



Transforming the culture of care

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 00.01am Thursday 24 October 2013

NEWS RELEASE...NEWS RELEASE

New report on railway suicides calls for effective preventive strategies and 'robust' statistics on women and ethnic minorities

The lack of research on the gender and ethnicity of people who commit suicide on the UK railway system obscures an urgent need for more effective preventive strategies, claims a new report launched today.

Commissioned by NHS England, and produced by Careif and the Cultural Consultation Service, '*Railway Suicides in the UK: Risk factors and prevention strategies*' reveals inconsistencies in how data on suicide is collected and the way emergency services, government agencies and the police collaborate.

Among the report's recommendations is:

- the need for a standardised framework to collect information on suicide, including ethnicity and previous contact with care services
- better coordination between emergency services to help prevent railway suicides
- more effective intervention in high-risk groups with steps to improve public awareness and public mental health and wellbeing in general
- implementation of an emergency pathway across all agencies nationally to enable a consistent and coherent response.

Professor Kamaldeep Bhui, co-author of the report and director of the Cultural Consultation Service, said: "We need a standardised way of collecting vital information about railway suicides and near misses, including ethnicity and any previous contact with care services. This will enable us to mount an intelligent preventive approach which harmonises NHS efforts with the police, the ambulance service and local government as part of an emergency pathway with effective detection and intervention among high risk groups. We have to make railway suicides everyone's business."

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Edgar Jones, co-author of the report and professor of the History of Medicine and Psychiatry, King's Centre for Military Health Research, Institute of Psychiatry, added:

“Falling rates of rail suicide [in excess of background population rates] for some European nations have shown that some preventive measures, such as physical barriers, can save lives. We discovered gaps in knowledge, particularly in the socio-economic status and ethnicity of those who commit suicide on the UK railway system. It also appears that the proportion of females who commit rail suicide is rising. We need robust and detailed data to help design relevant psychological interventions.”

According to the study, the widely reported association between mental illness and railway suicide, believed to be due to a station's proximity to in-patient psychiatric units, and severe forms of mental illness, such as schizophrenia, requires further research.

The report is being launched today at a special conference at the Wolfson Institute, Queen Mary, University of London, with speakers including Dr Geraldine Strathdee, national clinical director for mental health, NHS England, Lord Victor Adebowale, chair of the Enquiry into the Police and Mental Health, and Dr Sashi Sashidharan, the former medical director of the North Birmingham Mental Health Trust, with representation from the British Transport Police and Network Rail.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The report, *'Railway Suicides in the UK: Risk factors and prevention strategies'* will be launched on **Thursday 24 October 2013** from 9.30am-5.00pm at the *Mental healthcare: Safety, security and preventive commissioning* conference, room 129-130, Wolfson Institute, Queen Mary, University of London, EC1M 6BQ. The report was commissioned by NHS England and coordinated by Dr Albert Persaud and professor Edgar Jones at Careif, and Kamaldeep Bhui, professor of Cultural Psychiatry and Epidemiology at the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, and director of the Cultural Consultation Service, Queen Mary, University of London.

The **Cultural Consultation Service (CCS)** (www.culturalconsultation.org.uk) is the only UK-based organisation that provides cultural consultation, training, research and policy at multiple levels, including the individual, teams, organisations and social systems. Since 2010, CCS has provided in-depth analysis to health and social care organisations, commissioners, teams and professionals. CCS uses anthropological and social science field research methods to reveal covert and overt cultures of practice to improve patient and public health.

The Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation International Foundation (**Careif**) (www.careif.org) is an international charity which shares knowledge on mental health to improve people's wellbeing through research and public awareness campaigns.

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