



2023 STEPs Survey findings

Mental Health: Suicide and depression

Rationale

Suicide is a critical global public health issue, accounting for 1 in 100 deaths, with 77% occurring in low- and middle-income countries.

It is the fourth leading cause of death among people aged 15-29. Though women attempt suicide more often, men have higher mortality rates.

Depression affects 5% of the world's population and will likely be the leading cause of disability by 2030. It disproportionately impacts women and individuals with chronic conditions, worsening health outcomes.

In Ghana, data on suicide and depression is scarce, and addressing this requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach for effective intervention. The WHO STEPS survey provides data to support evidence-based intervention.



Key messages

- There has been significant effort by the Ghana Mental Health Authority in reducing stigmatization of mental health conditions and encouraging the population to seek help.
- Continuous education of the populace to create awareness and improve health seeking behaviours despite the progress made must be prioritized.
- Government has shown commitment to suicide prevention by decriminalizing suicide in March 2023 and capacity of some primary health staff has been built through using the suicide module of the WHO mhGAP Intervention Guide.
- More young people have considered attempting suicide however, the risk of suicide attempt is higher among young women but increases with increasing age in men.
- The number of people living with depression is double (8%) the global estimate (3.8%).
- Targeted interventions must be developed to reduce the burden of suicide and depression using a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach.

Suicide:

- 3.8% of the population considered suicide in the past year, higher in women (4.6%) than men (3.1%).
- 9.1% of those who considered suicide sought professional help and are mostly in the 30-59 age group.
- 2.3% have attempted suicide, more women (2.7%) than men (1.8%), with attempts increasing with age in men.
- Nearly 40% of those who attempted suicide did so in the past 12 months.
- 2.8% of the population has lost a family member to suicide.

Depression:

- 33.0% had no depression; 36.1% had minimal; 6.2% had moderate to severe depression.
- 6.4% of men and 9.6% of women had moderate to severe depression

General Mental Health:

- 1/3 of the population attributes mental health issues to a curse.
- 86.4% believe mental health conditions are treatable.
- 1.6% have been diagnosed with a mental condition.

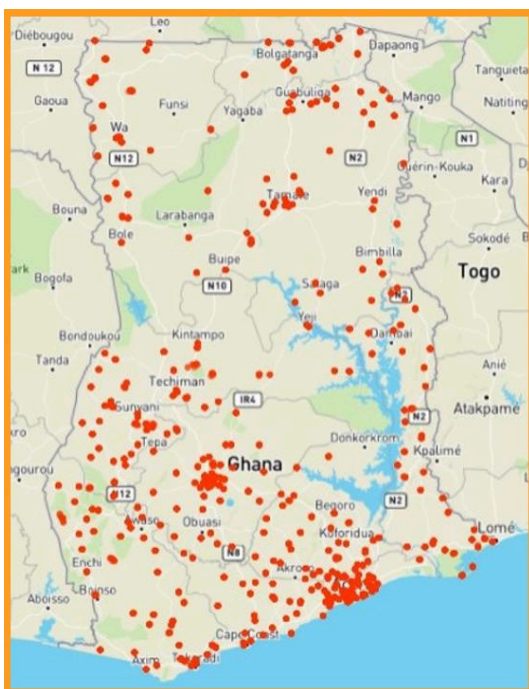
1. Mental Health

Suicide is a serious public health problem. Globally, 1 in 100 deaths is due to suicide with 77% of suicides occurring in low- and middle-income countries and fourth leading cause of death among young people between 15-29 years. For every reported suicide there are many more who attempt. Every death by suicide affects not just the individual, its impact affects, families, communities, and the entire country. Although more women attempt suicide, more men die by suicide compared with females.

Depression is a common mental disorder affecting 5% of the world's population. Global estimates indicates that depression will be the leading cause of premature deaths and increased years of living with disabilities by 2030. Twice as many women compared with men are affected by depression. Depression affects significant numbers of individuals living with chronic conditions such as Tuberculosis, HIV, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, respiratory, obesity, cancer etc. and impairs their self-care and adherence to the management of their condition increasing morbidity and mortality.

Investing in the treatment for depression yields a four-fold return on investment. There is however limited data on the prevalence and factors associated with suicide and depression in Ghana. Addressing the burden of suicide and depression requires a multi-sectoral, comprehensive, and integrated approach to achieve the desired impact.

