

Suicide Risk and Prevention during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Invited lecture · David Gunnell

Prof. David Gunnell, FFPH DSc FMedSci, is a Public Health Physician and Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Bristol (UK). He has worked in the field of suicide prevention for almost 30 years, publishing over 350 peer reviewed papers, largely focussing on: (1) national and international approaches for preventing suicide and improving population mental health; (2) early life and life course influences on suicidal behaviour and mental health. He has contributed several WHO reports – most recently their work on pesticide regulation. He is a member of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group for England and contributed to numerous medicine safety reviews. Areas of current research include: the mental health and risk of suicide of young people (including students); the impact of Covid-19 on population mental health and suicide; the global burden of pesticide suicide. In early 2020 he brought together a group of suicide prevention researchers from around the world to form the International Covid-19 Suicide Prevention Research Collaboration (ICSPRC).

Abstract. It's over 2 years since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 6 million people have lost their lives and over 500 million people have been diagnosed with COVID. Although research findings on trends in suicide during the early months of the pandemic have generally been reassuring, the substantial global disruption to populations, health systems and economies caused by the pandemic may lead to adverse effects on suicidal behaviour and suicide deaths in the medium to long term. The magnitude and duration of these effects is likely to differ in different countries and in different cohorts within countries depending on the severity of the pandemic, national and local responses, and underlying characteristics of the communities. Drawing on the work of the International COVID19 Suicide Prevention and Research Collaboration (ICSPRC) – a collaboration with members from over 40 countries – this talk will highlight the most recent evidence about the effect of the pandemic on suicidal behaviour in several locations around the globe, assess the implications of these findings for suicide prevention and outline priorities for suicide research in coming months.