



Women's Health Victoria

healthy empowered equal

**The invisible end: women and suicide
Implications for policy and practice**

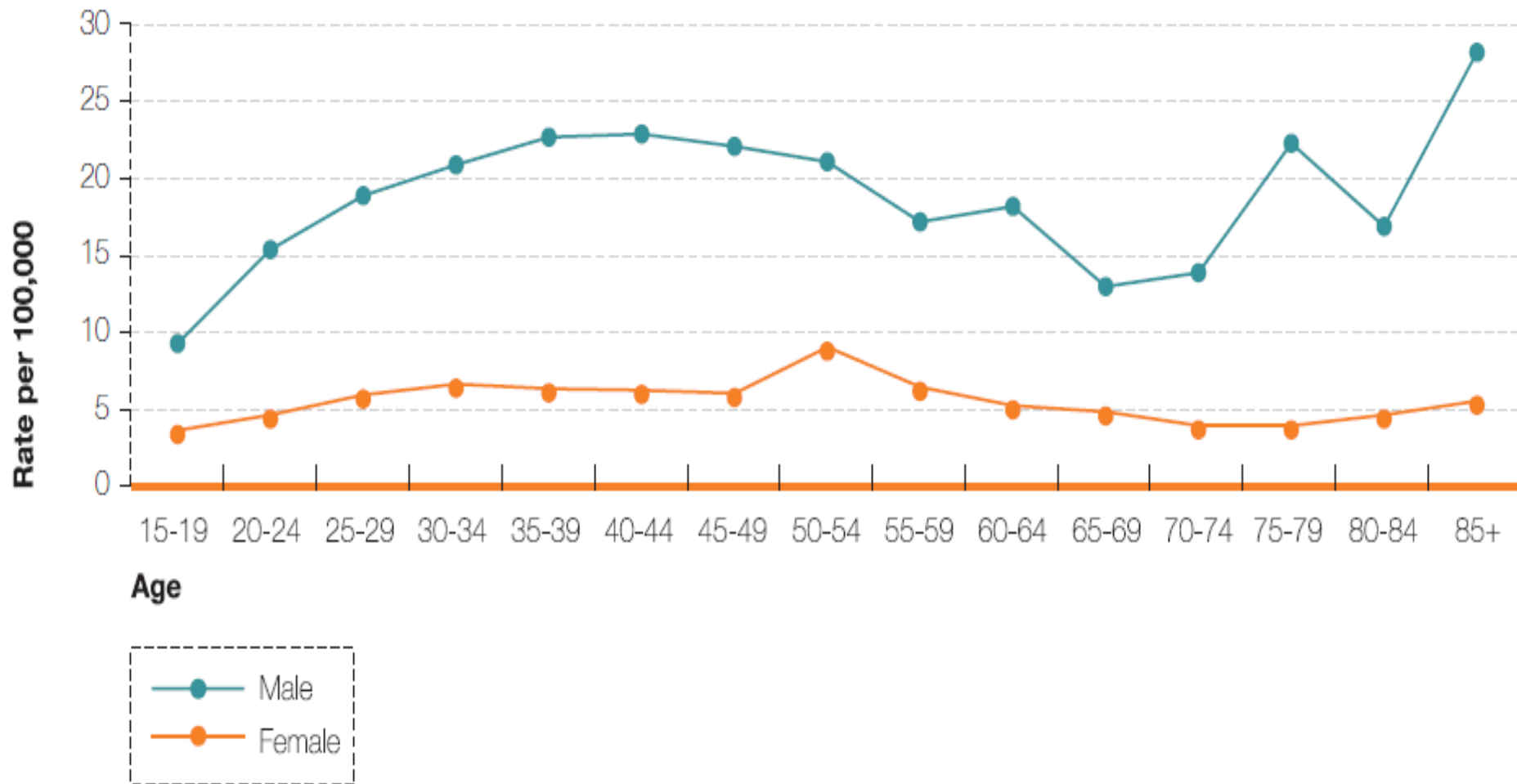
Pam Rugkhla, Health Promotion Officer

Gender influences suicidality

- Individual level - peer groups, self-expression and help-seeking behaviours
- Structural level – social determinants of mental health, such as access to services, social inclusion and financial security



Number of suicides in Australia in 2009



Number of completed suicides does not tell the whole story

More women than men engage in suicide attempts and suicidal ideation



Suicide attempts

- Women attempt suicide three times more often than men.
- method of suicide is a crucial factor in the differences in women's and men's suicide rates although the trend is changing



- Due to the fact that suicide attempts do not result in death, and are under-reported, women are often overlooked in discussions of suicide prevention.
- This can mean that women are not considered in the design and implementation of suicide prevention strategies.



Rigid gender norms can negatively impact women's mental health and increase suicide risk

- Depression
- PTSD
- Eating disorders



Body image

- Severe body image dissatisfaction is symptomatic of depression, eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorder, alcohol and substance abuse.
- The rate of suicide for women with anorexia is 32 times the average for women in the age group 20 to 45 years



Bullying

- Bullying negatively impacts both victims and perpetrators, and both are at an elevated risk of suicidality



Gender based violence

- Victims of GBV are more likely to report having depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and excessive alcohol consumption and elevated risk for suicide.
- Women who experience violence are three and a half times more likely to commit suicide



Stigma towards women who attempt suicide

- ‘Manipulative femininity’
- ‘Attention seeking’
- Impact on women’s self-expression, help-seeking behaviours and support they receive



What we can do – Cultural/structural

- Challenge harmful rigid gender norms – objectification of women and violence supportive attitudes
- Address the social determinants of women's mental health including bullying violence, body image, discrimination, financial securities



What we can do

- Sex-disaggregated data
- Well-articulated policies and strategies to address suicides and suicide attempts in women:
 - Gender sensitive mental health literacy programs
 - Gender sensitive service provision to meet the needs of women at risk
 - Mandatory procedures for the treatment of women seeking medical care following attempted suicide



Women's Health Victoria's resources

- Women and Suicide: Gender Impact Assessment
- Clearinghouse Connector: Suicide
- www.whv.org.au

Gender Impact Assessment
No. 15



Women's Health
Victoria

Women and Suicide

August 2011

0909 1807-6428

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Thank you



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