

## Identifying risk and protective factors for suicide in a regional high school setting: A survey to gain insight into student opinion

### Research Project Information Sheet

Ethics approval number: **S181270**

#### Investigators

The research team consists of Chief Investigator Dr Amanda Clacy, Co-investigator Dr Andrew Wood, Research Assistant Emma Jensen, and Research Assistant Glenn Holmes. The study being undertaken at the Sunshine Coast Mind and Neuroscience – Thompson Institute, part of the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC).

#### Project Description (what is the research project about?)

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), suicide is the leading cause of death among Australian young people aged 5 to 17 (2017). In Australia in 2017 in the 15 to 24 years age group, suicide was the number one cause of mortality accounting for more than twice as many lives as car accidents (the second highest cause of mortality); ABS, 2018). It is estimated that attempted suicide is 20 times more common than completed suicides (World Health Organisation, 2012), and can contribute to premature mortality.

There is variation in suicide rates across geographical location. Across Australia, suicide rates are higher in regional and urban areas, compared to metropolitan locations (ABS, 2017). This may, in part, be due to lower resources and poorer access to mental health services. Indeed, in regions such as the Sunshine Coast, although there may be some resources available, these may not be easily accessible to the people who need them most. For example, high school youth may not be able to take time off school to access services only available during work hours or may not have appropriate access to transport to access the services they need. Addressing suicide in young people in remote and regional areas is a clear priority.

A significant amount of local and international research has been performed in order to understand suicide. Despite this, no single risk factor has been identified, as risk factors are prone to variation across demographic characteristics such as age, gender and location (Scott & Guo, 2012). There is even less of an understanding of the crucial protective factors against suicidality. It is probable that multiple risk and protective factors interact in complex ways to contribute to a young person's chances of self-harm. There is a clear need to understand how specific risk factors can be targeted by specific suicide prevention programs. Suicide prevention programs that enhance or ensure protective factors and address adolescents at risk of suicide are critical.

Research has demonstrated suicide prevention programs in schools are effective for reducing suicidality in adolescents and do not appear to be harmful (Robinson et al., 2018). Despite evidence of their safety and effectiveness, there is a lack of school-based suicide prevention programs (Robinson et al., 2016) perhaps due to concerns of harm. A locally relevant, school-based suicide prevention program would therefore play an important role in reducing suicidality in adolescents. However, to be successful an educational program must be informed by the opinions of students as their opinions provide valuable insight into why an educational program may or may not be effective for them.

### **Aim**

The aim of this study is to investigate risk and protective factors for suicidality in adolescents in a regional high school setting, from the view of students themselves. Additionally, this survey aims to understand high school students' opinions on the risk and protective factors for suicide and how these can be addressed by future interventions. Specifically, students will be asked:

- What they believe are the risk factors to suicide for high school students
- What factors may protect students from developing depression and suicidality
- Whether they think Sunshine Coast high schools are doing enough in terms of mental health education for their students, and
- What they think an optimal high-school based mental health education program should involve

### **Participation**

Thank you for your consideration in your child's participation in our research. Your child has been invited to participate in this project because they are currently enrolled in a participating Sunshine Coast high school. If you and your child agree to participate in this project, your child will be asked to complete a non-identifiable online survey during school hours.

The survey will take place in your child's school, during supervised school hours on an iPad or computer and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey contains 20 survey questions asking students for their opinions of what they perceive as risk and protective factors to high school students, as well as how a school-based educational program could address these. The survey does **not** collect any personal information or ask for student's personal experiences and is instead directed toward gaining an understanding of general trends of what students need in schools.

### **Risks and benefits of participating**

There are minimal risks associated with your child's participation in this project. Research has demonstrated discussing suicide with young people does not increase their risk of suicide. There may be some risks involved in taking part in this study that should be considered however, before signing the informed consent.

The survey may raise some sensitive questions and/or distressing feelings surrounding suicide and mental health due to the nature of the subject matter. The survey has been designed in a way to mitigate this risk, however, if your child feels the need to talk to someone about these feelings, they will be encouraged to talk to their school counsellor or a teacher immediately. They will also be given the opportunity to discuss the survey with a guidance

counsellor or teacher at any point during or after the survey has been completed. Your child will be provided with phone numbers for Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), beyondblue (1300 22 4636), and Lifeline (13 11 14), with all services also available to you if any concern may arise. You may also wish to consider consulting your child's General Practitioner (GP) for additional support if they show signs of ongoing distress.

Although you or your child will not receive any money or rewards for participating in this study, the information provided will inform a potential suicide prevention or mental health program delivered to your child's school.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your child's participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you and your child agree to take part, either of you is free to withdraw at any point without explanation with the consent of the student taking priority. Please note, that if your child wishes to withdraw from the project after submitting their responses, the Research Team will be unable to remove their data from the project because their responses are not identifiable.

There will be no consequences of any level of withdrawal. If you or your child withdraws from any aspect of the research project there will be no consequences or judgments made against you. Both you and your child's decision to participate (or not), will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of the Sunshine Coast or the Sunshine Coast Mind and Neuroscience – Thompson Institute.

### **Consent**

As your child's parent or guardian, you will be asked to provide Informed Consent for your child to participate in the research with the consent of your child taking priority. A consent form will be required to be completed by you the parents/guardians and returned to the school by the due date provided. If you do not give consent, then your child will not be able to participate.

Your child will also be asked to provide Informed Consent before participating in the research. An information sheet similar to this one will be given to them. Before your child starts the online survey, they will be asked whether they consent to participate in the research before they can continue. If your child does not give consent, they will be redirected to other online tasks (e.g. crossword puzzle) in the allocated time so others do not identify their participation in the research.

The research team will not be able to identify if your child chooses to participate.

Consent is for the use of non-identifiable data in this research project and the use of your child's data in unspecified future projects that may be undertaken by the investigators as well as other researchers who may apply to use non-identifiable data from this research.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Any data collected as a part of this project will be non-identifiable and stored securely as per USC's Research Data Management policy.

Participants will not be named in any reports or publications resulting from the research project, and no document containing you or your child's name will leave the research site. The information given will be held in a secure location for 7 years after publications, after which time any identifying information will be destroyed.

## Results

Unfortunately, participants will not be able to request information about their individual data but are welcome to request a summary of the collective research findings on completion of the study by contacting the research team. Non-identifiable research summaries will also be provided to schools should they wish to communicate the key findings to staff.

If you would like a summary of findings of this research project, please contact the Chief Investigator (listed below). Non-identifiable results may be presented at external or internal conferences or meetings, or by publication in peer-reviewed journals.

The survey data will be used to inform a potential suicide intervention program in the participating schools and will also hopefully inform suicide prevention programs in general.

## Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the way this research project is being conducted, you can raise them with the Chief Investigator (listed below). If you prefer an independent person, contact the Chairperson of the USC Human Research Ethics Committee: (c/- Office of Research, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore DC 4558; telephone (07) 5430 2823; email [humanethics@usc.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@usc.edu.au)).

## Contacts

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*The Researchers and the University of the Sunshine Coast would like to thank you for your interest in this project and appreciate the effort involved*