

## SUICIDE IS A SOCIETY-WIDE PROBLEM THAT NEEDS A SOCIETY-WIDE SOLUTION: SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO MORE

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**GEORGETOWN, GY** - Guyana currently has the second highest suicide death rate in the world. This is in sharp contrast to other Caribbean countries which enjoy relatively low suicide rates, including Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

Suicide affects people of all races and ethnicity, however, it is more rampant in communities with a large Indian population. People of Indian origin accounts for around 40% of Guyana's population but for the vast majority of suicides. In fact, the Black Bush Polder area is known as the "suicide belt," where most suicide deaths in Guyana occur.

Several factors associated with suicide rates in Guyana are outlined in the Ministry of Health's 2015 National Suicide Prevention Plan including poverty, stigma about mental illness, access to lethal chemicals, alcohol abuse, interpersonal violence, family dysfunction, and insufficient mental health resources. The economic circumstances of life such as

the shortage of good paying jobs, low career mobility, high levels of crime, and hopelessness also contribute to a sense failure and suicide.

Unfortunately, these drivers are likely to worsen as the impact of closing multiple estates is compounded by the current economic slowdown forcing many people into poverty and hopelessness. On a recent trip to Unity Village, an estate worker who lost his job from the closure of one of the sugar estates broke down in tears lamenting,

***"As a husband and man of the family, my job is to bring home money to my family. My wife takes care of the home and kids, making sure they have what they need. Now I am out of work and can't find work in other industries. I have failed as a husband and a father, and I feel worthless."***

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The sense of failure and hopelessness are aggravated by a high level of disconnectedness from friends, families, social groups, community, and society and a whole. This is particularly the case in rural communities among people who are unemployed or in subsistence work.

In 2011, The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a strategic plan for the prevention of suicidal behavior in the United States, which focused heavily on the importance of “connectedness,” defined as the degree to which a person or group is socially close, interrelated, or shares resources with other persons.

A vast body of research shows that increasing community “connectedness” is a promising mechanism for suicide prevention, and schools, community centers, and especially churches and religious organizations can play a crucial role in promoting “connectedness.”

While the government, with the help of the World Health Organization (WHO), has responded to the suicide epidemic with various initiatives, it is crucial for non-governmental agencies and religious organizations take a more active role and expand their efforts in addressing this crisis. With advances in technology, that make human contact as easy as a click of a button, social institutions and faith-based organizations should take the lead in reaching out to people who might be at risk of suicidal ideations.

A good starting point for non-governmental organizations is to help people develop the skills and confidence to speak openly about suicide by removing barriers such as shame and blame and encourage help-seeking. Spotting early signs and providing after-care support services to remaining families, follow-up services, and peer-to-peer support are necessary services to help society combat and ultimately end this epidemic.

