

**“Working Together to Nurturing the Future”
The University of Hong Kong
The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention
releases the latest figures and prevention recommendations on suicide**

Everyone can make a difference in suicide prevention by working together. World Suicide Prevention day is observed on September 10 by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) each year. As a member of the IASP, the HKJC Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP) of the University of Hong Kong holds a press conference today with the theme “Working Together to Nurturing the Future” to release the latest suicide figures in Hong Kong and also to feature CSRP’s association in Jockey Club Online Youth Emotional Support - Open Up, the first 24/7 operated online-crisis support service targeting youth aged 11-35.

Latest Suicide Figures

With the data extracted from the Coroner’s Court, CSRP estimated that the suicide rate¹ in Hong Kong was 12.2 in 2018, lower than 12.8 in 2017. To enable valid comparison of suicide rates among different regions, suicide rates are often standardized and adjusted according to the age structure of the world population. Since the aging phenomenon in Hong Kong is more serious than other regions, after adjustment of the suicide rate, the age-standardized suicide rate in Hong Kong was estimated at 9.4 in 2018, lower than the global rate of 10.5 for 2016. (World Health Organization, 2018)

The suicide rate of male has been consistently higher than female from 1997 to the estimated number in 2018 by approximately 2 times. Regardless of gender, the estimated 12.2 in 2018 is a drop from 12.8 in 2017. The elderly population has been the highest among different age groups throughout the years. Nevertheless, it is observed that there was a downward trend since 2008, where the suicide rate for people at and over 60 years old stood at 27.1, which dropped to the estimated 18.8 in 2018. On the other hand, the suicide rate of children aged below 15 maintained at a low level of 0.8 in the past three years.

In recent years, youth suicides have become a heightened concern in society. The

¹ All suicide rates are calculated as per 100,000 people. Taking the overall suicide rate in 2018 (12.2) as example, it means there were 12.2 per 100,000 people in Hong Kong died by suicide.

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suicide rate of the age group 15 to 24 increased from 8.3 in 2012 to 10.4 in 2017 but dropped to an estimate of 9.5 in 2018. On the 25-39 age group, the suicide rate decreased from 13.3 in 2012 to 11.8 in 2017 but increased to an estimate of 13.4 in 2018. There's work to do to help this age group to reduce suicide.

The rising number of student suicide cases and the complexity of suicide is of concern to society and Prof Yip has called on each member of the society to work together in suicide prevention to nurturing the future of Hong Kong. Our CSRP is collaborating with non-government organizations to provide new service for youth in need of online-crisis support.

Jockey Club Online Youth Emotional Support - Open Up

Jockey Club Online Youth Emotional Support “Open Up”, the first 24/7 operated online-crisis support service in Hong Kong, was launched officially on October 7, 2018 targeting youth aged 11-35. The service connects youths to volunteer and social worker counselors via SMS (9101 2012) and popular social media platforms FB Messenger, WeChat and the official web portal (www.openup.hk) regarding their study, family, work and relationship-induced emotional distress. This service is funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, supported by CSRP and jointly operated with three leading youth non-profit organisations, Caritas-Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, and The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong.

In the first 11 months of service, Open Up's counsellors have served more than 19,800 cases, over 25,000 hours of service and exceeding 1.4 million messages. The majority of messages consists of less than 9 words while the longest message has over 2,000! There are more female than male, but all genders are welcome! The popular hours for youths chatting online is from 8 pm to 12 midnight. Youth come because they feel “comfortable chatting online than talking to someone in person or on the phone”. The pressures of school, work and life can be overwhelming and youth can come to open up with counsellors when in need.

CSRP has invited Ms. Shirley Chow, Clinical Supervisor of Open Up, to share about the service offered to youths in need, where those with eminent suicidal thoughts in crisis have priority. From some of the served suicidal cases, at the brink of suicide, the individual does not want to talk and that's when the help seeker chooses to use Open Up. For such person, instantly messaging online to express oneself is more

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comfortable than talking face-to-face or on the phone. She also mentioned that many youths over the age of 24 come to Open Up, this is because 24 is the age limit of many existing services offered. Open Up welcomes these youths and the service is 24/7, so no matter where youths are, they can find counselors to chat online.

CSRP has also invited Ms. Denise Mak, a volunteer counselor of Open Up. She shared that after stepping down as a DJ that she's glad to become a volunteer where she can provide support to those in need. She shared how the training and practicum have effectively equipped her to become an online counselor with assurance. During the actual online counseling process, she learned to self-reflect more and give feedback in a genuine, non-judgmental manner. She also tried to step into the shoes of the help seeker, to understand and walk with the distressed youth. With two daughters herself, the training and service at Open Up also help her to constantly reflect on the changing roles she plays in her daughters' grown-up and life evolving process. The experience she has at Open Up is contributing to solidifying her relationship in the family.

The demand to support youths in need is high and the number of cases has been climbing since launch. While Open Up is staffed with dedicated social workers with clinical supervision, the online service is always looking for more volunteers to providing online emotional support to youth and with offline events such as promotional events and training at schools and communities. Recruitment information are in the Open Up web portal (www.openup.hk).

About the HKJC Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP), HKU

Founded in 2002, CSRP has established its worldwide reputation in suicide research and prevention and extended its scope of research to the well-being of individuals as well as the whole society. CSRP believes that empirical research would optimize practices and contribute to the improvement of a society.

This press release, the PowerPoint and the photos for the press conference can be downloaded from the following website after 16:00, September 10, 2019:

<http://csrp.hku.hk/wspd2019/>



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