

Befrienders India

(National Association of Suicide Prevention Centres in India)

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PRESS RELEASE

10th September 2007 – WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

In India Every 5 minutes a person commits suicide . Suicide Prevention across the Life Span

World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10 is an annual event sponsored by the International Association for Suicide Prevention, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation. This year the theme of World Suicide Prevention Day is “Suicide Prevention across the Life Span”. This theme has been adopted to emphasise the fact that suicide occurs in all ages and suicide prevention and intervention strategies may be adapted to meet the needs of different age groups.

There is a common misperception that suicide occurs mostly amongst the young. This belief has its origins in research in the mid-1980s which showed that suicide had increased dramatically in young males in many countries. This trend focused attention on suicide as a major social issue for young people and led to an extensive focus on suicide research and prevention amongst young people.

While this focus was justified and led to much useful research and the development of appropriate interventions, it has tended to obscure the fact that suicide occurs across the lifespan. In almost all countries the majority of suicides, every year, occur not in young people, but in adults and older adults. Consequently, this year's theme for World Suicide Prevention Day is that suicide occurs across the lifespan and we must invest in suicide prevention programmes which address suicide in people of all ages.

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR: THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Each year approximately one million people die by suicide worldwide. Suicide is a major public health problem in many countries and accounts for nearly 3% of all world deaths.

In very young adolescents (under age 15) suicide is the leading cause of death in China, Sweden, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

In teenagers and young adults aged 15-24 suicide is a leading cause of death in many countries.

In adults, suicide is a leading cause of death, accounting for more deaths than all wars and homicides combined.

In most countries, the risk of suicide increases with increasing age. In many countries suicide rates are highest amongst the very old, aged 85 and older.

However, deaths from suicide are only one part of the problem. Attempted suicide is conservatively estimated to be 10 to 20 times more frequent than suicide, especially in younger women. While suicide attempts may vary in intent and medical severity, all attempts are indications of severe distress, unhappiness and/or mental illness.

Suicide and suicide attempts have a profound impact on family and friends and are the source of much distress and suffering. For individuals bereaved by suicide the emotional impact may last for many years, and for families the consequences may extend for generations.

The economic costs of suicide to society are substantial, estimated to be in the billions of dollars, and reflect the economic potential of years of life lost, the medical and treatment costs of suicide attempts, and the burden of care and suffering of families and friends of those who die by suicide and those who engage in various forms of suicidal behaviour.

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN

Fortunately, suicide is not an inevitable burden that must be accepted by society. There are many ways in which suicide can be prevented. There is a great need for effective, coordinated and comprehensive suicide preventive initiatives throughout the world if we are to reduce the enormous numbers of completed suicides, suicide attempts and problems related to suicide and self-destructive behaviours.

Effective suicide prevention calls for an innovative, comprehensive multisectorial approach, including both health and non-health sectors, including education, labour, police, justice, religion, law, politics and the media.

More than 1 million people commit suicide in a year around the world and for every suicide; there are approximately 20 attempted suicides. There are also many others who may not be suicidal, but urgently need access to appropriate emotional support services.

In India More than one lakh persons (1,13,697) lost their lives by committing suicide during the year 2004. I.e. every 5 minutes a person commits suicide in India This showed a marginal increase over the previous year's figure (1,10,851) by 2.6 per cent. The number of suicides in the country during the decade (1994 – 2004) has recorded an increase of 27.5 per cent (from 89,195 in 1994 to 1,13,697 in 2004). The population has increased by 20.6 per cent during the decade and the rate of suicides has increased by 6.1 per cent. The rate of suicides has declined continually during past 5 years from 11.2 in 1999 to 10.4 in 2003, but it has increased slightly to 10.5 in the year 2004.

Incidence and Percentage Share of Suicides in States/UTs

Maharashtra has reported the highest number of suicides (14,729) accounting for 13.0 percent followed by Andhra Pradesh (13,526) accounting for 11.9 per cent. The other States which have reported higher number of suicides during the year were West Bengal (13,424), Tamil Nadu (12,839) and Karnataka (11,937) accounting for 11.8 per cent, 11.3 per cent and 10.5 per cent respectively. These 5 States together accounted for 58.4 per cent of the total suicides reported in the country. Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state (16.3% share of population) has reported comparatively lower percentage of suicidal deaths, accounting for only 3.2 per cent of the total suicides reported in the country.

