



## Suicide – An Overview

### The Facts

Suicide is a leading public health problem with widespread individual, family and community ramifications. The terrible waste of human potential extends beyond the loss of individual life, to the psychological and emotional effects on bereaved families and individuals, some of whose grief is made more complicated by the suddenness of the death.

Recent suicide data shows that in 2016 over 2800 lives were lost averaging 8 deaths per day. Alarmingly, for every completed suicide it is estimated that 30-40 people have attempted equating to 200+ suicide attempts in Australia every day. Add to this the research that suggests that over 600,000 people experience thoughts of suicide each year and sadly we are facing a whole of society issue that affects not just the mentally ill, the weak or the disadvantaged – it can affect any one of us, and it will, either directly or indirectly at some point in our lives.

The economic, health and social costs associated with suicide are also high. While the emotional impact of suicide on family and friends leading up to and following a suicide is immeasurable, the associated economic costs such as service use pre and post suicide and the impact of lost productivity when a life is lost, is somewhat easier to quantify. A recent report by KPMG of the direct and indirect economic cost of suicide based on the estimated number of suicides, and the estimated cost per suicide

in 2012 suggests that the economic burden of suicide in Australia, totaled approximately \$1.7 billion for that year alone (KPMG, 2013).

### Why Suicide?

It can be difficult to understand how and why someone would consider suicide an option unless we have walked in those shoes ourselves. This is because Suicide is individual in that the reasons one person may consider suicide an option will be entirely different from another.

We have to remember that no one is immune to either direct or indirect effects of suicide. Though you may at this very point in your life think to yourself that you would never consider suicide an option or it will never happen to anyone close to you – the reality is that there are no guarantees and it can happen to any one of us.

## Common Characteristics

The factors associated with suicide are varied and unique to every individual. Predicting who will take their life is extremely difficult, even for experienced professionals.

Common theories propose that there are several common characteristics of suicide including unbearable psychological pain, a sense of isolation, and the perception that death is the only solution. These are accompanied by negative emotions such as shame, guilt and sadness. Other factors that have been associated with suicide include trauma, loss and chronic pain. In addition to this, some may suffer from depression, anxiety or other mental illness, which exacerbates the issue.

At the opposite end of the spectrum lay protective factors made up of individual, social and environmental elements such as

ability to cope and culture which may make an individual less likely to consider suicide.

## What Can I do?

When someone you know appears to be struggling, there are warning signs that you can keep in mind to identify if suicide may be on their mind. You may notice that they don't appear to be interested in their favourite activity anymore, they are withdrawing from family and friends or saying things like "I just can't take it anymore".

Obviously, all of us may exhibit some of these behaviors throughout our life and not be considering suicide, but if multiple signs are present it may be worthwhile raising the issue in a safe, non-confrontational environment and manner.

Given the enormity of the impact of suicide in our communities, it is important for us all to gain a more in depth understanding of the complexities surrounding suicide including risk factors, groups most at risk, signs of suicidality and most importantly how everyday people can help.

*To learn more about Suicide and how you could help in the fight against suicide, contact TALK SUICIDE Support Service on 1800 008 255 to discuss tailoring a training package to suit your needs.*

TALK SUICIDE Support Service is an initiative of Suicide Prevention Pathways Inc. (SPP) offering programs that educate, raise awareness and above all provide emotional and practical support to those at risk of suicide and their family and friends. For more information visit [www.spp.org.au](http://www.spp.org.au) or call us on 1800 008 255.

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