

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

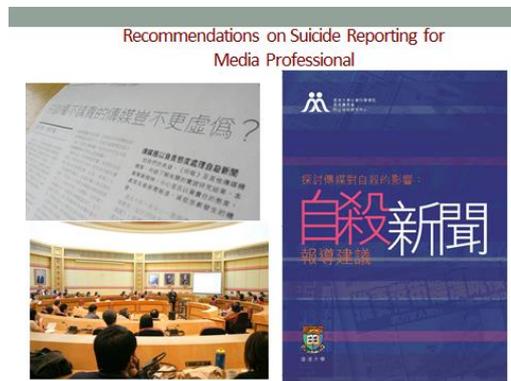
IMPACT CASE HISTORY

Reduction of Hong Kong’s Suicide Rate by a Population-based Suicide Prevention Programme in the Community

1. Summary

The Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention led by Professor Paul S F Yip has successfully contributed to Hong Kong’s suicide rate reduction of 32% between 2003 and 2012 through a multi-pronged population-based suicide prevention programme. The programme includes research, education and training as well as means restriction, which aims to empower and educate the community to prevent suicides.

This is a pioneer programme for suicide prevention in Hong Kong and in the region, and its impact has been widely recognized. It has successfully transformed the University’s knowledge, through advocacy, into concrete changes in society, such as speeding up the installation of platform doors by MTR Corporation and the practice adopted by supermarkets of putting warning labels on charcoal packs and removing charcoal from open selves. The programme also contributes to enhancing mental wellness of disadvantaged groups and school children. It reaches out to disconnected youth through social media and dedicated websites. Through its outstanding accomplishment in community engagement, the Centre has been identified as a local and regional knowledge hub in suicide research and prevention.



2. Underpinning Research

Traditionally, suicide has been viewed as a mental health issue best addressed primarily through clinical interventions, especially through the treatment of depression. However, it has been found that the majority of people who committed suicide had not received psychiatric services prior to death. Furthermore, in view of the size of the problem and the limited resources, the medical and clinical model involving intensive professional care service might not be practical in Asia.

Led by Professor Yip, the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP, or “the Centre”) in the Faculty of Social Sciences has used a public health approach for suicide prevention. Using information and knowledge generated from research studies, they have adopted a holistic, integrated and multilayer intervention approach together with community collaboration.

The CSRP conducted a large scale psychological autopsy study among those aged 15-59 who committed suicide in Hong Kong and released a report in 2005. The risk and protective factors for suicides were examined. The research findings served as the cornerstone of the public health approach to suicide prevention adopted by the Centre.

The Centre’s exemplary pilot project on prevention of visitor charcoal burning suicides and suicide pacts done in collaboration with the local community in Cheung Chau demonstrated the effectiveness of the strategy of means restriction, which resulted in a clear drop in suicides, and increased the awareness of government bodies.

By enlisting the help of all supermarkets in two districts, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long, the Centre also conducted a one-year study comparing suicides in Tuen Mun, where charcoal packs were removed from the open shelves of major retail outlets, with those in Yuen Long, where charcoal was sold openly as usual from June 2006 to July 2007. The rates of charcoal burning suicides fell sharply in Tuen Mun, by 53.8%, but similar results were not seen in Yuen Long. These results were compared with the overall drop in Hong Kong’s suicide rate during the same period, which was 5.7%. The results demonstrated the effectiveness of means restriction as a suicide prevention strategy, and were reported in major local and international newspapers and published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* and *Lancet*.

Research of the Centre has shown that barrier installations in subway stations are effective in preventing suicides. Furthermore, their study has shown that if the loss of fare revenue, passengers’ waiting time and the lost lives due to premature mortality are taken into account, safety barriers are cost-effective based on international standard.

As a pivotal research hub in Asia for suicide prevention, the Centre has conducted independent and collaborative research involving various stakeholders, resulting in best practices and guidelines for suicide prevention in Asia.

3. References to the Research

Key peer-reviewed publications:

