



Trade unions

Work-related suicides should be investigated by watchdog, unions say

Death of headteacher Ruth Perry prompts calls for employers to have to report when workers take own lives

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Work-related suicides should be reported by employers and investigated by the safety watchdog amid concern that workplace stress is at “epidemic levels”, trade unions have said.

They fear the death of the primary school headteacher Ruth Perry, who killed herself while awaiting the outcome of an Ofsted report, shows that potentially fatal work-related stress is not confined to teaching.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC), Unison, the Public and Commercial Services Union and teaching unions are all backing a change in the law to allow the [Health](#) and Safety Executive (HSE) to investigate work-related suicides.

Under HSE rules, employers have a [duty to report all deaths of their workers](#), with an exception for suicides - unlike other countries. In the UK the HSE cannot investigate any work-related suicide unless it receives a referral by a coroner.

Perry’s death prompted experts to call for a change in the law to allow it to launch an immediate inquiry into work-related stress in the education sector. An article in the British Medical Journal by Martin McKee, a professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and Prof Sarah Waters from the University of Leeds said there had been reports of at least eight other teacher suicides linked to Ofsted reports. But it said the true extent of the problem could not be known without an inquiry.

Trade unions have backed the call for a change in the law but say it should be broadened to include a duty on all employers to report work-related suicides.

The TUC’s Shelly Asquith, who leads on health and safety issues, said: “It is vital that work-related suicides are reported and investigated by the HSE.

“The tragic case of Ruth Perry is not an isolated one. Ofsted has been cited several times by inquests into educators’ deaths. Work-related stress is at epidemic levels. We cannot turn a blind eye to it.

“The HSE must be given the funding it needs to improve safety and wellbeing at work. That means reversing the swingeing cuts of the last decade.”

Unison and the PCS union are also backing the call. Jon Richards, an assistant general secretary at Unison, said: “Stress, bullying and harassment at work take a massive toll on the mental health of staff. The HSE should take account of the full impact of work on employees. That includes where workers tragically take their own lives.”

Prof Phil Banfield, the chair of the British Medical Association, backed the call and said there was a “serious mental health crisis amongst healthcare professionals driven by huge levels of demand, the largest ever backlog of care and serious staffing shortages”.

He added: “The HSE must have the necessary resources and correct processes in place to ensure that they can effectively investigate and evaluate this in a way that can result in much-needed change within the healthcare system to ultimately help reduce the prevalence of work-related suicides.”

The National Association of Head Teachers praised the BMJ article as a “**powerful intervention**”. And in a tweet the National Education Union also welcomed it for “highlighting the urgency of the mental health crisis [@Ofstednews](#) is fuelling”.

McKee said: “Every suicide is a tragedy for the family and friends of the individual who loses their life. And if there are circumstances that could be tackled to prevent that happening we have a responsibility to do something about them.”

Jim McManus, the president of the Association of Directors of Public Health, stopped short of backing a change in the law, saying suicides were currently investigated by coroners.

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at befrienders.org.

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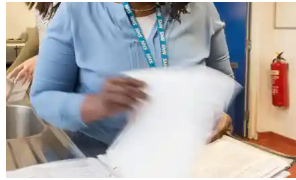


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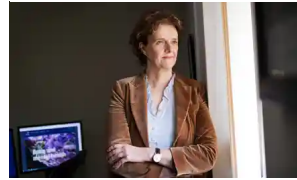
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