



Pieta  House



Supported by the Construction Safety Partnership





**MIND OUR WORKERS**  
**ON OUR SITES,  
IN OUR MINDS**

# Mind Our Workers



## Foreword by Brian Higgins, Pieta House CEO



The issues of suicide and self-harm are significant problems that we together as a community need to address. The statistics surrounding both of these issues are stark. In 2012, 541 people died by suicide in Ireland, 445 of these were men. In that same year, over 12,000 people presented to hospital accident & emergency departments with self-harm.

When we look at suicide in particular we see that the numbers of suicides have plateaued over the last 3-4 years. At Pieta House, we welcome that fact that numbers are not increasing, but we are not going to rest on our laurels. We are committed to seeing suicide and self-harm rates decrease year on year across Ireland.

We are delighted to initiate and launch the *Mind Our Workers* campaign in partnership with the CIF. It is extremely encouraging that a national body as influential as the CIF sees the impact of suicide on the construction industry and its employees and is partnering with an organisation such as ourselves to help tackle the issue. Partnerships such as this are a way of building resilience within our society. We want to equip people with the capacity to spot the signs when a person is in distress and to create an environment where it's ok to ask for help, and equally to offer help and support.

Hope is the key word that we at Pieta House promote. We want to create an openness and a culture where throughout society people are more hopeful, safe in the knowledge that there is help and support available at a time of crisis. Partnerships and campaigns such as *Mind Our Workers* will go a long way towards achieving this.

My thanks go to my colleagues in Pieta House and also the CIF who had the foresight and initiative to bring this campaign to reality.

*In 2012, 541 people died by suicide in Ireland, 445 of these were men. In that same year, over 12,000 people presented to hospital accident & emergency departments with self-harm.*



# Mind Our Workers

## Foreword by Michael Stone, CIF President



*We want to help  
drive awareness of  
suicide and mental  
health throughout the  
construction industry.*

The spectre of suicide continues to cast a long shadow over Irish society. Every year hundreds of Irish men and women are lost to suicide - each one a tragedy in itself for their friends and families. The statistics are saddening. The individual stories even more so.

For far too long suicide has been a taboo topic in Irish culture. Traditionally many saw it as rude or disrespectful to talk about a suicide when it occurred, focusing on the death rather than the circumstances that led up to it. We didn't understand that what we thought was the polite approach was actually helping to propagate myths and misconceptions about suicide. We didn't realise that by keeping the issues of suicide and mental health locked away in the dark we were actually creating an environment that allowed these problems to grow in our society. Even now for many in Ireland the traditional approach still holds when it comes to talking about suicide and mental health.

The only way we can counter that attitude is to help create more understanding of mental health issues and suicide. This is particularly true amongst Irish men. When you consider that 8 out of every 10 people who die by suicide are male, there is a clear need to foster awareness of suicide and mental health amongst Irish men.

Delving deeper into the statistics it is also clear that more Irish men who died by suicide in recent years had a professional background in construction or production than in any other type of career.

That is why the CIF is honoured to be working with Pieta House on the *Mind Our Workers* campaign. We want to help drive awareness of suicide and mental health throughout the construction industry. We want to help foster a greater level of understanding and a more open culture throughout the sector when it comes to these extremely important issues.

We want to see a working environment in the industry whereby it is acceptable for men to ask their friends and colleague - "Are you ok?". Men in any walk of life should be able to talk about their problems. We need to take these matters out of the shadows and bring them into the light.

That is why we believe this campaign is not only important, but deeply necessary. We hope that through the various actions that will be taken under Mind Our Workers we will be able to shine a powerful spotlight on the subjects of suicide and mental health in the construction sector.

If even one life is saved thanks to the awareness and understanding promoted during the course of this campaign, then I know everyone in the CIF and Pieta House will consider the campaign to have been a great success.



# Mind Our Workers



## Foreword by Tom Parlon, CIF Director General



We spend so much of our lives in the work place. According to an American research study on time usage conducted last year, the average working person between the ages of 25 and 54 spends 7.7 hours a day sleeping and 8.7 hours working. That's more than one third of each working day.

When we are spending so much time in the workplace invariably the people we are working with become a major part of our lives. They are not just our colleagues - they are the people in whose company a significant portion of our lives are spent.

That is why when you are looking to promote better practices and new ways of thinking, you have to take into account the people we all work alongside. This principle is what inspired the development of the new *Mind Our Workers* campaign between the CIF and Pieta House.

