

Nursing Matters: A survey of mental health in student and registered veterinary nurses



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Introduction

- 3-year project: investigated mental health in UK SVNs and RVNs.
- Funded by the IDEXX Foundation; interprofessional team.
- Knowledge gap: extensive research on veterinary surgeons and veterinary students but little on RVNs and SVNs.
- A 2021 UK survey¹ RVN/SVN survey (n=650) found:
 - 96% → bullying and incivility was a problem
 - 81% → found their work stressful
 - 75% → thought work and study affected wellbeing
- Our scoping review (2024)² of VN mental health: 13 relevant papers out of 2118. However, inconsistent measures = weak evidence base.

Methods

- An online survey was disseminated to RVNs and SVNs in the UK.
- Validated psychological tools: WEMWBS³, DASS-21⁴, Moral Foundations Questionnaire⁵ and Moral Distress scales^{6,7}.
- Bespoke questions designed to assess respondents':
 - wellbeing
 - mental health
 - moral distress
 - moral foundations
 - attitudes to euthanasia and suicide

Personal thoughts on self-harm and suicide

Comparisons between our study and other studies exploring prevalence of self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts in the general and veterinary population

Survey results

Question: Have you ever...?	Response	Our study (n=669) Veterinary Nurses		NHS 2014 ⁸ (n=7546)*	Cardwell et al. (2013) ⁹ (n=475—482) Vet students	
		Total 'Yes' %	Total 'Yes' %	Total 'Yes' %	Total 'Yes' %	
Q1: ... had suicidal thoughts, even if you would not really do it?	No	230 34.4%		79.4%	358 75.4%	
	Yes (more than 12 months ago)	220 32.9%	439		70 14.7%	
	Yes (within the last 12 months)	219 32.7%	65.6%	20.6%	47 9.9%	
Q2: ...attempted to take your own life?	No	549 82.1%		93.3%	469 97.3%	
	Yes (more than 12 months ago)	105 15.7%	120		13 2.7%	
	Yes (within the last 12 months)	15 2.2%	17.9%	6.7%	0 0%	
Q3: ...deliberately harmed yourself but without the intention of killing yourself?	No	354 52.9%		92.7%	409 85.6%	
	Yes (more than 12 months ago)	226 33.8%	315		53 11.1%	
	Yes (within the last 12 months)	89 13.3%	47.1%	7.3%	16 3.3%	

* NHS data was weighted

Participants' demographics

- 669 valid responses
- 495 RVNs; 172 SVNs
- 648 female; 15 male; 6 other/prefer not to say
- Age: 18–68

Wellbeing (WEMWBS)

- Mean score = 41.0 (low wellbeing)
- 46% <41 → probable clinical depression
- 20% = mild depression range (41–44)
- Only 34% >44

Mental health (DASS-21)

- Mean scores = *moderately severe* depression, anxiety, stress
- Higher than general population norms.
- Comparable only to COVID-era health professionals

Moral Foundation

- Higher scores on Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity and Purity/Sanctity

Moral Distress

- Mean = 20.2% → lower than most other healthcare studies

Conclusion

- Findings suggest poor wellbeing in RVNs and SVNs.
- Highlights need for interventions in training, practice and workplace culture.
- In-depth analysis of qualitative (interview) data complementing this survey is ongoing.
- Key goal: utilise project findings to develop a practical, reflective tool.

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