

5. Helping Families in face of Deliberate Self-harm

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Introduction:

The community-based multi-disciplinary approach to the prevention of deliberate self-harm behaviors as well as the assistance to suicide attempters and the bereaved families of suicides are proved to be pragmatic in the Eastern District.

Purpose of the Project:

The conceptual and programmatic elements of the programme aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness in preventing the suicidal attempts and rendering timely assistance to the attempters and the bereaved families of suicides.

Material & Methods:

The programme was initiated by a multi-disciplinary team which included police officers, academics, medical practitioners (emergency medicine specialist and psychiatrist), social workers (both in the hospital and the community), as well as the housing managers in November 2006. It incorporates elements of prevention and crisis intervention with strategies to identify and empower natural and professional social support networks. Multi-level preventive strategies include training for the front-line police officers by medical, psychological and social work professionals; developing a "First Responder Kit" for police officers; producing an information card, exhibition boards and posters with help-line numbers for public education. Enhanced effectiveness in helping the distressed is achieved through establishing the Police-Hospital-Social Worker referral mechanism for suicide attempters and the bereaved families of suicides; sensitivity training for general practitioners, teachers, housing management staff and security guards about early identification of suicidal behaviors; as well as developing professional-led psycho-educational groups for the bereaved families, etc. With continuous reviews of the multi-disciplinary efforts based on data collection and analysis, the above strategies have been made pragmatic.

Results:

Since the development of the programme, we have observed a relatively stabilized suicide attempt and completed suicide trend until 2008 and an obvious decreasing trend in 2009.

Conclusions:

The empirical evidences show that the synergy derived from multi-disciplinary collaboration in a local community is effective to help the suicide attempters at the earliest possible time while being empathetic to the particularly painful grief of the bereaved families of suicides.