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SUICIDE: SIGNS, CAUSES AND PREVENTION
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Resume: Risk factors, signs, causes and prevention of suicide at the different levels are described. Results of questioning of the students are shown.

Key words: suicide, suicide prevention, suicide risk factors

Relevance. Suicide is a serious global public health problem; it is associated with an array of factors, including mental illness, social isolation, physical illness, substance abuse, family violence and access to means of suicide. The epidemiology of suicide rates varies across countries and regions; those in Eastern Europe are among the highest in the world.

Objectives:

1. To define the importance of the problem.
2. To determine causative agents of suicides and suicidal attempts, risk factors and warning signs.
3. To describe preventive actions.

Materials and methods.

Google Forms were used as a questionnaire. 139 students of different universities and faculties were interviewed. Inbuilt statistical tools were used to analyze data. Native and foreign literature, CDC and WHO sites, internet resources, scientific papers were used.

Results and discussions.

Every year, more than 800 000 people die by suicide – one person every 40 seconds. Young people are among those most affected; suicide is now the second leading cause of death for those between the ages of 15 and 29 years globally. The numbers vary in different countries, but mostly the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including Belarus, bear the global suicide burden, with an estimated 75% of all suicides occurring there [6].

Belarus is on the 6th place in the world by the number of suicides per 100 000 population. In 2012 suicide was in the 1st place among external causes of death, when 2051 deaths were registered. Speaking about those who committed suicide, the statistics are the following:

- 50% are 40-59 year old men
- 65% have a particular blood alcohol concentration
- 55% were either unemployed or didn't have a regular learning training
- 85% commit suicide by hanging [4]

The major differences between high-income countries and LMICs are that young adults and elderly women in LMICs have much higher suicide rates than their counterparts in high-income countries, while middle-aged men in high-income countries have much

higher suicide rates than middle-aged men in LMICs, but, as indicated above, the situation in Belarus differs.

Risk factors

Suicide tends to be a complicated phenomenon, which can be caused by several different factors. All these factors could be divided into three groups:

I. Associated with the health system and society

- a. Difficulties in accessing health care and receiving care needed
- b. Easy availability of the means for suicide
- c. Sensationalizing suicide by media reporting leads to ‘copycat’ suicide (imitation of suicides) among vulnerable people. Media practices are inappropriate when they gratuitously cover celebrity suicides, report unusual methods of suicide or suicide clusters, show pictures or information about the method used, or normalize suicide as an acceptable response to crisis or adversity.

II. At the individual level

- a. Previous suicide attempts
- b. Mental disorders
- c. Alcohol abuse
- d. Financial loss
- e. Chronic pain
- f. Family history of suicide

III. Linked to the community and relationship

- a. War and disaster
- b. Stresses of acculturation
- c. Discrimination
- d. Sense of isolation, abuse, violence [6]

The “message” of suicidal attempt

As a rule the person who makes suicidal attempt wants it to be noticed. He puts some meaning in his action. There are different types of “messages”.

1. “Protest” means the intention to punish offenders, to make them feel guilty.
2. “Call” is an intension to arouse sympathy, compassion.
3. “Escape” the punishment or suffering, for example, in case of chronic pain.
4. “Self-punishment” means the intention to redeem fault.
5. “Surrender” is the recognition of absolute helplessness. This situation is quite common for economic crises [3].

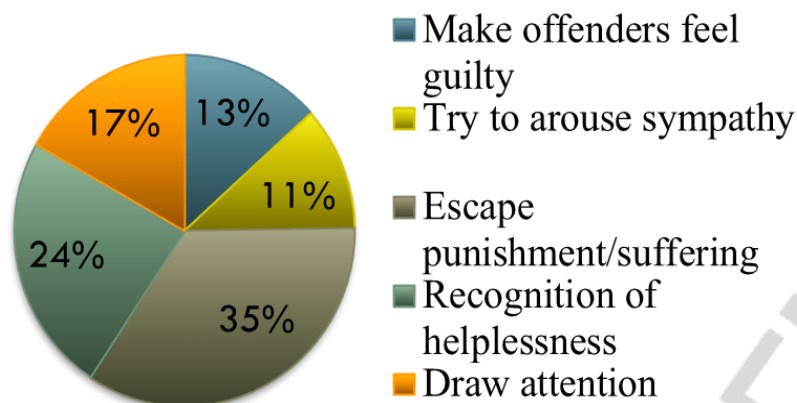


Figure 1 - Why do people commit suicide (based on the results of questioning). Description below in the text

Warning signs of suicide

The majority of suicides have been preceded by warning signs (verbal or behavioral):

- High anxiety
- Sudden change in grades
- Change in eating
- Change in sleeping
- Giving away possessions
- A previous attempt
- Sudden happiness
- Verbal or written threats
- A history of suicide or mental illness in family
- Increased drug and alcohol use [5]

Prevention

Given the widespread stigma around suicide, most people who are contemplating suicide do not know who to speak to. Rather than encouraging suicidal behavior, talking openly can give an individual many options on the time to rethink his/her decision, thereby preventing suicide.

