporters.

The construction company has partnered with SOS/Riverside for the past six years to bring mental health literacy and suicide prevention trainings to safety leadership, foremen, staff, and laborers. Given the depth of knowledge already demonstrated by staff members and leadership at this construction company, we took the next step in rolling out peer support training for internal mental health champions. As described by the Riverside Trauma Center, Peer support is designed to be a proactive prevention and early intervention framework, which helps to increase awareness of mental health challenges while decreasing the stigma that surrounds mental illness. This approach operates with the premise that peers in any sense – occupational, age, and gender – are more likely to turn to one another for support during difficult times. The Riverside Trauma Center’s peer support model is intended to provide a formal, standardized approach to building an effective, sustainable peer support program.

Michael Bonadio Jr., the clinical manager of consultation and training at SOS, identifies that peer support is about tapping into conversations that are already happening in the workplace, which increase their effectiveness and introduce opportunities for connection to resources. The peer support training has been provided to men in various roles in construction who could be available to provide support for approximately 1,500 workers across 40 construction sites.

### **Sources of Resilience & What Would Help**

When asked what would help the mental health of construction workers, men suggested monthly group meetings about managing stress and work-life balance, as well as more informal check-in calls with managers or foremen.

Follow-through is something they focused on specifically. With mental health resources provided and posted, following up with employees on a more individual basis may ensure that the resources are being located and used when needed. Some suggest AA groups or similarly organized support groups to cope with specific problems.

In addition to the sense of responsibility they have for their families and the support they provide, sources of strength for these men often come from the work and culture built within their own teams. They celebrate their milestones and take great pride in their accomplishments. Many of them also report great camaraderie with team members and see them as friends.

### **How Construction Workers Describe Themselves**

- Resilient in every way
- Problem solvers
- Team players
- Tough but caring
- Respectful
- Hard working
- “We will be there for someone if they are struggling, we will take the time to talk.”



## **Construction Spotlight: Industry Champions & Positive Change**

### **Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP)**

The Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention is a nonprofit organization formed in 2016 with the goal of reducing suicide risk in the construction industry. CIASP is dedicated to preventing suicide through education and provision of resources to construction professionals and organizations. The CIASP website offers a wide range of resources pertaining to mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention with an effort to reach underserved populations.

#### **Jamie Evans, vice president of safety, Turner Construction**

Jamie Evans has been a champion of increasing awareness about suicide prevention in the northeast region. Over the past six years, he has led the integration of suicide prevention, addiction awareness, recovery training, and increasing mental health literacy as part of strengthening overall safety on construction sites. With his leadership, peer support training has reached hundreds of men and women across various roles in construction.

#### **Jerry Shupe, chief health and safety officer, Hensel Phelps Construction**

In his role, Jerry Shupe has had extensive experience responding to and organizing supports for men experiencing mental health challenges. In addition to his role at Hensel Phelps, he participated in a research panel at a Colorado based university to further effective and ethical responses to suicide risk and addiction management in the construction industry. He also recognizes the need to create a back-to-work plan for employees returning from medical leave related to mental health or substance misuse. He values the need to go beyond awareness to better understanding, saying "The next steps will involve looking at what stressors may be triggers for the men, including how those stressors travel upwards to owners of projects, and make wider changes as an industry as a result of what they find. We have to own our role in improving."

## IV. RELATED RESULTS

### Creation of Lived Experience & Awareness Building Videos for Each Industry

During our interviews and focus groups, certain individuals shared their lived experience, such as their history of substance misuse, recovery process and success in maintaining sobriety. Given their past experiences advocating for mental health in construction and their considerable status at work, they agreed to participate in a video which we created to raise awareness within that sector through men's own narratives.

### Summary of Findings: Salient Trends & Data Across Industries

THEMES	FISHING	MINING/EXCAVATION	CONSTRUCTION
<b>Work-Life Balance</b>	Long days fishing Weeks away on boat	Working 7 days/week Overtime demanded	Seasonal work stress Overtime + weekends
<b>Impact on Family</b>	Time away	Time away	Not mentioned as often
<b>MH Struggles (incl. Suicide, SUD)</b>	Isolation, depression, suicide in communities. Exposure to overdoses.	Isolation, impact of shift-work, less exposure to suicide and overdoses.	Anxiety noted; Exposure to suicide. Overdoses on sites.
<b>Trauma</b>	Man overboard; loss of men and boats at sea.	On site critical incidents/accidents	On site critical incidents/accidents
<b>Work/Industry Culture</b>	Insular, tight community. Mistrust of outsiders/govt.	Trust within shift teams. Less trust in leadership	Trust within teams and more trust in leadership.
<b>Benefits of Job</b>	Generational pride, love of sea/freedom of work	Money, benefits, pension	Money, benefits, teamwork
<b>Climate / environmental related issues</b>	Caps, rations on where / when you can fish.	Worries about where to mine, etc.	Green codes for building
<b>Public perception of industry</b>	Invisible workforce: "people don't know where their fish comes from". Falsely seen as enemy of ocean.	Invisible workforce: "people don't think about who builds the roads they drive on".	Mixed perception; respect depends on role in the field (engineers, PMs versus laborers).
<b>Help seeking preferences</b>	"Fishermen will only talk with fishermen". May use counseling if free and in their fishing community.	"Old school mentality. We bottle it up". Know of resources through unions.	Know of MH resources and suicide prevention due to industry progress, company, unions.
<b>Resources deemed useful</b>	Peer-type support Embedded clinicians Financial literacy counseling	MH literacy and suicide prevention. Access to counseling based on schedule/convenience.	Peer support Accessible services Recovery support
<b>Regulatory Organization Involved</b>	NOAA, NIOSH	MSHA, NIOSH	OSHA, NIOSH

