

THE GAZETTE



The official newsletter of Center of Research & Strategic Thinking

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THE IMPORTANCE OF READING.

Reading brings knowledge and knowledge is power, therefore reading is power. The power to know, learn and understand... but also the power to dream. Stories inspire us to reach high, love deep, change the world and be more than we ever thought we could. Every book allows us to dream a new dream"

Reading is Knowledge and Knowledge is Power

Marcus Tullius Cicero (a Roman writer, speaker, Philosopher and Politician) once said, "A room without books is like a body without a soul"

The Untold Consequences of Covid19 Pandemic

By DR SHALEEZA KHAN

The untold consequences of covid19 pandemic

Covid19 was declared a pandemic on 11.03.2020. the world faced an

Unprecedented "lock down". Unprecedented in modern history.

During this process, the earth showed signs of positive regeneration. man, historically hunter-gatherer, was now in confined spaces and face masked when venturing out for "essential only services". This declaration of confinement highlighted the disequilibrium between man and earth. It highlighted pollution which had become the byproduct of our "Modern living" on planet earth. The "lockdown" has highlighted the untold consequences of psycho social Challenges of man, the historical hunter - gatherer, Man the social creature. The economic consequences for the masses have not been accounted for in any meaningful way. As at June 2021, we are still in confinement mode, with only "most essential Services and travel allowances", vaccinated with a gamut available. Yet the numbers show no convincing signs of decreasing. Governments seem to have no clearer policies other than what was initiated at the onset of the declaration of a pandemic. There has been no cease fire in war torn areas across the globe. Anti-lock down protests movements are increasing and becoming increasingly more violent. The other plagues of our society pre covid 19 haven't diminished, have not been in the fore front any longer. Has the time come for a reassessment of the approach to. The covid19 pandemic handling by the international. Bodies and governments around the world?

ANY SOCIETY WHETHER ANCIENT OR IN THE 21ST CENTURY NEEDS INFORMATION GATHERING TO BE ABLE TO FUNCTION COHESIVELY AS A SOCIETY.

INFORMATION GATHERING CAN ONLY BE DONE BY STRATEGICALLY THINKING OF THE ISSUES AFFECTING THE SOCIETY IN A DISRUPTIVE MANNER.

THE COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA IS GEOGRAPHICALLY A SOUTH AMERICAN STATE AND A MEMBER STATE OF CARICOM. IT BRIDGES THE 2. IT ALSO SHARES RELATIONS WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD. HENCE ITS IMPORTANT FOR GUYANA TO UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE ITS UNIQUE ISSUES WHILE PROJECTING ONTO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE.

THE COVID19 PANDEMIC HAS DOMINATED HEADLINES SINCE 2020.THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES HAVE NOT BEEN PRACTICALLYASSESSED. HENCE OUR 1ST RESEARCH PAPER WILL SEEK TO DO SAME.

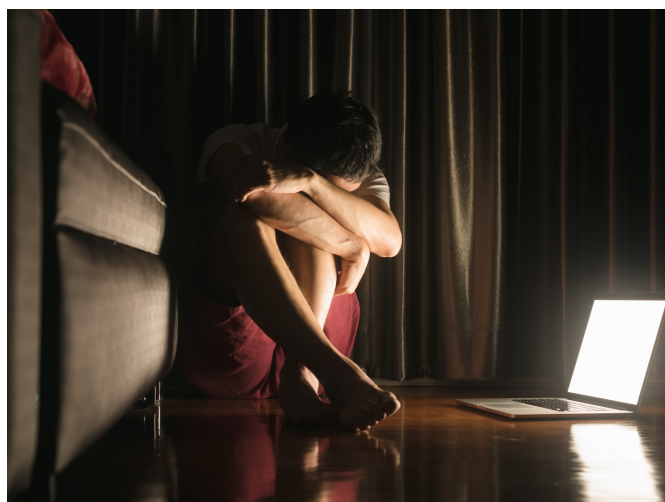
31 children attempted suicide in 2020

By Rehana Ahamad

It is no secret that Guyana has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, and, even more disturbing, is the fact that the recorded global figures also account for children, more accurately, persons below the age of 18.

