Suicide, Falling Oil Prices and Unemployment

With oil prices falling below US$37.00 per barrel (WTI) today there are increasing signs that a struggling Alberta oil industry is impacting the mental and financial well-being of Albertans. Rising anxiety, depression and suicide attempts are expected to rise dramatically in 2015.

Nothing kills happiness more than being unemployed. Statistics show that for each 1% rise in the unemployment rate, the rate of suicide increases by 0.79%. The above shows the trends of Alberta’s unemployment rate, the rate of suicide increases by 0.79%.

Alberta’s Medical Examiner expects suicides will increase by 30% in 2015 compared to 2014. Over 654 suicides or 15.3 per 100,000 are expected, the increase by 30% in 2015 compared to 2014. Over 17% of these people who attempt suicide are permanently disabled, restricted in their ability to work, each year, at a cost of $15,000. Over 17% of these people who attempt suicide are permanently disabled, restricted in their ability to work, each year, at a cost of $15,000. Over 17% of these people who attempt suicide are permanently disabled, restricted in their ability to work, each year, at a cost of $15,000.

In 2013, 2011 Albertans died in traffic accidents compared to over 500 suicides.

The rate of suicide is amongst Alberta men was 2.9 times higher than for women in 2011. Men are more likely to hang themselves and use a firearm to end their life. Women choose either drugs or hanging. Amongst the provinces, Alberta suicide rate ranked 6th highest overall. Prince Edward Island and Ontario had the lowest rates in the country at 6.0 and 8.1 per 100,000 population, respectively.

The number of suicides per 100,000 population has risen since the 1950s, from a low of 7.8 per 100,000 population in 1953 to a high of 18.6 per 100,000 in 1992.

In the US, for every suicide completed in 2013 there were 32 attempts and 226 thoughts of suicide according to the US National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control. If these ratios applied to Alberta, then for every one of the 654 projected suicides in 2015 there will be 147,809 people thinking about suicide and 20,661 suicide attempts.

Reasons for Suicide

The reasons for suicide are complex and theories abound. Health Canada lists “the role of environmental influences and mental disorder, the existence and nature of predisposing genetic or biochemical factors, and the parallel issues of proper and effective treatment and prevention,” noting that “suicide is an action; it is not an illness.”

How the socio-economic “cocktail” of financial stress, debt loads, a supercharged economy and marital breakdown affects suicide is not well understood. Societal fragmentation, social isolation, media influences on self-worth, unemployment and environmental factors are additional determinants. Understanding the influences that lead to suicide presents one of the greatest challenges in health sciences and studies of mental illness.

The Cost of Suicide to Alberta’s Economy

Suicide affects all of society by robbing a family, household or community of human lives as well as consuming resources and human energy in dealing with both attempted and successful suicide. US studies have found that the average cost of one suicide is $1.239 million in terms of hospital and other costs. Each attempted suicide costs the medical system $15,000. Over 17% of these people who attempt suicide are permanently disabled, restricted in their ability to work, each year, at a cost of $128,000 per person. We estimate that 654 suicides in 2015 will cost Alberta’s economy about $811 million in direct costs (medical and other) and indirect societal costs (i.e. lost productivity).