As the statistics in this report highlight the level of suicide in the construction sector has been startling. As an industry we can't ignore this problem - there is a necessity to take steps to try to help those in need. By promoting a more open approach amongst construction workers and encouraging people to talk to their colleagues when they are experiencing problems, we hope that it might help reduce the numbers of people who feel they have no way out.

As the national representative body for the construction industry, the CIF is in a position to reach out to the Irish construction sector. We will be using that reach as part of this campaign to try to get the message out to all involved in the industry.

We are also honoured to be working with Pieta House on this campaign. They are the experts in this field and the work they do to help raise awareness around suicide and to provide hope to those in need is unmatched. Our own hope is that by highlighting their ideas and bringing them to the construction industry, we will bring that hope to those who feel they have lost it.

*The level of suicide in the construction sector has been startling. As an industry we can't ignore this problem - there is a necessity to take steps to try to help those in need.*



# Mind Our Workers



## Introduction

Pieta House and the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) have teamed up to launch a joint initiative entitled *Mind Our Workers*. The aim of the campaign is to help raise awareness of suicide and mental health issues throughout the construction sector. The campaign will be themed in a similar fashion to Pieta House's *Mind Our Men* campaign.

Over the past 10 years, suicide and mental health have become two of the most important issues in Ireland. The culture around these subjects has started to change. Unfortunately in the past too many people in Ireland sat in deathly silence while brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers were lost - ashamed that suicide had visited their doorsteps.

Thankfully, that stigma is beginning to lift. People are becoming more open about the issues of suicide and mental health. However if we want to help reduce the number of suicides and improve awareness of mental health issues then there are still massive strides to take.

This is especially true when it comes to helping the men of our nation. In Ireland the majority of people who die by suicide are men.

If we want to see a reduction in the number of suicides in Ireland then one of the steps that must be taken is to help promote further understanding and awareness of suicide and mental health amongst Irish men. Action is needed to help accomplish this objective. Irish men can be reluctant to discuss their problems and emotions with their colleagues and friends. This is particularly an issue in areas of Irish society which are disproportionately male.

In modern Ireland, one of the remaining aspects of society which can still be disproportionately male are certain kinds of workplace. The workplace is a particularly influential environment, given the large amount of time people spend at work and in the company of their work colleagues.

No industry in Ireland is as male dominated as the construction sector. According to the latest Quarterly National Household Survey from the Central Statistics Office, of the 116,700 people working in the industry, 108,300 are male. This means that men represent 93% of those employed in the industry.

From the research that is available on this subject, an extremely high level of suicides have a professional background in construction (see page 8). Construction and production account for more suicides than any other area of Irish professional activity.

Taking all these factors into consideration, it would seem that those interested in combating suicide in Ireland need to engage with the construction sector. It is for that reason that this campaign has been established - to help mitigate the level of suicide throughout the Irish construction industry.

By combining Pieta House's expertise with the reach and industry insights of the CIF, it is hoped that greater awareness of suicide and mental health can be fostered throughout the sector. Helping to promote a greater level of understanding of these issues will ultimately reduce the number of suicides and most importantly help save lives.

*The aim of the campaign is to help raise awareness of suicide and mental health issues throughout the construction sector.*





## Recent analysis of male suicide in Ireland

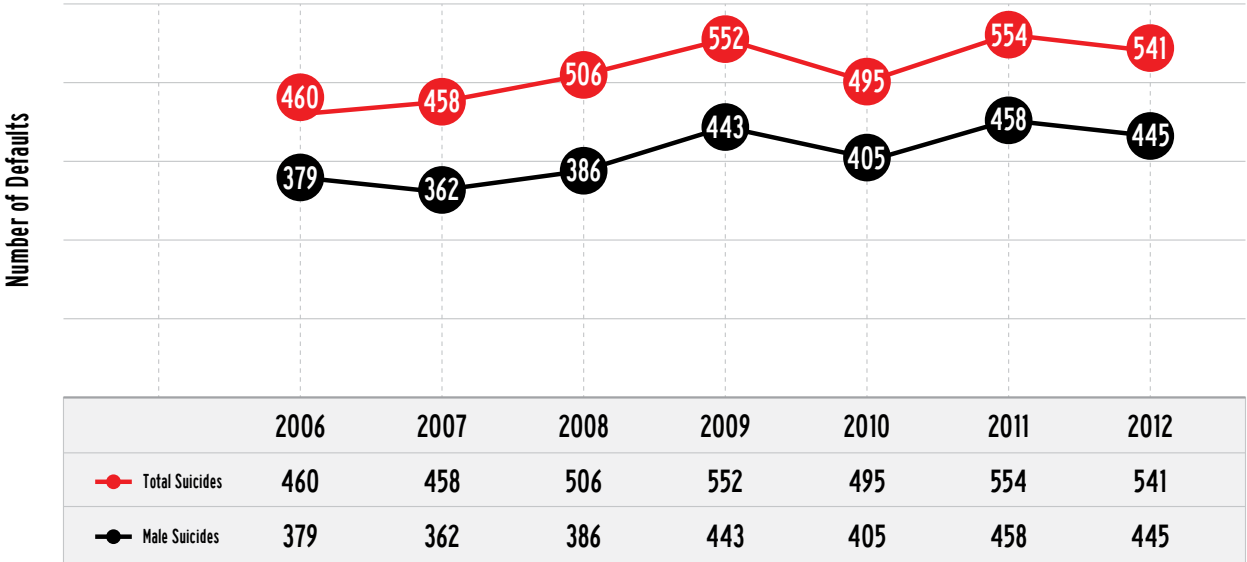
Between the years of 2001 and 2007, when Ireland was experiencing peak economic growth, we had seen a steady decline in the overall and male rates of suicide. In that period the highest number of suicides occurred in 2001. Of the 519 suicides recorded that year, 429 were men. That represented 83% of the total.

