



Hear Women's Voices!

EVENT SUMMARY

UNPACKING THE STIGMA OF SUICIDE

"Losing a loved to suicide is one of life's most painful experiences. The feelings of loss, sadness, and loneliness experienced after any death of a loved one are often magnified in suicide survivors by feelings of guilt, confusion, rejection, shame, anger, and the effects of stigma and trauma. Furthermore, survivors of suicide loss are at a high risk of developing major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as a prolonged form of grief. Added to the burden is the substantial stigma, which can keep survivors and the family and friends of survivors away from much needed support and healing resources."

Suicide bereavement and complicated grief. Dialogues Clin Neurosci. 2012 June.

As women, we're often the shock absorbers within our families and close circles in times of crisis. As mothers, daughters, carers, the task of taking on the responsibility to help people heal from loss and trauma is designated as ours. Support services are understaffed and underfunded. How do we come to terms with losing a loved one or help them recover from a suicide attempt, when the impact from both experiences causes such debilitating ripple effects?

"One of my neighbours is a woman in her 30s. She lives with her husband. I've spoken with her on a number of occasions and she's terribly unhappy. Her husband bullies her. It's coercive control. He prefers her to stay at home alone even though she is desperate to work so she can save money and leave him. He texts and calls her a lot, monitoring where she is, who she has spoken with. They both moved to Glasgow from Europe so she has no close friends or family nearby. I've given her information about places to get help but she's too scared to get in touch with them. I found out that her husband's brother recently died from suicide. I'm worried that her husband will be taking out his grief on her, and that her living situation has become even more unbearable."

- According to the National Records of Scotland, there were 202 probable female suicide deaths in Scotland in 2023. Probable suicides are categorised as such when there's a recognised underlying cause. The extent of domestic abuse related suicide, and hidden homicides that include, for instance, "accidents" and femicides that pass as suicides, is only now beginning to emerge.
- Research by homicide specialist Professor Jane Monckton Smith, estimates that between 3 and 9 women take their own lives each week as a direct result of domestic abuse.
- The female group with the highest suicide rate is those aged 45-54 years. A growing number of academic studies are focusing on the association between menopause and suicide.
- If a woman lives in an area of social deprivation, the suicide mortality rate will be higher in that area.
- Nearly half of working-age women in the UK are providing an average of 45 hours of unpaid care every week. The care documented focuses on caring for partners, children and the elderly. The provision of emotional support to vulnerable children and adults is not included in these findings.
- Those caring for individuals who attempt suicide are also at risk from experiencing periods of poor mental health as a result. Symptoms can include nightmares, panic attacks, flashbacks, physical pain, unwanted feelings, self-neglect and substance misuse.

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The event took place at Radisson Blue Hotel on 7th November 2024. 20 women were in attendance. The following discussion topics were tackled:

Morning session- Discussion Topics

1. How does an individual reach this point? The triggers.
2. What is the connection between Mental Health and Suicide?
3. The connection between Domestic Abuse and Suicide
4. The impact on friends and family

Afternoon session- Discussion Topics

1. Guilt and Shame and Blame.
2. Suicide and Menopause.
3. Societal norms. Norms for who?
4. Societal norms. Norms for who?

MORNING DISCUSSION 1. THE DETAILS:

How does an Individual reach the point of suicide?

The triggers:

- **Isolation.** No friends, no social life, away from family, feel alone in the world.
- **Depression.** Acute or chronic. Physical illness (e.g cancer), gruelling treatments. Poor housing.
- **Bereavement.** Loss of parents, partner, kids, close friend...
- **Loss of job.** Financial problems, loss of self- esteem, loss of friends.
- **Dependant Relatives.** Carer. Seeing a loved one suffer.
- **Emotional crisis.** Bottling things up. Not discussing problems. Introverted.
- **Betrayal.** In business or friendship. Let down by family members.
- **Disappointment.** Leads to feelings of hopelessness, mental health crisis. E.g Recruitment agencies, slave labour, forced prostitution.

THE BIG VISION- Adequate provision of services including GP, Samaritans, Young Minds, Breathing Space, Women's Aid. Easily accessible services.

