

VETERANS COMMITTING SUICIDE AT UNPRECEDENTED RATES A REVIEW

Why is there such an alarming increase in the rates of military and veteran suicides? How is this crisis being addressed by the VA and organized veterans' groups? What more can and should be done?

These are the questions that are the concern of ex-Marine Anthony Swofford in his May 28, 2012 **Newsweek** article (pp. 27-33). Swofford cites details of an incident in California where an ex-Marine is contemplating suicide and calls a crisis hotline. He served two combat tours in Iraq and has been unemployed since his discharge.

This is the lead-in story that provides a context as he relates results of interviews, research and fact finding. Swofford is seeking insight into causes of this epidemic and how it is being handled. "About 18 veterans kill themselves each day. Thousands from the current wars have already done so." However, "no one within the VA will use the word 'epidemic' when talking about suicide."

Today, we can readily find headlines, articles, books and studies that focus on veteran suicide. Swofford's timely article is a welcomed addition to such "literature." Public awareness of problems surrounding veterans' mental health needs to be continually fortified. Lighthouse readers will find this article helpful in recognizing the urgent need for solutions to the tragic consequences of war. It is a problem that doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon.

TWO DISTURBING COMMENTARIES

The cover stories in two consecutive issues of **Newsweek Magazine** focused on suicide.

"**Behind the Mary Kennedy Tragedy**" was a cover headline in the **June 18, 2012** issue (pp. 24-33). The article, "The Last Days of Mary Kennedy" relates the story of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his estranged wife whom he was seeking a divorce from. It describes in vivid detail the nature of their relationship, their marriage, encounters with drugs and alcohol and the eventual death of Mary who was found hanging in their barn.

Mary had been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and had undergone extensive treatment and counseling.

"**Europe's White Widows**" (before pp.34-37) reports on the current rash of suicides caused by the economic crisis in Europe. Individual accounts from Italy and Greece highlight the continent's coping with a "suicide spiral."

In Greece, 1,727 people have died by suicide (or attempted) following the financial strains of austerity since 2009. In Italy, the harsh methods and pressure tactics of Equitalia, the public collection agency, has come under fire in collecting back taxes and late fees. Tizana Marrone, whose husband took his life, formed a group of grieving widows to protest conditions. She says, "I don't want anyone to live my experience, but every day there are more widows to console."

A TEEN'S TAKE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide is a subject that I hold near and dear and I want to tell the world my views on how I think the problem can be addressed. Teen suicide isn't a subject that is thought of lightly. Dozens of teens kill themselves every year due to depression or drugs.

Sometimes teens may feel unloved or unappreciated, or both. Parents may become too involved in their own lives, or some parents may prefer one child much more than another child; or a younger sibling may get more attention while the older siblings get left in the dust and do not feel loved.

I think depression in teens may result from parents, friends and teachers not understanding them. A teenage student may have a bad home life due to divorce or abuse and that teen then acts out in school and may get expelled. Also, an obviously sad student in school doesn't socialize with other students and gets mocked and ridiculed; and the teachers don't do anything to stop it and may even be part of it.

If a teen is upset at home and the parents make fun and tease him or her, or worse, yells and just ignores the teen altogether then it is the responsibility of friends and neighbors to confront the problem and seek help before the situation gets out of hand.

Another serious issue may happen when a student goes to the doctor's office for a sports physical and gets diagnosed with either major or minor depression. The parents may not take it seriously nor do anything about it. Then, the teen may feel even more unwanted.

When a teen gets out of a relationship with a person they care about the most, it becomes a painful experience. If there has been a special relationship and it ends, then it may become devastating and lead to depression.

There are ways to help teens cope with depression by helping them figure out what they can do in life and feel wanted in society. There are creative activities like art, music, poetry, crafts and dance. And there are physical activities such as sports and working out. These activities help get your mind off the outside world and provide a positive way to express yourself.

Music has always been a way for me to relieve stress. Being able to turn on the radio and rock out favorite tunes and sing like nobody is watching makes you feel alive and free from judgment of others. Dancing also has been one of those things that helps me let go of all the stress in life and show feelings. Music, dance and art might help teens get rid of tensions building up inside them. They also could learn to make their own music by learning to play guitar, piano, sax or even drums. Teens could join a school band, or another band, and be part of something that lets them be free in mind and soul while revealing their talents to others.

We all have little things that we are good at that could possibly provide a start toward a future career. If there were programs involving teens in different hobbies, maybe they would feel like they could accomplish something in their lives.

Teens are at a vital stage in life where they know everything that goes on around them, but they aren't always mature enough to handle negative situations. They need parents to take time to sit down and talk about their lives and their futures. If parents don't expect their teenage children to be successful in life then they may become depressed and even contemplate suicide.

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