

# Reducing stigma and promoting hope through the lived experience of suicide



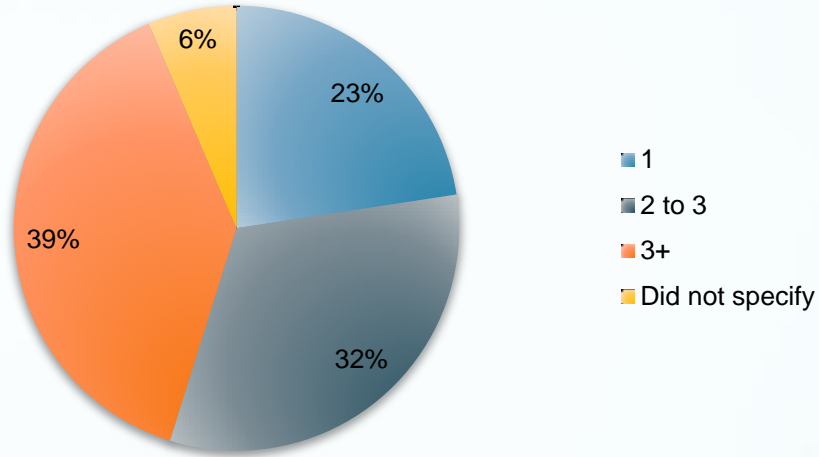
## Aim

To gain insight into the lived experience of suicide and to investigate what factors may assist or interfere with an individual's recovery after a suicide attempt.

## Methodology

- Any individual over the age of 18 who had attempted suicide over 6+months ago could express their interest to the research team.
- Expressions to participate were high, with approximately 70 people contacting SANE over a 4 week period. This resulted in the completion of 31 telephone interviews, taking approximately 30-60 minutes each.
- A risk assessment was conducted at the time of the interview to ensure that the participant was not currently experiencing a suicidal crisis and was well supported.

# Number of suicide attempts



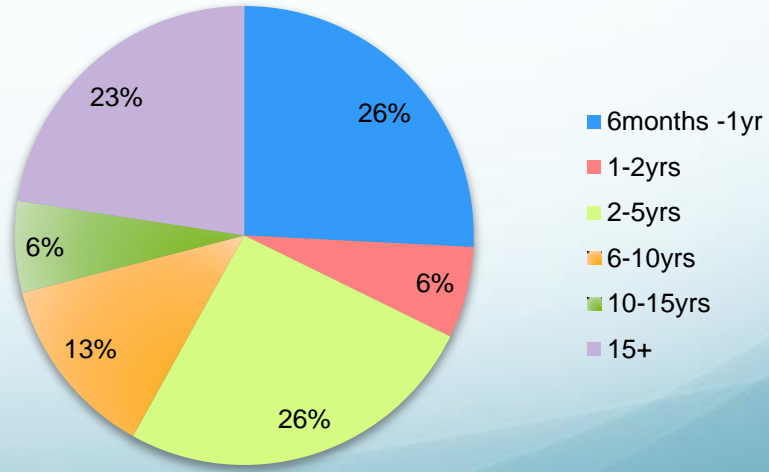
# Demographic Data

Of the 31 participants:

- Gender: 7 male; 24 female (77%)
- Age range: 19-72 yrs.

The majority of the participants (87%), reported having been diagnosed with at least one mental illness. More than half of the sample (52%) also reported two or more mental health diagnoses

# Time since last attempt



## Historical Risk & Triggering Influences

- childhood abuse and/or neglect
- trauma (unspecified)
- suicide bereavement
- the death of a parent in early life
- bullying
- grief and loss associated with Aboriginal cultural identity.
- impact of MI
- suicide bereavement
- lack of professional support
- Interpersonal/relationship problems
- pressures of work
- drug and alcohol misuse
- experiencing abuse or sexual assault
- Y/A transitions and/or pressure; year 12 or starting university.

## Emotional state at the time of the attempt:

- intense emotional pain
- disconnected
- hopelessness
- overwhelmed
- depressed and;
- trapped with no other option.

## Barriers to communication:

Within our sample, **67% did not communicate their thoughts or feelings of suicide** prior to their attempt. Common themes revolved around:

- a fear of rejection or negative reactions from others
- feeling that they were unworthy or could not be helped
- feeling unable to open up or not knowing what to say and;
- not wanting to worry others.

## Professional support:

Difficulty accessing effective treatment was the most commonly reported barrier to an individual's recovery journey.

The most commonly reported problem with hospital was:

- being discharged too early or having difficulty being admitted
- feeling that they were not taken seriously or were misunderstood

## Stigma and judgemental attitudes:

Misunderstanding, stigma, and judgemental attitudes came from professionals and non-professionals alike. This was the second biggest barrier to recovery that was highlighted by the participants.

Of particular concern was the assumption that **suicide is selfish or attention-seeking.**

## Factors that promote recovery:

- professional support
- access to effective and affordable treatments
- support from family and friends
- learning better coping mechanisms and insight
- learning to communicate more clearly about their feelings and to access their support network when they begin to struggle.

## Important messages from the participants:

- remove the stigma around suicide particularly in relation to the assumption that suicide is selfish or attention-seeking.
- You can recover
- Talk to someone



## Recommendations

### ***Reduce the stigma of suicide and mental illness***

- Opportunity 1: Education campaigns aimed at both the general public and health professionals to increase understanding about what leads people to suicide and to reduce judgemental attitudes particularly in regards to the assumption that suicidal behaviours are attention-seeking and selfish, and that suicide and mental illness do not discriminate – anyone can be affected.

## Turning research into action

- Hearing real life stories from people who have been through hard times is a powerful way to increase empathy and understanding. SANE wanted to share the incredible stories of resilience that underpinned the Lessons for Life research.
- We felt that a short film is a great way to share some of the people's amazing journeys of recovery with the broader community. The aim of the video is to reduce the stigma associated with suicide, increase community understanding, encourage help seeking and give hope to others who may be in a similar situation.

## What key message/s did you take from the video?

- Hope
- Help
- Recovery

‘I have been through this situation in my work and eventually I tried to take my own life. The comments articulated what I have been unable to say for years. I have carried on without intervention for many years now, but after watching this video I feel like it might be time to consider some. This video had a huge personal influence on me.’ *Anonymous male, 35 years.*

## Impact on attitudes and help-seeking behavior

- Attitude change
- 77% positive help-seeking change (23% much more likely)
- 83% encourage help-seeking in others (45% much more likely)

*Thank you to all the brave and inspiring people who took part  
in the research and the Lessons for Life video*

The Lessons for Life Report and Video can be found at  
[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI7X7t7Mga4&feature=youtu.be>

Thank you for listening!

[Samara.gray@sane.org](mailto:Samara.gray@sane.org)

Who and Why Media

[simon@whoandwhy.com](mailto:simon@whoandwhy.com)