

Rise in suicides related to recession

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A STEEP rise in the number of people taking their own lives is directly related to the recession, an expert on suicide has said. A total of 527 people took their own lives last year, according to the most recent figures, an increase of more than 100 on the total for 2008 which was 427.

Dr Conor Farren, a psychiatrist at St Patrick's Hospital in Dublin, said there was a link between suicide and alcohol consumption which accounted for a spike in the numbers in the past decade. However, there has been a decline in alcohol consumption since it peaked in 2005, yet the number of people who have taken their own lives has risen again.

Alcohol is a factor in more than half of all suicides in Ireland and in 93 per cent of cases where someone under the age of 30 has taken their own life.

According to Dr Farren, he sees the effects of the recession all the time in his role treating patients who have depression and addiction problems. "On an anecdotal level there is a massive amount of people out there who have been affected by the recession and for many people it is personal. We had a recent day called Black Thursday, but for anybody going through a state of depression, every day is Black Thursday."

Dr Farren said he noticed many people, ranging from builders to construction workers, who had gone into a downward spiral after losing their jobs and had taken to drinking which can lead to disinhibition and to a situation where a person can end up taking his/her own life.

"Recession might be all about big figures on RTÉ news, but when you lose your job, your house or when you have changes in your own life, that's when it hits. There is a large number of people, not just mega property developers who have lost millions, who are personally affected in a large number of ways and they are personally suffering."

Dr Farren has lent his support to a new campaign to highlight depression. The *Lean on Me* campaign, supported by the mental health charity Aware and Lundbeck Ireland, has been developed to foster a better understanding of the condition.

"It is vital to appreciate that even the most complicated cases of depression can be effectively treated, and the start of that treatment for the sufferer is through recognition of their problem, and then sharing the burden, with family, friends, support groups or professionals," he said.

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