In the years after 2001, the total number of suicides dropped. The total fell to 458 by 2007 - a decrease of 12%. At that point male suicides accounted for 79% of the overall total.



\*CSO yearly birth, deaths and marriages reports

As the recession gripped from 2007 onwards however, suicide rates began to rise again. Between 2007 and 2009, the total numbers rose from 458 to 552 - a jump of 21%. While there was a drop in the overall numbers in 2010, there were higher levels of suicide again in 2011 and 2012<sup>1</sup>.



\*CSO yearly birth, deaths and marriages reports

In total there were 6,520 deaths by suicide between 2000 and 2012. This figure is 60% higher than the total number of road deaths during the same period. Of that grim total, 5,263 were male suicides, representing 81% of the overall total.

1 2012 was the most recent year for which suicide figures were available at the time of going to print.



## Mind Our Workers Suicide - Key Statistics



Every week in Ireland  
**10** people die by suicide.



**8** out of those **10** are male.

**116,700** people are employed in the Irish construction industry.

→ → → → → **108,300** are men.



Men represent **93%** of those employed in the sector.

**2,137** male suicides in Ireland between **2008** and **2012**.

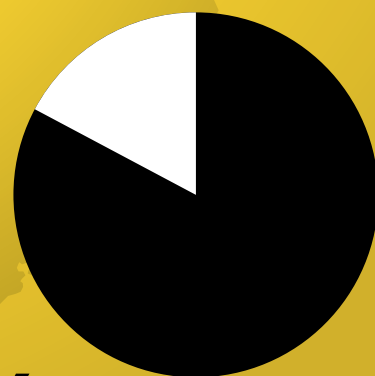


**1,039\***

The estimated number of male suicides between **2008** and **2012** that came from a construction or production background.

**6,520**

suicides in Ireland between **2000** and **2012**.



**81%** of these were male (**5,263** in total).



# Mind Our Workers



## Mind Our Workers Campaign



Under this joint initiative between Pieta House and the CIF, both organisations will work together to help drive awareness and understanding of suicide and mental health issues in the Irish construction industry. The *Mind Our Workers* campaign will utilise a range of different channels and approaches to help highlight these issues to companies of all shapes and sizes operating throughout the industry.

Among the measures that will be taken during the course of the campaign are:

- Toolbox Talks - construction workers will be encouraged to gather in the workplace (ie construction sites) for short talks about suicide and mental health.
- Leaflets - Campaign leaflets will be produced and distributed throughout the construction industry to help communicate about the subject matter of the campaign and related issues.
- Digital videos will be developed providing more information and awareness about the campaign.
- Briefings and workshops will be organised for CIF members on the various issues relating to the campaign.
- Pieta House representatives will attend regional CIF branch meetings to discuss suicide and mental health.
- Blogs - a regular stream of blog articles around the campaign and campaign related subjects will be published on the CIF website.
- Social media - specific social media activities targeted at the construction sector will be utilised to further engagement.
- The CIF will encourage more construction sector representatives to participate in the annual Darkness Into Light event organised by Pieta House.
- Direct emails to construction companies highlighting specific elements of the campaign.
- A section dedicated to the campaign will be set up on the CIF website hosting materials and resources relevant to the campaign.

The campaign will run throughout 2015.

