

A Study of Sociological Risk Factors of Youth Suicidal Behaviour
and Problem Solving Counselling as a Therapeutic Tool on
Prevention – A Study in a Sub-urban Hospital in Sri Lanka

by

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Dedicated to the memory of my father

The work described in this thesis was carried out by me under the supervision of Professor S.T. Kathriarachchi of the Department of Psychiatry and Professor D. S. D. J. Abeysekera of the Department of Sociology & Anthropology of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and a report on this has not been submitted in whole or in part to any University or any other institution for any other Degree/Diploma.


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We certify that the above statement made by the candidate is true and that this thesis is suitable for submission to the University for the purpose of evaluation.

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ABSTRACT

Suicidal behaviour has been a major concern in all societies and literature on suicide has been found as far back as the 5th century and was later popularized by sociological work of Emile Durkheim. Suicidal behaviour has become a public health issue and approximately one million people would have committed suicide in the year 2000 globally. Suicide and attempted suicide rates in Sri Lanka fall within the highest group of countries in the world. There were only a few descriptive studies that investigated the sociological risk factors as well as counselling as preventive tool for youth suicidal behaviour in the country. This Study included two components. The first was designed to identify the demographic profile and sociological risk factors of the Study sample, which is a descriptive study. The second part was designed to test effectiveness of problem solving counselling as a therapeutic tool in prevention of youth suicidal behaviour, which is a comparative study. In this second part, the sample is divided into two groups, experimental and control and offered four sessions of problem solving counselling to the experimental group. The Homagama Base Hospital was selected and a sample of 124 cases admitted was interviewed. Buddhists (88.7 percent) and Sinhala

(96.0 percent) predominate the sample comparable to catchment area and the national data. Of the total, 66.9 percent were women and 71.8 percent were single. Results indicated that the age group of 15 to 24 years is a vulnerable group for suicidal behaviour in sub-urban areas of Sri Lanka and that females are more susceptible in this age group. Risk factors such as poor interaction with father (79.8 percent), poor educational attainment (66.1 percent), poor interaction with mother (53.9 percent), family conflicts (52.4 percent), exposure to suicidal behaviour of close associates (48.3 percent), poor interaction with neighbors (43.5 percent), unemployment (41.9 percent), poor interaction with friends (39.5 percent), easy access to pesticide (36.3 percent), easy access to medicinal drugs (35.6 percent), mother being abroad (26.6 percent), break-up of love affairs (26.6 percent) and alcohol behaviour of parents (24.2 percent) were the risk factors identified in this Study. The Study found that four sessions of problem solving counselling conducted by the same therapist for each subject have significantly improved the problem solving skills and coping strategies of youth with suicidal behaviour. Subjects in the experimental group had shown progressive behaviour in terms of coping stressful life events. The Study confirms that problem solving counselling found to be an effective therapeutic tool in reducing youth suicidal thoughts and behaviour in sub urban communities in Sri Lanka, indicating the introduction of community-wide counselling facilities at the community level would be an important aspect in reducing youth suicidal behaviour. Counselling needs to be made easily available and accessible to the youth to establish therapeutic relationships in medical institutions and in the community.