

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Suicide in Turkey:

Understanding
Youth Suicides
and Fostering
Hope for a
Better World

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What Should We Do to Prevent Youth Suicide?



This booklet is the result of our research titled, “Youth Suicide in Turkey: Understanding Youth Suicides and Fostering Hope for a Better World”. It is based on the analyses in the research report as well as the outputs of one-on-one interviews and workshops with experts (sociologists, political scientists, psychologists and psychiatrists). We hope that the set of recommendations proposed here will urge all relevant stakeholders to reflect on what can be done to prevent youth suicide in Turkey. We need to think and act together in order to implement preventive measures and that requires both dialogue and cooperation between political parties, civil society organizations, educational institutions, youth organizations, trade unions, professional associations, parents and active citizens across society.

Access to Information: Case Data and Indicators Need to Be Clarified

Official data (primarily TurkStat data) on suicides resulting in death or suicide attempts should be clear and unambiguous. The same applies to case indicators. *Uncertainty* or *ambiguity* in indicators make it difficult to properly understand the cases and to identify risk situations. It is therefore essential that all indicators are made explicit and fully shared by relevant institutions. Only if we identify the problem properly can we predict suicides, offer preventive measures and develop strategies to combat them.

Psycho-Social Autopsy Studies:

Interviewing the families and close friends of those who have committed suicide or attempted suicide can provide valuable information to help identify and better understand the causes. Such information is vital for a multi-layered and in-depth understanding of cases.

Risk Factors Need to Be Identified and Multi-layered Social Policies Should Be Offered

It is essential to identify the multilayered psychological, social and political risk factors that apply to all cases.

► Economic hardship and related problems are among the most important risks factors. Unemployment is a scourge in itself, but hopelessness about the future, or an oppressive or exclusionary work environment can also trigger suicidal behavior. Therefore, young people struggling with financial problems should never be left alone. If the institutions (both at the central and local levels) responsible for youth policy want to prevent youth suicide, they should strengthen a social policy approach based on the principle of solidarity. In short, the establishment of supportive mechanisms should be prioritized.

► The various forms of pressure to which young people are exposed constitute another spectrum of risks. Starting from the closest social environment (family, neighborhood, etc.), young people face pressure mechanisms at every level in society. Trying to cope with economic inequalities on the one hand and social pressure on the other, they may feel worthless, powerless or desperate in the face of these pressure mechanisms that get intertwined. As the case studies discussed in the research report clearly demonstrate, systematic forms of oppression (family oppression, community oppression, peer bullying, mobbing, sexism, homophobic oppression, etc.) can be damaging and even destructive. Therefore, it is essential to disclose and problematize mechanisms of oppression and to establish horizontal solidarity mechanisms that will empower young people in their struggle. Civil society organizations (political parties, educational institutions, etc.) working with and for young people should take the initiative.

► Youth unemployment is, of course, a problem in itself, but the pressure that working youth are subjected to in work place (“*working pain*”) must also be taken into consideration. As the cases analyzed in the research report make clear, institutional oppression in work life is having an increasingly devastating impact on young workers. The well-being of young adults is certainly dependent on improving working conditions, and here, trade unions and professional organizations could take a leading role.

Risks Should Be Mapped and Monitored

It is vital to identify the risk factors that may lead young people to suicidal thoughts, behaviors or attempts. It is advisable to identify areas where risks are concentrated, to create a risk map by the central government, to update it regularly and to monitor it in coordination with local authorities. As can be seen in the cases examined in the report, workplaces, schools and dormitories stand out as risk areas. Conducting risk screenings at regular intervals in the areas included in the risk map can be an effective preventive measure. Up-to-date monitoring of the risk map and regular and effective risk screenings can help to predict suicide cases and take preventive measures.

Suicide Should Be Treated as a Public Health Problem

Social scientists consider youth and young adulthood a transitional period; so, it is vital to study the experiences of anxiety, stress, hopelessness and loneliness specific to this period. However, it is urgent to develop public services and policies that focus specifically on the problems of the youth, one of the most vulnerable social groups. Therefore, mental health [of the youth] should be concern not only the social scientists and youth researchers, but also (and perhaps primarily) civil society and political organizations. Youth suicide is a public health issue. Mental care should be defined as a basic human right for all people and made accessible to everyone, especially to the young and other vulnerable groups.

Mental health and resilience should be designed as an integral part of health care curricula from secondary education onwards. In addition, planning to educate parents about the mental health of young people can be a highly effective preventing measure against suicide.

Mental health should be made a public agenda item; the relationship between mental health and work life should be an area of focus and trade unions and professional organizations should play a leading role in this effort (organizing internal trainings and workshops, organizing campaigns, etc.).

Mental Health Crisis Helpline and Expert Support

Mental health services should be made accessible to everyone as a human right, and easily accessible special centers should be established where young people can get support if and when they feel desperate. Recruitment of experts is of paramount importance. It is an absolute necessity to establish confidential structures that young people can easily and quickly access to receive psychological support when they feel helpless. The establishment of a *Mental Health Crisis Helpline* covering the whole country may be a first step.

Solidarity Networks and Organizations Should Be Strengthened

Collective solidarity is the key to improving the mental health of young people and neutralizing the factors that feed suicidal tendencies. Civil society solidarity networks and youth organizations should maximally involve young people, open up spaces for their subjectivation, deepen solidarity practices and tools, expose limitations, and take a leading role in generating common responses to young people's problems. Simultaneously, it is necessary to create and strengthen political platforms and initiatives where young people can talk about their own problems and solve these problems on their own without being controlled by adults.

We must strive to identify the forces that isolate and disempower the youth and neutralize these forces. Our research is also a call to think about ways and means of developing a solidarity network.