

# **Safer access to pesticides for suicide prevention**

**Experiences from community interventions**



**World Health  
Organization**



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WHO/MSD/MER/16.3

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Printed by the WHO Document Production Services, Geneva, Switzerland

# Contents

03 **Foreword**

04 **Acknowledgements**

05 **Part 1**

**Tackling pesticide suicides through community engagement**

Introduction and background

Focusing on community interventions – creating safer access to pesticides

08 **Part 2**

**Strengthening community prevention – three case studies**

**Case study 1:** China – combining household lockboxes with community education about suicide prevention

**Case study 2:** India – central communal storage of pesticides

**Case study 3:** Sri Lanka – safely securing pesticides within households

24 **Part 3**

**Lessons learnt and conclusions**

Lessons learnt

Conclusions

27 **References**



# Foreword

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Self-ingestion of pesticides remains among the most important means of suicide in the world, accounting for an estimated one third of all suicides globally. Pesticide suicides are of particular concern in rural areas of Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and on Pacific islands, where they can account for up to 60% of suicides. Many efforts have been made to better understand pesticide suicides and find ways to prevent them; in this regard, the importance of means restriction as part of an overall suicide prevention strategy has been highlighted. This report consolidates such efforts by summarizing three case studies that explore the feasibility and acceptability of one category of intervention, which is the secure storage of pesticides in rural communities.

Most people who engage in suicidal behaviour are ambivalent about wanting to die at the time of the act, and some suicidal acts are impulsive responses to acute psychosocial stressors. Restricting access to means of suicide is a key component of suicide prevention efforts, because it provides an opportunity for these individuals to reflect on what they are about to do and, hopefully, for the crisis to pass.

Devising appropriate means restriction interventions, however, requires a detailed understanding of the methods of suicide used in the affected communities. Engaging communities is a key approach to ensuring that suicide prevention efforts are tailored to the context of each community, focus on local ownership and respond to local people's needs. It is important to identify interventions that are feasible and acceptable, and to specify why and how they work.

The three case studies explore safer access to pesticides, alongside community education and awareness programmes. The studies provide important knowledge that can be applied in the future. This knowledge, alongside findings from other studies in pesticide education, regulation and management of acute intoxication, are important aspects of efforts to reduce pesticide suicides. Ultimately, such efforts should contribute to reaching the global target of reducing the suicide rate in countries by 10% by 2020. WHO Member States have committed themselves to work towards this target in the WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020.

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# Acknowledgements

## Conceptualization and guidance

Shekhar Saxena (WHO)

## Project coordination and technical contributions

Alexandra Fleischmann (WHO), Sutapa Howlader (Australia), Michael R Phillips (China), Lakshmi Ratnayeke (Sri Lanka), Lakshmi Vijayakumar (India)

## Expert reviewers

Michael Eddleston (United Kingdom), David Gunnell (United Kingdom), Flemming Konradsen (Denmark), Kairi Kolves (Australia)

## Reviewers from WHO headquarters and regional offices

Richard Brown, Dévora Kestel, Joanna Tempowski

## Administrative support

Adeline Loo

## Editing

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## Graphic design and layout

Yusuke Nakazawa, Japan

WHO would like to thank Syngenta, Switzerland, for its financial contribution through an

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