

# Disruptions to sleep patterns lead to an increased risk of suicides

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The link between sleep problems and suicidal thoughts and behaviours is made starkly clear in new research from The University of Manchester, published in the *BMJ Open*.

In this study, conducted by researchers from the University's School of Health Sciences alongside the University of Oxford, 18 participants were interviewed about the role [sleep problems](#) have on [suicidal tendencies](#).

Three inter-related pathways to suicidal thoughts were identified arising from sleep problems. The first was that being awake at night heightened the risks of suicidal thoughts and attempts, which in part was seen as a consequence of the lack of help or resources available at night.

Secondly, the research found that a prolonged failure to achieve a good night's sleep made life harder for respondents, adding to depression, as well as increasing negative thinking, attention difficulties and inactivity.

Finally, respondents said sleep acted as an alternative to suicide, providing an escape from their problems. However, the desire to use sleep as an avoidance tactic led to increased day time sleeping which in turn caused disturbed sleeping patterns - reinforcing the first two pathways.

Donna Littlewood, lead author of the study, said the research has implications for service providers, such as health care specialist and social services.

"Our research underscores the importance of restoring [healthy sleep](#) in relation to coping with [mental health problems](#), [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviours.

"Additionally, night time service provision should be a key consideration within suicide prevention strategies, given that this study shows that those who are awake in the night are at an increased risk

of suicide."

**More information:** Donna L Littlewood et al, Understanding the role of sleep in suicide risk: qualitative interview study, *BMJ Open* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012113](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012113)

Provided by University of Manchester

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