

Suicide and Older People

Fact Sheet

2006

Executive Summary

Each year across the world, 1 million people take their own lives; in the United Kingdom about 5000 people, many of them over 65 years. In fact, older people are the most successful age group for suicide with about one in four attempts resulting in death. Here in the West Midlands nearly 700 older people have died by suicide in the last ten years. Around two thirds of these suffered from depression and with timely detection and intervention their deaths could have been prevented. Evidence from a growing body of research, shows that suicide in older people is reasonably well understood; it results from complex social, psychological, biological and spiritual processes. What still remains lacking in tackling this devastating problem is concerted and sustained action by each and every one of us to value, support and include older people in all aspects of life. Working together; partners, friends, health and social services, emergency services, business, voluntary and faith groups, and the media can make a significant impact on the problem of suicide in older people. Action is required at both the individual and at the societal level to improve the physical, psychological and social health of older people. We need to reduce the effects of unwanted social isolation and loneliness by empowering and enabling older people to participate fully in everyday life. Steps need to be taken to recognise and respond to the continuing social devaluation and exclusion of older people.

