



World Suicide Prevention Month 2024

An article generated from the 16th Annual World Suicide Prevention Day Seminar, hosted by **Choose Life International (CLI)** on **Tuesday September 10th**, The seminar aimed to address the pervasive stigma around mental illness and suicide, encouraging open dialogue and effective interventions.

Prepared by: Akeem Whitehead
Research Analyst
JIFS



Introduction

Suicide can be defined as an intentional self-inflicted death and is a significant cause of mortality globally. September is recognized as World Suicide Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness and foster meaningful dialogue around mental health.

Recognizing the importance of mental wellness in professional development, The Jamaica Institute of Financial Services (JIFS) had the pleasure of sponsoring and participating in the 16th Annual World Suicide Prevention Day Seminar hosted by Choose Life International on September 10, 2024. This year's theme, "Let's Change the Narrative: Start the Conversation," aimed to tackle one of the most pressing issues in mental health today: the pervasive stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide.

Professional development is crucial in this context, as it seeks to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge to recognize mental health challenges, engage in supportive conversations, and advocate for effective interventions within their workplaces and communities.

The seminar was designed not only to spread awareness but also to empower attendees to continue the work of breaking down barriers that prevent people from seeking help. It provided evidence-based approaches and practical solutions for addressing suicide and mental health issues, alongside a panel discussion on key strategies for policy formulation and collaboration in suicide prevention. This report presents the major takeaways from the seminar and emphasizes the importance of mental health initiatives across all sectors, with JIFS as a key supporter of such efforts.

Global Trends in Suicidality: Seeking answers with emphasis on Jamaican context, (Dr. Grace Kelly, Greif & Trauma Therapist)

The risk of suicide, usually indicated by suicidal ideation or intent, especially as evident in the presence of a well-elaborated suicidal plan is referred to as suicidality. Suicidality is fueled by numerous factors, such factors include trauma, stigma, unforgiveness, financial stress, chronic illness and pain, depression or other mental illness, and aggressive tendencies.

World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 720,000 people die by suicide every year, with a person taking their life every 40 seconds.

This statistic starkly illustrates the urgency of addressing suicidality on a global scale as it is the 3rd leading cause of death in individuals ages 15- 29. The geographic distribution of suicidality shows that the continent of Europe has the highest rates of suicide per 100,000 people.

Figure 1. Suicidal Rates per 100,000 people: Global Trends

Continent	Rates per (100,000)	Population	Per Capita
Europe	20-30	748 million	1 st
Asia	15-25	> 4.6 billion	2 nd
Africa	15-10	> 1.4 billion	3 rd
North America	13-15	600 million	4 th
Oceania	13-11	43 million	5 th
South America	6-10	434 million	6 th
Antarctica	0	No permanent	7 th

Gender Disparities

Statistics show that males are more likely to die by suicide, while females are more likely to attempt suicide. These disparities can be linked to differences in socialization, mental health stigma, and methods used in suicide attempts.

Socioeconomics

Factors such as poverty and unemployment are major contributors to suicidality, especially in developing countries. Approximately 77% of suicides occur in low- and middle-income nations.

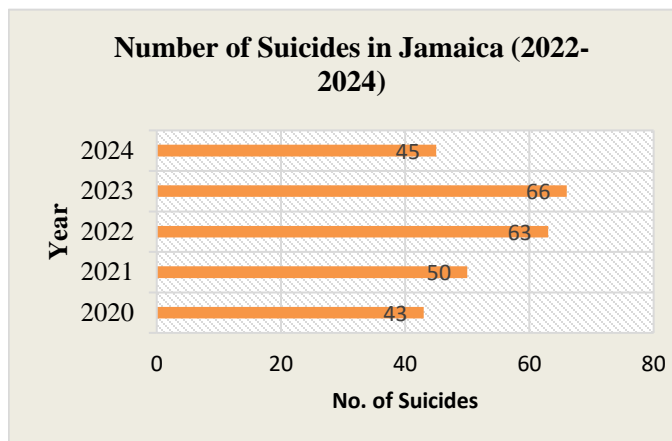
The root causes of suicide, include:

- Mental health disorders
- Access to lethal substances and weapons
- COVID-19 impacts
- Trauma and abuse
- Sextortion
- Chronic illness and pain

Jamaica Suicide Facts

Based on the suicide statistics 2020-2024 Jamaica has recorded cases of suicide among children ages 10 & 16 respectively, in the year 2021. Young adult males ages 20-24 accounted for the largest share of suicides committed in said year. Older adults ages 65+ saw more male suicide cases being recorded with financial stress and chronic illnesses being cited as the contributing factors.

Figure 2. Number of Suicides in Jamaica



Approaches to Suicide Prevention

Various approaches and interventions can be taken to prevent suicide such as a trauma-based approach, stigma reduction, organizational wellness programmes, emotional freedom therapy (EFT), forgiveness, and the formulation of policies and strategies.

Changing the narrative on suicide: A trauma-based approach, (Dr. Roger Ball, Social Worker & Lecturer)

Trauma plays a significant, often overlooked role in the development of mental health issues and suicidality. Trauma affects individuals on multiple levels: mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The trauma-informed approach is a subtle but crucial reframing that helps to understand the root causes of an individual's suffering and more effectively guides them toward recovery. It is important in giving individuals the language to express their trauma which is crucial in initiating the healing process. Trauma manifests not just in the mind, but in the body, spirit, and sense of self. When individuals can name their experiences, they gain a sense of control over their narrative.

