



The University of Melbourne

## Allison Milner

Social epidemiologist specialising in workplace mental health. Born in Melbourne, Australia, on May 1, 1983, she died of injuries in an accident in Melbourne on Aug 12, 2019, aged 36 years.

As a researcher committed to improving health services, especially mental health services, Allison Milner wanted the evidence she generated to inform policy and practice in areas related to employment, disability, and gender equality. Milner was Deputy Head of the Disability and Health Unit at the Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health (MSPGH) at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Although her social epidemiological research explored various communities, colleagues said Milner's studies of suicide among men in the construction industry was among her most impactful. "They were often groups who you wouldn't necessarily think of as being vulnerable populations", said Marie Bismark, Associate Professor and colleague of Milner's at the MSPGH. "But Allison was so driven by the evidence. She would look at suicide rates among men and think it was a problem that needed her attention, even if it didn't necessarily fit with stereotypes."

Milner's research helped in the development of a programme to address mental health by the charity MATES in Construction. Milner served on the board of MATES. Jorgen Gullestrup, MATES' CEO of Queensland and Northern Territory, said the loss of her input in the ongoing design and evaluation of the programme, "is something that never gets replaced. That combination of intellect and humour, but also sensitivity and respect for people".

As an undergraduate, Milner studied to be a psychologist, but had a preference for epidemiology and population health.

"She was much happier working in that big-picture arena", said Jane Pirkis, the Director of the Centre for Mental Health at MSPGH. Milner received a doctor of philosophy from the Griffith University's Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention in Brisbane and a masters of epidemiology from the University of Melbourne. After finishing her doctorate on the crosscultural links between globalisation and suicide, she held a research fellowship at the University of Melbourne and, in 2015, became the Deputy Director of the Work, Health and Wellbeing Unit at Deakin University in Melbourne. The next year she took up a position as senior lecturer at the MSPGH and in December, 2018, was elevated to Associate Professor and became Deputy Head of the Disability and Health Unit. Her colleagues said she was a tireless researcher. "She was hard to keep up with," Pirkis said. "She was prolific. She had a huge capacity for taking in information and synthesising it." Anne Kavanagh, the Chair of Disability and Health and the Head of the Disability and Health Unit at the MSPGH said Milner was always looking to identify opportunities to "shift the experience of any disadvantaged group. She cared deeply about mental health and making sure people looked after each other. And she became very focused on the workplace as a site for population-based interventions to improve mental health." As Pirkis explained: "One of the things in suicide prevention is there's a lot that we still don't know about what works and what doesn't work...She was bringing together evidence for particular types of interventions", including the benefits of different methods for remaining in contact with someone after they present at a hospital after a suicide attempt.

Anthony LaMontagne, Professor of Work, Health and Wellbeing at Deakin University, said Milner had already established herself as a global leader in the field. "Over the course of just 6 or 7 years of her work, she did more to link working conditions and suicidality than any other single author," he said. "It's a loss of a generation of public health research," Bismark said. "If you look at what she had achieved already and think if she had another three decades of work, the incredible difference she would have made in the world." Milner had also been widening her research into gender and gender equality. "Her rapid trajectory in the area demonstrates her agility in quickly grasping new concepts and her ability to exploit the rich benefits of cross-pollination of methods and concepts across areas", said Tania King, Senior Research Fellow in the Disability and Health Unit at MSPGH. Milner was beginning research on measurement of gender equality in Australia when she died.

Bismark said Milner was a role model for women in research. "It meant a lot to young women in the department to see the poise with which Allison combined being an amazing mother and being an amazing academic." Milner is survived by her husband, Rohan, and sons, Byron and Theo.

Andrew Green