

World Suicide Prevention Day 2009

Suicide prevention in different cultures

The theme of World Suicide Prevention Day, "*Suicide Prevention in Different Cultures*", highlights the fact that all cultures are affected by suicide, and strategies for prevention should take the cultural dimension into account.

Every year, almost 1 million people commit suicide. This is about 1.5% of all deaths, making suicide the 10th leading cause of death globally. Every 40 seconds another family loses a loved one to suicide.

While the risk factors for suicide are universal, their importance and nature differ across countries and cultures. Whereas there might be more focus on early identification and treatment of mental disorders in developed countries, restricting access to pesticides may have a more significant effect in agricultural communities in low- and middle income countries. Currently, WHO is undertaking demonstration projects for safer access to pesticides by safer storage and education in communities in China, India and Sri Lanka. Harmful use of alcohol is yet another example of a factor at play differentially in cultures and communities around the world.

Suicide is of major concern in Eastern Europe, where rates are up to almost 40 suicides per 100,000 people in some countries, such as Belarus, Lithuania, or the Russian Federation. Also, highly affected is Asia, mainly China, India, and Japan, where 30% of all suicides worldwide occur. In all regions, this poses a tragic loss of those in the most productive years of their life; in particular suicide is the main cause of death among young women in the Western Pacific Region and the second main cause of death among young men in the European Region. To increase attention on indigenous health issues, including suicide, WHO is planning to organize a UN interagency meeting in collaboration with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in Geneva in 2010, as it has been found that indigenous groups in many countries have much greater rates than the rest of the country's population; for example the Aborigines in Australia, the Maori in New Zealand and the Native Americans in Canada and the United States of America.

Suicide should not be seen as an inevitable cause of premature deaths throughout the world: World Suicide Prevention Day is aimed at spreading the message that suicide prevention is a realistic goal, and governments worldwide should work together to find solutions to this growing public health problem.

For further information, please contact:

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