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Welcome to the seventh update on the RaPSS project

Jo Bell and Sharon Mallon, RaPSS researchers

Nearly there ...

We have been working on the project for just over two years and we are now entering the final six months of the research. It is good to know that through this newsletter, some of you have been able to follow the journey of RaPSS since the beginning. Since the last update, we have been working hard to increase the numbers of people taking part in the study. Interviewing is still taking place as we are keen to ensure that as many families as possible are given an opportunity to add their voices to the research. Nevertheless, while active recruitment is continuing, the data collection phase of the research is beginning to wind down and we are starting to shift our attention towards identifying findings. We are already aware from conversations with university staff of the anticipation within the university sector which surrounds the forthcoming report and, although our date of publication is November this year, we have already had a number of requests for copies of the report.

In preparation for writing the report we are about to start the analysis phase. As some of you who have participated in the research will be aware, after each interview, the recording of the conversation is transcribed into a written format. The interviews we have carried out vary in length but most are between 1-3 hours long and this transcribes into about 50-100 pages of standard size text. As we have now interviewed 64 people for the study, you can imagine we have amassed a significant amount of data, all currently safely stored in a cabinet in our office.

As the project has progressed we have carried out some preliminary work briefly analysing the interviews, some of these initial findings were shared with PAPHYRUS members at the last AGM. Analysis is undertaken in the light of the literature review which has been on-going throughout the research and has been updated with new relevant articles identified over the life of the study. In order to be as responsive to the experiences that people have shared with us in interviews, we endeavour to be as open as possible to all the themes and patterns that are contained within the data. We are therefore reluctant to make any assumptions at this stage about what the outcomes of our analysis will be. However we are confident, given our knowledge of existing data in this field, that our data represents a very valuable opportunity to provide new insights into student suicide. In addition, our unique case study approach provides multiple perspectives on student suicide which may be relevant for the study of young suicide in general.

While carrying out our analysis we will be meeting with members of PAPHYRUS to ensure that we provide PAPHYRUS with findings and ideas which can continue to be developed by the organisation after the main body of the research has been completed. As yet, the format of this continuing work has not been decided upon, however we will have further details in the next issue of the newsletter when the project will be almost complete.



Final Report

We are also thinking about how we can ensure that the research achieves as big an impact as possible and, in order to raise wider awareness of the project an abstract representing some of our early work has been reviewed and accepted at the 11th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour to be held in September. This represents an important opportunity for the work of RaPSS and PAPHYRUS as an organisation to be represented in an international forum and it provides a useful opening to advertise the forthcoming final report.

Also in preparation for the launch of the final report, we have been continuing to make contact with relevant persons in the academic sector and within the wider community. As part of this process, we attended a recent seminar at the House of Commons hosted by Linda Heathcoat-Amory and the Child Bereavement Trust. The aim of the seminar was to draw attention to the impact of suicide on families. It was attended both by representatives with a personal loss and by those with a professional interest in young suicide. This dual focus was extremely useful in highlighting the effects of young suicide on individuals and the impact that it

can have on those left behind, whilst also illuminating the national context from an academic perspective. The event provided the RaPSS team with an opportunity to meet some key figures within the suicide field and to catch up with some familiar faces from POPYRUS. It also provided us with useful information for our own expert seminar which will be held in King's College London in October to discuss the issues around developing systems for recording numbers of students who die from suicide while studying at university.

In the next issue of the newsletter there will be an update on our seminar and the outcomes of our analysis
 If in the meantime you would like to contact the researchers either regarding an interview or about any views you may have on the research itself please contact Sharon@rapss.org.uk (01772 893407) or Jo@rapss.org.uk (01482 463354).

Sharon Malloy
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Coming from a different perspective

Marcus Lyth-Lawley reflects on his input into a suicide seminar held in the House of Commons on May 22nd

There were around 8 speakers, some speaking about their personal experiences, and some speaking from a professional standpoint. Linda Heathcoat-Amory particularly gave an incredibly emotional speech - I don't think there was a dry eye in the room. Some of the surviving families had been involved in setting up trusts to help depressed young people which had done some very effective things, and others mentioned existing campaigns such as CALM

The professionals were sensitive in acknowledging their lack of personal experience, and in particular the psychologist was very interesting and gave me a lot of food for thought regarding how people frequently use guilt as a way of ascribing causality to something they don't understand - guilt being preferable to the apparent inexplicability of the suicide for most people.

I thought I'd just try to provide a personal 3rd party perspective, since that didn't seem to be something that was going to be covered by anyone else.

I commented that as a sibling it's natural to feel protective towards

your parents and to feel annoyed at someone who you perceive as ruining their lives. I used as an example a friend with a severely anorexic elder sister of 35 or so, where my friend now doesn't talk to his sister at all as he is unable to stop himself becoming destructively angry with her because of her 'selfishness'. Obviously he recognises that this is illogical, but that doesn't mean he can change his behaviour. I wondered if sometimes siblings could feel guilty that they were unable to interact positively with the person who, for all they were suffering an illness which was in no way their fault, is nevertheless making everyone else (who may actually all have their own problems) miserable. I mentioned how POPYRUS initiatives such as HOPELineUK could really help with this feeling of not being able to help by providing a resource for people worried about someone else committing suicide.

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