

Suicide a rural reality

By Sarah Vance

While medically assisted dying accounts for one death per day in the province of Ontario, there are approximately five deaths by suicide every day that do not involve doctor assistance.

Statistics Canada states that suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst teenagers, preceded only by accidents (unintentional injuries). Suicide death rates are higher for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children. These tragedies deepen effects felt intergenerationally by communities after each new death.

More than seven per cent of the deaths recorded by the east regions of the Ottawa and Kingston offices of the Coroner's Office between 2012 and 2014 were a result of suicide - where out of 8,684 death investigations for these offices, 641 were suicide. The east region of the Kingston office is made up of Northumberland, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough, Frontenac, Hastings, Lennox and Addington, and Prince Edward. The east region of the Ottawa office is made up of Lanark, Leeds-Grenville, Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell, Ottawa, and Renfrew.

Out of more than 47,000 death investigations in the province, 3,875 were suicides. This means these regions made up almost 17 per cent of total suicide deaths in Ontario.

These stats suggest suicide is more frequent in rural communities. This could be contributed to by high rates of poverty in rural areas.

"Poverty causes enormous stress and anxiety and depression," said program co-ordinator for North Hastings Community Trust Jane Kali. Mental health disorders such as depression greatly increase the likelihood of someone attempting suicide which is why it is so important that the person suffering seeks help. There are a number of different treatments available including counselling, CBT, medication or even natural remedies like this low cost CBD oil. However, there are those that struggle to ask for help when they are most in need.

"Asking for help can cause anxiety. Being turned away from services and help, causes anxiety. Feeling deprived of basic needs causes anxiety and depression," said Kali. "Our entire quality of life suffers when we cannot meet our basic needs."

Supporting agencies like NHCT work to fight poverty, but these efforts are often understaffed and underfunded creating residual effects for the people who struggle to make ends meet.

In rural communities, the OPP is the only 24 hour responder outside of hospitals and paramedics, and it is mandated by public safety.

There were 49 calls for service relating to mental health for the area policed by the Bancroft detachment of the OPP in 2016. Six of these calls related to attempts to complete suicide, with one call being an effort to complete suicide using the police as a means to achieve that death.

This is approximately one call per week, when considered across 365 days.

"All possible suicide calls (or suicide in progress) are priority as one life lost is too many," said Bancroft OPP Const. Philippe Regamey. "If there are grounds we will apprehend the individual under the mental health act and transport them to the nearest hospital facility to speak with a doctor or psychiatrist."

There are no easy solutions to the root causes of calls for service. Statistics Canada has identified that people in their midlife have the highest rates of death by suicide, with people between the ages of 40 to 49 being most at risk. This could mean that the aging population in North Hastings is also a contributing factor to high suicide rates.

Despite this knowledge, people continue to fall through the cracks. It is estimated that for every completed suicide there are as many as 20 attempts. The causes are varied, but often stem from depression which itself stems from social anxiety, exclusion and isolation. Something as simple as taking [balanced kava](#) can reduce these feelings of anxiety in the same way as CBD can help, but those in rural areas often have no access to medication.

Globally, the world health organization has suggested that 800,000 people complete suicide annually. The number is nearly five and a half times greater than the population of Oshawa.

This is the final article of in a series on assisted dying and suicide in the community.

If you or someone you know is considering suicide help can be found at suicideprevention.ca/need-help/ or by calling the Mental Health Helpline: 1-866-531-2600.