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEP- Talk to someone.

MORNING DISCUSSION 2. THE DETAILS:

What is the connection between Mental Health and Suicide?

- Untreated and unidentified anxiety and depression.
- Side effects of medication.
- Menopause/ peri- menopause. Female being treated by male doctor.
- Undiagnosed mental health.
- Lack of support, isolation.
- Working from home – major impact on mental health.
- The mind and body work together- holistic.
- Humans need to interact with others.
- Drugs, alcohol- coping mechanisms.

- Survivors of abuse- withdraw.
- Cuts across income brackets- race/gender.
- Negligence of signs- loss of job, loss of relationship, bereavement.
- Social media used proven to worsen mental health especially in young girls who are more negatively affected by online comments.

Solutions- CBT Training (NHS online).

Raise awareness of topic- including professional suicide training.

Protest against NHS cutbacks in Mental Health.

Workplace suicide awareness.

Help co-workers.

THE BIG VISION- Training awareness, of suicide risks and treatments.

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEP- Interact with 5 different people every day.

MORNING DISCUSSION 3. THE DETAILS:

The Connection between Domestic Abuse and Suicide.

- Coercive control
 - Emotional Abuse
 - Financial abuse
 - Justice system failing women.
 - Shame and stigma of domestic abuse.
 - Difficulty in leaving, not being able to provide for yourself, hard to get credit, barriers to getting any.
 - Hard to gain employment if we have been staying at home.
 - Gaslighting, the lying. Having no understanding of the behaviour can impact mental health, confidence, self- esteem.
- More than just physical.
Loss of children/ home.
Loss of finance.

Lack of Support

- The justice system- civil cases – divorce- the legal system- legal fees/legal aid- childcare- impact on mental health (NO WAY OUT).
- Although there is legislation, the justice system doesn't know how to deal with it, leaving women with the emotional impact of its failings.
- Impact on the children involved in domestic abuse, the learned behaviour. When women leave their partner their children can become abusive which impacts the women further.
- The connection between women who have suffered domestic abuse being at high risk of developing physical illness, which impacts mental health and causes hopelessness.
- Women being the fixers, 'We can fix him', keep the family together. But at what cost to the women themselves.
- Women who have suffered any form of abuse, the affect on their self worth/ self esteem/ confidence – in alignment with suicidal tendencies.
- The impact that a major traumatic experience has.

THE BIG VISION- A domestic abuse free world!!

This will be achieved by-

- A fully working and fairer justice system for women
- A massive influx in funding for women's support services
- Raising awareness of domestic abuse and how it impacts
- Knowledge of where to get help, support and resources

- Break that stigma! Let women know it's not their fault!
- Community and social support services
- A childcare system that works for women
- Reform the justice system and legal aid in order to support women
- Support for and access to awareness raised on domestic abuse for partners that move to Scotland through marriage
- More resources for women who are fleeing domestic abuse, including mental health support
- A one stop shop that meets all the needs of women who have suffered domestic violence
- Women need to be believed and heard
- More shelters for women
- Positive education and understanding of domestic abuse to teach men
- An understanding of the impact of social media on the younger generation with regards to normalising cheating and abuse

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEP- Systems that are broken and not fit for purpose, laws that were made 200 years ago by men when women were seen as 2nd class citizens, these all needed completely overhauled by women.

MORNING DISCUSSION 4. THE DETAILS:

The Impact on Family and Friends.

- Hopelessness/Helplessness.
- Responsibility (Even when you know you can't control or change anything).
- Guilt- pulling away, vicious circle
- How it affects or emotional/physical/mental health
- Masking how the situation is affecting you can set an example to others-e.g children affected
- The roles that men and women take on. Women dealing with the fallout on a deeper and wider level- practical, emotional, nurturing.
- The difficulty in expressing- due to the past/ religion/ shame/ confusion/ emotional pain
- Society – who do you speak to? People's reactions
- Dodging emotions
- Breakdown of connections.
- Historical changes.
- Political influences.
- Feelings of guilt and fallout for the individual in crisis
- Self acceptance- it's hard. Standing back/ moving on.
- Facing death in all forms.

