

Elderly depression 'on rise'

Bid to tackle suicide rates, mental illness

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Elderly people tend to take their own lives after they have lost self-respect, said Dr Sirinthorn Chansirikarn, a professor in geriatric medicine at Mahidol University's Ramathibodi Hospital.

"Elderly people who commit suicide often succeed as they live long enough to be more resolute in their intentions," she said.

"They will use methods such as drowning, hanging or a gun that will guarantee the intended outcome."

According to data gathered by the National Research Council of Thailand in 2013, 23% of elderly patients admitted at four state hospitals, suffered from depression.

A similar percentage was recorded at state-run nursing homes.

Depression often contributes to Alzheimer's disease or other psychological problems.

Dr Sirithorn said a lack of self-esteem often drove elderly people to kill themselves.

They are likely to commit suicide as they face many problems, be they economic, financial, poor health, or feelings of loneliness and being a burden on others.

She said a sense of worthlessness becomes apparent if people lose their jobs and are forced to become reliant on others.

"They feel powerless and worthless. Their deaths can also be attributed to abuse from others who do not feel compassion and treat them with

respect," Dr Sirinthorn said.

However, she said the problem can be solved with compassion and understanding.

Children or grandchildren are encouraged to communicate more with the elderly and talk more positively about topics, she said.

"Their anxieties can be eased and they can be made happier through a more respectful and kinder atmosphere within their families," she added, saying that care and understanding strengthens a positive way of thinking.

Frustrations or setbacks within families should not be used to abuse the elderly, she said.

"People can only focus on what they have and cherish it."

Some habits attributed to the elderly that can annoy people, such as repeating themselves and constant complaining, should be addressed.

Family members should show patience and shower them with affection, Dr Sirithorn urged.

Longstanding conflicts with elderly family members should be set aside by trying to understand them in order to get along better and create happiness.

The Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development has published a manual for family members to deal with depression in elderly people.

The manual offers ideas from doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, therapists, psychologists, gerontologists, pharmacists, community keepers, families, community officers, public health officers, psychological experts and non-profit organisations.

It also offers tips on how to detect depression and reduce it, often through simple means such as enjoyable meals.

It can be downloaded from this link: <https://1th.me/k3jBH>