The Postvention Stream at the 2013 IASP World Congress: The Way Ahead!

Karl Andriessen.

The XXVII IASP World Congress, 24-28 September 2013, in Oslo, Norway, was one of the best, if not the best IASP congress to date. It combined a perfect organization and warm hospitality, with a high quality of presentations from various parts in the world, dealing with multiple aspects of suicidology. The congress program included three optional tracks or streams, including a stream on suicide bereavement and postvention.

The Taskforce (TF) on Congress Participation, established within the Special Interest Group (SIG) on Suicide Bereavement and Postvention, aims to encourage presentations at IASP conferences that are relevant to the practice, research and theory of postvention. The activity of this TF aims to increase and sustain the visibility of postvention at the IASP Congresses. The close collaboration of the TF, chaired by John Peters (UK) and members Myfanwy Maple (Australia), Sally Spencer-Thomas (USA), and Karl Andriessen (Belgium), with the SIG and the Congress organizers resulted in a comprehensive postvention stream throughout the whole congress program.

Plenaries on Complicated Grief, and Knowledge Production

For the first time in the IASP history, the program included two plenary presentations on suicide bereavement and postvention. Katherine Shear (USA) presented the concept of complicated grief among suicide survivors, a chronic disabling condition recently included in the ICD-11 and DSM-5. In her presentation, Dr. Shear elaborated on the psychotherapeutic strategies and techniques used in the treatment of complicated grief, which was also the topic of her well-attended pre-congress workshop. The results of her research reveal promising effects of treatment of complicated grief. In the second plenary, Karl Andriessen (Belgium) introduced a few essential questions that continue to challenge the practice and research in suicide bereavement and postvention. He argued that it is necessary to study the knowledge production to better understand the status of the postvention research. To this aim, he presented the results of his study regarding suicide bereavement and postvention in the major international suicidology journals during the past forty years. He identified strengths as well as serious gaps in the postvention knowledge and research.

Studies on Survivorship and Support for the Bereaved

The postvention stream further included two research symposia, two parallel sessions with oral presentations, a workshop and two symposia organized in
collaboration with other SIG.

The two research symposia included presentations on suicide bereavement in families (D. Ratnaraja et al.), parents, (S. McDonnell et al.), clinicians (D. Castelli-Dransart et al.), and society (V. Postuvan). Other presenters focused on the provision of support for parents (W. Feigelman), support during the coronial process (M. Maple et al.), support through online memorialization (K. Krysinska et al.), the experience of after-death communication (S. Spencer-Thomas), as well as on the status of suicide bereavement research (M. Maple).

Two parallel sessions included presentations on survivorship among consultant psychiatrists (E. Kelleher et al.), general practitioners (M. Treven et al.), professional caregivers (Grad et al.), young people (W. Bartik), partners bereaved by suicide (E. Erlangsen et al.), and the experience of stigma among suicide survivors (E. Toffol et al.). Other presenters focused on the provision of support through community volunteers (S. McNally et al.), support in community settings (J.M. Mackenzie et al.), group therapy (M. Leonard et al.), Internet help seeking (A.S. Hagström) and online support possibilities (K. Krysinska et al.).

The TF facilitated a workshop to discuss ways to improve bereavement support. Collaboration between survivors and professionals (J. Peters) and formal and informal help-seeking (S. Mallon) were highlighted. In addition, lessons learned from a lifekeeper memory quilt project (A. Staines et al.) and guidelines to create and sustain a community support program in the USA (M. Koenig) and from the Australian Standby project (J. Fisher) were presented.

Collaborations with other Special Interest Groups

A symposium jointly organized with the SIG on Clustering and Contagion (Chair: E. Arensman) included presentations on the implications for responding and postvention of suicide contagion (J. Bell et al.), evaluation of community responses to suicide clusters (A. Beaurtrais), and the presentation of a guidance document on how to respond on suicide clusters (S. McCarthy).

The symposium of the SIG on Suicide and the Workplace (Chair: S. Spencer-Thomas) focused on postvention with a series of presentations related to the impact and resources for managers (L. Berman et al.), first responders (S. Spencer-Thomas), railway crew (C. Bardon et al.), psychiatrists (P. Thomyangkoon), and the presentation of guidelines for postvention in the workplace and the community (L. Berkowitz et al.).

Posters

A number of posters presented the work of survivor organizations in different countries, i.e., from Denmark (E. Fleischer et al.), Brazil (FC. Marquetti et al.), and Italy (E. Toffol et al.). Other posters presented studies on support for bereaved families (C. Genest et al.), complicated grief among suicide survivors (V. Klimaite et al.), and the experience of a suicide survivor (HR. Topp).

