Book Review

Suicide Prevention Across Countries and Continents: Lessons Learned

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Suicide and Suicide Prevention From a Global Perspective

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Suicide constitutes a persistent public and mental health problem. Despite increasing efforts of researchers and clinicians to understand the causal mechanisms of suicidal behavior and its prevention, approximately 800,000 people die by suicide annually. Translation of research findings into practice as well as concerted and sustained strategies tailored to local needs are needed to prevent suicidal behavior and to alleviate its impact on individuals and communities. However, over the decades suicide prevention has been informed mostly through research from Westernized countries, while most suicides occur in other parts of the world. This calls for continent- and culture-specific perspectives on suicide prevention. This book aims to contribute to the development of such perspectives. The editors are well-known world leaders in suicide prevention research, and the nine chapters have been written by selected experts from various continents.

The first chapter sets the scene by outlining the global initiatives developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). The WHO *Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020*, which included the aim to reduce the suicide rate by 10% in countries by 2020, has been adopted by all WHO member states. The subsequent WHO report *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative* outlined the strategies countries could implement. As a result, efforts to implement national suicide prevention strategies have increased

in many countries, as revealed by an IASP global survey. This survey has also uncovered information about suicide prevention strategies in non-Western regions of the world, which has informed several chapters of this book. The first chapter concludes by identifying ongoing challenges, such as the availability of accurate data and the need of national leadership in countries.

The second chapter addresses suicide prevention in the European region. There is a substantial variety in suicide mortality across countries, as well as the extent to which countries have developed suicide prevention strategies. This chapter provides an overview of suicide prevention programs in individual countries, as well as 11 suicide prevention projects funded by the European Union. The third chapter discusses suicide prevention in the Southeast Asia region comprising 11 low- and middle-income countries. The chapter highlights the need for accurate data collection. Also, given a shortage of professionals, it emphasizes the involvement of NGOs and volunteers in the development and implementation of suicide prevention strategies. Chapter 4 is concerned with suicide prevention in the Americas, a region that is also facing a large variation in suicide mortality across countries. In addition to outlining suicide prevention strategies in the United States and Canada, the chapter details the suicide prevention approaches in Caribbean and South American countries, such as access to suicide means or suicide prevention training programs.

The fifth chapter discusses suicide prevention in the African region. It appears that most African countries do not have national suicide prevention strategies and only few countries are preparing one. Apart from a few exceptions, it seems that national suicide prevention organizations are mostly absent, and scattered prevention initiatives stem primarily from local organizations. The chapter highlights the importance of the socioeconomic context, the lack of resources, and the prevailing stigma surrounding suicide and mental health issues. Chapter 6 focuses on the Eastern Mediterranean region. In general, the national suicide rates of these countries are below the world average. However, a history of armed conflicts and the legal status or religious/cultural attitudes toward suicide may affect the reliability of the suicide data. Further, only few countries in this region have adopted an official suicide prevention strategy, despite a need related to, for example, war-related traumas.

The seventh chapter presents suicide prevention in the Western Pacific region, which comprises 37 countries and is home to one quarter of the global population. The chapter first details the suicide prevention strategies developed in various individual countries. Next, it summarizes suicide prevention strategies across countries, highlighting the availability of suicide prevention organizations and training, and suicide-related data. The eighth chapter reviews the evidence of effectiveness of 13 suicide prevention strategies found in national suicide prevention programs. These strategies include a variety of universal, selective, and indicated approaches. The chapter concludes that there is evidence of effectiveness for means restrictions and certain pharmacological interventions. However, there is weak evidence for the effectiveness of multilevel, multicomponent community-based programs,

setting-based programs in schools and workplaces, front-line staff training, and selected psychotherapeutic and aftercare interventions. Consequently, the chapter concludes with a plea for more methodologically sound research on the effectiveness of interventions and national suicide prevention programs. The ninth and final chapter ties the book together by formulating the recommendations for future directions.

In conclusion, this volume contains a wealth of up-to-date information of the current status of suicide prevention across the globe. Both the detailed and summarized overviews of suicide prevention approaches in various continents provide the reader with an opportunity to think outside the box, while considering the evidence base of specific strategies. In this context, it could have been useful if the involvement of people with lived experience of suicide and suicide bereavement in the development and evaluation of suicide prevention programs had been addressed in the volume. Nonetheless, the volume is a testament to the richness of the available suicide prevention strategies and the accumulated expertise. It emphasizes the need to maintain a high standard of research and practice, while providing ample examples of good practices. The book will be most valuable for anyone involved in suicide prevention, including researchers and policy-makers.

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