As at October last, some 31 children had attempted to end their lives by various means. These figures, provided by the Childcare Protection Agency (CPA), specify that 25 females and six males attempted suicide for the period January 2020 to October 2020. This represents a significant decrease in the number of cases reaching the agency when compared to 2019. Last year, a staggering 79 children comprising 55 girls and 24 boys, attempted to take their lives.





31 children attempted suicide in 2020

Global studies show that young children and teenagers attempt suicide mainly due to depression caused by the stress and anxiety attached to academic pressure, alcohol consumption, the loss of a valued relationship, frequent change of residency, poor family patterns and abuse. Director of the CPA, Ann Greene, explained, during a recent staff conference, that the agency is working aggressively towards improving and expanding its psychosocial services to children and families throughout Guyana, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We definitely will be concentrating on providing assistance to the family by increase services and social network supports at the community level,” Green said. She indicated that the agency’s long-term goal is the development of the family as a safety net for children.

“The family is regarded as an agent of the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG) and it is said that through the essential roles of the family that the SDG is achievable. Consequently, the plan is to use a family-centred and strength-based approach, which involves building positive partnerships with the family and identifying its strength and build on it,” Green elaborated.

She informed that the reduction of the agency’s caseloads is critical to it being able to deliver on its mandate to ensure that Guyana’s children are raised in loving, healthy environments that are conducive to their overall wellbeing. As a result, the appointment of key personnel is expected to be pursued in the coming year. “Accordingly, we will be using new approaches to combat same in the new budget year,” Green said.

For the aforementioned period, a total of 775 boys and 991 girls were afforded counselling through various CPA interventions. There were also 3,547 cases where parental counselling and capacity building were also provided. Nonetheless, even though CPA data for the past two years show more girls attempting suicide as compared to boys, the overall figures for Guyana indicate the opposite.

In fact, the United Nations Human Development Report for 2020 specifies that female suicides in Guyana occur at a rate of 14.2 per 100,000 persons, while suicides among males recorded a rate of 46.6 per 100,000 persons.

According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, Guyana has made several notable steps forward with regard to the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A latest update on Guyana’s progress specifies that the country’s suicide rate was reduced by some 35 per cent.

In September 2019, Director of the Mental Health Unit, Dr. Util Richmond-Thomas, confirmed the reduction, specifying that Region Two had the highest rate of suicides in the country, followed by Region Six. Examination of the Ministry of Health’s data showed that persons of East Indian origin were more prone to suicides, accounting for 68 per cent of suicides recorded in Guyana. This was followed by the African-Guyanese community with a 17 per cent rate, as of 2018.

AUOR study finds suicide is a grave problem

Dr. Eton Simon, President of the American University of Research presenting the findings of a study done by a Research and Consultant Group on 'Suicide Prevention and Self Awareness Essequibo Project. To his right is Jennel Williams, Project Officer and Psychology Student who was part of the team

"This is an issue that is really scary at the moment, and I must say this issue is more scary than anything else when it comes to suicidal behaviour. And according to our analysis has become a trend and trends are not very easy to reverse, because the whole idea of trend tends to take on a new mental state of awareness." Dr Simon.

The findings of a study conducted by the Guyana-based American University of Research (AUOR) on 'Suicide Prevention and Self-Awareness in the Essequibo' has found that suicides now constitute such a grave problem locally, that serious intervention is needed to stem the increase of suicidal behaviour in our land.

The study was done on the Essequibo Coast during the first week of February by a team of Researchers from the AUOR headed by President, Dr. Eton Simon. The study sought to determine the prevalence and root causes of suicide, and to map out strategies aimed at preventing the spread of suicide in the Essequibo.



The Study

Dr. Simon, who presented the findings to the media at the AUOR offices last Wednesday, while acknowledging that suicide has become a dangerous trend locally, nevertheless debunked the statistics appearing in a news story in a section of the media last month claiming that for the year 2013 there were 82 suicides in the Essequibo.

