



THE VALUE OF SPORT ON PREVENTING YOUTH SUICIDES

A. Description of the case

WHO says: “World Mental Health Day is observed on 10 October every year, with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues around the world and mobilizing efforts in support of mental health.

For the 2019 WMHD the theme was suicide prevention. From the rich documentation concerning the overall situation, we focus to one that highlights the trend: “Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan and is the second leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds globally.” (Instead, 10 years ago was the third one).

In the early 1990s, the seminal document entitled “Prevention of suicide: guidelines for the formulation and implementation of national strategies” was published by the UN following consultation with a variety of experts and with technical support from WHO. The document emphasized the need for intersectoral collaboration, multidisciplinary approaches, and continued evaluation and review, and also identified key elements as a necessary means of increasing the effectiveness of suicide prevention strategies (UN, 1996). (Let us emphasize the **intersectoral** and **multidisciplinary** dimensions as necessary parameters.)

The Sport and PE/PA context is a privileged / advantageous – thus preferential mean to be used for the suicide prevention because of

- The indisputable value of Sport for the MH and wellness in general
- The increased and particular relation of youth with the Sport /PE overall context in many aspects (trust to the coaches, open discussions of personal problems among peers, motivation deriving from participation to sport activities, team spirit against isolation, inclusive framework, positive / attractive lifestyle, immense influence of the Sport sector to the society as a whole).

Scientific evidence is rich. An short indicative list of related publications is provided at the bottom.

B. Only WHO CAN CREATE THE MOMENTUM

The most comprehensive WHO’s related document is “**National suicide prevention strategies: progress, examples and indicators (2019)**” while “**LIVE LIFE: preventing suicide**” approach provides the current views of the organisation on this issue.

https://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/national_strategies_2019/en/

A first study of the above documents does not provide any reference to PA or Sport context as contributing to the prevention of suicide stakeholders:

- p.5 A national suicide prevention strategy needs to be multisectoral, involving not only the health sector but also sectors such as education, labour, social welfare, agriculture, business, justice, law, defense, politics and the media. (no sport reference)





- p.14 Identify stakeholders

It is important to identify the key stakeholders in suicide prevention when developing a national strategy. Suicide prevention needs to involve different actors and disciplines working on suicide prevention – such as different ministries, health administrations, nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, universities, and civil society at different levels (national, regional, state or provincial, and community) ([no sport reference](#))

However in p.34 sporting organisations are mentioned as at least potential information providers (*Ensuring that accurate information and guidance on effective suicide prevention are provided for community-based organizations (e.g. family resource centres, **sporting** organizations).*)

(Lead stakeholders are listed according to strategic actions for suicide prevention in **WHO's Preventing suicide: a global imperative (WHO,2014)**). Potential stakeholders at community level can be found in WHO's ***Preventing suicide: a community engagement toolkit*** (WHO, 2018b). ([no sport reference](#))

“LIVE LIFE – Preventing suicide” leaflet ([no sport reference](#)).

C. A call for action

So, this goal would be served by an integrated approach that includes different means and activities:

- **Guide for sport professionals and youth to recognize the problem and push youngsters in risk in supporting environments.**
- **Training of sport professionals**
- **Creation of youth leaders (or primal assistance groups) charged to disseminate the information and to enhance individuals towards taking proper professional support.**
- **Engage structured Sports sector and Sport industry**

To make it practical:

1. Launching of an initiative for the prevention of suicide of adolescents through Sport and PE/PA
2. Core concept of the initiative is the development of a “Suicide prevention toolkit through sport” including the four items above mentioned (Guide, training, youth leaders, Sport sector)
3. The initiative (materials, training and intervention) has to be a collective work. A unique opportunity for MH organisations to establish new synergies.
4. The necessary sources could be raised by donors, EU or State funding.





D. Publications

Can sports events affect suicidal behavior? A review of the literature and implications for prevention.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19767270>

Physical activity, participation in team sports, and risk of suicidal behavior in adolescents.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10174666>

Attempted and completed suicide in adolescence.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17716070>

Participation in sports activities and suicide prevention

<https://bit.ly/3xiMKuD>

Reducing the risk of athlete suicide in and through sport

<https://bit.ly/2Rwlgkz>

Sport participation during adolescence and suicide ideation and attempts

<https://bit.ly/2T6O6K6>

Active Sport Participation, Sport Spectatorship and Suicidal Behavior

<https://bit.ly/3zdFeCL>

PARYRUS- PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE: The Role of Sport

<https://papyrus-uk.org/learning-disability-week/>

Everybody's Business: A report on suicide prevention in Wales

<http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11947/cr-ld11947-e.pdf>

Does sport have a protective effect against suicide?

<https://bit.ly/3cqETD4>

High school youth and suicide risk: exploring protection afforded through physical activity and sport participation.

<https://bit.ly/34VWpLt>

Physical activity and depressive symptoms in American adolescents.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17968052?dopt=Abstract>

Effects of physical exercise on anxiety, depression, and sensitivity to stress: a unifying theory

<https://bit.ly/3wWDjke>

Lifestyle Interventions and Prevention of Suicide

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6232529/>

Exercise reduces suicide attempts by 23 percent among bullied teens

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/09/150921095433.htm>

Does participation in sports activities prevent suicide?

<https://bit.ly/3fXyUYx>

Physical Activity and Sports to Prevent Suicidality among School-going Adolescents

<https://bit.ly/3zdRXFxf>

Suicide prevention offering recovery through sport

<http://sports-1stbangor.co.uk/>

An Innovative Collaboration among the Sports and Suicide Prevention Sectors to Advance Social Change in the U.S.

<https://bit.ly/3w4ED4n>

Sport Against Suicide

<https://sportagainstsucide.org.uk/>

2020 Suicide Prevention Night

<https://www.preventsuicidepa.org/2020sportspartners/>

