



Youth Suicide in New Zealand

- By Hannah Thomas



Research Question

‘Why do New Zealand youth have the highest rates of suicide in comparison to all other age brackets of those who take their own lives, and how does this knowledge impact nursing practice?’

Between mid-2016 and mid-2017, 606 people in New Zealand committed suicide, a statistic that has been increasing over the past few years. The age group containing the highest amount of suicides was the 20-24 group, statistics which led to a UNICEF report stating that New Zealand has the highest teen suicide ranking in the world (Life Matters Suicide Prevention Trust, n.d; Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, 2017).

So why are youth at higher risk of committing suicide?

Impulsivity

Between the onset of puberty and into your twenties, the brain undergoes several changes which can lead to increased impulsivity and impaired judgement (Gluckman, 2017). These traits are linked to higher risk of suicide due to poor self control and more drastic emotional responses to certain stressors. This means that instead of showing resilience where one might expect, youth may express more harmful behaviours (Gluckman, 2017).

Alcohol consumption

Over half of youth suicides in New Zealand involve alcohol or drug exposure (Gluckman, 2017). Alcohol consumption on the whole is more prevalent in adolescents than in adults, and can be a contributing factor to an attempted suicide as it is a depressant and can cause disinhibition (Gluckman, 2017; Spear, 2018).

Peer influence

During adolescents, relationships with peers grow in significance and therefore are able to have a greater influence (Gluckman, 2017). Unfortunately, New Zealand has a high rate of bullying in schools. The effects of this can be devastating on the victim's mental health, especially where cyber-bullying is occurring as it is less able to be avoided or intervened (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2017; Gluckman, 2017).

Relevance to the Nursing Profession

No matter the area of nursing, it is almost inevitable that all nurses at some point in their career will care for patient with suicidal intent. Therefore, having knowledge around this topic and how to deal with it is vital for good practice. Nurses hold a lot of power, and part of their role is to educate the community. With a sound knowledge on how young people can keep themselves mentally well and which strategies they can use to deal with distress, they will be able to educate those around them and possibly have an immense impact on their community.

Recommendations

- 1) That nurses provide a resilience training program in schools to children right throughout their schooling, preferably long before they reach adolescence. Building resilience from a young age has been shown to reduce suicidality in youth due to people being better equipped to adjust and cope when life stressors become overwhelming (Gluckman, 2017).
- 2) Providing education sessions for parents about how to identify suicidal behaviour and how to go about getting help could be an effective preventative method also (Burnette, Ramchand, & Ayer, 2015).

Conclusion

Youth suicide leads to an alarming number of deaths in New Zealand each year. It is an unfortunate and traumatic phenomenon which requires more attention and efforts to be made in order to reduce its prevalence.

References

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PECOT Model

	Information Relating to Question	Explanation
Population	Youth in New Zealand (between the ages of 12 and 24) that have committed suicide.	Between July 2016 and June 2017, 130 people under the age of 24 committed suicide in New Zealand (Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, 2017). I am focussing on this age range as they have the highest suicide rate.
Exposure (intervention)	Contributing factors to youth in New Zealand committing suicide.	To understand what reasons are contributing to so many young people ending their lives each year.
Control (comparison)	New Zealanders above the age of 24 may have taken their own lives.	To be able to see which factors are unique to young people taking their lives as opposed to the older generations.
Outcome	To reduce the rate of youth suicide in New Zealand by gaining a better understanding of contributing factors and therefore being able to address these.	Through improving nurses' knowledge of how to prevent youth suicide and what young people can do to stay well, they will be able to go on to educate the community in order to try and reduce these statistics.
Time	N/A	N/A

Summary

My aim in presenting my literature review findings in the form of a poster is to capture the audience's attention by presenting the summarised information in a visually-appealing way. Research has proven that posters are a useful way to increase an audience's knowledge about a topic, especially when accompanied by an oral presentation (Ilic, & Rowe, 2013). Posters are an effective way to quickly get your main points across because they captivate the audience without being too intimidating with an abundance of writing (The University of Edinburgh, 2016). I felt that because I am a visual learner, along with many of my peers, using a poster would be the most effective and relevant way to present my information. Visual learners are people who retain information best by reading or by seeing pictures and diagrams. They remember things from sight, therefore it was important to me to make my poster easy to read with a logical flow of information (Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, n.d.).

References

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Ilic, D, & Rowe, N. (2013). What is the evidence that poster presentations are effective in promoting knowledge transfer? A state of the art review. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 30(1), 4-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12015>

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