



Low perceived transferable skills increase suicide-related behaviours and thinking in veterinarians

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THIS STUDY IS THE FIRST TO INVESTIGATE HOW A VETERINARIAN'S PERCEIVED SKILL TRANSFERABILITY IS LINKED TO SUICIDE-RELATED THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR, AND HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR VETERINARIAN PROFESSIONAL BODIES AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS, SUCH AS UNIVERSITIES.

RESEARCH AIMS

This research explored the role of lowered occupational mobility in suicide risk in Australian veterinarians. In particular, the study examined whether suicide-related thinking and behaviour (e.g., self-harm) increased over 12-months if veterinarians desired to leave the profession, but perceived that their skills to be undervalued by other professions and potential employers.

METHODS

To test this suggestion, the researchers conducted a longitudinal study with two data collection surveys examining change in suicide-related thinking and behaviour over 12 months.

Participants who responded to both surveys were a group of 161 practicing veterinarians, aged between 22-79 years old. This group has broad ranging practice experience and years of practice.

FINDINGS

The results of our study support the suggestion that when a veterinarian desires occupational mobility, but believes their skill set is not easily transferred to another profession, their experience of suicidal-related thoughts and behaviours will increase over 12 months. This was in contrast to those who wished to leave the profession and thought their skills were valued outside the veterinary profession. In these people, there was actually a decline in suicidal thinking and behaviours over 12 months. Thus, it appeared that perceived or actual professional mobility when desiring occupational change may play a role in suicide-related factors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study speak to one possible risk-factor for veterinarians. In particular, limited occupational mobility when there is a desire for professional change.

In practice, we suggest providing resources to veterinarians wishing to change professions such as professional vocational coaching. Coaching can assist veterinarians identify their meta-competencies and how they are applicable to potential employers. Coaching can also assist with access to skill development and training opportunities that build on an existing skill-base.

Moreover, universities, professional bodies and other training institutions help to normalise career change and helping students and practitioners to think about their skills as having broader application.

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