The Way Ahead

With a total of 41 presentations (7.7% of all congress papers) in the postvention stream throughout the congress program, the congress became a huge resource for people working in postvention, and a very rich floor to exchange experiences and research ideas. Given this success, the business meeting of the SIG wholeheartedly complimented John Peters (unfortunately, he was not able to attend the congress) and the TF members for their accomplishment. Not surprisingly the business meeting proposed to continue the work of this TF on Congress Participation, in order to prepare a postvention stream for the next IASP World Congress, to be held at Montréal, Canada, 16-20 June 2015. In addition, the TF would encourage the SIG members to present at other suicidology congresses such as the upcoming 15th ESSSB, in Tallinn, Estonia, 27-30 August 2014.

Call for participation

If you are interested to take part in the postvention stream at the next IASP World Congress, 16-20 June 2015, in Montréal, Canada (http://www.iasp2015.com); or if you are planning to present at the ESSSB, 27-30 August 2014, in Tallinn (http://esssb15.org) please e-mail:
- John Peters: john.peters@manchester.ac.uk
  Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, and University of Manchester, UK.
- Karl Andriessen: karl.andriessen@pandora.be
  University of Leuven, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Leuven, Belgium.
Dr. Kari Dyregrov is a senior researcher and the research leader of the Center for Crisis Psychology, Bergen, Norway. She is a sociologist and a physiotherapist by educational background, but also holds a degree in psychology. Since 1995 she has been conducting research in the field of grief reactions after traumatic bereavement, suicide, research ethics, social support, grief groups, and organization and strategies of psychosocial assistance in the communities. Also, for eight years, she has been a senior researcher in the field of suicidology at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Oslo, Norway. In 2012 she received professorial competency.

In her research Kari Dyregrov has, when relevant, always combined qualitative and quantitative methods trying to give a broad picture of the research issues. The last 18 years she has lead more than 20 different research projects in the field of suicidology and traumatic bereavement.

Dr. Dyregrov lectures a lot both in Norway and abroad and played an active part in writing up the Norwegian Guidelines for Suicide Postvention. Thus, care and support for bereaved after suicide and other traumatic deaths has stood close to her heart for many years. The title of her doctoral dissertation (dr. philos) *The loss of a child by suicide, SIDS and accidents: Consequences, needs and provisions of help* mirrors this.

Kari Dyregrov has “insider knowledge” from those bereaved by suicide and other traumatic deaths by means of extensive in-depth interviewing as well as being a Board Member of the Norwegian Organization for Suicide Survivors (LEVE) and the Norwegian SIDS and Stillbirth Society for many years. From 2001 she has been a Member of the International Suicide Postvention Task Force, and the Norwegian representative to IASP from 2010 to 2013. She played a central part in establishing LEVE, and in 2007 she received the Farberow Award for her work in the field.

Dr. Dyregrov is a reviewer for many journals dealing with death, trauma and suicide. She has more than a hundred publications about suicide and related topics and is the first author of *After the Suicide: Helping the Bereaved to Find a Path to Recovery,* and *Effective Grief and Bereavement Support.* She is also co-author of the Norwegian books *Crisis Psychology in Practice,* and *Children as Carers,* and the English book *Traumatic Bereavement* launched at the Oslo conference 2013. Being active in constructing a web-site for professionals about postvention and crisis intervention ([www.kriser.no](http://www.kriser.no)), and another about grief groups for bereaved ([www.sorggrupper.no](http://www.sorggrupper.no)) she has tried to make a difference for those who suffer traumatic bereavement.

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The Slovene center for Suicide Research has launched a new website that aims at understanding suicide: Živ? Živ! (zivziv.si) (lit. Alive? Alive!; in slovene the two words sound as appealing word-play and have a suggestive meaning).

**Short description:**
Alive? Alive! is a webpage designed as a station. We call it a web-station where mental health professionals, suicidologists and lay people stop-by and write about their experiences. The aim is to foster destigmatisation of mental health issues and in particular of suicide. We wish to speak up about suicide. 

Four main target groups are addressed on the webpage: 
1. Vulnerable groups, people in distress and with high suicide risk can find explanations about factors that contribute to suicidal behaviour and preventive measures to prevent it (category “Si v stiski?” [Are you in distress?]).
2. Gatekeepers can find information about how to notice suicidal ideations and how to help a suicidal person.
3. Suicide survivors are empowered by descriptions of bereavement process after suicide and after other traumatic deaths and other relevant information. They are also invited to collaborate with us in research and supportive interventions.
4. Media can use our reliable data on suicide and guidelines about responsible reporting on suicidal behaviour.

