

Innocenti Report

By Beate Matthies, Chair, Auckland District Council of Social Services

A few months ago, UNICEF released the *Innocenti Report* which focuses on the well-being of children in industrialised countries.

In our March edition of *Community Network* we were mentioning the *Sustainable Development Goals*. Some of these goals are also used as criteria for this report on child well-being across 41 countries of the *European Union* and the *OECD*.



It didn't come as a huge surprise to see that the youth suicide rate in New Zealand was high – but it was shocking to read in this *UNICEF Report* that in regards to youth suicide New Zealand was the *OECD* country with the worst rate in the world at 15.6 per 100,000 people (age group 15-19)¹.

Surprisingly, countries like Portugal (1.7 per 100,000 people), Italy (1.9), and Spain (2.0) were among the best performing countries. Yet, as of August 2017, these three countries are among the six *EU* countries most affected by youth unemployment. Spain's young people under the age of 25 have to cope with an unemployment rate of 38.7%² and yet the youth suicide rate

continues ➡

1. www.unicef-irc.org/publications/890/
2. www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/

is so much lower than New Zealand where the unemployment rate for young people is currently at 9.3%³.

So, the reason for suicide is not necessarily related to unemployment.

Many specialists in New Zealand agree that young New Zealanders have to be more resilient and need hope for the future. The earlier we start with this task, the better.

The *World Health Organisation (WHO)* considers suicide as preventable and in a fact sheet⁴ offers suggestions how to prevent and control suicides:

- ❶ reducing access to the means of suicide (e.g. pesticides, firearms, certain medications);
- ❷ reporting by media in a responsible way;
- ❸ introducing alcohol policies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol;
- ❹ early identification, treatment and care of people with mental and substance use disorders, chronic pain and acute emotional distress;
- ❺ training of non-specialised health workers in the assessment and management of suicidal behaviour;
- ❻ follow-up care for people who attempted suicide and provision of community support.

WHO Key Facts⁴



- Close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year.
- For every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide every year. A prior suicide attempt is the single most important risk factor for suicide in the general population.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds.
- 78% of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries.
- Ingestion of pesticide, hanging and firearms are among the most common methods of suicide globally.



**World Health
Organization**

3. www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/government_finance/central_government/nz-in-the-oecd/unemployment.aspx

4. WHO, fact sheet, updated August 2017

High suicide rates are a challenge for every society.

The shocking statistics on youth suicide in New Zealand were the topic of a “Discussion Paper” which was published by the Office of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor in July 2017. The Chief Science Advisor is *Professor Sir Peter Gluckman*, and hence the report is often referred to as the *Gluckman-Report*⁵.

The report points out that it is not enough to label youth suicide as a mental health issue but rather start with prevention methods from early childhood on:

- ❶ Primary Prevention during the pre-pubertal period;
- ❷ Secondary Prevention during the adolescent period;
- ❸ Tertiary Prevention for those who are especially at risk and may have already attempted suicide.

Recently, the Mayor of Whangarei, *Sheryl Mai* made a desperate plea to her community. After at least three suicides of young people between 13 and 22 within only four days, she reiterated that there was support available in the community. *The New Zealand Herald* quotes her⁶ regarding the girl who committed suicide with:

“It just makes me incredibly sad [she] decided there was no hope for her future,” *Ms Mai* said on Facebook.

“There is support in our community if you need it. Please, if you’re considering suicide, talk to someone, make the most of your friends.

“If there’s anything we can do to help, please, please, let us know.”



Sheryl Mai

Sheryl Mai mentions hope. In a society that focuses on economic success and success in sports, the idea of hope is often looked down on. In our society today, the emphasis is all facts and probability. Hope is trusting in life and a future without proof. Having hope doesn’t mean being passive and waiting

5. www.pmcса.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/17-07-26-Youth-suicide-in-New-Zealand-a-Discussion-Paper.pdf
6. www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11943947

for a solution to fall from heaven but being ready to take whatever action is necessary.

Our challenge in society is to give children and young people hope, and support them in a non-judgmental way. I think it is not just about winning or losing, but helping them to see beyond that stage and trusting in the future.



Where to Get Help⁷

If you are worried about your or someone else's mental health, the best place to get help is your GP or local mental health provider.

However, **if you or someone else is in danger or endangering others, call 111.**

If you need to talk to someone, the following free helplines operate 24 / 7:

Depression Helpline

0800-111-757

Youthline

0800-376-633

or text 234

Lifeline

0800-543-354

Need to Talk?

Call or text 1737

Samaritans

0800-726-666

There are lots of places to get support – visit tinyurl.com/ADCOSS-MHHelp

7. Source: *The New Zealand Herald*, "Break the Silence" special series on youth suicide, www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11885369