2. 2023 STEPS Survey method



- Map of Ghana showing Nationwide household selection.
- A multi-stage sampling technique was used to obtain a nationally representative sample.
- Data was collected in all 16 regions, 385 enumeration areas and 5438 respondents aged 18 to 69.

Preventing Suicide



Research has shown that many people who die by suicide have seen a health worker in the previous month. Therefore, all health workers have an important role to play in recognizing, assessing and supporting people who are at risk of suicide.

3. Suicide

The survey determined the percentage of Ghanaians aged 18-69 who seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months. The survey also determined the proportion who attempted suicide in the past 12 months.

3.1 Proportion who seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months

Seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months*

Age Group (years)	Men			Women			Both Sexes		
	n	%	95% CI	n	%	95% CI	n	%	95% CI
18-29	550	3.7	1.3-6.1	873	4.1	2.4-5.9	1423	3.9	2.4-5.4
30-44	721	2.7	1.5-3.9	1393	5.4	3.8-6.9	2114	4.1	3.0-5.1
45-59	519	2.3	0.9-3.8	812	4.4	3.0-5.8	1331	3.4	2.4-4.4
60-69	232	2.4	0.2-4.5	337	4.2	1.1-7.3	569	3.3	1.4-5.2
18-69 (All)	2022	3.1	1.9-4.3	3415	4.6	3.6-5.6	5437	3.9	3.0-4.6

A total of 647,783 Ghanaians aged 18-69 have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months. More women than men seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months

* During the past 12 months, have you seriously considered attempting suicide?

A total of 647,783 (3.8%) of the population reported having considered attempting suicide within the past 12 months. This proportion is slightly higher in women [401,488(4.6%)] than in men [257,887(3.1%)]. Similarly, more women went ahead to plan how to attempt the suicide than men.

Only 58,948 (9.1%) among the population who considered attempting suicide, sought professional help. A greater proportion of those who sought professional help were in the middle age group (30-59).

3.2 Percentage having ever attempted suicide

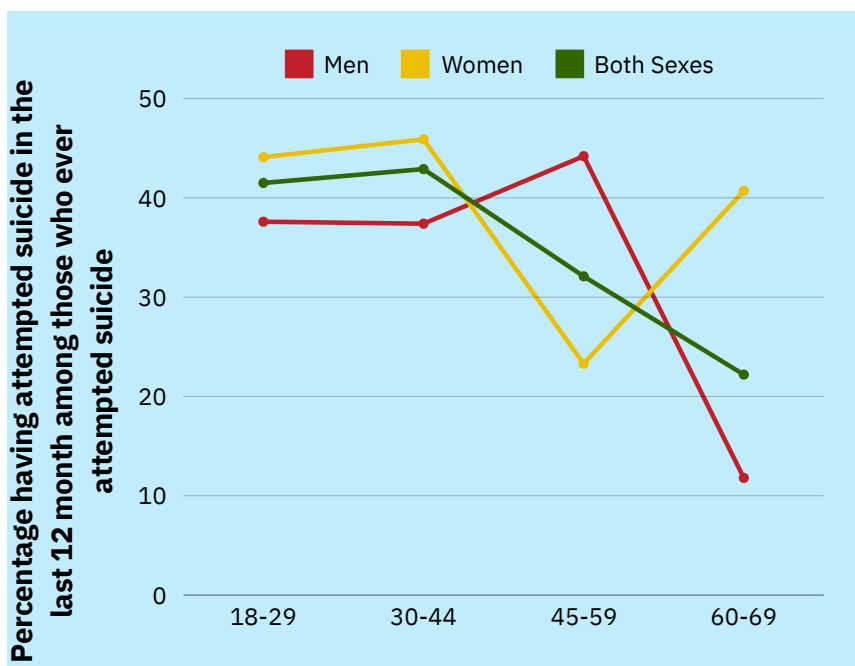
Age Group (years)	Men			Women			Both Sexes		
	n	%	95% CI	n	%	95% CI	n	%	95% CI
18-29	549	1.8	0.6-3.1	873	3.0	1.5-4.5	1422	2.4	1.3-3.4
30-44	721	1.5	0.5-2.6	1393	2.7	1.8-3.6	2114	2.1	1.4-2.8
45-59	519	2.0	0.8-3.2	812	2.6	1.5-3.7	1331	2.3	1.5-3.2
60-69	232	2.5	0.0-5.1	338	1.4	0.0-3.1	570	1.9	0.4-3.5
18-69 (All)	2021	1.8	1.1-2.5	3416	2.7	2.0-3.5	5437	2.3	1.7-2.8

