

Effective Suicide Prevention for Youth Needs the Voices of Young People

Invited lecture · Diana van Bergen

Prof. Diana van Bergen works at the University of Groningen and focuses her research on the complex dynamics of suicide and suicide-related behaviors among young people. Her work is specifically focused on socially vulnerable youth. Her aim is to develop tailored, effective interventions that address the specific needs and context of these at-risk groups.

Abstract. This presentation will address two key points that have received relatively little attention in suicidology: (1) In order for interventions to be successful and recovery process to run smoothly, we need to hear from young people themselves what precipitated their suicidal behavior, and their self-perceived needs and wishes for overcoming their distress; (2) A focus of recovery and how to overcome suicidal behaviors, can inspire suicidologists to optimize care and support for those youth who currently struggle with suicidality. For suicide-prevention interventions to yield success and for the recovery journey to progress seamlessly, it's imperative that we engage with young individuals to comprehend their perspectives on the factors contributing to suicidal behaviors. Hence, in the first half of this presentation, we focus on understanding self-perceived reasons for developing distress that contributes to suicidal behaviors in young people. Arguably, this is a first and critical step for developing the right responses for helping youth who feel suicidal. Next, although experiencing suicidal behaviors during adolescence can create a continued increased risk of future suicidal behaviors and overall negative mental health consequence, for the majority of adolescents suicidal behaviors do not persist into (young) adulthood. Hence, It is important to better understand what factors contribute to recovery processes. In the second half of the presentation, an overview will therefore be provided on what we know about recovery factors, mostly self-identified by young people. Recovery factors can be summarized into: interpersonal factors, self-esteem and coping related factors, perspective and meaning making aspects, personal autonomy, mental health and well-being components, and practical support issues.