

Suicide Among Older Adults

Creating *Hope* Through *Action*



BACKGROUND

There are many risk factors for suicidal behavior in older adults, even if the pathway to suicide is unique for each individual. These risk factors include depression, social disconnection and loneliness, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, the negative impact on quality of life of physical and functional impairment, perceived burdensomeness, as well as stressful life events, such as bereavement and transition to residential care. However, the main risk factor is distress. Wishes to die should be seriously addressed by all care providers, without presuming that suicide is a rational act in old age. It should be noted that suicidal ideations in older adults do not necessarily appear after a specific event, but are rather associated with an accumulation of negative and difficult experiences over the course of life.

Suicide prevention interventions could work to reduce ageism, since the internalization by older adults of the negative perceptions about ageing, conveyed by society and the media, increase feelings that their life doesn't matter and is no longer worth living. Therefore, interventions are needed to improve older adults' quality of life, especially through the development of social skills that foster significant human contacts.

HOW CAN WE DO MORE?

As in other age groups, older adults need to be useful to their community, and that others rely on them, care about them, and are interested in what they think/want. They need to feel that they matter to others.

YOU CAN ALSO HELP CREATE HOPE THROUGH ACTION.

YOU CAN *be the light* *

STATISTICS

Suicidal behavior in older adults is a major public health issue. Although suicide attempts are more frequent among adolescents and young adults, older adults show the highest suicide rate in almost all countries. Suicidal behaviors and suicidal ideations can affect any older adults.



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The suicide rate increases relative with age and the highest rate is found among people older than 65.



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TAKE ACTION

- * Consider older adults' wish for death and wish to die seriously.
- * To detect older adults at risk for suicide, give rigorous attention to the stress produced by chronic illnesses and functional disability, to the impact of physical symptoms on the quality of life, to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and thoughts that they don't matter to others, as well as perceived burdensomeness.
- * Refer older adults to community resources that can help them improve the quality of their life and their well-being, and incidentally, restore the desire to live.
- * As in other age groups, suicide in older adults is rarely rational, but related to significant distress.
- * Do not be afraid to speak to older adults about death and dying. Do also not be afraid to ask about suicide thoughts.

RESOURCES

There are some interesting information on the web about suicide among older adults, such as:

- * [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
- * [Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health](#)
- * [Suicide prevention among older adults. A guide for family members](#)

STATISTICS

In 2019, the world suicide rate for people aged 70 and over was 24.5 per 100,000 population, while it was 9.4 for all age groups. Among older adults, the suicide rate increases with age. Suicide rates are particularly high among older men.



10 September is World Suicide Prevention Day (#WSPD). 'Creating Hope Through Action' aims to inspire confidence in all of us; that our actions may provide hope for those that are struggling.

