

Book Review: Reducing the toll of suicide. Resources for communities, groups and individuals

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De Leo, D. & Postuvan, V. (Eds.) (2020). *Reducing the toll of suicide. Resources for communities, groups and individuals*. Hogrefe Publishing. ISBN 978-0-88937-569-7. 216 pages

This second book based on the *Intuition, Imagination and Innovation – TRIPLE I in Suicidology* International conferences aims to create hope for practitioners, researchers, students and all those who come into contact with the tragedy of suicide. This occurs through the prioritising of stimulating new ideas and interventions in responding to suicidality. More broadly, the volume is one in a series which serve as enrichment for the community of suicide research scholars and practitioners. Perhaps the field of suicidology is indeed one where a community is needed. As the editors describe in their Preface, understanding how multiple factors combine to lead to the development of suicidal behaviour continues to be a challenge. This is despite it being a preoccupation for humans throughout history. They note that suicidality is value-laden and raises questions not only about life and death but also ethics, choice, freedom and religion.

The book begins with a focus on the individual (older adults in particular and psychotherapy with suicidal patients) before expanding to groups at increased risk of suicide (such as young people, prisoners, males and people with mood disorders), understanding the role of community (media, technology-based suicide prevention programmes, community interventions, community responses to people bereaved by suicide) and finishing with two chapters on understanding suicidology more broadly. This range of topics highlights the complexity of suicidality and accordingly the challenge of reducing its incidence.

To assist in exploring this complexity and reducing the risk of overwhelm for the reader, the editors have sought out writers who explore this longstanding conundrum in new ways. One such writer is Larkin who in her chapter titled "What is different about suicidology?" describes the person who dies by suicide as the absent story-teller. She describes how the person's death by suicide leaves those around them without a direct account of how the person made the decision to take their life. Much of the search after the death by relatives and friends is to work backwards from the point of death to try to discover what led to it. Efforts such as reviewing suicide notes (noting that only around 30% of people who die by suicide leave a note) and psychological autopsies which make efforts to understand the state of mind and life story of the person are two ways of attempting to make sense of the person's life and death. Other efforts more broadly include studying those who survive a nearly lethal suicide attempt. In doing so, the researchers can learn more about risk factors, details of the cognitive processes and decision-making steps leading to the suicidal act as well as a range of other personal characteristics and life experiences which played a role. Larkin also has a way of stating the obvious while challenging aspects of researching suicide. She notes that while suicide occurs too often, from a statistical point of view, it is rare. This explains some of the challenges of deepening understandings as this creates difficulties in methodological approaches to researching suicide with encroaching ethical

concerns which restrict the types of research designs that might provide better answers to the many questions suicidologists continue to have.

Working and studying in the area of suicide prevention is not for the faint hearted and walking the line of reality and hope seems to be what this book does well. It provides an opportunity for the reader to enter into an exploration of this tragic way of death through a variety of lenses. The book takes the reader on a journey through various aspects of practice and research, facing challenging unanswered questions where research has not yet been sufficiently conducted while also consolidating what is currently known in order to provide supportive messages about future ways to embrace innovative approaches. The importance of this work as a meaningful pursuit to contribute to the possibility of a world where suicide ideation, behaviours and deaths are reduced never falters. Models such as the Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model of Suicidal Behaviour are presented, but in keeping with the curious nature of the book, rather than being described as a static model which explains a phenomenon, it is featured as a vibrant dynamic learning model which provides some useful information while still lacking sufficient evidence to ensure that it is an accurate representation.

Community Psychologists reading this book are likely to enjoy the depth and variety of lenses through which suicide prevention is explored. The exploration of multifaceted aspects of a person's life that may lead them toward a suicidal state will fit well with the Community Psychologist's understanding of individuals living and being impacted by the context of their environment. The risk and protective factors related to individuals will be familiar along with beliefs and actions always seen within the context of values and ethics related to improving understandings, through working or researching collaboratively with individuals, ideally within a prevention framework aimed to create circumstances which promote wellbeing and reduce distress. While suicidality occurs within an individual, the role of the individual within the context of community is recognised throughout the book and accordingly some of the responses to suicide prevention or postvention necessarily fall within the realm of the community. The chapter on the long-term perspectives on suicide risk of youth, for example, recognises how:

Lives are defined in terms of their interconnectedness with others. The struggles and successes experienced by one person can have effects that ripple across their lifespan and the lives of the many other people with whom they are connected ... Thus, preventing suicidal behaviour has the potential to have very long-term positive effects that extend far beyond the individual and the most obvious (and critical outcome) of a life saved. (De Leo & Postuvan, 2020, p. 54)

This understanding suggests that Community Psychologists could be playing a far more active role in suicide prevention than may have been recognised so far.

The book was never intended to cover all aspects of suicide prevention, but rather stands as a point in time representation of some of the ideas and approaches which contribute to the current wave of interest in suicide prevention internationally. A reader interested in capturing the core elements of what current research and debates are occurring in suicidology would be well served by reading this book and following up by engaging with the ongoing work of the authors.