



● ● ● 2024

# Intuition, Imagination and Innovation in Suicidology Conference

Virtual Conference  
14–15 May 2024

Programme and Abstract Book



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center za  
raziskovanje  
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2024 Intuition, Imagination and Innovation in Suicidology Conference  
Virtual Conference | 14–15 May 2024  
Programme and Abstract Book

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## Welcome Address

Dear intuitive, imaginative and innovative guest,

We were pleased to welcome you to the Intuition, Imagination, and Innovation in Suicidology Conference, an event hosted by the Slovene Centre for Suicide Research (University of Primorska, Andrej Marušič Institute). This conference marked our fifth consecutive year of gathering digitally, and we were delighted to welcome both new and returning participants from across the globe.

Our goal is to not only enhance understanding and knowledge about suicide but also to foster the development of effective suicide prevention and postvention activities. Over the years, this conference has evolved into a dynamic platform for rich discussions among distinguished experts in suicide research and prevention, as well as a nurturing ground for young and aspiring suicidologists and other mental health professionals.

Despite being held in an online format through Zoom, our commitment to creating an interactive and engaging conference experience remained unwavering. This format has indeed broadened our reach, allowing a global audience to benefit from invaluable knowledge exchange and cross-cultural learning without leaving their homes. Participants had the distinct opportunity to hear from and engage with leading suicidologists through insightful presentations and meaningful discussions.

This year's programme focused on the theme 'Is Suicide Prevention Destined to Stagnate?' with speakers addressing crucial issues related to suicidal behavior, suicide, and prevention strategies. Our sessions were designed to deepen understanding and promote active dialogue.

We hope the Conference provided an opportunity for you to express and practice your intuition, imagination and innovative ideas.

Prof. Diego De Leo and Prof. Vita Poštuvan, Chairs  
Vanja Gomboc and Lucia Rojs, Organising Committee



Diego de Leo



Vita Poštuvan



Vanja Gomboc



Lucia Rojs



## Organizer

### ***Slovene Centre for Suicide Research (UP IAM SCSR)***

The Slovene Centre for Suicide Research ([www.zivziv.si](http://www.zivziv.si)) was founded in 2011 at the Andrej Marušič Institute, University of Primorska. The initiative to establish an independent unit within the Institute was taken by Prof. Diego De Leo and a group of former colleagues of the late Prof. Andrej Marušič in memory of his work, aiming to continue it. Research and prevention of suicide are the main activities of the clinical and academic work of the Centre. Through its involvement in national and international projects, the Centre is the initiator of numerous innovative approaches in suicidology. The Centre's vision is to provide high-quality research for a better understanding of suicidal behaviour, thus contributing to suicide prevention, intervention and postvention.

*You are welcome to read more about us at [zivziv.si](http://zivziv.si)!*

# Programme Outline

## **14 May 2024**

- 9.00 Assoc. Prof. Vita Poštuvan and Prof. Diego De Leo: 'Welcome'
- 9.15 Prof. Heidi Hjelmeland: 'Is Suicide Prevention Destined to Stagnate? Yes, Unless ...'
- 10.30 Prof. Diana van Bergen: 'Effective Suicide Prevention for Youth Needs the Voices of Young People'
- 12.30 Dr. Saška Roškar: 'Strengths, Limitations and Challenges of Contemporary Suicide Prevention'
- 14.00 Dr. Dan Reidenberg: 'Rays of Hope'
- 15.00 Assoc. Prof. Vita Poštuvan and Prof. Diego De Leo: 'Closing Remarks for Day One'

## **15 May 2024**

- 9.00 Dr. Luke Balcombe: 'Is Human-Artificial Intelligence in Suicide Research and Prevention a Capable Combination?'
- 10.30 Ms. Nina Krohne: 'Overcoming Stagnating Prevention: Expanding Suicide Prevention to Embrace Women's Silent Struggles'
- 12.30 Group discussions, Co-chairs: Assoc. Prof. Vita Poštuvan and Prof. Diego De Leo
- 14.00 Dr. Alan L. Berman: 'Outside the Box: Rethinking National Suicide Prevention Strategies to Actually Prevent Suicides'
- 15.00 Assoc. Prof. Vita Poštuvan and Prof. Diego De Leo: 'Closing Remarks'

