



## ***Family Digest 58***

***September 2023***

### **#WorldSuicidePreventionDay**

World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) is observed on 10<sup>th</sup> September every year as a way of focusing attention on the problems of suicide worldwide and to express commitment and action to prevent suicides. WSPD was first launched in 2003 by the International Association for Suicide Prevention, with the endorsement of the World Health Organization (WHO). It promotes understanding of the issue, reducing stigma, and raising awareness among organizations, governments, and the public that suicides are preventable. *'Creating Hope Through Action'* is the triennial theme for WSPD from 2021-2023, and reflects the need for collective action to address this urgent public health issue.

The whole month of September each year has been designated as a way of focusing attention on the problems of suicide worldwide, providing "a dedicated time for people, organizations, and communities to join their voices and share that there is hope, help is available, and healing is possible".<sup>1</sup> More than 700 000 people die due to suicide every year, which is roughly one death every 40 seconds. Furthermore, for every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide, and a prior suicide attempt is an important risk factor for suicide in the general population. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds, and 77 per cent of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries. Ingestion of pesticide, hanging and firearms are among the most common methods of suicide globally.<sup>2</sup>

The suicide rate in Africa is the highest in the world, estimated at 11.2 per 100 000 population. Research has found that, with an estimated 87.5 suicides per 100 000 deaths, Lesotho has the highest suicide rate in the world.<sup>3</sup> From the Global Health Estimates report, it is evident that South Africa has the third-highest suicide rate out of all African countries, at 23.5 per 100 000 population, while suicide attempts, suicidal ideation, and self-harm are major public health concerns.<sup>4</sup>

A South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP) report found that of the 13 774 suicides reported in South Africa, 10 861 were men whilst 2 913 were women – translating to a rate of 37.6 per 100 000 for men and 9.8 per 100 000 for women.<sup>5</sup> During Men's Health Month in June the SASOP urged men to speak up before it is too late, and to break the stigma that it is 'unmanly' and a sign of weakness for men to reach out for help. "Men are five times more likely to die by suicide than women and often use more aggressive methods. Although surveys reveal that women are diagnosed more than men with mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, men don't speak about their feelings until it is too late."<sup>6</sup> The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) reports that in South Africa 23 suicides a day are recorded, as well as 230 serious attempts.<sup>7</sup>

While many suicides happen impulsively in moments of crisis with a breakdown in the ability to deal with life stresses, such as financial problems, relationship break-up or chronic pain and illness, others are planned after a prolonged period of suicide ideation. In addition, experiencing conflict, disaster, violence, abuse, loss, together with a sense of isolation, are strongly associated with suicidal behaviour. Suicide rates are also high amongst vulnerable groups who experience discrimination, such as refugees and migrants; indigenous peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) persons; and prisoners.<sup>8</sup>

The incidence of suicide among adolescents and young people is of particular concern. Recently, Gauteng Education MEC Matome Chiloane expressed sadness over the death by suicide of two learners

in Ekurhuleni in separate incidents. In the first incident, a Grade 12 student from Nigel High School died by suicide after allegedly taking poison at her home on 29<sup>th</sup> June, while a Grade 8 learner from Geluksdal Secondary School also consumed poison at her home, on 4<sup>th</sup> July.<sup>9</sup> This psycho-social stage of emotional development is characterized by impulsive action, lack of perspective and often difficulty in understanding consequences. Bullying is also a significant factor in teen suicide

The non-profit organisation Gift of the Givers has noted that poverty-linked suicides are on the rise in the Eastern Cape.<sup>10</sup> This follows an incident in Butterworth where a mother and her three children were found dead in their home. Last year in the Butterworth area, nine children in one month died of severe food insecurity.<sup>11</sup>

Monitoring of suicide mortality data can be used as a surveillance tool to identify the mental health needs of a population and to target appropriate interventions.<sup>12</sup> Suicide is the tragic product of a complex interplay of psycho-social and socio-economic factors. It is against the spirit of Ubuntu. No one should experience the alienation, desperation and loneliness which leads to the path of suicide.

The following links provide more information and analysis.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>

<https://save.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>

<https://www.safmh.org/world-suicide-prevention-day-2022/>

[https://files.aho.afro.who.int/afahobckpcontainer/production/files/iAHO\\_Suicide\\_Regional\\_Fact\\_sheet\\_August2022.pdf](https://files.aho.afro.who.int/afahobckpcontainer/production/files/iAHO_Suicide_Regional_Fact_sheet_August2022.pdf)

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/research-finds-that-lesotho-has-the-highest-suicide-rate-in-the-world-20230605>

[https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1904&Itemid=151](https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1904&Itemid=151)

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/half-a-cabbage-is-a-meal-for-seven-people-as-hunger-grips-the-eastern-cape/>

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/basics/awarenessmonth.html>

<https://www.sasop.co.za/mens-health>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/basics/awarenessmonth.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/research-finds-that-lesotho-has-the-highest-suicide-rate-in-the-world-20230605>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.safmh.org/world-suicide-prevention-day-2022/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sasop.co.za/mens-health>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sasop.co.za/mens-health>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1904&Itemid=151](https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1904&Itemid=151)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/two-ekurhuleni-high-schoolgirls-die-by-suicide-after-drinking-poison-621b3003-65f8-482b-8c59-1676ef0d255d>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/half-a-cabbage-is-a-meal-for-seven-people-as-hunger-grips-the-eastern-cape/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/half-a-cabbage-is-a-meal-for-seven-people-as-hunger-grips-the-eastern-cape/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7142470/>