THE BIG VISION- Acceptance for self and others on a societal scale.

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEP- Openness, education, support, counselling.

AFTERNOON DISCUSSION 1. THE DETAILS:

Guilt, Shame and Blame.

- Generational-programmed to see men as stronger and more powerful
- Young- gender roles in home, who does dishes/gardening
- Abuse in family, afraid to be heard/seen.

- People pleasing >creates low self esteem> negative self talk> low self worth> self loathing > self sabotage
- Depression, mental health disorders, anxiety, self medicating
- Care experienced, abandonment, low self esteem, rejection, what's wrong with me? (From the start)
- When an adverse event occurs, the tendency to internalise and blame ourselves >guilt >shame
- Pointless to be here. Sees life as worthless, hopeless. Despair.
- Internalised anger.
- Be a good mum. Be a good daughter. Be a good wife. Be a good grandmother. What is good? The pressure to be good enough.
- Comparison & social media. Compare & despair.
- Difficult to believe in yourself.
- Mistrust of self

THE BIG VISION- A guilt, shame and blame free world!

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEP- Educate people on self- worth.

AFTERNOON DISCUSSION 2. THE DETAILS:

Suicide and Menopause.

- Women's symptoms go undiagnosed. Mother's little helpers.
- GPs not menopause trained.
- Women are seen as disposable/replaceable.
- Perimenopause- body awareness. Not knowing it's ok to feel not ok as part of a women's cycle. Hormones fluctuate and we may feel overwhelmed and misunderstood.
- Is menopause seen? A contributing factor to suicide.
- Work policy introduction- rights to taking time off.

THE BIG VISION- Honour the higher rites of passage, divine feminine

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEP- Women must make more noise to make the medical establishment see them

AFTERNOON DISCUSSION 3. THE DETAILS:

Societal norms. Norms for who?

- In certain cultures, if a women's husband dies from suicide, the woman is blamed. The woman is judged, "What did you do?". But when the situation is reversed, the man is shown compassion.
- Some cultures force women to sit on the floor and abstain from washing for 40 days if their husband dies.
- In some cultures women are seen as replaceable resources for men.
- Mothers are seen as having value but as an individual woman, you have no value.
- The weight of responsibilities/ the attitudes of others/ blame and shame drive women to the point of suicide. Responsibility is shifted from everyone else onto the woman.
- In some cultures men hold control of the money, which leaves women at home with no way out.
- In some cultures women don't have a voice or choice. The patriarchy holds the power.
- How can we have speed and growth in tech and economy and society and science when women still face such issues?
- The responsibility to make the change is also on the women, because men won't facilitate any change that benefits women. We have 2 sexes on the planet, why is it just one sex's responsibility?

- The romanticism of older times being better times, 'things were built to last back then' but women had even less rights, had even less of a voice.
- For older generations there was more of an obedience to the state, we are challenging things now, more likely to speak up.
- The attitude of 'that's just men!', means we are accepting of certain behaviour. When do we speak up?
- We're not vocal enough, speaking up about these 'norms'.
- We need to educate and attend training on suicide.
- Notice women in crisis, help not judge.
- Check in on people, reach out to them, including young people.
- The attitude of 'Just smile/get over it' when people are suffering.
- The expectation that women should 'just get on with it', no support.
- Why is it women's responsibility when adult children make mistakes? Men are parents too.
- As women we need to help ourselves by teaching our children to treat women with respect.
- Men like it when women take on all domestic responsibility, and are treated like kings.

THE BIG VISION- For a minimum period of 20 years, each country must appoint a female leader/succession of leaders to compare the differences between male and female led governing.

THE FIRST CONCRETE STEPS- Men need to level up, educate boys and men.

- Attitudes have to change.
- Understand cultural norms.
- Implement legislation.
- Change the language around marriage.
- Change the laws and hegemonic beliefs. It was men who set these in the first place.
- Women must be involved in making these changes.
- Time to change all the methods/ways of doing things we have relied on for years. Time to revise, update.
- More career opportunities for women with families.
- Break with generational beliefs and traditions. Move forward.
- More female leaders from grassroots, all the way up!
- Correct oppressive behaviours.