

Successful business performance in recent years may be associated with a human cost

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Young people are more likely to consider suicide as a result of business success, finds important new research by Rawayda Abdou, Damien Cassells and Jim Hanly from TU Dublin, in conjunction with Jenny Berrill from Trinity Business School.

The researchers suggest that this may be a result of the negative impact of work-related stressors.

According to Rawayda Abdou

"A potential explanation for this finding is that a business environment characterized by adverse working conditions and organizations that promote profits over the mental wellbeing of employees, might have diminished the protective role of a successful business environment on suicide."

The researchers found that the younger population are particularly vulnerable to business successes, given that this age group is in the early stages of their employment, meaning they have not yet developed a coping strategy to manage work stressors or succeeded in developing a healthy work-life balance." Their results find that women are not as resilient to fluctuations in business performance despite previous research failing to recognise that women are so sensitive to these fluctuations.

The researchers suggest that teaching work-life management and problem-solving skills to manage everyday work stressors may be important strategies to mitigate the psychological cost of business successes.

The research also found that young male and older females may also consider suicide if their job prospects are bleak.

"There are three possible interpretations as to why the young male population aged 15–24 was found to be less resilient to economic insecurity than the older population. First, younger males seeking entry to the labour market for the first time will be more responsive to the uncertainty and economic insecurity since it might potentially constitute a barrier to their entry. Second, for young people at the beginning of their professional careers with a low level of human capital, they may be subject to low employability and are expected to respond more aggressively to economic insecurity because if they lose their jobs, there is a low probability of being re-employed.

"Third, young people did not have enough time to accumulate wealth to buffer potential changes in income. Thus, uncertainty about future income may matter more for young male individuals, especially if they are expected to fulfil their masculine role as breadwinners.

"By comparison, females in the age group 55–64 were found to be particularly vulnerable to economic insecurity. It is plausible that at this late stage of their employment career, economic insecurity may pose a threat of involuntary retirement - an issue that has been previously linked to negative psychological symptoms. A particularly striking finding is that, while males near retirement are resilient to the threat of job loss, this threat is sufficiently powerful to precipitate the suicide of

their female counterparts. Loneliness and diminishing in the importance of the female traditional role in late midlife, for instance, motherhood, are potential mechanisms that could explain the particular vulnerability of females aged 55–64 to economic insecurity.” Says Rawayda Abdou

The researchers suggest that timely intervention before the actual realization of job losses, should be considered as a primary suicide prevention strategy. Moreover, policies that promote employment protection may help mitigate the impact of economic insecurity.

These results are vital to share so that governments and employers understand who could be at risk of work-related suicide.

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