

Development of mental health first aid guidelines for helping a suicidal person in Sri Lanka: A Delphi study

Who we are

The Centre for International Mental Health is based at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne.

Background

Four years ago, we carried out Delphi studies in Asian countries (e.g. India, the Philippines and Japan) to develop guidelines for members of the public providing first aid for people who are having suicidal thoughts or displaying suicidal behaviour. These guidelines were published and made freely available to the public via the Mental Health First Aid Australia website (www.mhfa.com.au) and in the International Journal on Mental Health Systems.

What we are now doing

The aim of this current research project is to develop guidelines for members of the public providing first aid for people in Sri Lanka who are having suicidal thoughts or displaying suicidal behaviour.

Why we're doing it

Suicide is a public health problem of considerable concern. In the early 1990's Sri Lanka had one of the highest suicide rates in the world. Recent data showed that in 2005 the rate of suicide in Sri Lanka was 25 per 100,000 population. A study in Sri Lanka has recommended gatekeeper training programmes as an effective suicide prevention strategy, thus the need to develop guidelines in Sri Lanka.

The guidelines might provide the basis for developing a suicide prevention training course, aiming to increase awareness and appropriate helping responses in members of the general public for suicidal people in Sri Lanka.

How we're doing it

The guidelines will be formed on the basis of expert consensus. We will form one expert panel, consisting of professionals and 'lived experience' advocates, both having expertise in suicide. The strategies that receive a high level of endorsement from the panel will be included in the guidelines. Expert opinion will be collected via online questionnaires containing strategies obtained from scientific journal articles and suicide prevention materials. Some of the statements may seem contradictory or controversial; however, these are included because they reflect the wide range of people's beliefs about intervention and care. The questionnaire will be available in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

Who we're looking for

We are inviting people worldwide who are aged 18 years or over and who have expertise in the field of suicide among people in Sri Lanka to be panel members. People who are being invited to become panel members are considered to have an expert level of knowledge about suicide through their clinical and /or research experience or as a 'lived experience' advocate.

In order to participate, we require experts to be:

- Able to complete 3 online questionnaires. Questionnaire completion involves: providing some general details such as age, gender and experience with suicide; rating basic mental health first aid strategies; providing comment on items that they consider to be irrelevant or unacceptable in Sri Lanka; and suggest any additional actions that were not included in the questionnaire that would be particularly relevant for people in Sri Lanka. It is estimated that this will take around 3 hours in total.
- Have an excellent understanding of suicide and its prevention among people in Sri Lanka; the signs and symptoms that people are likely to encounter and how to respond upon recognition of these.
- Have experience working in the area of suicide prevention among people in Sri Lanka or people who have previous personal experience of suicidal ideation or attempts or loss of someone close to them in Sri Lanka through suicide.
- Aged 18 years or over.

Given your expertise in the field, we would be grateful if you would consider being involved, as well as nominating other individuals with similar expertise. We encourage you to forward this email to all relevant contacts who you believe meet the criteria and would be interested in participating.

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

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Are there any risks?

Some people may find that reading the statements in the questionnaire upsets them, or may remind them of their own experiences. However, in previous studies using this method only a very small number of people reported feeling upset. Many people in previous studies have said they felt proud and happy to be able to contribute to a better understanding of how to help others. We advise anyone who finds themselves feeling upset to talk to their support people and decide whether they wish to continue with the questionnaire or stop.

If you feel you want to talk to someone about feeling upset, please contact one of the recommended helplines in Sri Lanka:

Sri Lanka Sumithrayo

Telephone: 2692909/2696666/2683555

Website: www.srilankasumithrayo.org

CCC Foundation

Telephone: 1333

Website: <http://cccfoundation.org.au/cccline/>

If you change your mind

Participation in this project is voluntary. If you change your mind about participating, you are free to withdraw from the project at any time and you may also withdraw your data if you wish, simply by contacting the researchers through the details provided below.

Your privacy

Any data we collect from you will be held under password protection and not divulged to others. We are interested in the consensus views of the panel, rather than the views of individual members, so your individual answers will never be reported. We will only present the results in statistical summary form. Due to research code requirements, we will be storing the information collected for 5 years after the study, but none of your information will be identifiable or be able to be traced back to you. This information will not be deleted however until all continued interest in the information (if any at all) ceases.

If you are interested in participating or require further information

If you would like further information before deciding to participate, or if you are interested in participating, please contact Dr Erminia Colucci (ecolucci@unimelb.edu.au, +61-3-9035 3082) or Ms Saranga De Silva (sarangad@student.unimelb.edu.au, +61-4-3252 0369). This study is done in collaboration with the National Institute of Mental Health in Sri Lanka.

If you have concerns about the project

If you have concerns about the *scientific aspects of the study*, please contact the coordinator of the project, Dr Erminia Colucci (ecolucci@unimelb.edu.au, +61-3-9035 3082).

This project has been approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee.

If you have concerns about the *ethics of the study*, please contact:

Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne,

Ph: +61 3 8344 2073; Fax: +61 3 9347 6739

This project has also been approved by the National Institute of Mental Health Sri Lanka, Ethics Review Committee.

Ph: 0112578234-7; Fax: 0112578238

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