**One in 10 bereaved by suicide risk contagion: researchers**

* THE AUSTRALIAN
* JANUARY 28, 2016 12:00AM
* [**SAVE**](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/one-in-10-bereaved-by-suicide-risk-contagion-researchers/news-story/11be0b6c0cfb1df6ea799ca3e52a9676)
* [*PRINT*](javascript:window.print();)
* [John Ross](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/author/John+Ross)

Higher Education reporter

Sydney

**One-tenth of people who lose friends or relatives to suicide are at risk of following suit.**

British researchers have found that bereaved people are 65 per cent more likely to attempt suicide if they are grieving for comrades who took their own lives.

The finding suggests that ­losing someone to suicide should be considered a risk factor for early death, alongside such measures as familial history of heart ­attack or cancer. And while relatives of suicide victims have long been considered a high-risk group for suicide, the new study suggest screening should be extended to their in-laws and friends.

Lead researcher Alexandra ­Pitman of University College London­ said doctors and thera­pists should include such probes in clinical assessments of patients with psychological distress or ­suicidal thoughts.

The study, published in the journal *BMJ Open*, tracked more than 3400 university staff and ­students who had suddenly lost friends or family members, through both natural and unnatur­al causes.

The 614 participants who had lost people to suicide­ proved substantially more likely to contemplate killing themselves afterwards, with 9 per cent attempting to do so.

Dr Pitman said it was not clear why suicide had such devastating effects on friends and relatives, particularly given that it did not appear to trigger higher rates of depression than other forms of ­bereavement.

She said it was possible that suicides inspired people to copy them — a phenomenon known as “suicide contagion” — but this was impossible to verify without gauging people’s attitudes before and after comrades had killed themselves. The researchers say taboos around suicide could make it particularly destructive.

*If you are depressed or contemplating suicide, help is available at Lifeline on 131 114*