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*Both organisations will work together to help drive awareness and understanding of suicide and mental health issues in the Irish construction industry.*

# Mind Our Workers

## Suicide in the construction industry



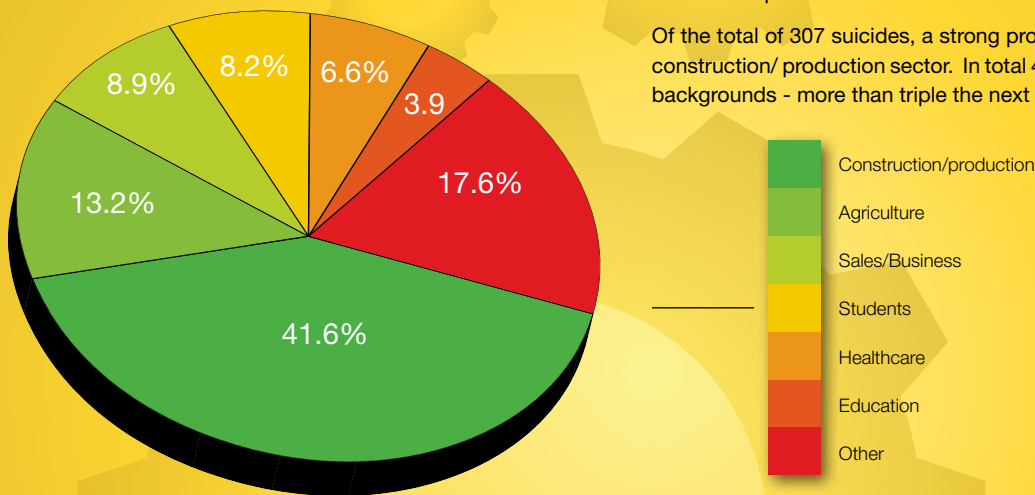
Generally speaking, there is little data on the professional background of people who have died by suicide in Ireland. One of the current limitations in suicide analysis research means that industry specific information is rarely available.

However, in recent years, the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) commissioned the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) to undertake a study and establish a Suicide Support and Information System (SSIS).

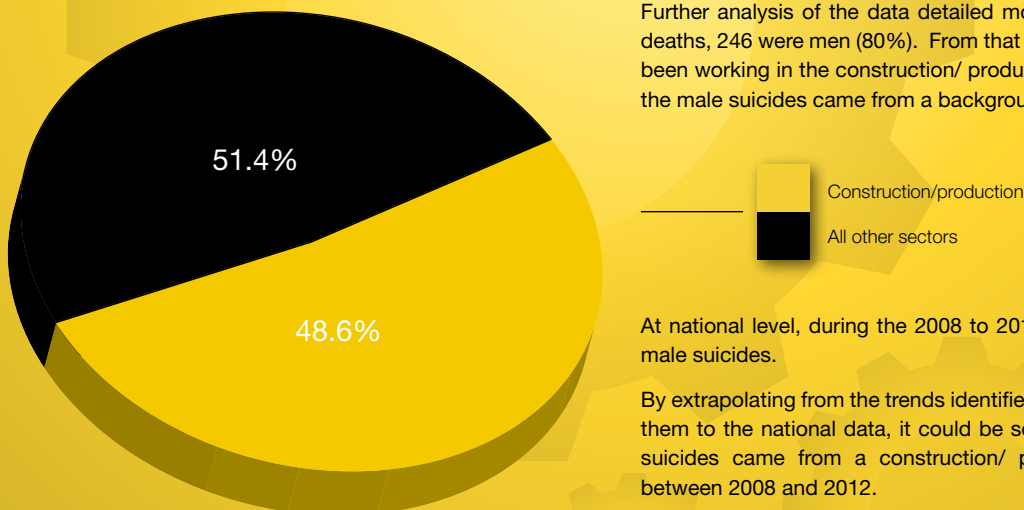
Following the success of the initial study, SSIS 2 was then commissioned. This was a more in-depth study into the backgrounds of those who had died by suicide.

Under that research a total of 307 cases were studied by the SSIS 2 in Cork between September 2008 and June 2012 (275 suicides and 32 open verdicts).

Of the total of 307 suicides, a strong proportion were found to come from the construction/ production sector. In total 41.6% had construction or production backgrounds - more than triple the next highest sector (agriculture at 13.2%).



Further analysis of the data detailed more interesting statistics. Of the 307 deaths, 246 were men (80%). From that total of 246 it was found that 120 had been working in the construction/ production sector. This meant that 49% of the male suicides came from a background in construction/ production.



