UN watchdog sounds alarm over suicides in Africa

October 6 2022

Africa needs to combat a suicide rate that is the highest in the world yet remains widely unrecognised and often stigmatised, the UN said on Thursday.

Six of the 10 countries with the greatest suicide rates in the world are in Africa, and the continent's per-suicide rate is more than a fifth higher than in other regions, the World Health Organization (WHO) said.

"Around 11 people per 100,000 per year die by suicide in the African region, higher than the [global average](#) of nine per 100,000 people," the agency's Africa branch said.

Death by hanging or poisoning by pesticide head the list of methods.

The agency launched an appeal for awareness of the problem ahead of World Mental Health Day on October 10.

"Suicide is a major public health problem and every death by suicide is a tragedy.Unfortunately, [suicide prevention](#) is rarely a priority in national health programmes," said regional director Matshidiso Moeti.

Stigma is a key problem, as is lack of funding, the WHO said.

Africa has on average only one psychiatrist for every 500,000 inhabitants—a ratio 100 times lower than the WHO's recommendation—and the lack of therapists is especially serious in

countries that have been in conflict.

Spending on [mental health](#) in Africa is under 50 cents per head, less than a quarter of UN recommendations.

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