



Beneath the Smile

A Women's Suicide Prevention Toolkit

Statistics

In Canada, in **2009**, *901 women died by suicide* (2,989 men died by suicide) <http://goo.gl/OE0gN>.

In the province of Alberta, in **2009**, there were **106** female suicides (and **377** male) <http://goo.gl/oC7lq>.

In Alberta, in **2010**, there were:

- **1,833** attempted suicide/self-inflicted injury-related hospital admissions
- *5,053 attempted suicide*/self-inflicted injury-related emergency department visits.
- Females accounted for **58** per cent of the hospital admissions and **61** per cent of the emergency department visits for attempted suicide/self-inflicted injuries.
- Females **15 to 19** years of age had the highest rate of hospital admissions and emergency department visits for attempted suicide/self-inflicted injuries.
<http://goo.gl/I92JK>





Suicide attempts occur at least 10 times more than suicide (Chaudron, 2004). For younger people the figure can be as high as 200 attempts for every suicide. Generally, the higher the age group, the less attempts occurring per suicide. In the over 65 age group, for example, there are two to four attempts for every suicide (Marcus, 1996).

Women attempt suicide two to three times more often than men. This is reflected in all female age groups—<http://goo.gl/m8upe>.

Suicides have risen in recent years in Canada among teenage girls. This is attributable to an increase in the use of lethal means—principally suffocation—where a suicide attempt can more likely result in suicidal death (see CMAJ report— <http://bit.ly/H4nOzW>)

Suicide Attempts and Suicides

Depression is a major risk factor for suicide attempts and other suicidal behaviours. Depression disproportionately affects women (Chaudron, 2004).

Major depression is a psychiatric disorder that includes several symptoms. The two main symptoms according to the Canadian Mental Health Association are:

- **depressed mood** – feelings of worthlessness, thoughts of dying, overwhelming sadness
- marked **loss of interest** in the activities that used to give you pleasure

In addition, women are more likely than men to have related physical and mental health problems at the same time as their depression. <http://goo.gl/dGDJK>

In the **United States**, approximately **70** per cent of all prescriptions for antidepressants are given to women.



Depression

*Women are
two times more
likely than
men to suffer
from major
depression.*

Sexual and physical abuse is much higher than previously suspected and is a major factor in women's depression.

<http://goo.gl/8tbAz>



Protective Factors

Pregnancy

reports show that the state of pregnancy can help protect women from suicidal behavior. Suicide rates are half of those of women who are not pregnant.

Motherhood

maternal bond with dependents is an innate protective factor.

Willingness to seek help

women will seek help for emotional and mental health issues far more often than men.

Familial support and social supports

women show a greater tendency to rely on the support of family members and/or friends in times of crisis.

Choice of less lethal means of suicide

will tend to use less lethal means, such as prescription drugs, when attempting suicide. Greater numbers of young women are increasingly using more lethal means such as suffocation.

Risk Factors for Depression and Suicide

Pregnancy Issues

Being pregnant can be a major **protective** factor against depression and suicidal behaviours. However, experiencing a **death of a child**, having an **unwanted pregnancy** or undergoing an **abortion** can be major **risk** factors for both depression and suicide.

Postpartum depression (PPD)

PPD is a risk factor. This is a moderate to severe depression some women experience after giving birth and up to a year afterwards. There are both hormonal and non-hormonal causes <http://goo.gl/YPxYv>.

An estimated 9-16 per cent of postpartum women will experience PPD <http://goo.gl/fHGUp>.

Domestic Violence

Partner violence greatly increases risk of suicide attempts and is a major factor in women's depression. It can also be a source of **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**. Research indicates women are twice as likely as men to develop PTSD. Although men do experience abuse by their partners, women outnumber men **nine to one** as victims of assault by a spouse or partner.

Sexual Abuse

Is a major factor in women's depression and future suicidal actions. It can also be a source of **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**.

One in six women is the victim of attempted or completed rape.

Women may adopt coping strategies to protect them during the abuse, including **self-harm, substance abuse and high-risk behaviours**, such as unprotected sex and choosing violent partners. These coping strategies may ultimately undermine their feelings of self-worth, cause major depression and put them at greater risk for suicide.

Other Risk Factors

- **Eating Disorders**
- **Female life cycle, including menstruation and menopause**
- **Body self-image issues** – can affect both young women and the pressures they experience to emulate unrealistic physical expectations. It can also describe women who undergo major surgeries, such as mastectomies, which can precipitate major depression.