A significant number of people contemplating suicide are experiencing anxiety, depression and hopelessness and may feel that there is no other option. So if the person shows warning signs of suicidal behavior, several simple steps can prevent suicidal attempt.

- Talk to a trusted person.
- Don't make promises to be silent.
- Call Hotline.
- Try not to leave the person alone.

It has been mentioned that risk factors could be at the individual level and at the level of society. So it means that prevention must be implemented not only at the individual, but also at the state level. The measures include:

- Access to health care for people with mental disorders
- Training volunteers
- Restriction of access to means of suicide (ban on carrying weapons, small tablet packaging, bridge barriers)

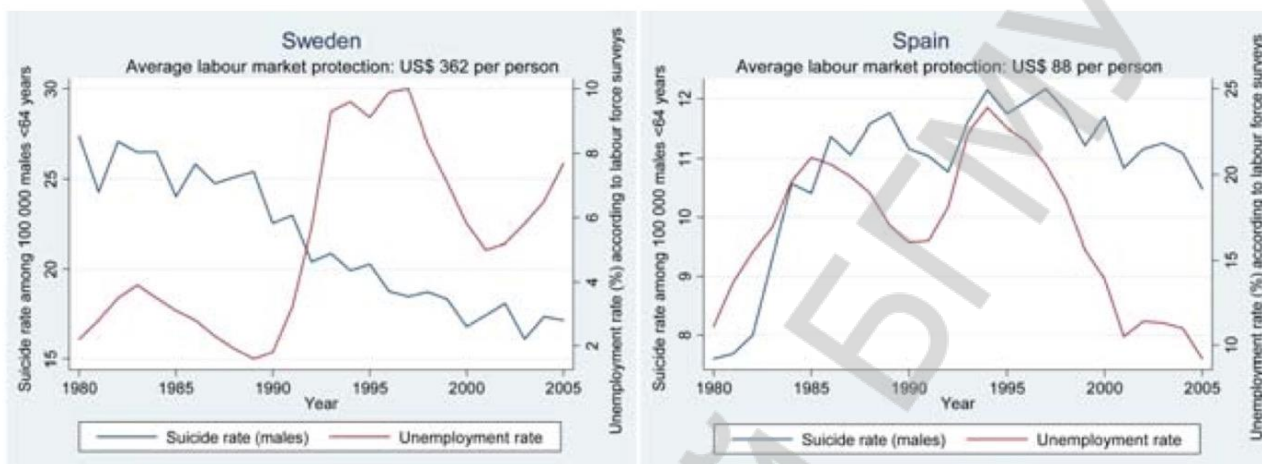


Figure 2 - Unemployment rate and suicide rates per 100000 males in Sweden and Spain, 1980-2005

- Policies to reduce harmful use of alcohol and drugs
- Restriction of media reporting of suicides
- Resources for social protection in case of unemployment (Fig.2) [2]

The results of questioning.

Most of the students think that the most valuable preventive factor is strong relationships (63%). Then follow religion and spiritual beliefs (13%), positive attitude (12%) and something else (12%).

People make suicidal attempts: to escape punishment/suffering (35%), as a recognition of helplessness (24%), to draw attention (17%), to make offenders feel guilty (13%) and to try to arouse sympathy (11%) (Fig. 1).

69% students do not justify people making suicidal attempts, by contrast 31% do. The thoughts of students about risk factors of suicide attempts are shown in figure 3.

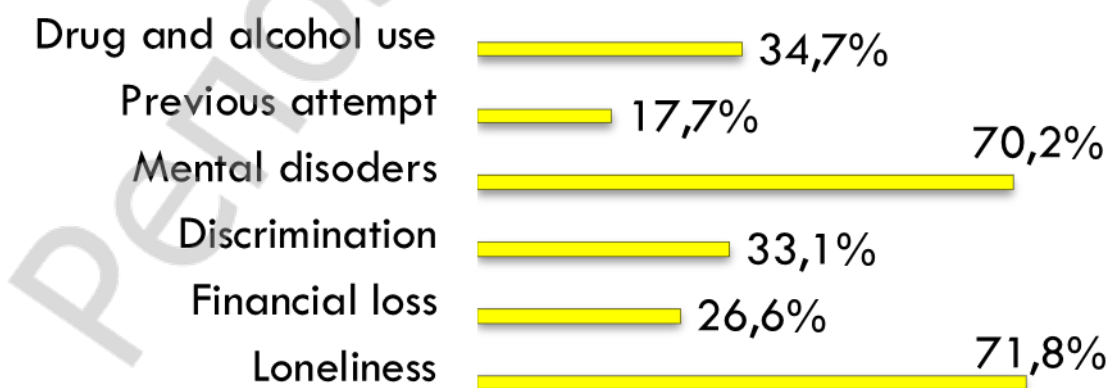


Figure 3 - Risk factors of suicide attempts, results of questioning.

Conclusion:

Suicide is a complicated phenomenon, which is not spontaneous and due to many

factors. The decisive factor is the lack of trust and support. Therefore, the most effective prevention of suicide is at the level of relationship in family and society. Nevertheless the state contribution is very essential.

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