FROM THE PRESIDENT

IASP Suicide Mortality Database Project

Whenever people seek up-to-date information on suicide rates around the world, they usually first look to the mortality data bank of the World Health Organisation. WHO data is incredibly useful, but the WHO includes only mortality data provided by governments of member states. Several member states have not provided information for recent years and many countries do not send them information on suicide mortality at all. Even in cases where recent data are available locally, it may take several years before that data are sent by the government to WHO. This can sometimes be frustrating when looking for recent suicide data, and particularly when more up-to-date data are available locally within the countries. Individual researchers within a country often receive government reports on suicide data long before they are “officially” sent by the government to WHO. IASP has received many requests for data that are available, but not yet on the WHO database, or not available in a consistent format with standardized rates, by age and gender. For this reason, IASP has undertaken a project to make available comparable standardized suicide mortality data, categorized by sex and gender, on a yearly basis and for five year intervals, from countries who do not report data to WHO, and also when more recent data are available than that posted in the WHO data bank.

This ambitious project will depend upon IASP National Representatives, under the coordination of the Chair of National Representatives, Prof. T. Maniam, to obtain the most recent data on suicide mortality that is available in each country (number of suicide deaths by age and gender) and also to obtain statistics on the population of the country during the same years, by gender and age groups. IASP has developed a simple computer data entry file for use in this project. Danielle St-Laurent, the epidemiologist at the Quebec National Institute for Public Health who for many years has compiled the Quebec suicide data, has volunteered to process the data we receive and calculate standardized rates. These rates will be available on the IASP website and should provide an important complement to data available from WHO. We will try to be as all-inclusive as possible, citing sources and adding commentaries about data collection methods as well as discussions of reliability issues, when appropriate.

We encourage IASP members who have access to suicide mortality data in their countries to participate in this project. Comments and suggestions are very much appreciated.

Brian L. Mishara, Ph.D., President, IASP
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IASP Task Force on Elderly Suicide Prevention

Suicide is not only a youth problem. In fact, studies show that, in many countries, suicide rates among elderly persons are higher or as high as young people. However, suicide in old age is a very neglected area. Considering that the number and proportion of the senior population will increase significantly in the coming decades (not only in financially wealthy countries, but also in poorer countries), it is probable that the absolute number of suicides in this group will increase accordingly. During the IASP Congress in Durban, it was therefore proposed to create a Task Force on Elderly Suicide Prevention.

Goals

- To identify and report on prevention projects that focus on the elderly (aged 65+).
- To increase IASP’s involvement in elderly suicide prevention.
- To increase awareness and understanding about suicide in the elderly.

Chairpersons

- Sylvie Lapierre, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivieres, Canada.
- Annette Erlangsen, University of Aarhus, Denmark and University of Rochester, USA.
- Collaborators: the International Research Group on Suicide among the Elderly.

Planned activities

- Identification and description of prevention projects, which have the elderly population as a main target group.
- Identification of the limits and strengths of these projects.
- Organization of symposiums on suicide in older adults at IASP congresses.
- Development of a section on suicide in the elderly in IASP website to increase awareness of members about the need of this population.

Contact

If any of IASP’s members would like to contribute actively to this task force or are aware of prevention projects focusing on suicide in older adults, they are kindly asked to contact Sylvie Lapierre (Sylvie.Lapierre@uqtr.ca) or Annette Erlangsen (aer@nrcr.dk).
Second Asia Pacific Suicide Prevention Conference 2006

The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) was invited by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) to host the Second Asia Pacific Suicide Prevention Conference 2006.

The organizing committee, which was comprised of members from different departments, quickly went into full gear. We engaged CMA as our event organizer, and they proved to be an excellent partner. Dr Chia Boon Hock was our local suicidologist who gave us invaluable advice. IMH invited Social Service Training Institute (SSTI) and Singapore Psychiatric Association (SPA) to be our co-organizers. Lundbeck also came onboard early to launch their community project – Depnet Singapore for Depression website, in unison with our conference.

A very rich program was put together which included 12 main plenary speeches, 6 main symposiums, and 28 parallel sessions by our distinguished international, regional and local speakers. There were also 26 papers and 15 country presentations. Global, regional and local suicide trends were presented at the start, followed by more than 80 other topics on suicide and its prevention in the following days. Topics focusing on philosophy, sociology, and medico-legal issues were included. There were also several skill-based workshops.

The conference was fully subscribed and proceeded smoothly from 10th to 12th March 2006 at the Furama Riverfront Hotel. A third of our participants were from overseas – more than 25 countries were involved which was most heart-warming. Our local delegates included all the hospitals, different Ministries, schools, community Social Services, Singapore Armed Forces, Singapore Civil Defense Force, Singapore Police Force, Singapore Prison Service, and religious organizations as well.

The opening and closing ceremonies touched the hearts of most participants. Our Guest-of-Honor Ms. Yong Ying-I, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health, welcomed all participants with a very inspiring opening speech.

The event was well received by the media. They helped us reach the general public through newspaper, radio and television before and during our conference. A successful public forum attended by more than 300 people reflected this, and the awareness of suicide and its prevention in Singapore was further heightened.

Our pre- and post-conference workshops were also well received. The LivingWorks ASIST program taught useful and practical suicide first-aid skills; and Syngenta’s International Workshop on Secure Access discussed pesticide suicide in the world. MH Chief Executive Officer Mr Leong Yew Meng hosted the gala dinner held at the Asian Civilization Museum. All the local and foreign guests had a good evening of closer interaction.

The conference was a huge success. It brought the world and region to Singapore, and Singapore to the world; it also drew closer all of the organizations in Singapore taking care of people at risk. Institute of Mental Health is proud to have held this significant conference. Most importantly, it touched on this sensitive and important topic of suicide and its prevention. Future efforts and collaborations by all providers will be essential to our efforts to reduce suicide regionally and internationally.

Dr. Alex Su, Consultant Psychiatrist, Head of Emergency Service, Institute of Mental Health Organizing Chairman, Second Asia Pacific Suicide Prevention Conference 2006