

Navigating the Darkness: A Roadmap to Suicide Prevention

Article by Acharya V Venkat

Suicide is a global public health crisis that takes lives without discrimination. World Suicide Prevention Day, observed on September 10th, aims to create awareness about the scale of the problem and the ways to prevent it. On this day, individuals, communities, and organizations worldwide come together to promote understanding about suicide and highlight effective prevention strategies. This article will explore current trends, a WHO report on suicide, India's position, the main causes of suicide, prevention measures, necessary steps, and a one-year action plan while providing an analysis of age groups most affected.

Current Trends:

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one person dies by suicide every 40 seconds, making it a leading cause of death globally. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues worldwide, with an increase in reported cases of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Technological advances have also enabled online platforms and social media to both positively and negatively influence suicide rates. While they offer support and connection for some, they can also be a source of cyberbullying, social isolation, and self-harm content for others.

WHO Report:

The WHO's comprehensive report on suicide showcases global trends and prevention strategies. It highlights that 79% of suicides occur in low and middle-income countries, yet these countries often have fewer resources to address the issue. It also reveals that men are more likely to die by suicide than women, but women are more likely to attempt suicide. The report emphasizes the importance of comprehensive national strategies for suicide prevention, including restricting access to means of suicide, promoting responsible media reporting, implementing school-based interventions, and providing support for those at risk.

India's Position:

India has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, accounting for over a third of global female suicides and a quarter of male suicides. Young adults and the elderly are particularly vulnerable groups. Several factors contribute to this high rate, including societal pressures, family expectations, financial stress, and lack of mental health services. The Indian government has taken steps to address this issue by decriminalizing suicide and increasing funding for mental health services. However, much work remains to be done.

Main Causes:

The causes of suicide are multifaceted and vary from person to person. Common factors include:

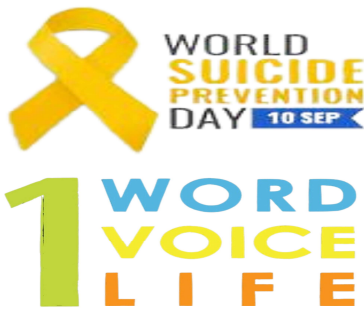
Mental Health Disorders: Conditions such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia increase the risk of suicide.

Substance Abuse: Abuse of alcohol, drugs, or other substances can lead to feelings of despair and suicidal thoughts.

Social Isolation: Lack of social support and feelings of loneliness contribute to suicidal ideation.



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Traumatic Events:

Experiences such as abuse, violence, or loss of a loved one can trigger suicidal thoughts.

Economic Stress:

Financial difficulties and unemployment are significant stressors that can lead to suicide.

How to Prevent:

Prevention is crucial to combat the rise of suicide rates globally. Strategies include:

Raising Awareness: Promote mental health awareness and educate the public about the signs of suicide and how to help.

Encouraging Help-Seeking: Encourage individuals to seek help from friends, family, or professionals when struggling with mental health issues.

Improving Mental Health Services:

Increase access to mental health services and ensure they are affordable and culturally appropriate.

Providing Support:

Offer support to those at risk, including individuals with a history of self-harm, mental health disorders, or a family history of suicide.

Promoting Responsible Media Reporting:

Media should report responsibly on suicide to avoid sensationalism and contagion.

Necessary Steps:

Governments, communities, and individuals must take proactive steps to prevent suicide:

Develop and Implement National Strategies:

Comprehensive national strategies for suicide prevention should be developed and implemented, including policies, funding, and resources.

Train Health Professionals:

Provide training to healthcare professionals to identify and support individuals at risk of suicide.

Promote Mental Health in Schools:

Implement school-based interventions to promote mental health and prevent bullying.

Action Plan for Next 1 Year:

Establish a National Suicide Prevention Task Force: Create a task force with representatives from various sectors, including government, healthcare, education, and the community, to coordinate and implement suicide prevention efforts.

Increase Access to Mental Health Services: Expand mental health services, including crisis helplines, counseling centers, and online support platforms.

