

## Elke Elzinga – Mental Health Junior Travel Award 2022

With the Mental Health Junior Travel Award I was able to travel to Copenhagen in August 2022 to visit the 19<sup>th</sup> European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour (ESSSB).

Suicide postvention was an important topic during the 4-day conference program. Postvention is a coordinated approach to facilitate recovery after suicide and to prevent adverse outcomes. This is important, because people who are bereaved by suicide have an increased risk on developing mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, and to engage in suicidal behaviour themselves. Postvention can therefore be seen as prevention.

I was very happy to visit the ESSSB in Copenhagen. I attended the Special Interest Group 'postvention: support for people who have been bereaved by suicide', where we shared knowledge and experiences. I presented a poster about our qualitative study results: we conducted interviews with 21 employees from school who all experienced suicide or attempted suicide of a student. All respondents were personally impacted by the experience of a student's suicide or attempted suicide. After experiencing this, they were more concerned about mental health and suicidal behaviour of other students. Important needs reported by teachers are tools and training to support students with mental health problems and suicidal thoughts. During this poster presentation I spoke to some interesting people and learned about relevant interventions and research conducted in other countries.

In **Denmark**, for instance, 1 in 145 suicides occurs among first-relatives of people who died by suicide. Critical moments are the first 30 days after suicide, the birthday of the deceased, and the day of the suicide. Peer-support is important for the provision of support; bereaved-ones feel understood by peers, and to listen to others. In addition, these peers should be supported by professionals. Digital supports yielded good results. Both bereaved-ones and professionals should be trained in postvention.

**England** has a lot of organisations, such as the police and the government, who collaborate closely with regard to postvention. Timing of postvention was important. There are a lot of volunteers who expressed their needs in terms of postvention; cards were developed with information and referral to training, there are special centres that can be called when a suicide has occurred. Role-specific support groups, such as specifically for parents or siblings, were valued the most. Overall, support groups are effective in decreasing psychological complaints, such as depression and anxiety.



Other countries shared some of the projects with regard to postvention. **Germany** also facilitates support groups, led by a trained professional and experienced peer. People are very positive about these support groups. In **Ireland** there is a specific day for people bereaved by suicide in November. **Canada** organizes 'Roots of Hope', responsible for both pre- and postvention in various settings, such as mental health care and domestic violence. **Australian** researchers are studying the copycat effect of suicide in clusters and tests a framework aiming to prevent this. **Slovenia** has recently developed a protocol for suicide in school-setting, which was very useful for the action plans that we were developing at the time (and which just released).

Finally, we organized an onsite meeting with Australian researchers for a joint project. This year, we will conduct an RCT to study the effectiveness of a social media intervention on safely communicating about suicide online. If this appears to be safe and effective for the general public, we will also test the extent to which it can be applied for suicide postvention.

Altogether, it was a very interesting conference where I learned a lot about suicide postvention approaches in other countries, and it was the start of a new collaborative research with a research group from Australia. I want to thank APH sincerely for this opportunity.

For any questions regarding this trip or my work, please email me at [e.elzinga@113.nl](mailto:e.elzinga@113.nl)

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