### The Role of Regulatory Organizations

National regulatory organizations across the three sectors are taking steps to support mental health, reduce substance misuse, and engage in suicide prevention within these industries.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is a U.S. science-based agency dedicated to understanding, managing, and safeguarding

the oceans and coasts. Its protection mission is grounded in three core pillars: science, service, and stewardship. NOAA works to ensure the sustainable use of more than 4 million square miles of U.S. Ocean territory. NOAA Fisheries (National Marine Fisheries Service) focuses on:

- Sustainable fisheries management
- Marine species conservation and recovery
- Habitat restoration
- Maintaining healthy marine ecosystem

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is a part of the CDC and supports mental health among miners through several initiatives. The Miner Health Program seeks to understand and improve the health and wellbeing of all mine workers through research, workplace interventions, and evaluation.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) is under the Department of Labor and works with the primary goal of reducing deaths, injuries, and illness in the mining industry through regulations, inspections, and training programs. MSHA is governed by the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, ensuring compliance with mandatory safety and health standards for miners.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) ensures safe and healthful working conditions for workers by setting and enforcing standards, providing training, and offering assistance. Industries of focus include construction, manufacturing, and health care, among others.

### **Mental Health Screening Data**

In addition to this in-depth qualitative project, a prior Harry's sponsorship enabled us to reach hundreds of thousands of men through an online mental health screening program. This evidence-based screening platform facilitates early identification of behavioral health challenges leading to improved health outcomes and reduced health care costs. The SOS Screening Program (formerly MindWise) consists of thirteen validated, web-based tools accessed privately online via computer, mobile phone, or another device. The platform is anonymous and confidential and helps identify signs and symptoms of a variety of behavioral health disorders, and connects users with locally available resources.

The rates of screening and the most used screening tools mirrored the national statistics regarding commonly occurring mental health conditions for men. From

2019 to 2025, the SOS Screening Program reached a total of 510,745 men.

Age Breakdown of the SOS Screening Program – male only:

- 18-24            64% - 60%
- 25-34            18% - 20%
- 35-44            9% - 10%
- 45-54            5% - 5%
- 55-64            3% -3%
- 65-74            1% - 1%

Four most commonly used screens by men:

1. Depression (HANDS)
2. Generalized Anxiety (CD-GAD)
3. Bipolar Disorder (MDQ)
4. Alcohol Use (AUDIT)

Additional data analytics:

- 89% of Depression screens resulted in people showing signs consistent or highly consistent with depression.
- 92% of Anxiety screens resulted in people showing signs consistent with anxiety.
- 95% of those who took our general wellbeing screen showed initial signs of mental health conditions.

The above findings likely reflect the self-selection process, meaning individuals who take a given screen are concerned about behaviors and symptoms that are consistent with the mental health condition for which they are screening. As a reminder, this mental health screen is not diagnostic; a consistent score does not indicate the presence of a mental health condition, but rather a sign to consult with a medical or mental health professional.

**Recommendations: Ways Forward**

Given both the similarities and clear distinctions between the three industries in this study, including the differing levels of mental health and suicide prevention efforts, occupation-specific interventions, and resources are needed. It is clear that each industry involves physical and mental resilience, and wide-ranging skills, which can be underappreciated. It is vital to keep these considerable strengths in mind when

developing nuanced, effective resources to support and sustain positive mental health in the commercial fishing, mining/excavation and construction industries. In addition to interventions that support individuals and communities, a systemic approach to creating psychologically safe workplaces is important. Amy Edmondson, the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School, describes psychological safety as a work culture, which drives collaboration, fosters trust, and promotes an atmosphere that learns from mistakes rather than a punitive response.<sup>23</sup>

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

### Commercial Fishing

- **Incorporate peer support training**, which includes mental health literacy and suicide prevention training so that fishermen can turn to a trusted colleague when they are struggling;
- **Offer community-based training** for families and community members;
- **Improve access to mental health clinicians** in fishing communities;
- **Develop financial literacy training** to better equip fishermen to make sound financial decisions;
- **Build cultural competence** among clinicians to better understand the fishing world and workforce; and
- **Provide postvention services** after a critical incident or loss, including death by suicide and/or overdose.