On the contrary, 34 mega cities accounted for 10.3 per cent of the total suicides in the country. The States and UTs which have reported significant increase in Suicides in 2004 over 2003 were Manipur (an increase of 57.7%) followed by Jharkhand (53.3%), Nagaland (40.9%), Meghalaya (34.1%), Andhra Pradesh (18.6%), Mizoram (15.4%) and Chhattisgarh (14.7%) as compared to national average increase of only 2.6%

Rate of Suicides – Trends in States/UTs

Rate of suicides, i.e., the number of suicides per one lakh of population, has been widely accepted as a standard yardstick. The All India rate of suicides was 10.6 during the year as compared to 10.4 during 2003. Pondicherry reported the highest rate of suicide (53.6) followed by Andaman & Nicobar Islands (32.7) Kerala (27.8), Tripura (23.4) and Goa (22.0).

Causes of Suicides

'Illness' and 'Family Problems' accounting for nearly 22 per cent each, were the major causes of suicides among the specified causes.

It is observed that social and economic causes have led most of the males to commit suicides whereas emotional and personal causes have mainly driven females to end their lives. Youths (15-29 years) and middle-aged people (30-44 years) were the prime groups taking recourse to the path of suicides.

Among the specified causes, 'Failure in Examination' (456), 'Family Problems' (386) and 'Illness' (346) were the main cause of suicides among children (2,913). Nearly 40.1 (3697 out of 9213) per cent of suicides due to 'Illness' were committed by Senior citizens (above 60 years & above) Senior citizens have accounted for 8.1 percent of the total victims. It is observed that 19.7 per cent (573 out of (2,913) of children (upto 14 years) who committed suicides belonged to West Bengal. 19.0 per cent (1,749 out of 9,213) senior citizens (above 60 years) belonged to Kerala.

Housewives (23,170) accounted for 56.4 percent of the total female victims which are nearly 36.0 per cent of total victims committing suicides.

Self employed category accounted for 40.6% of victims.

Suicides in Cities

The four Metropolitan Cities—Bangalore (1,528), Chennai (1,196), Mumbai (1106) and Delhi (967) have reported higher number of Suicides. These four cities together have reported 41% of the total suicides reported from 34 mega cities.

Suicide - The Size of the problem

Every 40 seconds a person commits suicide in the world.

Every 3 seconds a person attempts to die.

Suicide is one of the top three causes of death among the young in the age group of 15 – 35 years.

Each suicide has a serious impact on at least 6 other people.

The psychological, social and financial impact of suicide on the family and the society is immeasurable.¹

Suicide is a complex problem for which there is no one cause. There is no single reason why a person commits suicide. Suicide results due to a complex interaction of biological, genetic, psychological, social, cultural and environmental factors.

It is also difficult to explain why certain people take this decision while others in a similar or even worse situation do not. However, most suicides can be prevented.

Suicide is now a major public health issue in all countries. Empowering volunteers in identifying, assessing, managing and offering emotional support to the suicidal person in the community is a very important step in Suicide Prevention.

Suicide is a form of communication which expresses that those persons who attempt to commit suicide feel lonely, depressed and that life is not worth living. Unfortunately, this communication is not listened to by many.

Emotional support offered with warmth and understanding at the time of crisis might avert the thought of suicide. To provide this unconditional timely support through the use of volunteer befriending, Befrienders International was established in 1974. Initially started as The Samaritans Movement in the year 1953 to serve depressed and suicidal people through volunteer befriending in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, it was subsequently expanded across other countries through Befrienders International there are currently over 350 centres affiliated to Befrienders International worldwide in around 45 countries with a work force consisting of around 40,000 volunteers providing care and support to the depressed and suicidal people.

Recognising this need in India to help people from committing suicide Befrienders India (The National Association of Suicide Prevention centres in India) has helped people open suicide prevention centres across the country from the year 1992 till now.

Suicide is considered as a cry for help and people who are feeling suicidal are always caught in a conflict between the wish to live and the urge to die. People who commit suicide take this extreme step only because they are confused and not able to take any other decision and they are forced to take this decision. Befrienders India coordinates the activities of national help lines that work towards prevention of suicides. Befrienders India was registered in November 1992 bringing together all the then existing centres. There are currently 9 centres spread around India in Chennai, Ahmedabad, Kolkotta, Kochi, Mumbai and Navi Mumbai, New Delhi, Pondicherry and Secunderabad. All these centres offer volunteer befriending through personal telephonic/post and email interaction.

The aim of Befrienders India is to spread awareness about suicide and the ways to prevent it. Befrienders India through its centres has been able to reach out to more than 50000 people in a year and offer emotional support to the depressed, desperate and the suicidal.