***Percentage of respondents who have ever attempted suicide among all respondents.**

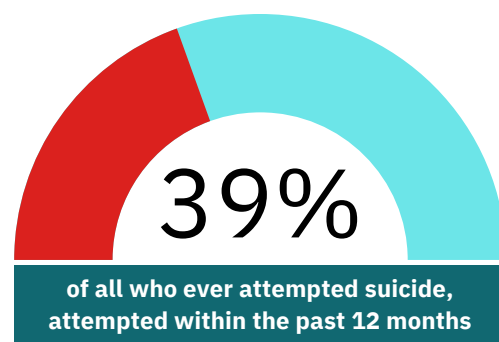
2.3% of Ghanaians aged 18-69 have ever attempted suicide. More women than men have ever attempted suicide. Overall, majority of those who ever attempted suicide are in the younger age group (18-29).

A total of 392,079 (2.3%) Ghanaians aged 18-69 have ever attempted suicide out of which 149,741 (1.8%) are men and 235,656(2.7%) are women. This seems to increase with increasing age in men, but in women, the highest proportion of those who have attempted suicide is in the younger age group.

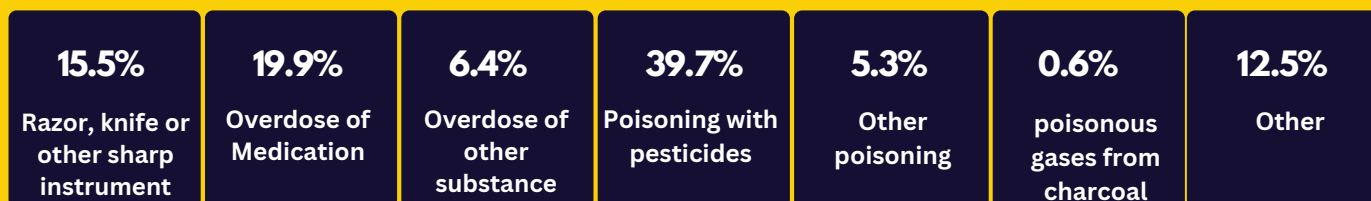
3.3 Percentage having attempted suicide in the last 12 months

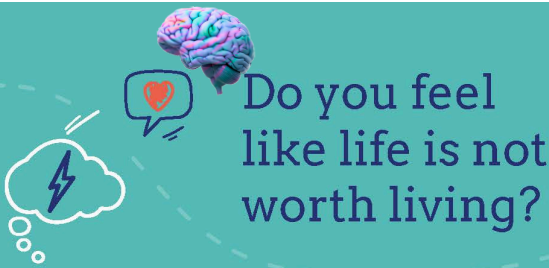


Overall, 39.2% of all who ever attempted suicide, attempted within the past 12 months. A total of 153,695 (39.2%) of those who have ever attempted suicide, have done so in the past 12 months. The proportion who attempted suicide in the past 12 month, generally decreased with increasing age.



Method used last time suicide was attempted





Do you feel like life is not worth living?

If you have experienced thoughts of suicide or self-harm, read on...

Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Pain that seems overwhelming and unbearable.
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness.
- Loneliness.
- Constant negative thoughts.
- Difficulty imagining any way to deal with your problems other than suicide.
- The feeling that everyone would be better off without you.
- Difficulty understanding why you are thinking or feeling this way.

What you need to know

- You are not alone. Many people have gone through what you're experiencing and found help.
- It's okay to talk about suicide. Talking can help alleviate some of the feelings you're experiencing.
- Experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm is a sign of severe emotional distress.
- Thinking about suicide is not a weakness and nothing to feel guilty about.
- You can get better.
- Help is available.

What you can do

- Talk to someone you trust about how you feel.
- Talk to a health worker, such as a doctor or mental health professional, or a counsellor or social worker.
- Join a support group.
- If you think you're in immediate danger of harming yourself, contact the emergency services or a crisis line.