### Mining / Excavation

- **Train leaders** with a focus on advancing mental health literacy and building a psychologically safe work culture;
- **Incorporate mental health literacy training** with a focus on dispelling myths about mental illness and mental health conditions. This training should increase knowledge of substance misuse and provide tools to support others and increase help-seeking;
- **Develop mining/excavation specific suicide prevention training;**
- **Raise awareness about employee assistance programs** and other mental health resources; and
- **Provide postvention services** after a critical incident or loss, including death by suicide and/or overdose.

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<sup>23</sup> Edmondson, Amy C. *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2019.

## Construction

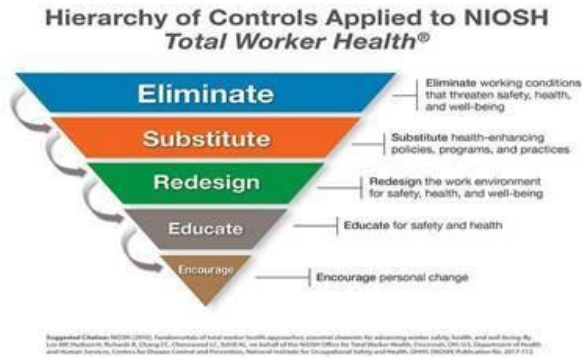
- **Expand peer support training**, which includes mental health literacy and suicide prevention training;
- **Provide suicide prevention training for health care workers** on site (wellness trailers, etc.) so that physical and occupational therapists, medics, nutritionists, and others on-site can better recognize when workers are in distress and provide timely support;
- **Increase the presence of on-site recovery coaches** to support construction workers who are in recovery for substance misuse. These recovery services can be provided by union employee assistance programs or company resources;
- **Strengthen leadership coaching** among safety personnel and site leaders (project executives, foremen) to manage crises and high stress work demands; and
- **Provide postvention services** after a critical incident or loss, including death by suicide and/or overdose.

## Recommended Systemic Frameworks

To assist in creating systemic change to benefit the men we spoke with and others in their industries, we drew upon three trusted frameworks to create recommendations for organizational change, which could improve the workplace culture, boost morale, and benefit leadership as well as the respective workforces. Each of the three frameworks below take a systemic approach to recognizing the role of the environment – both physical and social – as integral to furthering safety and mental health. They are as follows:

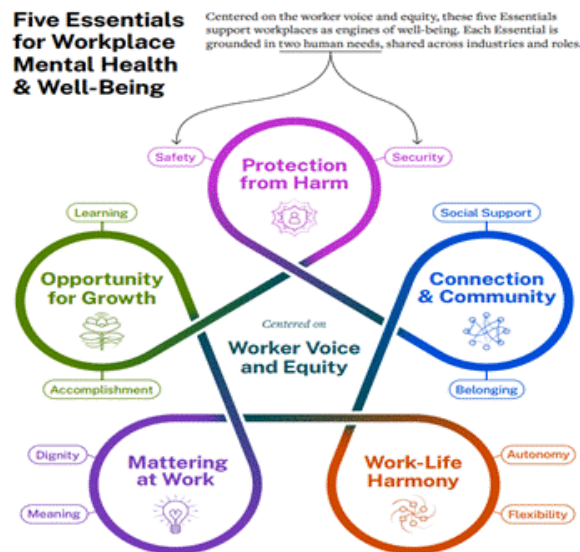
### 1. **NIOSH Total Worker Health – Hierarchy of Controls**

The [Total Worker Health](#) framework encourages workplaces to remove as many hazards as possible so workers stay safe and healthy. It suggests that employers design jobs and environments that support worker wellbeing by focusing first on changes to the organization and the workplace itself. According to this framework, it is the organization/employer/industry that has a responsibility to create a safe environment, which has taken all occupation-related precautions to guard against danger. When these steps are taken to ensure physical and health safety in terms of the work environment, education can take place regarding mental health, suicide awareness, and substance misuse. The framework is illustrated below:



2. **Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy’s Workplace Mental Health & Wellbeing Framework (2022)** [The U.S. Attorney General’s Framework for Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

Dr. Murthy crafted the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing framework post-COVID to acknowledge the significant impact that the workplace has on individual wellbeing. It was designed to, “encourage and assist organizations to develop, maintain, and update policies and best practices to support the mental health and wellbeing of all employees.” His framework is illustrated below:



### 3. A Suicide Prevention framework: Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide

The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, developed by Psychologist Thomas Joiner, seeks to explain why and how individuals may be vulnerable to suicidal ideation or attempt suicide, with the goal of being able to identify and assist at-risk individuals. He conceptualized suicidal behavior through the interplay of perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and acquired capability for self-harm. His model is shown below:

