

SUICIDE IS NOT THE ANSWER:

HOW TO OVERCOME THE OVERWHELMING

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MILLENNIALS
IN UNHAPPY
RELATIONSHIPS,
OR THOSE
SUFFERING
FROM MENTAL
OR PHYSICAL
ABUSE FALL
VICTIM TO
SUICIDE
WHEN THE
STRESS EXCEEDS
THEIR COPING
ABILITIES.

**DID YOU KNOW
THAT, EVERY YEAR,
OVER 800,000
PEOPLE DIE BY
SUICIDE ALL OVER
THE WORLD?**

This means roughly one death every 40 seconds. Did you also know that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds in third world countries? Every suicide is a tragedy that has long-lasting effects on the people left behind, and February can be especially difficult with the love overload. We dig into the core reasons millennials resort to suicide when the going gets tough, and how you can help.

Although the number of people falling victim to suicide in Sri Lanka has reduced, this paradise isle still ranks rather high, placing 22nd in a 2015 study by the WHO*. What's more, in Sri Lanka, general figures indicate that more women attempt suicide than men. Underlying mental conditions like schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder, along with daily struggles like exam pressure or managing finances could very likely result in suicide, according to past data. But, one of the most prevalent causes is relationship issues. Millennials in unhappy relationships, or those suffering from mental or physical abuse fall victim to suicide when the stress exceeds their coping abilities.

THE BIG "WHY?"

Millennials in Sri Lanka often face difficulties accessing adequate mental health care. Stigma around mental health problems continues to play a huge role in Sri Lanka, and undiagnosed and mistreated, psychological disorders like anxiety, depression and substance abuse increase the risk of suicide. Those in need of assistance due to suicidal thoughts and behaviour may have difficulty accessing the appropriate services required, says Clinical Psychologist Ransirini De Silva (BSc Psych (Hons), PgDCP, MPhil Clinical Psych).

"We are a collectivist society, with stigma around mental health problems," says De Silva, "so most mental health issues tend to be absorbed by the family and community, until the problems exacerbate to the point where the person can't function without some form of professional psychological intervention."

Unfortunately, by that time, the illness may have been allowed to progress without proper treatment, and the individual may be at risk to engage in detrimental behaviour such as self harm.

But what of those who *appear* to be of sound mind, yet display suicidal behaviour? Why do they choose to take their own lives? Often, it may be that they haven't been taught to cope with the variety of curveballs and stress life throws at them.

An underlying issue in all of this could also be that most Sri Lankans aren't familiar with the role of a psychologist or a counsellor. "People aren't too certain how effective 'talking therapy' can be," says De Silva. So they choose to not meet with a psychologist and learn different coping strategies to deal with life's difficulties, because who knows if it really works, right? In this case, the decision to visit a therapist could *actually* mean the difference between life and death.

HOW CAN SUICIDE RATES BE LOWERED?

The same WHO study referenced above indicates that the Sri Lankan government made attempts to regulate the availability of toxic pesticides in 2007, which ultimately aided in reducing the number of suicides. In that same vein, if the means by which one commits suicide is regulated or eliminated, there would likely be a decrease in the rate.

But this is just one step. "Intervention at different levels is necessary," states De Silva. "[O]ne important means by which this could be achieved is through

education." Schools should be encouraged to instill practical psychological methods to deal with stress, along with realistic coping mechanisms when problem-solving, into their syllabi.

Mental health awareness is also key, as well as the knowledge that you don't have to be ashamed of getting the help you need—mental illnesses are as debilitating as physical ones, and should not be underestimated or undermined.

WARNING SIGNS

If you're concerned that a friend or family member might be suicidal, always look out for a change in behaviour or the presence of entirely new mannerisms. More often than not, suicidal people exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or do.



TAKE NOTE IF YOUR LOVED ONE TALKS ABOUT:

- > feeling trapped
- > being a burden to others
- > experiencing unbearable pain
- > having no reason to continue living
- > killing themselves

IN TERMS OF BEHAVIOUR, WATCH OUT FOR:

- > increased use of alcohol or drug abuse
- > Googling materials and means to kill themselves
- > behaving recklessly
- > isolating themselves from friends and family
- > insomnia or excessive sleep
- > withdrawal from activities
- > calling people to say goodbye
- > giving away possessions
- > aggression

YOU
MATTER

you are
LOVED

you're
AWESOME!

be
yourself
😊

I CARE
ABOUT
YOU ♡

I'M YOUR
FRIEND

HOW CAN YOU HELP SOMEONE WHO IS SUICIDAL?

So you've identified that your loved one is suicidal. Don't panic! Stay calm and approach them gently. Talking to someone about their suicidal thoughts can be extremely difficult, but very often, giving such an individual the opportunity to express their feelings can provide a certain relief from the bottled up, negative emotions. You can open the conversation by saying, "I've recently noticed that you haven't really been yourself, and I just wanted to check in and see how you're doing," or "I've been feeling quite concerned about you as of late."

You can move to questions like "When did you begin feeling this way?" or "How best can I help you right now?" and "Have you thought about getting help?"

➤ Make sure you offer comforting statements, such as "You're never alone in this. I'm always here for you," or "Believe it or not, but the way you're presently feeling will change and you *will* feel better," or "I may not understand exactly what you're going through, but I really do care and want to help."

➤ It's important to remember to be yourself and to just listen. No matter how negative the conversation gets, the fact that they're talking is a good sign. Always take the person seriously and convey that it is ok for them to share their grief with you.

➤ Get help by encouraging the person to see a mental health professional. You can locate a hospital or go with them for the appointment.

➤ If the doctor prescribes medication, follow up and make sure they're taking it as directed. Keep an eye out for possible side effects and inform the specialist. It can take some time and persistence until the therapy or medication that works efficiently is found.

➤ Always encourage positive lifestyle changes like a healthy diet, exercise and plenty of sleep. Working out releases endorphins and helps keep stress at bay.

➤ Keep tabs of any emotional triggers like alcohol, stress from relationships or an anniversary of a loss.

➤ Remove any means of self-harm, like knives or razors. If the person is inclined to overdose, keep medications locked away and dispense tablets only as needed.

➤ Have a plan listed out in case of an emergency. If things seem to be going wrong, mention that you are available at any time and encourage doctors or other family members to be on the "Call List."

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOURSELF?

Right now, most state hospitals in Sri Lanka have suicide assistance available in the form of a psychiatrist or a medical officer trained in mental health; psychologists can be channelled at private hospitals, and help lines have been set up by private organisations. If you experience suicidal thoughts, occasionally or otherwise, you must first and foremost seek help.

These tips can also help you cope and banish emotions that are bringing you down.

KEEP A JOURNAL AND WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS.

Each day, pen down the important people in your life and your hopes for the future. Re-read what you've written whenever you need to remind yourself of the importance of your life.

SPEND TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

Typically, most of us enjoy hanging out with our nearest and dearest. When you're depressed, it can be extremely hard, but it is important to make the effort.

STAY ACTIVE.

Get some exercise—go for a walk or ride a bike. Often, suicidal thoughts fade when something or someone stimulates us.

START ON A CREATIVE PROJECT.

Try your hand at art, music, crafts, writing or gardening. It doesn't matter if you aren't that great—it will still help you ease the suffering.

TALK ABOUT IT.

Share your thoughts and feelings with a friend or loved one. Often, they can provide perspective and reassurance.

Suicide is a desperate attempt to escape misery that has become intolerable. Blinded by feelings of self-loathing, despair and isolation, a suicidal person can't see any way of finding respite except through death. Understanding that this is a prevalent issue and helping someone who feels suicidal to push through these feelings of hopelessness will almost always save their life. ■