# Is Suicide Prevention Destined to Stagnate? Yes, Unless ...

*Invited lecture · Heidi Hjelmeland*

*Prof. Heidi Hjelmeland works at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Mental Health. Her extensive research portfolio covers a variety of cultural contexts in several European and African countries. Currently, her academic work is anchored in the framework of Critical Suicide Studies and focuses on topics such as meaning, communication, gender, culture, context, intervention and prevention as well as theoretical and methodological issues.*

*Abstract.* ... the field undergoes radical changes in terms of how suicide/suicidality is understood and researched, which, in turn, have implications for how we attempt to prevent suicide. I will start by taking a critical look at the current 'regime of truth' (Marsh, 2010), which is dominated by three basic assumptions: (1) Suicide is pathological; (2) Suicide is individual; and (3) Suicidology is science (Marsh, 2016), with inherent consequences for suicide prevention. I will point out some of the problems with all these assumptions. Moreover, we need to accept that suicide is complex way beyond being 'multifactorial,' as in adding together risk factors in more or less complex explanatory models, and I will present a different way of understanding causality and complexity in relation to suicide. I will also argue that most of what currently is referred to as suicide prevention actually is intervention requiring professionals to intervene. The potential for improved suicide prevention lies in understanding that all suffering has its basis in people's life history; a life history deeply anchored in numerous interwoven relations to other people, which, in turn, are intertwined with overall social, cultural, economic, and political systems, together constituting a complex dynamic context. Thus, to become better at preventing suicide, we need to move towards genuine prevention, so that everybody, as fellow human beings and/or parts of various 'systems,' really can contribute to prevent suicide. Then, we need to acquire and disseminate knowledge about how suicidality, as a complex contextual and relational phenomenon, may develop through people's life histories, in context. All in all, I argue for the need of a paradigm shift in this field, which, in fact, might already be underway, albeit to fierce resistance from people in powerful positions.



# Effective Suicide Prevention for Youth Needs the Voices of Young People

*Invited lecture · Diana van Bergen*

*Prof. Diana van Bergen works at the University of Groningen and focuses her research on the complex dynamics of suicide and suicide-related behaviors among young people. Her work is specifically focused on socially vulnerable youth. Her aim is to develop tailored, effective interventions that address the specific needs and context of these at-risk groups.*

**Abstract.** This presentation will address two key points that have received relatively little attention in suicidology: (1) In order for interventions to be successful and recovery process to run smoothly, we need to hear from young people themselves what precipitated their suicidal behavior, and their self-perceived needs and wishes for overcoming their distress; (2) A focus of recovery and how to overcome suicidal behaviors, can inspire suicidologists to optimize care and support for those youth who currently struggle with suicidality. For suicide-prevention interventions to yield success and for the recovery journey to progress seamlessly, it's imperative that we engage with young individuals to comprehend their perspectives on the factors contributing to suicidal behaviors. Hence, in the first half of this presentation, we focus on understanding self-perceived reasons for developing distress that contributes to suicidal behaviors in young people. Arguably, this is a first and critical step for developing the right responses for helping youth who feel suicidal. Next, although experiencing suicidal behaviors during adolescence can create a continued increased risk of future suicidal behaviors and overall negative mental health consequence, for the majority of adolescents suicidal behaviors do not persist into (young) adulthood. Hence, It is important to better understand what factors contribute to recovery processes. In the second half of the presentation, an overview will therefore be provided on what we know about recovery factors, mostly self-identified by young people. Recovery factors can be summarized into: interpersonal factors, self-esteem and coping related factors, perspective and meaning making aspects, personal autonomy, mental health and well-being components, and practical support issues.

# Strengths, Limitations and Challenges of Contemporary Suicide Prevention

*Invited lecture · Saška Rožkar*

*Dr. Saška Rožkar works in the field of prevention of mental diseases, but her primary interest is public health approaches to suicide prevention. She leads the interdisciplinary working group for suicide prevention within the Slovenian National Mental Health Program – MIRA. She has contributed to suicide prevention in Slovenia through initiatives such as the development of guidelines for responsible reporting on suicide, the establishment of a network of counselling services, training of gatekeepers ...*

**Abstract.** Contemporary suicide prevention, encompassing different actions, is a roadmap for saving lives and combating the stigma attached to suicidality and those affected by it. Suicide prevention as we know it, certainly has many strengths. A lot of initiatives on a universal, selective and indicative prevention level were successfully implemented in the last decades. Studies focusing on evaluation of these initiatives – either as a package in the form of National Suicide Prevention Strategies or their respective components – have, however, provided mixed results regarding the effectiveness of these strategies and their impact on the suicide rate. Preventative efforts are mostly focusing on risk factors for suicide and are hence in the duty of preventing the suicidal process to develop and/or worsen. But can suicide prevention really be achieved and operationalized merely through diminishing the risk factors? By not sufficiently focusing on protective factors and determinants which maintain and strengthen mental health and resilience, we miss an opportunity to reach out to a great number of individuals who at this moment are ok and would, thorough initiatives aimed at strengthening their mental wellbeing also stay in a good mental condition. If we want to do that, then suicidology and contemporary suicide prevention needs to get more open and inclusive for approaches seemingly not related to suicide prevention. Mental health promotion, focusing on protective rather than risk factors and on socioeconomic determinants of suicide, is one such area. In fact one could argue, that mental health promotion in its most broad sense is suicide prevention. This is not to say that suicide prevention needs a general refurbishing but rather that the field would benefit from embracing new approaches and ideas.

# Rays of Hope

*Invited lecture · Dan Reidenberg*

*Dr. Dan Reidenberg is a distinguished expert in the field of suicidology and is known worldwide for his contributions as an international speaker and creator of an evidence-based suicide prevention program. He is Director of the US National Council for Suicide Prevention and Special Advisor to the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). Dr. Reidenberg's special interest and expertise are in media, messaging and technology, focusing on how these areas can influence and be used in suicide prevention.*

**Abstract.** We live in a world filled with predictions. We predict the weather, what we think the stock markets will do and the outcome of sporting events. Companies try and predict what consumers will want, grocers predict how much food to order and statisticians try and predict who will win elections. But how good are we at predictions and do they really help us? Prediction – what we think of as risk assessment – is a challenging issue in the field of suicide prevention and with suicide rates changing constantly how are we to make sense of this? Our field has debates, silos and complexity, but too many lives are lost each day and even more are filled with despair for us to rest. We need to challenge old beliefs and practices, be laser-focused, and implement scalable, innovative approaches to save more lives. I believe that one ray of hope comes from technology and social media. In this presentation I will share some of my thoughts on these issues as well as discuss my reasons for believing that technology offers us our best hope at saving more lives.

# Is Human-Artificial Intelligence in Suicide Research and Prevention a Capable Combination?

*Invited lecture · Luke Balcombe*

*Dr. Luke Balcombe specializes in the field of digital mental health, focusing on the potential and limitations of digital tools for suicide research and prevention. His research also extends to the impact of social media on mental health. In addition, Dr. Balcombe has a keen interest in the mental health of athletes, exploring key aspects such as transitions, adaptation and resilience. His research also encompasses men's mental health and aims to address and understand the particular challenges faced by this population.*

*Abstract.* This keynote presentation critically examines the intersection of generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) in suicide research and prevention, highlighting the dual potential and significant ethical and legal challenges that currently impede its full utilization. It acknowledges GAI's capability to process vast datasets, thereby identifying risk factors and targeted intervention opportunities with unprecedented precision. However, the application of GAI in this sensitive domain is fraught with concerns regarding privacy, consent, and the potential for data misuse. Despite these challenges, the presentation posits that through rigorous regulation, transparent ethical guidelines, and extensive testing, some of the barriers to the effective use of GAI in suicide research and prevention can be surmounted. It suggests that a robust framework that incorporates data protection laws, ethical AI use standards, and continuous oversight through a human-artificial intelligence model could pave the way for responsible GAI deployment in this domain.

# Overcoming Stagnating Prevention: Expanding Suicide Prevention to Embrace Women's Silent Struggles

*Invited lecture · Nina Krohne*

*For the past five years, Nina Krohne has dedicated herself to the field of suicidology and has been actively involved as a junior researcher at the UP IAM Slovene Centre for Suicide Research. Her main focus revolves around her doctoral thesis, in which she is researching suicide in women. In particular, she is examining how intimate partner violence correlates with suicidality and which factors promote resilience. Her curiosity also extends to researching suicide prevention strategies, particularly electronic interventions, exploring mental health literacy and addressing the impact of COVID-19 on mental health.*