1. Chen, Eric Y.H., Chan, Wincy S.C., Wong, Paul W.C., Chan, Sandra S.M., Chan, Cecilia L.W., Law, Y.W., Beh, Philip S.L., Chan, K.K., Cheng, Joanne W.Y., Liu, Ka Y., **Yip, P.S.F.** (2006). Suicide in Hong Kong: A case-control psychological autopsy study. *Psychological Medicine*, 36(6): 815-25.
2. Wong, P.W.C., Liu, P.M.Y., Chan, W.S.C., Law, F.Y.W., Law, S.C., Fu, K.W., Li, H.S., Tso, M.K., Beautrais, A.L., **Yip, P.S.F.** (2009). An integrative suicide prevention program for visitor charcoal burning suicide and suicide pact. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, 39(1): 82-90.
3. Law, C.K., **Yip, P.S.F.**, Chan, W.S.C., Fu, K.W., Wong, P.W.C., & Law, Y.W. (2009). Evaluating the effectiveness of barrier installation for preventing railway suicides in Hong Kong. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 114: 254-262.
4. **Yip P.S.F.**, Law C.K., Fu K.W., Law Y.W., Wong P.W.C., & Xu Y. (2010). Restricting the means of suicide by charcoal burning. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 196(3): 241-242.
5. **Yip, P.S.F.**, Caine, E., Yousuf, S., Chang, S.S., Wu, K.C., & Chen, Y.Y. (2012). Means restriction for suicide prevention. *Lancet*, 379(9834): 2393-2399.
6. Chang, S.S., Stuckler, D., **Yip, P.**, and Gunnell, D. (2013). Impact of 2008 global economic crisis on suicide: time trend study in 54 countries. *BMJ*, 347: f5239.
7. Chang, S.S., Chen, Y.Y., **Yip, P.S.**, Lee, W.J., Hagihara, A., and Gunnell, D. (2014). Regional changes in charcoal-burning suicide rates in East/Southeast Asia from 1995 to 2011: a time trend analysis. *PLoS Med*, 11: e1001622.
8. Cheng, Q., Fu, K.W., Caine, E., and **Yip, P.S.** (2014). Why do we report suicides and how can we facilitate suicide prevention efforts? *Crisis*, 35: 74-81.
9. Wong, P.W., Caine, E.D., Lee, C.K., Beautrais, A., and **Yip, P.S.** (2014). Suicides by jumping from a height in Hong Kong: a review of coroner court files. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 49: 211-9.
10. **Yip, P.S.** and Chen, F. (2014). A study on the effect of exclusion period on the suicidal risk among the insured. *Social Science & Medicine*, 110: 26-30.

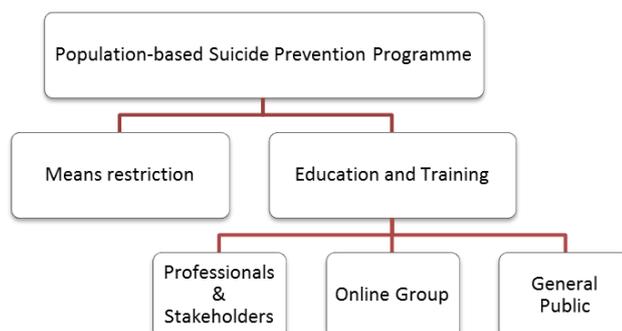
Selected external grant funding:

1. A study on Suicide Clusters: Hong Kong and Taiwan experiences (HKU 784210M)

Funding Scheme:	General Research Fund (GRF) of the Research Grants Council (RGC)
Principal Investigator:	Professor Paul S F Yip
Period:	2010-2014
Amount Awarded:	HK\$798,648
2. Suicide and employment (HKU 784012M)	
Funding Scheme:	GRF of the RGC
Principal Investigator:	Professor Paul S F Yip
Period:	2012-2014
Amount Awarded:	HK\$628,800
3. A study on suicide news reporting ecology in Hong Kong and Taiwan: accuracy, stereotyping and mutual causation (HKU7030-PPR-12)	
Funding Scheme:	Public Policy Research
Principal Investigator:	Professor Paul S F Yip
Period:	2012-2014
Amount Awarded:	HK\$300,696
4. Pilot Project on Community-based Intervention to Suicide Clusters	
Funding Scheme:	Lotteries Fund
Principal Investigator:	Professor Paul S F Yip
Period:	2012-2015
Amount Awarded:	HK\$5,139,000

4. Details of the Impact or Benefit

Backed by cutting edge research and evidence-based practices that follow recognized standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO), the CSRP has successfully contributed to Hong Kong’s suicide rate reduction of 32% between 2003 and 2012 through a multi-pronged population-based suicide prevention programme. The programme simultaneously promotes restriction to suicide means and targets three separate population groups for education and training to provide a holistic suicide prevention strategy (see figure 1).



The success of the Cheung Chau pilot project led to opportunities to extend to other

community-based projects in the Eastern and North Districts with the support of the Health Care and Promotion Fund (HCPF) and the Lotteries Fund respectively. For example, the Centre has joined the Eastern District Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Prevention of Deliberate Self-Harm to develop a series of practical strategic suicide prevention initiatives within the community including a systematic evaluation of its effectiveness. For the North District, the Centre has initiated a collaborative project involving different government departments and community organizations to implement measures to prevent suicides in the community with a suicide cluster. Through education, training, and increased public awareness, not only are these communities better equipped to prevent suicide, the Centre's programme and research has also had a sustainable impact on reducing the suicide rate in these areas.