Support High-Risk Groups: Provide targeted support to high-risk groups, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, refugees, and those with a history of self-harm or mental health disorders.

Implement Public Awareness Campaigns: Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the signs of suicide and how to help.

Promote Mental Health in Schools: Implement mental health education in schools to promote emotional well-being and resilience.

Monitor and Evaluate Efforts: Regularly monitor and evaluate suicide prevention efforts to ensure their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

Analysis of Age Groups

Suicide affects all age groups, but some are more vulnerable than others:

Adolescents and Young Adults: This group faces significant pressures, including academic stress, social media influence, and identity formation. They also have a higher rate of mental health disorders and substance abuse.

Middle-Aged Adults: This group faces challenges such as economic stress, relationship issues, and the burden of caring for both children and aging parents.

Older Adults: This group is at risk due to social isolation, physical health issues, and the loss of loved ones.

Age Group-wise Risks and Causes

Adolescents (10-19 years): Risks: Bullying, academic stress, family conflicts, substance abuse, and exposure to self-harm content on social media. Causes: Lack of coping mechanisms, peer pressure, hormonal changes, and the onset of mental health disorders.

Young Adults (20-34 years): Risks: Relationship issues, career pressures, financial stress, and substance abuse. Causes: Unrealistic expectations, social isolation, and the struggle to establish a stable life.

Middle-Aged Adults (35-64 years): Risks: Financial stress, marital problems, caregiving responsibilities, and chronic health issues. Causes: Feeling of unfulfilled ambitions, midlife crisis, and the burden of caring for aging parents and children.

Older Adults (65+ years): Risks: Chronic health issues, loss of loved ones, social isolation, and feelings of being a burden. Causes: Decline in physical health, lack of social support, and the struggle to find purpose post-retirement.

Global and Indian Data:

Global Data: According to the World Health Organization, close to 800,000 people die by suicide every year, which equates to one person every 40 seconds. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds globally. 79% of suicides occur in low and middle-income countries. Men are more likely to die by suicide than women, but women are more likely to attempt suicide.

Indian Data: India accounts for over a third of global female suicides and a quarter of male suicides, making it a significant contributor to the global suicide rate.

According to a study published in The Lancet Public Health, the age-standardized suicide rate in India is 21.1 per 100,000 population, which is higher than the global average of 16.6. Suicide is a significant concern among young adults in India, with the highest suicide rates observed among those aged 15-39 years. The same study revealed that married women in India are at higher risk of suicide compared to married men, which is contrary to the global trend where married men are at higher risk.

The Indian government has taken steps to address this issue by decriminalizing suicide in 2017 and increasing funding for mental health services. However, the stigma surrounding mental health and lack of adequate services remain significant barriers to suicide prevention in India.

Source: WHO and various publications, Please note that while this provides a comprehensive overview, there may be more recent data available. It is always recommended to check the latest publications and reports for the most current information.

Conclusion

Suicide is a global public health crisis that requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. On World Suicide Prevention Day, it is crucial to reflect on the progress made, the challenges ahead, and the actions required to save lives. Together, we can create a world where everyone feels supported, connected, and valued.

Role of Society: Society plays a crucial role in suicide prevention. It is important to foster a culture of openness, empathy, and understanding, where people feel comfortable talking about their mental health struggles without fear of judgments or stigma.

Importance of Early Intervention:

Early identification and treatment of mental health issues are key to preventing suicide. Schools, colleges, and workplaces should implement mental health programs that teach individuals how to recognize the signs of mental distress in themselves and others, and how to seek help.

Utilization of Technology:

Technology, when used correctly, can be a powerful tool in suicide prevention. Online platforms can provide access to mental health resources, connect individuals to support networks, and offer crisis intervention services.

Continuous Effort:

Suicide prevention is not a one-day event, but a continuous effort that requires commitment from individuals, communities, and governments. It is important to maintain the momentum generated on World Suicide Prevention Day throughout the year.

Let’s Join hands for the cause.



“वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्”
“VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM –
The world is one family.”

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