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.
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.
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