We wish that the targeted groups would get involved in the website and that they recognise their own reasons to visit the website. Information is available on how to seek help, where to find helplines and how to get involved in research and prevention programmes.

Web-station is a metaphor: suicidal behaviour can be seen as one of the stops in our life-journey. The playful Živ?Živ! name suggests that suicidal crisis or bereavement after suicide are a station – but one can move on from there. The logo of the site might remind you of the train-station sign. But, the red-white circle is also a signpost »markacija« which traditionally marks the right path in Slovene mountains. Živ?Živ! symbolises finding the right path.

Website is not aimed for the marketing purposes nor profitable activities. It has an international serial number ISSN.

We are looking forward to your ŽivŽiv visit. Even, if you don't follow Slovenian, the design speaks for itself.

Asist. Vita Poštuvan, psychologist  
Deputy head  
Slovene Center for Suicide Research  
Editor Živ? Živ! website  
[zivziv.si](http://zivziv.si)
“Survivor and Supporter”

My husband, Steve, and I are survivors...we lost our daughter, Ruthann, to suicide in April, 2007. Unlike many survivors we knew our daughter was suicidal from the age of 13 (her first attempt) until her success at age 47. She left two daughters who we treasure.

Our over 30 years of dealing with our daughter's depression, mental illness and suicide attempts gave us a unique view of the denial, fear, bias and misunderstanding of those who commit suicide, and those who deal with the aftermath by friends, family, church groups, co-workers and neighbours...in other words...the world.

Fortunately for us, we were directed to the SOS (Survivors of Suicide) group sponsored by EMPACT-SPC (Suicide Prevention Centre) by the police officer who came to see us following the discovery of our daughter in a hotel where she checked in and took the pills that ended her "pain".

SOS is the group that is led by volunteer facilitators, all of whom have first come to the group as we did...as survivors. This is the group that "gets it" and this is the group where one is able to "vent" feelings, fears, anger, guilt, frustration and loneliness in a place where confidentiality is maintained. What is said here...stays here.

And so the journey began. Step by step...from survivor to supporter.

Two years after our daughter took her final step, I applied for and was accepted for training as an EMPACT-SPC Group Facilitator...and was back as a co-facilitator for the same SOS group where my husband and I had first entered two years before.

As co-facilitator, it has been my role to establish communication, via my computer, with those who enter our group, whether they only attend one time or for many years. In this way, Survivors can stay connected and supported. Two years ago, I was instrumental in starting EMPACT-SPC’s on-line Quarterly newsletter which is sent to the Survivor community to keep them updated about support groups and events, and to keep them encouraged through inspirational stories and words of wisdom.

In our SOS group we have modelled the true spirit of community, holding pot luck dinners, baby showers, and birthday celebrations with group members; we have cried together, hugged each other, and have evolved into a family that understands

I believe that the SOS groups offer so much, to so many...a door that is always open. A survivor can walk through that door whenever they want or need to, and most survivors do just that. At some point they get busy again with the demands of life, but know that SOS is always available when they have a meltdown or when they experience difficult times. SOS is a place of compassion and understanding. And, for me, it is a place that offers solace, a place that has enabled us to help others work through pain and make sense of personal tragedy.

Steve and I will never forget our love or loss....but we rejoin life.

Beverly and Steve Weckstein
Scottsdale, Arizona
Developments since Oslo Congress.

Postvention SIG Taskforce on Suicide Bereavement and Postvention Research

Following discussions at the IASP World Congress in Oslo, the Bereavement and Postvention SIG has established a Taskforce on suicide bereavement and postvention research. The purpose of this taskforce is to establish an international research agenda for suicide bereavement and postvention for the next decade. The new taskforce is chaired by Dr Myfanwy Maple (Australia) with Dr Julie Cerel (United States) as co-chair.

Background

Suicide bereavement and postvention research has contributed to the understanding of suicide and suicidal behaviours for over four decades, with the American suicidologist Edwin Shneidman coining the term ‘postvention’ in the late 1960’s through detailing the importance of care for the bereaved in prevention in future generations. During the past decades there has been growing activity in the bereavement and postvention field. Recent research publications continue to demonstrate the need to better understand the needs of those bereaved, as well as those more distantly connected, how best to support them, as well as the important interplay between being exposed to a suicide death and the increased risk for suicide behaviours in those affected.

