

Statement

Facts about suicide

More than 55,000 suicides occur in the EU every year, the majority of which occurs in the context of a psychiatric disorder

Leipzig, Germany, Friday, 10th April 2015

The European Alliance Against Depression deeply regrets the tragic Germanwings crash that occurred in the French Alps and commiserates with the families and friends of the deceased. In this context, we consider it important to provide an update on the nature of Suicide and Depression and to express our concerns about the negative consequences of an increased stigma for patients with psychiatric disorders.

Suicidal behaviour and its association with psychiatric disorders

More than 55,000 people in the European Union die by suicide every year. The rate of attempted suicides is estimated to be ten times higher than that, which is a major public health concern. In most countries, the risk of suicide is highest among older men, and the risk of suicide attempts is more often associated with young women. More than 90% of all suicides and suicide attempts in Europe occur in the context of a psychiatric disorder, of which the majority are depressive disorders.

When suffering from depression, individuals perceive and describe their problems as augmented or magnified, and as being at the center of their lives. *“In the case of severe and so called “psychotic depression”, extreme anxiety about the future and feelings of guilt, together with inner tension, exhaustion, sleeping problems and hopelessness occurs, which can lead to suicidal thoughts and also suicidal behavior,”* explains Prof. Dr. Ulrich Hegerl, President of the European Alliance Against Depression.

Homicide-suicide

“In extremely rare and very severe depression, a so-called ‘homicide-suicide’ can occur. Individuals suffering from severe depression perceive the world through dark glasses, and as desperate and absolutely unbearable, thus they do not want to leave their relatives behind in this perceived terrible circumstance and take them to death,” says Prof. Hegerl. *“The fact that unknown persons, as in the case for this airplane crash, are being dragged into death is*

highly atypical for depression and is different from a homicide-suicide that occurs within depression,” explains Prof. Hegerl. “In general, depressed patients are very reliable and considerate individuals who in no case want to harm others”, he adds.

Evidence-based treatments for psychiatric disorders are crucial in order to prevent suicidal behaviour. *“The high rates of attempted and completed suicides are not acceptable, especially given the fact that the majority of people suffering from depression can be treated successfully, particularly with psychotherapy and antidepressants, and thus suicidal behaviour can be prevented,”* according to Prof. Dr. Ella Arensman, Vice-President of the EAAD and President of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP).

“Therefore, it should be a key priority of suicide prevention programmes to improve detection, diagnosis and systematic treatment allocation for people with depression. This also requires improved awareness and reduced stigma related to depression in occupational settings, including airline professionals,” as underlined by Prof. Arensman.

“The European Alliance Against Depression aims to improve care and optimise treatment for patients with depressive disorders and to prevent suicidal behaviour across Europe - we are working on this aim for more than 10 years together with a large group of experts and researchers in Europe. We hope that this tragic event is not contributing to a further stigmatization of people with psychiatric disorders, and depression in particular,” summarised Prof. Victor Pérez Sola, Treasurer of the EAAD and coordinator of the depression programme from CIBERSAM.

EAAD recommends caution for overreactions to this tragic event. Measures presently discussed such as an occupational ban for people with depression or reduced professional discretion of physicians, may lead to more tragic deaths because people with depression and other psychiatric disorders will be more reluctant to be open about mental health problems, and as a consequence will not seek help and will not receive treatment.

Further relevant information, and contact details for support services in different European countries are provided here:

www.ifightdepression.com

www.eaad.net

www.iasp.info

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