Background

The Tackling Suicide on the Railways programme is a joint initiative between Network Rail and the Samaritans and represents one of the most progressive and ambitious programmes in Europe. T845 'Improving suicide prevention on the rail network in Great Britain' is the research project that has been evaluating this programme.

T845 covered three work streams; two have already been completed and included statistical analysis and investigation of relevant data; a literature review; an overview of work that industry partners, such as the train operating companies (TOC) and British Transport Police (BTP), are undertaking to improve measures of prevention of suicide across the GB mainline; and the creation of a Geographic Information System (GIS) prototype to geographically display data for interrogation.

The third and final work stream consisted of a 3-year evaluation of the Network Rail and Samaritans joint programme, comprising initiatives covering training, outreach, and communications campaigns.

This project has been running since late 2008 with the initial objectives of improving the industry's knowledge of railway suicide and to evaluate a programme of work aimed at reducing the number of suicides on the mainline network in GB by 20% by 2015, which was always considered to be an optimistic objective. The first objective of improving the industry's knowledge has been met through various initiatives that have been developed, such as training and surveys. The second objective of evaluating the programme was very challenging and the research was not able to come to a conclusive answer.

Whilst it was clear from the evaluation work that the objective of reducing the number of suicides on the railways was not met, there are long-term external factors which suggest that, overall, national non-railway suicide figure may be rising but there is a considerable time lag which affects the availability of information.
and the possibility of comparing it with the railway suicide figures and trends.

This stage of the research project is now complete and a report has been published which focuses on the findings of the evaluation of the programme to date. A further monitoring stage is under consideration.

The programme has been successful in bringing together a wide range of different organisations in planning, promoting and delivering complex activities at both national and local levels. There has been sharing of information and experience between the key organisations; better coordination of policies and practices (such as communication with the media); and learning about introducing complex activities across different organisations and locations.

The dissemination of information about the programme has been an evolving process which formalised into a written communication strategy. However, the general approach has built on the experience of each partner organisation and was reported to have stimulated regular contact between their media teams. There has also been the development of a common approach to the messages being communicated about the programme. Distribution of information to local rail staff has involved learning how to communicate essential information. New approaches to communication, including the use of social media, have been explored encouraging Samaritans to set up a new digital media team.

**Aims**

The aims of this third work stream of research project T845 have been to evaluate the Network Rail and Samaritans Tackling Suicide on the Railways programme (designed to reduce the number of railway suicides by 20% by 2015), and improve the industry’s knowledge of railway suicide.

**Findings**

The main findings from this project are:

- Suicide numbers are affected by a number of factors external to the programme.
- Analysis of the costs borne by the industry is estimated to be between £20m and £40m per year; the largest element being the delay and cancellation costs paid by Network Rail to the affected TOCs.
A variety of programme activities have been initiated across the network including, but not limited to, Samaritans posters, physical barriers, and increased awareness of suicide.

There have been reduced response times to suicide, mainly as a result of better co-ordination of responses by the BTP. The mean time in 2010/11 was 2 hours 40 minutes, and for the most recent full year (2012/13) this had reduced to 2 hours 08 minutes; a reduction of 32 minutes (20%).

The delay minutes for 2013/14 were 290,752 which is a reduction from the 2012/13 figure of 299,932.

It has not been possible to ascertain BTP costs in detail. The 2013/14 BTP budget for National Rail operations is £226m. If BTP resources occupied in responding to suicides was between 2% and 5% (this figure is an RSSB estimate that is based on information provided by the BTP) of BTP's total resources this would represent an annual industry cost of between £4.5m and £11m (this is also a RSSB estimate).

Trauma Support Training (TST) was developed and started in 2011 and has had a total of 1023 staff trained in the year to date.

Managing Suicidal Contacts (MSC) training was developed and started in 2010 and a total of 4771 staff have been trained in the year to date.

MSC training did not have a significant impact on the number of interventions being made but it did affect:
- Staff being able to identify someone who may be suicidal.
- The quality of interventions.
- Positive actions following an incident.
- The likelihood of making intervention in the future.

On a national level the National Suicide Prevention Steering Group (NSPSG) and National Suicide Prevention Working Group (NSPWG) have been successful in:
- Supporting and promoting partnership working.
- Encouraging additional activities that were not originally included in the programme identifying and addressing obstacles to partnership working.
- Creating more engagement with other organisations but direct influence on local partnership working is less clear cut.

- At a local level:
  - The expertise of Samaritans is the most important factor to building and sustaining local partnerships.
  - There is evidence of a cultural shift from reacting to suicide prevention measures.
  - A lack of resources is a barrier to suicide prevention activities.
  - Senior buy-in is essential for suicide prevention measures to continue and be maintained.
  - Front line staff want to be involved in the programme and appear to be confused about whether they work in a priority location or not.
  - The activities were perceived to be effective in reducing the number of suicides and staff distress although it was not considered a big change.
  - There is no evidence of a significant change in the number of railway suicides.
  - The demographics and locations of suicides show no significant changes.
  - There are still areas for improvement in suicide prevention.

**Deliverables**

All three reports are available in SPARK.

**Method**

The programme evaluation combined data from both Samaritans (the delivery of programme activities) and RSSB (rail suicides, and delays and disruption caused by suicide).

The data was supplemented by:

- Two surveys; partnership working and attitudes towards suicide for front line staff.
- Eight case studies of programme activities.
- Staff interviewed at six stations.

The collection and analysis of information was undertaken by Tavistock, RSSB and the Samaritans.
Next Steps

A particular impact of the Tackling Suicide on the Railways programme has been a growing interest within the rail sector in finding out what works most effectively, under what circumstances, in preventing rail suicides. There are already plans to invest in further research into the causes of rail suicide with a proposal being developed to continue the programme for at least another year. This would provide the opportunity to gather further information about the impact of the programme activities.

Amongst the evaluation activities that might usefully be taken forward are:

- Continuing analysis of the national SMIS and TRUST data as part of the ongoing work by RSSB.
- Continuing and more in depth analysis, of programme delivery data.
- Investment in an overarching evaluation strategy.
- A more thorough evaluation of individual activities as evidence from the surveys suggests that staff feel that particular measures are more effective at suicide prevention than others, such as physical barriers.
- A repeat of the partner and front line staff surveys. Front line staff would receive the survey in both paper and electronic forms.

Contact

For more information please contact:

Michael Woods
Head of Operations and Management Research
R&D Programme
RSSB
enquirydesk@rssb.co.uk