Stigma reduction and Mental Health and Suicidality: An Integrated Approach, (Peta-Gaye Reynolds, Consultant Psychiatrist)

Stigma is a major barrier that prevents individuals from seeking the help they need. This stigma is often rooted in misunderstanding, fear, and societal expectations that discourage people from discussing mental health openly. Persons living with a mental illness are viewed as crazy or mad. There are also notions that people living with a mental illness can't make their own decisions, are violent or dangerous, depression is a sign of weak-mindedness, and that men must be strong and just get over their problems. Such notions play a major role in fueling the stigma towards mental illnesses. An integrated approach to reducing the stigma can be done through:

- Equipping healthcare workers with the tools to reduce stigma in a clinical setting.
- Anti-stigma workshops.
- Self-stigma interventions: through advocacy and activism, access to art, and expressive therapies.
- More public education campaigns on mental health and suicidality.
- Mental health literacy programmes in schools.
- Engaging Media: ensuring the correct wording or articles when writing on topics relating to mental health and suicide.

Promoting Organizational Wellness: Wellness Programmes, (Dr. Ijah Thompson, MD Organization Development Consultant)

Fostering a culture of organizational wellness is imminent in providing an outlet for employees to express their thoughts and feelings. Organizational wellness programmes can aid in the prevention of suicide and suicidality as individuals are often experiencing work-related stress coupled with personal and or past traumatic experiences. A simple exercise such as an appreciation check-in can provide insights into how someone is doing based on their response. Initiatives such as employee assistance programmes that provide confidential counselling services as well as mental health education can equip employees with the tools to recognize mental health issues in themselves and others. Additionally, a work-life balance approach inclusive of flexible working hours, remote work options and encouraging take time off to recharge can also be effective.

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT): A thought Shifting Technique in suicide prevention, (Dr. Pearnell Bell, Clinical Psychologist)

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is a unique approach to managing mental health through "tapping". EFT combines elements of cognitive behavioral therapy with tapping on specific acupressure points. This method helps individuals manage negative thoughts and emotions, offering a practical tool for those at risk of suicide. EFT is particularly useful for individuals experiencing anxiety, phobias, guilt, depression, or suicidal thoughts because it allows individuals to address their negative emotions in a non-invasive, self-guided manner. The tapping technique helps to calm the body's nervous system, while cognitive reframing encourages positive thinking patterns. It involves tapping the meridian points and repeating words of self-affirmation and respect.

Forgiveness and Suicidality, (Dr. Faith Thomas, Counseling Psychologist)

The burden of unforgiveness directly impacts an individual's well-being as it leads to resentment, bitterness, hostility, anxiety, stress, anger, and vengeance all of which are significant mental health challenges. Holding onto grudges and resentment can lead to chronic stress and increased anxiety and often they contribute to feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation which are all known risk factors for suicidal ideation. Forgiveness on the other hand increases resilience, improves mental health, and leads to emotional relief. Self-forgiveness lowers depression, suicidal thoughts, anger, and depression. Practical strategies of forgiveness include letting go which is a commitment to releasing retribution or holding on to grudges thereby freeing yourself from emotional burdens. Another strategy is to seek support through counseling support groups or spiritual guidance which can provide the tools and encouragement that is needed to work through forgiveness.

Suicide Prevention through strategies and policy formulations: Connection, Collaboration, and Choice. (Dr. Josef Thomas, Senior Resident Psychiatry UWI, Kashief Barton, Youth representative, Keisha Riley, Audience representative & Dr. Roger Ball, Social Worker & Lecturer)

Connection is one of the most profound ways in which we can end the public health crisis of suicide.

Connecting with someone affected by a mental illness truly and genuinely can bring them back to a sense of wholeness this means recognizing these individuals at a particular point in their lives without taking away the fact that they are experiencing high levels of pain. Collaboration involves a multidisciplinary approach having a team of individuals, agencies, and organizations that can cater to the different needs and areas of the affected individuals. Hence it is important to have choices, an open window of hope where they can choose the option to continue to live their lives.

Recommendations

- Collaboration between multiple agencies, organizations, schools, social workers, psychiatrists, and primary care physicians.
- Medication management & therapy.
- Mentoring programs.
- Advocacy policies.

Contact Jamaica Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Helpline at **(888) 639-5433** or Choose Life International at **(876) 920-7924, 856-2960** or **869-3403**. Email: **clihelpingpeoplelive@gmail.com**

About Jamaica Institute of Financial Services

The Jamaica Institute of Financial Services (JIFS) is a key player in the professional development of individuals within the financial services sector in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. Committed to elevating industry standards, JIFS offers a wide range of educational training programs, workshops, and seminars designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of financial practitioners. In addition to its educational offerings, JIFS fosters a collaborative environment for networking and knowledge sharing among industry professionals. By connecting members with industry leaders and experts, JIFS creates opportunities for mentorship and guidance, ensuring that professionals are well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of the sector.