**Abstract.** The conventional approaches of suicide prevention strategies have long been centered on high-risk populations, with a particular focus on reducing mortality rates. Thus, suicidality among women, often manifested as ideation and non-fatal attempts, has historically been understudied, leading to gaps in prevention strategies. This lecture will argue that the undervaluation of suicidal ideation as a serious and immediate concern hinders the progress of suicide prevention. We will explore the underlying mechanism of suicidality in female survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), illuminating the necessity to broaden the field of suicide prevention to include not only the professionals working with IPV survivors directly but the civil society to rethink the harmful stereotypes and prejudice preceding violence. By demonstrating the intricate interplay between IPV and suicidality, this lecture aims to present an innovative model, offering a nuanced perspective on risk and resilience factors affecting IPV survivors, enabling suggestions for interventions based on the individual needs of the survivors. By acknowledging the mental health distress and the burden on individuals and their loved ones, this lecture will emphasize the importance of understanding suicidality as a spectrum and suggest that ideation itself should be a call to action. We will argue that effective suicide prevention must broaden its scope to include those who suffer in silence, striving not just for the preservation of life but for the alleviation of suffering and the enhancement of mental well-being.

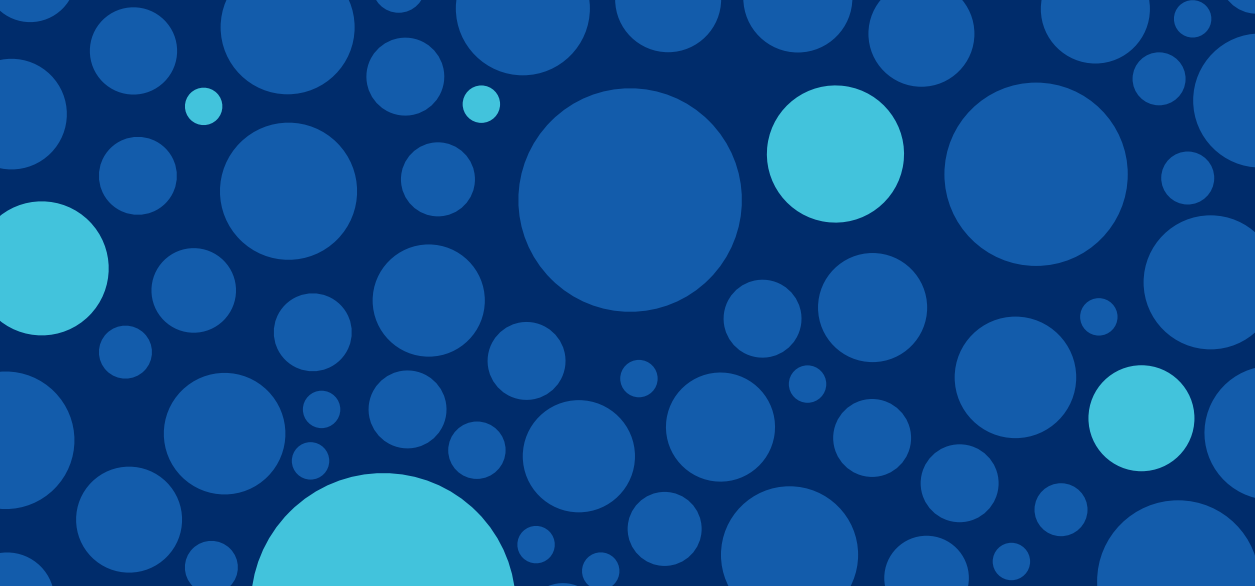
# Outside the Box: Rethinking National Suicide Prevention Strategies to Actually Prevent Suicides

*Invited lecture · Lanny Berman*

*Dr. Lanny Berman is affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Between 1995 and 2014 he served as Executive Director of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS). In addition to various distinguished roles, he also served as President of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) from 1984 to 1985 and President of the International Association for Suicide Prevention from 2009 to 2013. An accomplished scholar, Dr. Berman has published over 175 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and edited or authored eight books.*

**Abstract.** Roughly 40 countries now have adopted national suicide prevention plans/strategies and action programmes. There is considerable consistency among these in proposed strategies, both those that are evidence-based and those that are best practices. In spite of this general agreement across countries, evidence of effectiveness remains lacking. If these results were to occur in the world of corporate business, heads would roll. Instead, the usual outcome has been a revision and reissuance of a national strategy, often not based on a either a macro or evaluative perspective. To take but one example, the U.S. is now issuing its 3rd edition (over a 23 year period) during which its suicide rate has not declined, but, rather, has risen 34%. The solution does not lie in yet another or revised set of strategies; rather it rests on understanding what drives success, be it in business or public health, and, notably in attention to implementation science. In the world of suicide prevention, this is out-of-the box thinking and lives are depending on just that.



- 
- I follow my *intuition*,
  - I *imagine* more than ever,
  - I love to *innovate* ...

