

Strenghts, Limitations and Challenges of Contemporary Suicide Prevention

Invited lecture · Saška Roškar

Dr. Saška Roškar works in the field of prevention of mental diseases, but her primary interest is public health approaches to suicide prevention. She leads the interdisciplinary working group for suicide prevention within the Slovenian National Mental Health Program – MIRA. She has contributed to suicide prevention in Slovenia through initiatives such as the development of guidelines for responsible reporting on suicide, the establishment of a network of counselling services, training of gatekeepers ...

Abstract. Contemporary suicide prevention, encompassing different actions, is a roadmap for saving lives and combating the stigma attached to suicidality and those affected by it. Suicide prevention as we know it, certainly has many strengths. A lot of initiatives on a universal, selective and indicative prevention level were successfully implemented in the last decades. Studies focusing on evaluation of these initiatives – either as a package in the form of National Suicide Prevention Strategies or their respective components – have, however, provided mixed results regarding the effectiveness of these strategies and their impact on the suicide rate. Preventative efforts are mostly focusing on risk factors for suicide and are hence in the duty of preventing the suicidal process to develop and/or worsen. But can suicide prevention really be achieved and operationalized merely through diminishing the risk factors? By not sufficiently focusing on protective factors and determinants which maintain and strengthen mental health and resilience, we miss an opportunity to reach out to a great number of individuals who at this moment are ok and would, thorough initiatives aimed at strengthening their mental wellbeing also stay in a good mental condition. If we want to do that, then suicidology and contemporary suicide prevention needs to get more open and inclusive for approaches seemingly not related to suicide prevention. Mental health promotion, focusing on protective rather than risk factors and on socioeconomic determinants of suicide, is one such area. In fact one could argue, that mental health promotion in its most broad sense is suicide prevention. This is not to say that suicide prevention needs a general refurbishing but rather that the field would benefit from embracing new approaches and ideas.