

**Supporting suicidal
international students:
Insights and
recommendations**

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Background

- 15 years in Tertiary Education in UK & Australia
- Roles: Mental Health Adviser, Trainer, Consultant, Counsellor, Coach, Manager of counselling service
- Doctoral research on student suicide
- Publication in Universities & Colleges Counselling Journal, UK
- Offer consultancy and training on suicide to universities

Outline of the session

Introduction to student suicide

Suicidal international students: Current landscape

Challenges in supporting suicidal international students

Recommendations

Questions & Close

Friendly Reminders

01

We will cover a small aspect of suicide in relation to international students today

02

Warning: The topic of this presentation may be confronting. Please do what you need to take care of yourself

03

10 mins for questions at the end of the presentation. Please feel free to speak to me later if you have any questions. I will be here all afternoon

My story

- Experience of suicide professionally
- Curiosity about the impact of suicide on practitioner and university
- Doctoral research: Interviewed therapists on their experiences of working with suicidal students in Higher Education (UK)

**“A Difficult Tightrope to Walk”:
An Exploration of Therapists’ Experiences of
Working with Suicidal Students
in Higher Education**

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**Doctor of Counselling Psychology
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Psychotherapy by Professional Studies**

2020

Suicidal international students....

An introduction

Suicide statistics

**Second leading cause
of death among 15-
29-year-olds globally**

(World Health Organisation, 2018)

**Student suicide
emerged as a *pressing
global challenge***

(Universities UK & Papyrus, 2018),

Australia

No statistics available on international student suicides

Over 1 in 3 of deaths in 15-24 year olds are due to suicide

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)

Leading cause of death among Australians aged 15 - 44

(Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2022)



Orygen (2020)

Student groups at increased risk of mental ill-health:

- Young people (aged up to 25 years)
- Males
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- **International students**
- LGBTIQ+ students
- Rural/regional students
- Law and medicine students
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- PhD students
- Students with physical disabilities
- Students with existing mental health conditions

Why are international students at increased risk of mental ill-health?

- Adjustment difficulties
- Social isolation
- Financial hardship
- Visa concerns

Continued...

- Subject to discrimination
- Stress due to geopolitical issues in homeland
- Academic pressures
- Barriers to accessing mental health support

What are the challenges in supporting suicidal international students?

Barriers to accessing support:

- Cultural barriers
- Language barriers
- Lack of awareness of services
- Cost
- Universities' limitations in what they can offer

My research findings

Metaphor : Walking a difficult tightrope

4 themes emerged:

- Exploring suicidality
- The context matters
- What helps?
- The Barriers

Supporting suicidal international students....

Recommendations

1

Start talking about suicide

Speak about the unspeakable

Suicide is a taboo subject which is still associated with shame & guilt

2

Ownership of suicide

Adopt *whole of university* approach

Gather relevant data

3

Education on suicide

Training on suicide awareness for university community

4

Improve access to support services incl. crisis support

Services need to be accessible and inclusive

5

Student-informed services

Consult with students on how to best meet their mental health needs and engage in student-led initiatives

6

Peer support and training

Students tend to reach out to peers before seeking support from mental health services e.g *Look after your mate* program, UK

Conclusions

01

Things are
moving forward

02

Further research
and data
collection from
universities is
needed

03

Whole of
university
approach is
recommended

Points for self- reflection



- What are your attitudes towards suicide?
- How do they impact your interactions or work with suicidal international students?
- How do you support suicidal international students?
- Can you identify further areas for training for yourself around this topic?

A difficult tightrope to walk

Experiences of working
with suicidality in
higher education



Reference:

Kalsi, S. (2021). A difficult tightrope to walk: *Experiences of working with suicidality in higher education*. *University and College Counselling Journal, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*, November 2021 edition.

Link: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/university-and-college-counselling/november-2021/a-difficult-tightrope-to-walk/>

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Further reading

Kalsi, S. (2021). A difficult tightrope to walk: *Experiences of working with suicidality in higher education*, University and College Counselling Journal, *British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*, November 2021 edition.

Link: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/university-and-college-counselling/november-2021/a-difficult-tightrope-to-walk/>

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Link: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/guidance-for-sector-practitioners-on-preventing-student-suicides.PDF>

Questions???