Recent increase in interest in the field of postvention and suicide bereavement has resulted in increased research outputs. It is therefore timely for IASP to provide a research agenda to encourage researchers to work toward answering the ‘big questions’ in this field, to encourage collaboration (especially internationally) and to support research outputs.

Over the coming 18 months, members of the taskforce will map the existing bereavement and postvention research and will be asking those currently researching in this field to participate in a short online survey to map the research questions currently being investigated, but not yet published. The outcomes of this activity will be offered for presentation at the next IASP global congress in Montreal.

If you would like to be involved, or to find out more information, please contact Myfanwy Maple on m.maple@une.edu.au

• Development of discussion forum for Bereavement and Postvention Special Interest Group (SIG)

The Chairpersons of the Special Interest Group are currently in the process of establishing through the IASP website a discussion forum for members of the SIG. The forum has been created and we are now registering the various administrators who will look after this on behalf of us all in the Postvention field. This is an exciting development and will provide a platform for discussion, debate and access to one another across the globe. We will update you further when this is up and running.

• Postvention Congress Task Force (TF)

The postvention congress Task Force under the chairmanship of Mr John Peters from the UK are continuing to look at developing the postvention stream for the next IASP congress to be held in Montreal in 2015 and have already been in contact with the congress organisers. This committee who ensured that we had such a successful postvention stream during the event in Oslo will undoubtedly once again provide us with additional exposure during the Montreal congress. All of us in the postvention field need to begin thinking of ideas for inclusion in Montreal and linking with John and his team. John’s e-mail address is john.peters@manchester.ac.uk
The Development of a Suicide Bereavement Research Unit in the UK.

‘Do not worry if you have built your castles in the air. They are where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.’

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

The Centre for Mental Health and Risk at the University of Manchester, England is currently in the early stages of developing the first suicide bereavement research unit in the UK. This is an innovative, ambitious but achievable task which is being lead by Dr. Sharon McDonnell who specialises in postvention research. The aim is to develop a research unit that focuses on the needs of those bereaved or affected by suicide. Attention will be paid to children; adults; the offender pathway; and those responsible for their care.

Leading this initiative will involve a four pronged approach which will involve networking and collaborating with key stakeholders, generating funding, holding an annual suicide bereavement conference and provide education and training in this field. Sharon has recently received a Winston Churchill Travel fellowship to visit Australia and New Zealand for six weeks to learn how those bereaved by suicide are cared for and supported in these countries. You can follow Sharon’s progress during her endeavours on either twitter or on the Centre for Mental Health and Risk website which are listed below.

http://www.bbmh.manchester.ac.uk/cmhr/
twitter: @SJMcDonn
Upcoming Events

The 6th Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the IASP
Suicide Prevention - a journey through Asia and the Pacific Islands
Un voyage à travers l'Asie et les îles de l'Ocean Pacifique
Tahiti, French Polynesia

The 6th Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) aims to provide participants with an update on suicide research and prevention, locally and internationally. It will present the latest knowledge in the area, and will provide advice on how to adapt evidence-based research into suicide prevention activities.

The conference is being organized by SOS Suicide and IASP, with support from the French Polynesian and French Governments, and co-sponsorship by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific. The conference will strengthen regional cooperation to promote a better understanding of suicide and its prevention, and to foster good policy and practice in the region.

27-30 August, 2014
15th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour
Suicide prevention is mental health promotion
Tallinn, Estonia

The ESSSB is a bi-annual event, where people acting in the field of suicide research and prevention - researchers, clinicians, volunteers - can meet, share experiences and present recent achievements in order to save lives all over the world. The ESSSB offers not only a high-level scientific programme with plenary lectures, parallel sessions, workshops and posters, but also social events that connect conference participants in an informal way. The slogan of the ESSSB15 - "Suicide prevention is mental health promotion" - emphasizes an integrated and hopeful approach to suicide prevention. The ESSSB15 will be held in the vibrant Nordic city of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Conference organizers are the Estonian-Swedish Mental Health and Suicidology Institute (ERSI, www.suicidology.ee).

16-20 June, 2015
XXVIII IASP World Congress
New Technologies and New Discoveries in Suicide Prevention
Montréal, Québec, Canada

The 28th World Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention, in collaboration with the Quebec Suicide Prevention Association, the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention and Suicide Action Montreal, will be held from June 16-20, 2015 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The congress theme is: New Technologies and New Discoveries in Suicide Prevention. For further information, please click here to contact Professor Brian Mishara.
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