REMEMBER: You are not alone.

If you feel like life is not worth living, reach out for help.



4. Depression

Using the PHQ-9 to screen for depression among the adult population, 33.0% had no depression, 36.1% had minimal depression, 23.0% had mild depression, 6.2% had moderate depression, 1.3% had moderately severe depression and 0.5% have severe depression.

Depression assessment both Sexes

Age Group (years)	N	% No Depression	% Minimal Depression	% Mild Depression	% Moderate Depression	% Moderately Severe Depression	% Severe Depression
	n	%	%	%	%	%	%
18-29	1423	32.1	37.6	22.7	5.9	1.1	0.5
30-44	2114	31.5	36.9	23.5	6.1	1.5	0.6
45-59	1331	35.7	32.7	22.9	6.7	1.4	0.6
60-69	570	38.3	31.2	22.1	6.5	1.7	0.3
18-69 (All)	5438	33.0	36.1	23.0	6.2	1.3	0.5

Among men 34.5% had no depression, 59.0% had minimal to mild depression whereas 6.4% had moderate to severe depression, compared to women, 31.3% had no depression, 59.1% had minimal to mild depression, and 9.6% had moderate to severe depression.

5. General information on mental health

A little over a third of the population attribute mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, psychosis and others to a spell/curse.

A significantly higher proportion (86.4%) however believe that mental health conditions are treatable. Only 1.6% of the population reported ever been diagnosed with a mental condition with depression being the most common condition followed by anxiety and psychosis.

6. General information on mental health

A significant proportion of the population attribute mental health conditions to a spiritual origin (curse or spell) which may discourage the use of biomedical services. The burden of suicide and depression is of concern and requires targeted interventions at the community level using a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach. Task shifting and task sharing at all levels of care may be the most feasible approach to bridge the treatment gap in mental health.

7. Call to Action

- There is a need to strengthen awareness creation on mental health.
- To comprehensively address the burden of suicide, Ghana needs to develop a suicide prevention strategy as recommended by WHO using the LIVE LIFE guidance document.
- There is a need to invest in research to better understand the complexities of suicide and develop evidence-based interventions.
- Government must invest in domestic resource mobilization for mental health.

References

- Asante, K. O., Kugbey, N., Osafo, J., Quarshie, E. N. B., & Sarfo, J. O. (2017). The prevalence and correlates of suicidal behaviours (ideation, plan and attempt) among adolescents in senior high schools in Ghana. *SSM-population health*, 3, 427-434.
- Bulamba, R. M., Nalugoda, F., Nkale, J., Kigozi, G., Ochieng, A. M., Kyasanku, E., ... & Miller, A. P. (2024). Examining associations between mental health and Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (C-NCDs) among older adults in Wakiso, Uganda. *PloS one*, 19(6), e0293993.
- [Depressive disorder \(depression\) \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/suicide-in-the-world)
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/suicide-in-the-world>
[iAHO Suicide Regional Fact sheet August2022.pdf \(who.int\)](#)
- World Health Organization. (2018). *Live life: preventing suicide*. World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. World Health Organization.

Acknowledgement

The National STEPS Survey was conducted by Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service, Ghana Statistical Service, The World Health Organization and the members of the National STEP team task team. WHO provided technical and financial resources.

This Factsheet was produced by the WHO Country Office, Ghana under the leadership of Dr. Joana Ansong.

The WHO technical support team include Dr. Benjamin Nuertey, Mr. Dominic Atweam, Dr Leveana Gyimah, Dr. Pascal Mwin.

The STEPS Survey task team include; Dr. Dennis Odoi Laryea, Dr. Philip Teg-Nefaah Tabong, Dr. Peter Takyi Pephrah, Dr. Emmanuel Parbie Abbeyquaye, Dr. Yaw Ampem Amoako, Dr. Lambert Appiah, Dr. Mary Efua Commeh, Mr. Isaac Obeng Tandoh, Ms Sybill Sory, Dr. Joana Ansong, Dr. Sally-Ann Ohene, Dr. Leveana Gyimah, Mrs Priscilla Eshun, Dr. Elsie Kodjoe, Dr. Abraham Hodgson.

Contact us at: Connect with iAHO@who.int
us on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/iaho/>