

## Suicide Prevention in Southeast Asia – Ways Forward

Suicide is not evenly spread across the world, so suicide prevention strategies need to respond to country and regional characteristics. This has been illustrated, recently, through a Southeast Asia regional workshop under the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) Partnerships In Life program, the start of this year.

The Southeast Asia region is described as a ‘suicide dense region’ because the 11 low- and middle-income countries in the region contribute 39% of all suicides worldwide.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting, however, that this region is home to several countries that have made significant progress in suicide prevention such as Sri Lanka and India, and that almost half (five of the 11 countries) have a national suicide prevention strategy in place.

During the workshop, the high levels of stigma surrounding suicidal behaviour and mental health conditions were listed as challenges. Accordingly, the workshop identified the decriminalization of suicide, and the reduction of stigma and increased community awareness surrounding suicide and its prevention, as priorities for change.

Another priority area was the operation of a national helpline to support distressed and potentially suicidal individuals. These services are low cost, immediately available and operate through civil society organizations to reflect community characteristics. They can work to overcome stigma and barriers to support across different cultural settings. In a region which has high penetration rates for mobile phones and digital/social media usage, they can be regarded as widely accessible services for suicide prevention.

The importance of involving people with lived experience of suicide, following suicide attempts, caring for others through suicidal crisis and through bereavement and loss from suicide, was recognized in the workshop report. It is through this lived experience involvement in the development of activities that the cultural and social aspects of suicide prevention can be most effectively understood and addressed.

The workshop also identified a systems level change, for suicide prevention to be brought forward as a specific issue, not as a subset of mental health strategies, or a minor reference in non-communicable diseases.

The IASP Partnerships for Life program operates in all regions globally and provides for coordinators to work with countries on national suicide prevention strategies.

<https://www.iasp.info/2023/03/14/partnerships-for-life-global-initiative-to-prevent-suicide/>

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<sup>1</sup> Menon, V., Cherian, A.V., Ahmed, F., et al. 2024. Challenges and priorities for suicide prevention in Southeast Asia: Insights from the Partnerships for Life regional workshop on suicide prevention. Asian Journal of Psychiatry 98.