

## 3.2 Summary

The National Board of Health has established a committee, which began its work in June 1997 and published its recommendations for a National Programme for Prevention of Suicide and Suicide Attempts in August 1998.

The committee's recommendations are based on the position that it is not acceptable that people end their lives by committing suicide or trying to do so. Therefore, endeavours should be made - on several levels - to reject suicide attempts and suicides as being acceptable solutions or the only way out when life is difficult or seems unbearable.

In 1996, 900 Danes committed suicide and about 10,000 attempted suicide. The suicide rate has been on the decline since 1980, and the number of suicides in 1996 was the lowest for many years. Yet, the Danish suicide rate is still relatively high compared to that of other European countries. The reasons for the downward trend since 1980 are not known, and it is impossible to predict whether this trend will continue or change.

The suicide rate is highest among the elderly, notably among men. On the other hand, younger people, especially young women, most frequently *attempt* suicide. The 90s have seen a marked increase in the suicide rate among girls between the ages of 15 to 19. Moreover, it is also within these youngest age groups that most suicide attempts are made within a year. Studies seem to show that especially among teenagers there are considerable numbers of suicide attempts, which are not registered.

Despite the seriousness of the problem very few specific preventive measures or consultative and treatment offers are being offered people with suicidal behaviour. There is a lack of aftercare treatment after discharge from hospital in connection with suicide attempts, especially as far as those not eligible for psychiatric or abuse treatment are concerned. It should be noted that many suicide attempts and suicides occur shortly after discharge from psychiatric wards, which indicates the demand for a more intensive aftercare. Moreover a co-ordinated effort both on county and national level is called for.

The main purpose of making a national action plan is to reduce the number of suicide attempts and suicides in Denmark.

### Goals and recommendations

#### **1. Suicidal persons are to be identified and irrespective of possible mental illness, abuse, age, gender and ethnic background offered relevant treatment.**

##### **Recommendations:**

- \* Suicidal persons should be quickly and correctly assessed by the necessary professional expertise.
- \* Establishing aid for suicidal persons according to a supportive and attendant principle so that the suicidal person is not left on his/her own before other relevant support is started.

#### **2. An increased knowledge of risk factors and groups at risk with the purpose of reinforcing the effort towards groups at risk.**

##### **Recommendations:**

- \* The establishment of an intensified follow-up effort vis-à-vis the mentally ill and abusers.
- \* Increased attentiveness regarding the suicide risk within other risk groups such as the physically ill, ethnic minorities, the institutionalised and prisoners.

\* Attentiveness regarding the elderly, young people and the bereaved in terms of possible suicidal behaviour and the establishment of relevant supportive and treatment measures.

\* The education of general practitioners to be improved in terms of diagnostics and treatment of mental illnesses including abuse.

\* Reduction of the availability of the most common suicide methods.

### **3. Improving the resources of the individual and minimising social strains.**

#### **Recommendations:**

\* Establishing social efforts and political efforts within the health area aiming at increasing the human life quality to reduce unhappiness, marginalisation and stigmatisation of part of the population compared to the rest of the society.

\* By means of various pedagogical and psychological efforts to increase the ability of children, young people, grown-ups and the elderly to deal with conflicts and crises.

\* Social and volunteer networks should be strengthened and developed.

\* Preparing material informing of supportive offers and focussing on improving the general knowledge of and attitudes to suicidal behaviour.

\* Co-operating with the medias with a view to working out a set of ethical guiding lines for the presentation of suicidal matters.

### **4. Disadvantaged children and young people ought to be given tools, which enable them to master their own lives and enter into positive, social communities.**

#### **Recommendations:**

\* Schools and recreation centers should actively redevelop and introduce life incentive classes including endeavour consciously to create an atmosphere which invites a sense of community.

### **5. Increased professional competence in the field of working with suicidal persons.**

#### **Recommendations:**

\* All professional groups being in contact with suicidal persons must get basic knowledge about suicidal behaviour in their basic training, including in-depth studies on higher levels and retraining courses.

### **6. Increased knowledge about suicidal behaviour by means of research, evaluation and education.**

#### **Recommendations regarding the collection of statistical material:**

\* Registration of suicide attempts on a national level.

\* Mandatory registration of preparation type in cases of suicides caused by poisoning.

\* Suicide rates among psychiatric patients and persons having attempted to commit suicide are to be followed-up yearly and to be supplemented with registration of suicide attempts among psychiatric patients.

## **Recommendations regarding research**

\* Additional research within areas such as measuring the effects of reinforced education among general practitioners; the effect of increased efforts vis-à-vis psychiatric patients; evaluating treatment offers in connection with suicide attempts; the effect of reducing the availability of specific frequent suicide methods.

\* Research within other areas, such as for instance the reasons behind the suicide mortality, causes and motives behind suicide attempts and suicides, psychical characteristics in suicidal persons, etc.

\* Reinforcing and upgrading Danish suicide research including international cooperation.

### **\* Recommendation concerning the evaluation:**

Evaluation of the action plan, i.a. by registering whether the part elements of the action plan have been implemented.

## **7. Discourage that suicidal behaviour is generally perceived to be accepted and normal.**

**Spread the ethical attitude on which the action plan is based - that help is useful.**

**We suggest that the recommendations be established by means of the following three levels:**

- 1) Specific prevention directly aimed at the suicide process.
- 2) Prevention aimed at specific risk factors and groups at risk concerning suicidal behaviour.
- 3) General prevention and information aiming at improving human lives including the ability of the individual to deal with problems and crises.

### **Recommendations concerning the implementation of the action plan:**

\* The proposed recommendations in the action plan are to be implemented over a 5-year period.

\* Tasks are dealt with by means of co-operation between state, county, municipal and local communities. At the same time the voluntary social sector is included.

\* Appointing a national coordinating governing body being responsible for the implementation of the action plan.

\* Implementation of regional and local experimental and development projects.

# **II. Status**

## **4. Selvmordsadfærd i Danmark (resumé)**

### **Resumé af statusopgørelse 1998**

Som basis for handlingsplanen er udarbejdet en statusopgørelse over det statistiske materiale, der findes vedrørende selvmordsadfærd i Danmark. Denne statusopgørelse udgives som selvstændig publikation og indeholder baggrundsmateriale for handlingsplanen. Statusopgørelsen indeholder også en sammenfatning af forskningsresultater, danske som internationale, vedrørende vigtige risikofaktorer for selvmord og selvmordsforsøg. Herudover indeholder