Since 2007, the Centre has made a persistent effort to advocate for the construction of platform screen doors (PSDs) across all above-ground stations. Through discourse in the news, the Centre has raised public awareness of this issue and encouraged discussions with the Legislative Council. Their active voice continues to give pressure to the MTR Corporation to speed up the installation of PSDs on the East Rail and the Ma On Shan Lines.

In respect of education and training, focused workshops for Hospital Authority personnel, Hong Kong Police Force and its negotiation team, social workers and teachers have been held to address issues specific to each profession, deliver evidence-based information on suicide prevention, and empower these professionals with best practices guidelines and skills for effective suicide prevention.

A series of workshops has also been organized to provide training to local NGOs and educational institutions on the fundamentals of utilizing the Internet to engage targets via web 2.0 websites and social media.

The Centre recognized that the media has a unique role to play in preventing suicide. Over the past ten years, the Centre has been working closely with the Hong Kong media to enhance the ecology of suicide news reporting. In 2004, the Centre published the booklet, *Recommendations on Suicide Reporting for Media Professionals*, which introduced the WHO's suggestions on suicide news reporting to the Hong Kong media. Different workshops were organized for knowledge sharing with the media professionals. In 2012, the Centre and WHO co-organized a workshop for the media, which was well attended by editors, reporters and photographers of different news agencies. In 2013, the Centre organized a seminar on the "Contagion of Suicide Reporting" with the Hong Kong Press Council to gather experienced researchers and media professionals to discuss the relationship between media reports and suicide and the issue of responsible reporting on suicide.

From 2011-2014, the Centre launched 4 mentorship programmes for selected Primary 4-5 students in a Tin Shui Wai school and Secondary 2-3 students in a Sham Shui Po school. These students came from relatively disadvantaged background such as single-parent families or with learning or behavioural problems. Volunteer mentors

received training on helping students cope with their problems and develop a positive attitude on problem-solving. The project ran for nine months, after which the teachers and parents reported that both behaviour and academic results of the students had improved.

In order to reach out to people who do not come forward to seek help from professionals or who want to learn more about suicide prevention or mental health but prefer doing it in private over the Internet, the CSRP has created several e-platforms: MindMap (www.MindMap.hk), Little Prince is Depressed (LPD) [www.depression.edu.hk], and the CSRP main page (www.hku.hk/csrp), to engage them and deliver high quality information and research findings. With substantial support from the Quality Education Fund, the CSRP also developed an online e-learning programme, “Professor Gooley and The Flame of Mind” (www.gooley.edu.hk), to provide an engaging mental health-learning experience to teens and their parents. These online and interactive efforts not only are held in high regard locally by the public, with LPD winning the top ten awards in the Meritorious Websites Contest for six years in a row, but have also received accolades from mental health professionals abroad.

The effectiveness of the Centre’s programme and its contribution to suicide prevention has been recognized locally and internationally as evident from the various awards received by Professor Yip and his dedicated team, including the Lee Awards for Best Practices in Suicide Prevention and the Stengel Research Award by the International Association for Suicide Prevention in 2011.

The Centre has been working as a strategic partner with WHO and the International Association of Suicide Prevention for promoting suicide prevention regionally and globally. The Centre has been providing consultancy advice for WHO and our neighbouring countries, such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Mainland China and Macau.

5. References to the Corroboration of Impact or Benefit

- Statement of Support from the Committee on Home-school Cooperation is available for corroboration purpose.
- Awards received:
 - Hong Kong SAR Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority
Ten Healthy Websites 2004, Most Creative Website Award 2004
 - Asia Wall Street Journal and the Singapore Economic Development Board
Silver Asian Innovation Award 2005

- Hong Kong SAR Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority
Meritorious Websites Contest Award 2006-2011
(<http://www.merit.gov.hk/eng/info/result.php>)
- International Association of Suicide Prevention (IASP)
The Lee Award for Good Suicide Prevention Measures / Practices 2011
- Media Coverage:
 - News clippings on MTR platform screen doors are available.
 - In 2005, the Radio-Television Hong Kong collaborated with CSRP to produce a six-episode television programme series called “Living is Hope”, which aimed at promoting suicide prevention.
 - Since 2012, in response to the CSRP’s requests, major local newspapers have removed the Internet links to Helium gas access from their reports on using Helium gas to commit suicide and more responsible reporting was observed.
- Support from Social Media:
 - In 2013, in response to CSRP’s request, Google Inc. (Hong Kong office) removed a Google blog and YouTube video with detailed description of committing suicide by Helium gas.