On the contrary, the AUOR study conducted from Supenaam to Charity, Essequibo Coast supported by statistics from the Records Department of the Suddie Hospital spanning 2009 to 2013 showed that for 2013, 16 people died as a result of suicide and not 82.

Heading the 13-member team of researchers was Dr. Eton Simon, President of AUOR, along with Dr. Yeaswantie Beckhoo; Ms. Leila Ramson, Chairperson of the Teaching Service Commission, Ms. Aisha Mc Doom Singh; Jenel Williams, Project Officer and Psychology Student; Zairol Neisha, Co-ordinator, Guyana Professional Counselling Association and Adviser/Mediator in the High Court. Other participants included students of psychology at AUOR.

The project was funded solely by the American University of Research, a research, analysis and consultant institute, whose objective is to conduct research to find the root cause of social problems.

Suicide data:

Suicide data presented by the research team revealed the following figures over a 5-year period: For 2009 – 21 deaths; 2010 – 18 deaths; 2011 – 17 deaths; 2012 – 20 deaths; and 2013 – 16 deaths. Notwithstanding that fact, reported attempted suicides were: for 2009 – 65; for 2010 – 90; for 2011 – 80; for 2012 – 150; and 2013 – 113. Causes: Of the total of 92 suicides over the five-year period 2009 to 2013, 67 were by poison ingestion, while 25 were by hanging – numbers which all point to the fact that, according to Dr. Simon, suicide has become a trend, and constitutes a serious problem locally.

Trend: “This is an issue that is really scary at the moment, and I must say this issue is more scary than anything else when it comes to suicidal behaviour. And according to our analysis has become a trend and trends are not very easy to reverse, because the whole idea of trend tends to take on a new mental state of awareness,” Dr. Simon disclosed.

He said based on that mental state of awareness it becomes an addiction. And that addiction will take tremendous input to reverse, adding: “So I strongly believe that serious intervention must be given, to stem the increase of suicidal behaviour in Guyana.”

He gave examples of trends in Guyana and what these lead to, making reference to the culture of dumping garbage at street corners, in alleyways, in front of businesses and even a church cited. The end result is that it eventually gets into people’s psyche, and eventually they begin to pass garbage strewn along the way, without making any big deal of it. Trends, Professor Simon noted, are behaviour patterns that consume the human mind and when those trends consume the human mind they become very difficult to reverse.

He pointed to other dangerous trends being embraced in our culture, such as alcoholism, stressing that we need to be aware of them, because once they become ‘trend’ – it means that individuals would have become addicted to that behaviour and it’s not easy to reverse. “That is why we need to be very cognizant of these trends – these abnormal behaviours that are manifested in this culture today,” he reiterated.

Appalled at what came out of the news article on suicide in the Essequibo, Dr. Simon said the AUOR-led team, travelled to the region, conducted the research and further took the initiative to perform a pioneering role in addressing suicide.



In Essequibo a total of 2,370 people-12 years and older were interviewed, including parents, students’ teachers, persons who have themselves attempted suicide; random sampling from the public; as well as visits were made to public places where the team interacted with friends of persons who attempted suicide.

The team of researchers held workshops and counselling sessions with various target groups including an Amerindian Captain and his tribe at Wyaka in the Essequibo;

The team did a television presentation on suicide; held coaching and workshops on suicide prevention and other social issues with students and staff of the New Opportunity Corps (a remedial school); with persons who had attempted suicide, as well as their relatives.



Why people commit suicide: The AUOR cited reasons for committing suicide as including: Frustration, unemployment; domestic issues/domestic violence; relationship issues; peer pressure; bullying; parent/child conflict; child abuse; sexual abuse depression/stress.

Dr. Simon cautioned that in dealing with problems there are two basic approaches: Dealing with the symptoms, which is reactive or instinctive behaviour, which invariably people do, and land themselves into deeper problems; or 'getting to the root cause' which is in effect, the source of the problem.

"If you want to find the solution to problems you should look for the root cause of that problem, which is the underlying issue. When we start looking at the source - we come to the place where we would find the seed or foundation that was planted in the mind," he emphasised.

