

World Suicide Prevention Day 2008

Around one million people die each year by suicide

The focus of World Suicide Prevention Day this year is on suicide prevention by all, at all levels - personal, public and political. The 2008 theme, *"Think Globally, Plan Nationally, Act Locally"* encourages people worldwide to unite in commitment and action to promote understanding about suicide and ensure that they are prevented. The impact of suicide can be devastating for all concerned. On a personal level, friends and families require social support, on a national level governments need to recognize the causes of suicide and protect the most vulnerable groups in their communities. On a global scale, research and health organizations can identify global trends and encourage the sharing of information in effective prevention activities.

About one million people commit suicide each year. Every 40 seconds, the loss of a person who killed themselves shatters the lives of family and friends. For every person who completes a suicide, 20 or more may attempt suicide. For family and friends affected by suicide or attempted suicide, the emotional impact can last for many years.

World Suicide Prevention Day not only offers an opportunity to ensure that suicides are prevented, but also that people living with mental illness, in particular depression and alcohol use disorders, receive adequate treatment, that community-based care and close follow-up are available to people who attempt suicide, that access to common methods of suicides is restricted, and that media reports of suicides are more measured.

There is a growing awareness of suicide as a major public health problem, even though there is a taboo in many societies against discussing it openly. Worldwide, suicide rates have increased by 60% over the last 50 years, and the increase has been particularly marked in developing countries. Most suicides in the world occur in Asia, which is estimated to account for up to 60% of all suicides. **China, India and Japan** - because of their large populations - may account for up to 40% of all world suicides.

The World Health Organization (WHO) works with governments and other partners such as the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) to ensure that suicide is no longer stigmatized, criminalized or penalized. Suicide is a major preventable cause of premature death which is influenced by psycho-social, cultural and environmental risk factors which can be prevented through local, national and international responses which address these main risk factors. There is compelling evidence indicating that adequate prevention can reduce suicide rates.

WHO recently published a resource for media professionals to serve as a reference in preventing suicide. In addition, research into the complex causes and factors resulting in a higher incidence of suicide are communicated globally by WHO to help inform national governments. A recent example is the implementation of suicide-prevention projects in China and South-East Asia in early 2008. These projects focus around prevention of self-poisoning with pesticides, which accounts for 60% of suicides in many rural areas of China and South-East Asia.

WHO's role is to build political commitment and leadership to develop national responses to prevent suicide, strengthen national planning capacity to establish the core building blocks of such a national response, and build the national capacities to implement these responses.

If governments commit to defining national responses to prevent suicide, huge progress can be made. And by building networks and alliances like the projects in China and South-East Asia which support governments in planning and implementing their national responses, we will find that suicide is a largely preventable public health problem.

For further information, please contact:

Alexandra Fleischmann
Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse
WHO Geneva

Phone: +41 22 791 3444
E-mail: fleischmanna@who.int

Recent WHO publications on suicide:

"Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals"

"Preventing Suicide: How to Start a Survivors' Group"

"Suicide and Suicide Prevention in Asia"

http://www.who.int/mental_health/resources/suicide

WHO: http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide

IASP: <http://www.iasp.info>