

**OUR CORE VALUES:**

- Recognition of diversity
- Confidentiality
- Compassion
- Equal treatment
- Professionalism
- Teamwork



# MENTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

**My ref:** ..... MHA/C5/24/002

**Your ref:** .....

10<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**To All Media Houses**

## PRESS RELEASE SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024

There is growing concern about suicidal behavior globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like Ghana. Each year, the global community observes World Suicide Prevention Day on the 10th of September; and the Mental Health Authority is leading Ghana to observe same this year, 2024.

In the first half of 2024, Ghana recorded a total of 543 attempted suicides and 81 completed suicides through various district health information management systems across the country. This represents an alarming increase compared to the 594 attempts and 48 completed suicides recorded for the entire year of 2023. The surge is especially concerning as many of those affected by suicide worldwide are young (15-29 years).

The Greater Accra, Eastern, and Central regions recorded the highest numbers of suicide attempts for the half year of 2024, with the most completed suicides occurring in the Greater Accra region.

As we mark Suicide Prevention Day this year, the triennial theme "Changing the Narrative" again comes most appropriate. It calls for action to initiate conversations about suicide in our streets, homes, markets, offices, and schools, creating an opportunity to break the silence and stigma surrounding suicidal behavior. Over the years, significant unease has surrounded discussions on suicidal behavior which include thoughts of suicide, attempts, and death by suicide. Again, myths like "talking about suicide suggests the act and increases the likelihood of death by suicide" have been debunked, as speaking up actually saves lives.

It is crucial to pay attention to children and adolescents, as some studies in Ghana have shown a high prevalence of suicidal behaviors among students. One such study, Azasu and Joe, 2023, found a prevalence of 20.4% for suicidal thoughts, 23.4% for suicide planning, and 28.4% for actual suicide attempts among junior and senior high school students. Alarmingly, the prevalence was reported to be higher in junior high school students compared to those in senior high school.

Though in some instances, surviving relatives or friends may report no preceding clues, certain factors have been identified that may contribute to suicidal behavior. These include bullying, abuse (especially physical and sexual), neglect, substance use, family poverty, adolescent conflict with parents, corporal punishment and poor academic performance. While suicidal ideas in childhood or adolescence may not always result in

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attempts or death by suicide, they are shown to be risk factors for suicidal behavior in adulthood.

Despite suicide being one of the leading causes of death among young people, it can be prevented by encouraging the development of essential skills necessary to connect with others, limiting access to common means of suicide, and providing timely assessment and management for individuals affected by suicidal behavior. It is therefore crucial to start the conversation early to prevent the loss of our future generation to suicide.

With this in mind, the Mental Health Authority has resolved to change the narrative by engaging all stakeholders, including security and media personnel, to create nationwide awareness and education through various media platforms.

Ghanaians everywhere need to be educated to recognize subtle signs, which may include changes in behavior like withdrawal from social interactions, neglect of personal hygiene, or making statements that suggest guilt or a desire to die, such as “I wish I was never born” or “I wish I don’t wake up.” Though these statements may be overlooked or dismissed, they may very well reflect suicidal ideations, and paying close attention may help save a life.

With suicide now decriminalized, the Mental Health Authority urges everyone to be vigilant and seek help, as assistance is readily available through the national suicide call center, where professionals are ready to offer the needed support.

**Reach Out on our National Suicide Help Line: 0800 678 678**

Together, we can change the narrative by starting the conversation today!

Thank You



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