More suicides can be prevented if there is somebody to understand, respect and accept people as they are. Taking this into consideration suicide prevention centres in India offer emotional support to the suicidal by listening to their problems and also offer them total confidentiality. These suicide prevention centres are run by trained volunteers and the volunteers are from different walks of life.

WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY ACTIVITIES: ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The theme of World Suicide Prevention Day 2007, "Suicide Prevention across the Life Span", is an opportunity for researchers, clinicians, practitioners, community and voluntary organizations to disseminate information about the nature of suicidal behaviour in different age groups, and the most effective approaches to preventing suicide. Those who work in all areas of suicide prevention can use the day to highlight activities which increase public understanding and awareness of suicide as a preventable public health problem across the lifespan.

On World Suicide Prevention Day a range of activities has been taken to highlight this year's theme. Initiatives which actively engage, educate and involve people, and encourage participation and personal contact, will play an important role in helping people learn and absorb new information.

Befrienders India supports World Suicide Prevention Day through its vision for a society where less people die by suicide. And its beliefs are that being confidentially listened to and accepted without prejudice can alleviate despair and suicidal feelings. Integral to this is the Befrienders Worldwide website – being updated in time for World Suicide Prevention Day that lists helplines around the world and information on suicide in 14 languages. The site - www.befrienders.org - attracts 60,000 visitors a month.

Befrienders India centers are linking any local initiatives or events they are holding around September 10th to World Suicide Prevention Day. Some have chosen to hold their own local media conferences linked with other agencies involved in the issue of suicide reduction, some are holding suicide awareness programme, seminars, rallies, distributing pamphlets, conducting workshops for media etc while others are holding vigils.

Befrienders Worldwide branches have also chosen to mark World Suicide Prevention Day.

Suicide estimates suggest fatalities worldwide could rise to 1.5 million by 2020. Suicide is a largely preventable public health problem, causing almost half of all violent deaths as well as economic costs in the billions of dollars, says the WHO. In its fifth successful year, World Suicide Prevention Day, a collaboration between the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) and the WHO is being held to focus attention and call for global action –

Suicide rates tend to increase with age, but there has recently been an alarming increase in suicidal behaviours amongst young people aged 15 to 45 years old, nation wide. In the age group of 15 to 29 years among women and in men in the age group of 30 to 45 years the number of suicides is more. More men (64%) commit suicide although in most places more women than men attempt suicide.

Volunteer centres find much in common, with people's issues including relationships, bereavement, money problems, depression and general health worries - whether they are farmers in a poor district in Maharashtra where crops have failed, or students in Chennai or Kolkotta under pressure to succeed. Volunteers around India work in providing emotional support to people in emotional crisis around the country. This group of people in emotional need is recognised by the WHO as increasing in size and needing improved responses.

We invite all those with an interest in suicide prevention – the public, organisations, communities, researchers, clinicians, practitioners, politicians and policy makers, volunteers, those bereaved by suicide and interested groups and individuals - to join with us on World Suicide Prevention Day in creating awareness about preventing suicide for people of all ages.

For Befrienders India

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Notes to editors

Befrienders India is a registered society, founded in 1992, which offers emotional support to anyone in emotional distress through its centers in India. The centers are run entirely by volunteers and the services are totally free. Befrienders India's vision is for a society where fewer people die by suicide because people are able to share feelings of emotional distress openly without fear of being judged. It believes that offering people the opportunity to be listened to in confidence, and accepted without prejudice, can alleviate despair and suicidal feelings. It is the aim of Befrienders India to make emotional health a mainstream issue. The service is offered by 500 trained volunteers and is entirely dependent on voluntary support.

B E F R I E N D E R S I N D I A C E N T R E S (Caring for the Depressed, Desperate and the Suicidal)

President	Sumaitri, New Delhi	011 23389090	Daily	02 pm – 10 pm
Farrokh Jijina	Lifeline, Kolkatta	033 24745886	Daily	10 am – 07 pm
Samaritans Helpline-Mumbai	Samaritans, Mumbai	022 23074351	Weekdays	03 pm – 09 pm
			Weekends	10 am – 09 pm
	Aasra, Navi Mumbai	022 27546669	Daily	03 pm – 09 pm
Secretary	Saath, Ahmedabad	079 26305544	Daily	01 pm – 07 pm
P.V. Sankaranarayanan	Sneha, Chennai	044 24640050	Daily	24 Hours
Sneha - Chennai.	Maitreyi, Pondicherry	0423 2339999	Daily	02 pm – 08 pm
	Roshni, Secunderabad	040 66202000	Daily	11 am – 09 pm
	Maithri – Kochi	0484 2396272	Daily	10 am – 08 pm