References

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The Women's Centre, Calgary

www.womenscentrecalgary.org

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

www.cmha.ca/

Kids Help Phone

www.kidshelpphone.ca

Canadian Women's Foundation

<http://www.canadianwomen.org/take-action>

Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health

<http://www.ccsmh.ca/en/projects/suicideAssessment.cfm>

Related Links

The Nautilus Shell

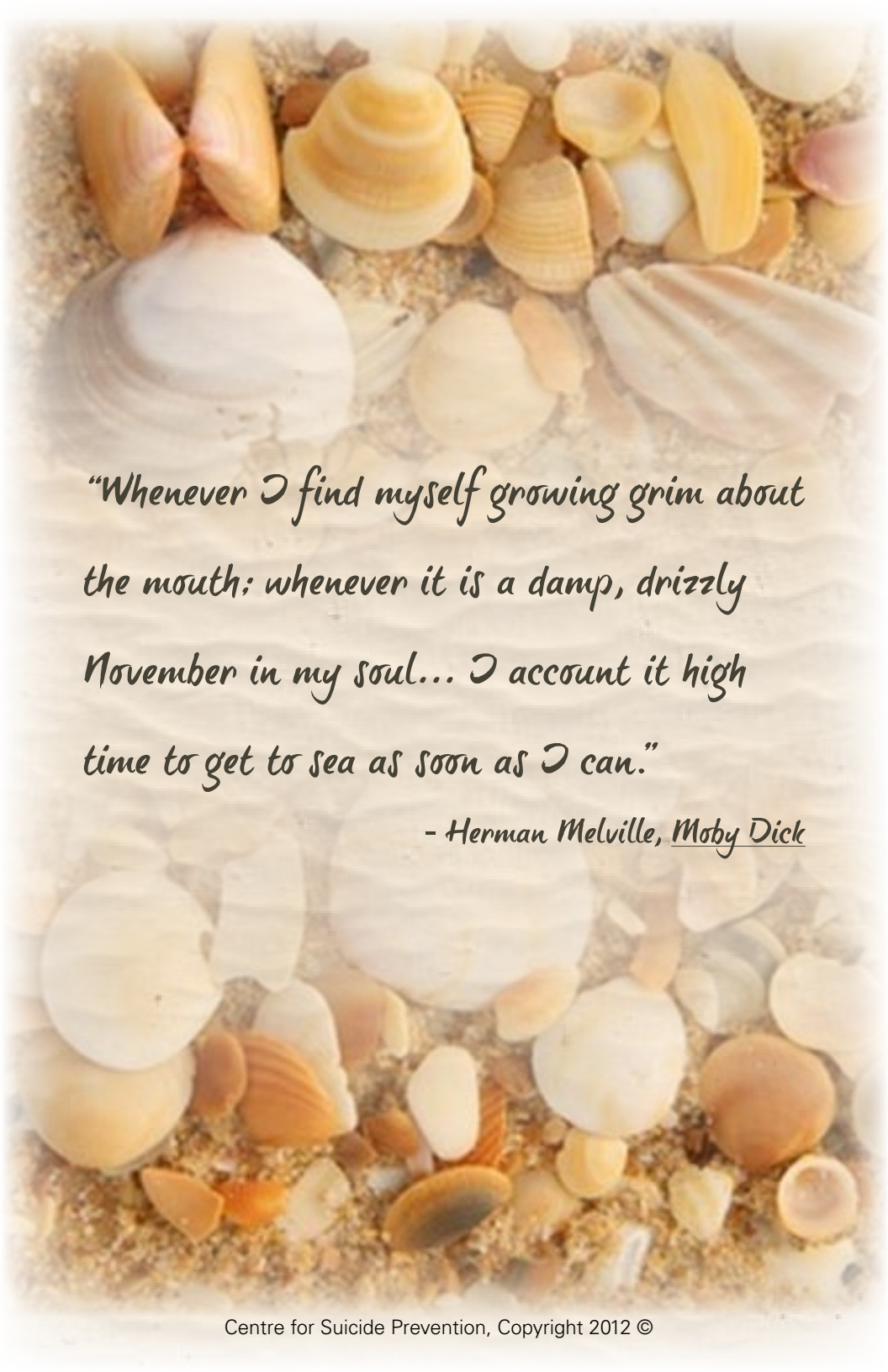


The nautilus shell used in our graphic presentation of this toolkit for women and suicide prevention is a most apt icon.

It is such an old species that it is considered a classic symbol. The outer shell is very durable while the inner chambers separated by septum provide little "rooms," from four to 30, to hold water, and ultimately adjust its buoyancy to provide balance.

Women carry within them the strength and balance and timeless beauty, the durability, world history and earth symbol as life givers and protectors. However, women also have the vulnerability and the fragility of this shell. They coil inward to protect themselves as does this creature and they have a tremendous capacity to be flexible. The nautilus, however, is only able to roam to a certain depth where it will ultimately succumb to the water pressure.

We need to protect all women, young and old, with education and information, before life becomes too difficult to bear.



*"Whenever I find myself growing grim about
the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly
November in my soul... I account it high
time to get to sea as soon as I can."*

- Herman Melville, Moby Dick

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