At national level, during the 2008 to 2012 period there were a total of 2,137 male suicides.

By extrapolating from the trends identified in the SSIS 2 research and applying them to the national data, it could be soundly estimated that at least 1,000\* suicides came from a construction/ production professional background between 2008 and 2012.

\*1,039 when figured directly extrapolated from SSIS 2.



# Mind Our Workers



## Triggers



- 1 Loss of a major relationship
- 2 Work related issues
- 3 Humiliation
- 4 Masked depression

## Signs



- 1 Increased isolation, reduction in social contact
- 2 Turning off phone, quitting social media
- 3 Decreased performance in work / school / sports
- 4 Emotional burnout
- 5 Increase in alcohol or drug usage
- 6 Loss of appetite
- 7 Changes in sleep patterns
- 8 Giving away personal possessions
- 9 Talking about death

## How you can help

By spreading awareness of the most common triggers that may lead a person to the point of suicidal crisis, and by teaching people to then look out for certain signs, we are equipping people with the information to help us with our goal to reduce rates of suicide in Ireland.

The information contained below is a short synopsis of our overall messaging. By taking this information on board you will be better equipped to notice and reach out to a person in distress.

### If you have any concerns:

**Remember... Ask APR**

**A**



Ask the Question  
“Are you suicidal?”

**P**



If the person is reluctant to talk, be persistent, and in a quiet setting, persuade them!

**R**



Have all the necessary details ready, helpline numbers etc. Make the call yourself.

Pieta House offers those affected by suicide or deliberate self-harm an intensive, solution focused and entirely free counselling service provided by trained and accredited therapists. The initial vision, which continues to be fulfilled, is to provide an accessible service:

- For people in suicidal crisis
- For people who are at a raised risk of suicide
- For people engaging in self-harming behaviours

This is a community based service and is completely free of charge.



# Mind Our Workers

## Myths about suicide

# Myth vs Fact



**Myth:** People who talk about suicide never go through with it.

**Fact:** Most people who have died by suicide had talked about it. They will often have shared their feelings with friends, family, counsellors or their doctor.

**Myth:** Only clinically depressed people attempt suicide.

**Fact:** Suicidal thoughts often follow a serious life event – such as the breakdown of a relationship, losing a job or the death of a loved one. This type of thinking can affect anyone, even if they have no history of depression or other mental health issues.

**Myth:** Suicide is attention-seeking.

**Fact:** Someone who attempts suicide needs to be taken seriously and treated with compassion. Without support and professional help, there's an increased risk of someone trying to take their own life again.

**Myth:** Talking about suicide encourages it.

**Fact:** Talking about suicide can save a life by encouraging someone to seek help. Ask the person if they feel suicidal, persuade them to allow you to get help for them, and refer them to a service such as Pieta House where they can get professional help.

**Myth:** Suicide cannot be prevented.

**Fact:** Most people who are suicidal don't really want to die. They just want the pain to stop. Most suicides are preventable. If your friend or family member talks about wanting to die by suicide or having suicidal thoughts, persuade them to get help from compassionate professionals like those in Pieta House.



# About Those Involved



## Pieta House

Pieta House is the centre for prevention of suicide or self-harm. They provide a free one on one counselling service for people who have attempted suicide, have suicidal ideation or are engaging in self-harming behaviours. In 2014 alone, over 5,200 people contacted Pieta House for support. They provided almost 50,000 hours of free, professional counselling in 9 centres across the country.

Year on year this represented an increase of 33% on the numbers attending their service from 2013. Crucially, for the first time ever, one of their centres is now seeing more men through its doors than women. Pieta House West reported that 53% of its clients in its first full year in operation were men. While this represents a great step, with over 80% of all suicides being male there is still clearly a lot of work to do.



## Construction Industry Federation

The Construction Industry Federation (CIF) is the national representative body for construction industry employers and contractors in Ireland. It is recognised by the Government and by public bodies across the country as the voice of the Irish construction sector.

The CIF is made up of regional branches and sectoral specific associations which cover all aspects of Irish construction activity.



## Construction Safety Partnership

The Construction Safety Partnership ([www.csponline.ie](http://www.csponline.ie)) is a partnership of the main stakeholders in the construction industry in Ireland whose aim is to improve the safety and health performance of the industry for the benefit of all industry workers and employers. Its principle role is to work in partnership to meet our mutual aims of continual improvement. The partnership has been in existence since 2000 and has been at the forefront of many initiatives and innovations that have helped drive safety awareness and competence in the Irish construction industry.

# Notes









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