

mhGAP: Integrating mental health into primary care

Chapter 1: Introduction to self-harm/suicide | Lesson 1: Recognizing self-harm and suicide

Why is self-harm/suicide a priority mental, neurological and substance use (MNS) disorder?

- Every year, more than 700 000 people die by suicide globally.
- Many more attempt suicide.
- Every attempt or death by suicide is a tragedy that has long-lasting effects on the families and communities left behind. (ripple effect)
- None of the people or families impacted by self-harm/suicide are getting the help they need early enough.

Many communities have a negative attitude towards people experiencing mental disorders and suicide. These lead to societal taboos that prevent the discussion of self-harm/suicide. This also makes the issue difficult to deal with.

Governments too lack the awareness of self-harm/suicide as major public health problems. For example, only 38 countries report having a national suicide-prevention strategy.

In combination, these issues mean people at risk of self-harm/suicide do not receive the support they need from family, friends and the wider community, including health workers.