

MENTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

OUR CORE VALUES:

- ❖ Recognition of diversity
- ❖ Equal treatment
- ❖ Confidentiality
- ❖ Professionalism
- ❖ Compassion
- ❖ Teamwork



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Press release from the Mental Health Authority

World Suicide Prevention Day, 10th September, 2021.

Introduction

Today, 10th September 2021, is globally being commemorated as Suicide Prevention Day with a thought-provoking theme captioned “*A renewed worldwide commitment to prevent suicides: creating hope through action*”. This year’s theme inspires us to think about what proactive action we can take to build the hope that we would not hear about the incidence of suicide. Over the years the day has been celebrated to raise awareness about the risk factors and premeditating causes of suicide. In addition, the day is also observed to inform the populace about the prevention strategies for suicide and management of suicide ideation. The overall objective is to reduce to the barest minimum the number of suicides and suicide attempts. Education about suicide has become very necessary now more than before because several individuals are severely impacted by various issues that push them to decide to die by suicide contributing to the painful global statistics that “somebody dies by suicide every 40 seconds”.

Ghana’s Situation

Ghana has been hit by this concerning phenomenon and media reportage on suicide has been uncomfortably common, an everyday occurrence. Indeed, the statistics confirms the media reportage. For example, in 2018 the number of people who attempted suicide was 797. This incidence increased to 880 in 2019 and marginally dropped to 777 in 2020. As of June 2021, that is just mid-year, 417 people have been recorded as attempting suicide. There are others that are also not reported because of stigma and fear of community repercussions. This implies that these figures could potentially even be higher than we know. That being said, this unfortunate behaviour is not peculiar to a particular age group, sex, profession but occurs across

all the social classes and demographic variables. One person dying by suicide is disturbing and these suicide figures are painfully far too high. There must be a concerted effort to end this phenomenon.

The cry for help – warning signs

In fact, any person who has suicidal thoughts and intends to act, exhibits behaviours, or expresses thoughts that are indicative of the action they intend to pursue. These are warning signs that we must all be familiar with. Indeed, these signs are a means of communicating to every other person that they would really appreciate some help to prevent them from killing themselves. These warning signs are a “cry for help”. It is for this reason that we must know them and provide support as needed. The major warning signs include openly expressing the intention to kill oneself, withdrawal from family, friends, and society, expressing no sense of purpose in life, no point in living, painting, writing, and talking about death, dying or suicide, expressing hopelessness and finding ways to kill themselves: poisonous substances, rope etc among others. These are easy simple notifiable warning signs that signifies a cry for help, and we must promptly act to help.

Decriminalising suicide

That is why the object of decriminalising suicide in our statutes is of essence. Simply put, these individuals have cried for help, we failed them. They took action to kill themselves and equally failed to kill themselves. Must we punish them when they had cried for help? Definitely not! But our current law criminalises suicide. They do not deserve punishment but simply need psychological support. Punishment worsens their plight and prevents them from being useful members of their community. However, there is enough evidence to show that psychological support can make them, once again, useful, and valuable members to their communities.

Professional help

There is professional help available in this country to assist families and individuals who find themselves in such situation. A visit to a psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor and to a medical facility is a source of help. As a matter of fact, even in the last seconds, a conversation with the right person is able convince the individual to rescind their decision. A dedicated 24/7 suicide prevention call centre with professionals to counsel people who need help would have been very ideal. The professionals are available to do the assignment. However, the challenge is getting toll free lines that individuals can call for free to get support. These toll-free lines come

at a cost that cannot be borne by the Mental Health Authority (MHA) at the moment. It is for these reasons that the MHA is appealing to corporate organisations and telecommunication organisations as part of their corporate social responsibilities to join resources to support MHA to establish this suicide prevention call centre. In the midst of this difficulty, these personal phonelines are used as helplines and are available to support individuals in crisis.

Temporary helplines

National Helplines

020-000-9997

050-344-4793

Regional Helplines

055-538-3056 – Ashanti

020-922-8954 – Brong

024-425-5594 – Central

024-401-4348 – Eastern

024-424-9928 – Greater Accra

024-450-8838 -Northern

024-395-0520 – Upper West

020-630-4788 – Upper East

024-267-1862 – Volta

024-489-0018 – Western

Conclusion

Finally, we appeal to our partners in the suicide awareness campaign and media partners not to relent in their efforts to keep this advocacy going on. Mental Health Authority extends an open arms invitation to the telecommunications and private organisations to join us in this advocacy. We appeal to everyone to make a personal commitment to acquire some knowledge on mental health and particularly the warning signs of suicidal thoughts because using this knowledge can save somebody's life. Let us all work together and stem the spate of suicide.

Thank you.

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