Findings of the American University Research:

- * Statistics from the last five years have revealed that a large number of persons have attempted suicide. Further information to be revealed by Dr, Beckhoo

- * Technological advance has created an imbalance between parents and children

- * Relationships and domestic issues are also vital contributing factors to suicide rates.

- * The age range of the majority of suicide victims was from 12 - 20.

- * The majority of persons who have attempted or committed suicide are males.

Future Plans:

The team has gathered extensive information on suicidal behaviour and is also in the process of designing a strategic plan to reduce this abnormal behaviour, which includes 'user technology'. The University will establish a 'Counselor-on-demand' system, whereby a person can just punch in a code and have live counselling from one of the University's counselors. And this is because of the realisation that persons have a stigma when it comes to mental health.

- * Self-awareness and self-development training are also on the cards.

- * Creating Youth Awareness group to work with other youths to share knowledge on self-awareness and self-development.

Recommendations:

Residents recommended: Establishment of Counselling Centres and recreational facilities; creation of more jobs to address the unemployment issue which proved to be a root cause of suicide; sensitisation on suicide through the use of TV programmes; formation of youth groups, outreach programmes to individuals and families.

AUOR recommended: TV programmes, establishment of community centres; social awareness training; self-development training; coaching; establishment of youth clubs, counselling; and religious involvement.



why aren't we making similar investments into the absolute and most critical aspect of our country's asset. Why aren't we investing in the mental wellbeing of a population that would be unprepared for prospects of "much" wealth?

BY KISHAN NARINE (STUDENT OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PEACE STUDIES INC)

There is a lot of talk of oil wealth and much fanfare regarding its implications on the lives of Guyanese in the coming decades. Most notably; multi billion dollars investments into infrastructure from fancy hotels to oil tankers of grandiose propositions. While this is a fantastic feat; it begs the question, why aren't we making similar investments into the absolute and most critical aspect of our country's asset. Why aren't we investing in the mental wellbeing of a population that would be unprepared for prospects of "much" wealth?

Mental Health has long afflicted our country, we have one of the highest suicide rate in the world, gender based violence is at an all-time high, abject poverty is ever more glaring as the pandemic rages on, spiraling blue collar and violent crime, and minority groups like the LGBTQ+ community and refugees from Haiti and Venezuela, are pushed to the fringes of society to exist in obscurity.

A lot of these social ills are manifestations of unresolved psychological issues, stemming as far as the formative years of development. Human development is a complex phenomenon that involves a combination of our inherited biological characteristics and environmental influences. Hence, our personality is shaped by these factors; it is generally accepted by the scientific community that when certain personality trait becomes too rigid and inflexible, it may lead to the development of a personality disorder. People with personality disorders have consistent patterns of thinking and acting that differ from what society considers usual or normal.

According to the American Psychological Association "childhood trauma is one of the leading causes of developing a personality disorder. Findings from one of the largest studies of personality disorders, the Collaborative Longitudinal Personality Disorders Study, offer clues about the role of childhood experiences. One study found a link between the number and type of childhood traumas and the development of personality disorders. People with borderline personality disorder, for example, had especially high rates of childhood sexual trauma." As stated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), which is the standard reference book for recognized mental illnesses, "borderline personality disorder is marked by unstable moods, poor self-image, chaotic relationships, and impulsive behavior (such as sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, overspending, and reckless driving)."

The Child Care and Protection Agency in its 2020 report said that "3,129 children between ages 1 to 18 were either abused physically, sexually or verbally; neglected, abandoned or witnessed abuse. The figures also showed that 688 girls between the ages of 14 and 18 and 127 boys were sexually abused." (Stabreok New, 2021). The Rights of the Child Commission Chair Person Ms.

