

Dear Committee

Kindly find my response to inquiry on men's suicide. This response is based from my personal experiences and vicarious experiences from the Men I have spoken to in the men's support group I have attended over the last 3 years.

Alex

Shit! Fuck! How am I going to pay for it now? Why! Why me? What did I do wrong to deserve this? Why is the system against me every day of my life? What future do I have? My life is no longer in my control! The only control I have over my life is my own exit. Love was not enough to keep him with us and his children. And he prematurely exited to escape the pain, to escape a future devoid of quality of the man deserving. I still can see his face cold on the slab, finally at peace with more life in death than life amongst the living since his separation.

By the end result of the knife, truly embedded inches into the kitchen bench top on the third swing and the previous activity of checking emails and double checking bank accounts, weeks after inviting family and friends to what was truly important to him, Christmas with family, it was obvious what my brother was going to do next. And as men do, he made sure his exit from this chapter in his story was successful.

He had been wrangling over many years with how to improve the quality of life of his children and himself. Against all odds and against the system. The last thing Eric told my mother was 'I know where the bastards can't hound me'. His children can no longer learn from his brilliance and the world has lost a probable Nobel Laureate. When going over photos, and meeting mourners, it was obvious he had a depth, breadth, love and generosity to his soul that very few could have seen the whole picture. I was unfortunate to witness first hand the abuse he received to his personality from his wife and his attempts to deal with such abuse over decades.

Much of Eric's complaints were about how the system had robbed his children and him due to a man who had made so many mistakes in judicial judgments that there has been a reversal rate of at least 85% of these judgements. The system failed his children and our society. There was no letting, there was no future so why carry on.

The judgement that he and his children received was so harsh and unjust due to a comedy of errors and serious judicial manoeuvring and prejudices and stereotyping from all sides. From this judgement he was never ever in his life, going to be able to recover. All hope had gone. He was 46 (34 days short of his 47th birthday and 4 days before Christmas).

Our whole family is still recovering.

My brother's tale is not an isolated one. After experiencing and seeing what was happening to men and their children I started to run a volunteer men's support group in Canberra. It is from here and from speaking to women as well that I express the following.

Through millennium men have been developing behaviours that largely ensured the success of their children and the family unit. These roles are the provider, the advocate (protector), the teacher and the guiding light for a family. Similar & complimentary roles have evolved for Women. With the necessary advancement of our western society, those roles have been redefined often conflicting with the evolved behaviours of our society. As child observers of the media we all see the depiction of the Aussie Man, the athlete, the larrikin, the mate. The

strong one that does not cry, the rock. I sat at the debrief of the Men's support group where hundreds of men had been helped by my brother, and carefully watched the faces as each of the men as they took their turn to express themselves. The pain was obvious but the room was dry. The anguish was real, palatable but silent. That is men. That is the way most men are taught to behave from an early age. Internalise your pain your emotions. 'Have self control you &*^&^*'.

I observe my son & daughter closely and chat with many, ranging from professionals to lay people about the differences between men and women, boys & girls. There is also much literature on the similarities and differences between men & women. We as men are taught to focus to make things happen. As such we will succeed and ensure our goals are met to the best of our ability. Unfortunately when the goal is to exit life and regain at least some form of identity, dignity, control and make a statement, we as men succeed far better than women 4:1. We don't fail.

When men face the fact they have only one way out, they will consider many things for a long time before hand and play out multiple scenarios, in those scenarios is included life insurance and the financial benefit their children will get. It is easy to make an accident happen. Their own pain they believe is pervasive and permanent and greater than the pain their loved ones will feel. Loved ones will still have hope, while their own hopes and dreams have finally evaporated.

Many that I have spoken to over the years have spoken of their dark times from various sources and most have said there was an exit plan. For those who have exited due to emotional impulse I will never know if there was ever a plan. Most who commit suicide are in a phase of depression of one form or another, I am unsure if the statistics can be broken down further to include relative depression due to circumstances or chemical depression. Such information can help target relief and assistance programs and deeper studies into suicide. The current quantity of deaths that are not confirmed as suicide or are delayed in confirming suicide prevent policy makers and support groups confirm the results of such services before the systems requires them to prove their efficiency and results.

After many discussions and personal experience relating to the fight that ensues a separation/divorce, I have come to the following conclusion. That the majority of people in our society have not heard of the concept of personal and communal benefit, based on the theory of Nobel Laureate John Forbes Nash, leading to engaging in a fight to the death (at all costs). Having both a son and a daughter and with the rate of pace ever increasing, reducing the time parents have to teach the important joys of life that lead to happiness for all. I would love for our & my children's sake if our society and the education system taught our children the skills to mediate and coping with and prevent conflict. I believe if such lessons accompany lessons on what it means to be happy much of circumstantial depression would be alleviated and the suicide rate would drop dramatically.

My personal experience with departments that deal with divorcing parent has raised concerns of how front line staff are trained in dealing with people that are most likely to be emotionally on the edge and ready to exit after losing hope. I believe the identification of people at risk of suicide has missed the details in links between family law circumstances and risk of suicide. There is also missing links with support available to at risk groups and lack of support and suicide. Where women support groups have a 200:1 ratio compared to men.

Currently there is a glimmer of hope in the psychology of counselling being led by prominent scientists around the world in the field of positive psychology. But as we look at history we can predict the future and the future is that it is going to be a slow process unless there is a

concerted effort to understand the benefits of positive psychology. I believe that current objectives of this committee is putting the chicken before the egg.

To look at suicide as an after event treatment seems so small an objective to be worthless. I work alongside people who analyse the cost of road deaths to a community. The formula includes, lose of production at work due to the grieving process, reducing mental capacity, unmatured investment return, the cost of reinstating infrastructure, repairs, time taken off work, funeral costs medical costs, travel costs the formula has come up with a figure of \$1.2million per fatality. This justifies the expenditure to reduce the risk of fatality at a particular location based on history of accidents and engineering probability of accidents. With 4 suicides per day by men attributed to the situation of family break downs, and that figure most likely being understated compared to the reality, an investment in teaching our society the secrets to a healthy and happy life seems sound investment. But only accurate statistics a can help in sound knowledge based policy decisions.

Kind regards

Alex Schulz