

## Overview

Samaritans\* offers free emotional support for anyone who needs someone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Without any distinction of any kind such as age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, etc., we believe everyone should have the opportunity to speak to someone without fear of prejudice or rejection and be met with undivided attention and empathy. This type of support meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair and should be available to anyone.

Samaritans Ireland believes mental health and wellbeing of a person is a human right and everyone should have direct access to safe health care, as well as healthy occupational and environmental conditions, and freedom from discrimination. It is imperative everyone has their mental health and wellbeing looked after and are provided with the best possible situations and opportunities to foster good mental health and that their rights as individuals are upheld at all times.

Samaritans Ireland is part of Mental Health Reform's national coalition and widely support the points and recommendations outlined in their submission. Built from research undertaken by Samaritans in recent years, Samaritans Ireland would like to specifically address the following points outlined under the Equality Acts Review.

### **3) The scope of the current definitions of the nine equality grounds. This will include consideration of the gender ground, the disability ground and whether new grounds should be added, such as the ground of socioeconomic discrimination**

Samaritans Ireland notes that changes are required to the definitions of the nine equality grounds and that new grounds should be added, with particular support of the inclusion of socioeconomic discrimination as an equality ground to the intersectionality of mental ill health and socioeconomic inequalities.

Our 2017 report, *Dying from Inequality*<sup>1</sup>, found that people living in the most disadvantaged communities face the highest risk of dying by suicide.

We found that income and unmanageable debt, unemployment, poor housing conditions, and other socioeconomic factors all contribute to high suicide rates. Recent anecdotal evidence from our helpline indicates people's anxieties around COVID-19 have evolved over the pandemic from at first being primarily rooted in health concerns, i.e., that the caller, or a loved one, were going to contract COVID-19, to concerns around the lasting implications of the virus, and in particular the potential ongoing socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.samaritans.org/ireland/about-samaritans/research-policy/inequality-suicide/>

## **4–5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8 D08 Y223**

Samaritans Ireland is a charity registered in the Republic of Ireland (20033668) and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (450409). Samaritans Ireland's registered office is located at 4-5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8, D08Y223. CHY number: CHY11880. The directors/trustees of Samaritans Ireland are as follows: E Farrell, K Flood, D O'Críodan, C Skelly, D Walsh (United Kingdom), G Danton (United Kingdom) J Trenaman, É Ní Mhuircheartaigh, R Fitzgerald, A Heron (United Kingdom)

Admissions to hospital following self-harm were also found to be two times higher in the most deprived areas compared to the most affluent in our 2017 report and specific self-harm research conducted in 2019 further supported this with the majority of participants living in households with income below the median.<sup>2</sup>

Our report indicated that stress is the most common psychosocial pathway linking socioeconomic deprivation to poor mental health outcomes, and contributes directly to depression, anxiety, panic attacks and anger, and indirectly to social isolation (e.g., family breakdown) and poor decision-making (e.g., managing limited finances).

'Fear' appears to be one of the most damaging psychosocial experiences and can lead to the avoidance of interactions with the public services intended to provide a basic level of support ('safety net'). Other psychosocial factors commonly described include shame, stigma, and low self-worth due to feelings of having relatively low social status.

**Suicide is a major socioeconomic inequality issue and tackling inequality should be central to suicide prevention. Samaritans Ireland urges the inclusion of socioeconomic status as a grounds for discrimination.**

#### **4) Whether the legislation adequately addresses intersectionality or the intersection of discrimination across a number of grounds**

Mental health intersects with all aspects of life and our research indicates compounding or intersecting factors all influence an individual's levels of mental ill health.

Our research consistently indicates that suicide is both a socioeconomic inequality but further within that it is also a gender inequality with lower-income men being most prone to suicide.<sup>34</sup> The most recent CSO figures indicate that 77% of suicides in 2019 were men.<sup>5</sup> Research also tells us that men in the lowest social class, living in the most deprived areas, are up to ten times more at risk of suicide than those in the highest social class, living in the most affluent areas.<sup>6</sup>

Samaritans Ireland conducted self-harm research<sup>2</sup> in 2019 and while the sample was too small to make definitive population-wide conclusions, where the numbers facilitated an analysis, it was found that demographic patterns in this cohort reflect those patterns of characteristics associated with higher rates of self-harm in other research. These include being female, being LGBT+, being younger and having lower income.

In January 2021, the European Human Rights Report 2020: Poverty and Social Exclusion<sup>7</sup> was published. Persons with disabilities are shown to face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population in all 28 Member States and even more so if you are a woman with disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> [https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Self-Harm\\_and\\_Support\\_Seeking\\_in\\_the\\_ROI\\_and\\_NI\\_allUCmz.pdf](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Self-Harm_and_Support_Seeking_in_the_ROI_and_NI_allUCmz.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> C. Wyllie et al., 'Men, Suicide and Society. Why Disadvantaged Men in Mid-Life Die by Suicide.' (Surrey: Samaritans, 2012)

<sup>4</sup> [https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans\\_-\\_out\\_of\\_sight\\_out\\_of\\_mind\\_2020.pdf](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans_-_out_of_sight_out_of_mind_2020.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/nosp-cso-nov-21.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> S. Platt, 'Inequalities and Suicidal Behaviour', in International Handbook of Suicide Prevention: Research, Policy and Practice, ed. R. O'Connor, S. Platt, and J. Gordon, 1st ed., Book, Section vols (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 211.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/european-human-rights-report/>

The recent Healthy Ireland Survey 2021<sup>8</sup> also outlines the intersectionality of mental health and suicide with age, gender, and the further explores the additional disproportionate impacts of COVID-19.

Additionally, in November 2021 the final report by the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community<sup>9</sup> found that "Travellers' daily experiences of racism and exclusion have a profound effect on their mental health." Furthermore, the Committee was notably, "struck by the interconnected nature of issues facing the Traveller community which they examined." Samaritans Ireland partnership work with members of the Traveller community would also recognise the mental health impacts and links to longstanding discrimination, neglect, and stigma.

The above are just a few examples of the profound impacts of intersectionality of the grounds for discrimination and social determinants of health.

**Samaritans Ireland urges the critical recognition and inclusion of specific provisions around intersectionality.**

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\* Samaritans operates 24hour helpline service across the UK and ROI and Samaritans refers to our specifically to caller awareness services which are universal across jurisdictions. Samaritans Ireland is an umbrella body overseeing the 21 branches across the island of Ireland

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9ef45-the-healthy-ireland-survey-2021/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_key\\_issues\\_affecting\\_the\\_traveller\\_community/reports/2021/2021-12-01\\_final-report-of-the-joint-committee-on-key-issues-affecting-the-traveller-community\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_key_issues_affecting_the_traveller_community/reports/2021/2021-12-01_final-report-of-the-joint-committee-on-key-issues-affecting-the-traveller-community_en.pdf)