Aleema Nasir at the time of submitting the commission's annual report for 2017-2020 stated that "there is a lot of neglect, a lot of abuse and a lot of incest". These findings are worrying as this disorder can manifest due to these unresolved traumas, as it's the most common of all the personality disorders and it is often misdiagnosed as Bi-Polar Disorder.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation and subsequent book Motivation and Personality" talks about the hierarchy of needs, starting from physiological needs all the way up to self-actualization. In our society; there is soul sucking poverty and poor social services; many of our citizens' struggle to have access to food, clean water and shelter. Lacking these needs may fuel a natural craving to fulfill a basic innate need by any means necessary. Hence, a lot of persons are developing Anti-Social Personality Disorder. According to the American Psychiatric Association "Anti-Social Personality Disorder is a pattern of disregarding or violating the rights of others. A person with antisocial personality disorder may not conform to social norms, may repeatedly lie or deceive others, or may act impulsively." As such, we can attribute poverty as one of the leading cause of the ongoing crime wave, influencing persons to become criminals as a means of survival to meet their basic need.



Abraham Maslow

1908-1970

The father of humanistic psychology and creator of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Our multi blended cultures and ethnicities that wraps the fabric of Guyanese society is one of our greatest strengths. However, we cannot use the cookie cutter approach in identifying and mitigating mental health issues in the different faucets of our society. Our mixture of individualistic and collectivistic cultures has made this plague of mental health even harder to address, as some portion of society "will sweep it under the rug", while another portion may say "toughen up and get going". Suicide is at the forefront in our battle with mental health and it is predominantly higher in the communities of Indian decent. Ministry of Health data states "It was found that Region 2 had the highest number of suicides followed by Region 6, with the East Indian population bearing 68% of suicides, followed by African-Guyanese with 10% in 2017 as stated by Director of the Mental Health Unit, Dr. Util Richmond-Thomas (DPI, September 10, 2019). There can be considered a link between the collectivistic cultures of Indians and how this contributes to persons developing Dependent Personality Disorder. The American Psychiatric Association defines Dependent Personality Disorder as "a pattern of needing to be taken care of and submissive and clingy behavior. People with dependent personality disorder may have difficulty making daily decisions without reassurance from others or may feel uncomfortable or helpless when alone because of fear of inability to take care of themselves. This culture places emphasis on the goals of the group and smothering is ever pervasive. Whenever these individuals are forced to be independent and face the stressors of life, they are often unable to cope. There is a low level of autonomy and self-identity and, most times decisions are made for you and you are unable to have an input. These are ideal characteristics for someone to develop a low self-esteem and self-confidence.

Another factor that can contribute to the high rate of suicide of males in these regions may be due to stagnant socio-economic environment. "According to research funded by the International Labour Organization (ILO) the closure of four sugar estates severely compromised the livelihoods of the laid off workers leading to increased instances of suicide, alcohol consumption and crime." (Stabroek News, June 11, 2021). Archaic gender roles dictates males are to be providers and protectors. Males aren't supposed to be able to regulate emotions and express feelings. Hence, in harsh economic climates, they may feel frustrated, and that frustration is then directed onto their spouse. Ever so often in our communities, we find ourselves reeling from another murder suicide or brutal domestic violence. Overtime, this may evolve in Anti-Social Personality Disorder in individuals who commit these offenses. As women develop sensory adaptation and becomes desensitize to the violence. Here again, another broken moral compass.

Our infrastructure to aid in our fight for adequate mental health services is bleak. "Guyana has been making very poor steps in addressing mental health issues and the state of its treatment hospital has been described as "sad". The country's Chief Psychiatrist, Dr Bhairo Harry yesterday called out the authorities for inconsistent action on addressing the plethora of mental health-related illnesses. Dr Harry told the opening of the Guyana Mental Health and Well-being conference that several plans had been put in place to further develop the level of psychiatric care in Guyana but most, if not all, of those plans have been abandoned." (Stabroek News, November 9, 2021).

Our laws are outdated and colonial as the current law states "Everyone who attempts to commit suicide shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and liable to imprisonment for two years." According to the Minister of Health. (Newsroom, 9 November, 2021.) After 55 years as an Independent nation, the silent plague continues to eviscerate our society with no end in sight, a raging pandemic will only add to this national issue as we the citizens anticipate much "wealth".

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