

Fighting the rise of workplace depression and suicide



By Eugene Yiga

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A recent [report from the CDC](#) showed that the USA is in the grip of a sustained rise in the suicide rate for both sexes and across all age groups. From 1999 to 2014, the suicide rate rose by 24%. A database from the OECD also shows that the recent uptick is mirrored in Britain and the Netherlands, among other countries.



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Epidemiological studies and surveys have shown that several factors indicate a higher risk of suicide. These include being male, aged 60 and older, being widowed or divorced, living alone, being unemployed or having financial problems, having suffered a recent adverse event (such as a job loss or death of a loved one), being clinically depressed or schizophrenic, and more.

While each case is different, there are things we can all do to help and support.

1. Stop the judgement

For counselling psychologist Dr Lori Eddy, one of the most significant barriers to seeking help is the stigma around mental health. Individuals might refrain from seeking support due to fear of judgement and discrimination. Another concern that may prevent seeking help is fear around the impact on career progression if emotional difficulties became known to employers.

“We need to stop self-stigmatising,” she says. “One in four people experience mental and emotional difficulties at any one time. This is part of life and with support you can recover and move forward.”

2. Create a supportive environment

A feeling of hopelessness is a major risk factor for suicide and an obstacle to reaching out for support. Hopelessness negatively skews a person’s perspective and makes it difficult to solve problems, which makes the person vulnerable to concluding that suicide is the only solution to current difficulties. A person with this mindset of hopelessness might see

no point in accessing support from others.

“Despite the fact that men are four times more likely to commit suicide than women, men are far less likely to seek support due to social norms and expectations around traditional masculinity,” Eddy says. “Men have a greater tendency to ignore signs of stress and depression and to throw themselves into work as a distraction or to turn to alcohol or other substances to cope, resulting in a cumulative build up which could lead to an escalation in symptoms with time.”

3. Take it seriously

Ultimately, if someone has disclosed that they are thinking of suicide, always take it seriously, even if you suspect it is just a way to get attention.

“The more specific the plan (the when, the how) and the greater their access to the means (medication, a gun), the higher is the risk of the plan being carried out,” says clinical psychologist, Dr Colinda Linde. “In these cases, it is more important to speak out and risk a friend or colleague being upset with you for it than it is to keep such a critical piece of information to yourself.”

4. Get help

Don't be afraid to seek professional help if you need it. Call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) or one of the [International Suicide Hotlines](#) for your country.

“Recognise that suicide is a permanent solution to temporary difficulties and that help is available,” Eddy says.

“Speaking to someone might not change your problems, but it might change your ability to deal with them.”

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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