ASSOCIATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION GHANA

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PRESS RELEASE

BY THE ASSOCIATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION GHANA (GASP) ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY (SEPTEMBER 10, 2024)

The global response to the silent epidemic of suicide has centred mostly on the critical area of awareness creation. Suicide, a significant global public health problem that accounts for over 700,000 deaths annually, continues to be shrouded in myths, silence, and stigma – a situation that militates against understanding and prevention. It is for such a reason that September 10th every year was instituted in 2003 as the World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). The triennial theme for World Suicide Prevention Day for 2024-2026 is "Changing the Narrative on Suicide". The theme is a call to action to "Start the Conversation". The goal is to raise critical awareness about the importance of reducing stigma and encouraging open conversations to prevent suicides. The stigma of suicide is often bred by a lack of understanding of why people take their lives. Stigma discourages open conversations on suicide at all levels. Thus, people who require help and can get the help if they were to open up to others will rather choose to remain trapped in their worries and distress, a situation that contributes to an unbearable psychological pain and creates the path towards suicidal behaviours.

Research shows that stigma of suicide is institutionalized at three levels: society, religion and law. At the societal level, suicide is viewed as an extraordinary moral evil and thus a taboo conduct. Hence, persons who engage in suicidal behaviours are seen as anti-social elements. At the legal level, suicide attempt is criminalized in some societies, making people see suicide attempt survivors as criminals. At the religious level, the act of suicide is viewed as a sin, and the actor, a sinner. These conceptions of the act and the actor at the societal, religious and the legal levels generate a pervasive stigma towards the act and the actor.

It is gratifying to note that research evidence is pointing to the direction where open conversations lead to understanding of the phenomenon and a change of negatives attitudes towards persons in suicidal crises. Open conversations seek to replace suicide myths with facts, fear with courage, silence with expression, condemnation with empathy, and inaction with hope-infused action. Changing the narrative on suicide is about transforming how we perceive this complex issue and shifting from a culture of silence and stigma to one of openness, understanding, empathy, and support. This call to action encourages everyone to start the conversation on suicide and suicide prevention. Every conversation, no matter how brief or small, contributes to a supportive and understanding society. When we begin to start such vital conversations, we can break down barriers, raise awareness, and create better cultures of support.

In Ghana, open conversations about suicide have recently led to the breaking down of a major barrier to suicide prevention, which is the repeal of the law criminalizing attempted suicide. While GASP commends this bold action and sees it as a major boost, it encourages major stakeholders, particularly the Government to lead efforts towards equipping the social welfare and mental health sectors to be able to adequately handle the potential 'overflow' of cases that might be reported in the post-decriminalization era. Changing the narrative and starting the conversations also mean equipping our media partners with requisite skills that will enable them to report and steer conversations on suicides appropriately and responsibly. In line with this call, GASP is currently working together with stakeholders in the media space towards the official

launch of two localized media resources (the Ghana Guidelines for Appropriate Media Reporting of Suicide, and the Ghana Suicide Reporting Scorecard) that will guide appropriate and responsible suicide reporting.

Changing the narrative is thus a call to build synergies and make systemic changes to prevent suicides. It is also a clarion call for policies that prioritize mental health, increase access to care, and provide support for those in need. All of us are encouraged to open up and start a conversation to offer and receive help. Help can be received in Ghana on the toll-free line 0800678678, or through an email to suicideprevention.ghana@gmail.com

Suicide can affect every one of us.

Suicide prevention is indeed everyone's business.

Start the conversation today!

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