



Can Hope Save Lives?

#ChooseHope

National Press Release

Choose Hope

Off the back of some of the most challenging years in living memory, The Stress Management Society launches a pioneering campaign to offer a chink of light to those that find themselves consumed by darkness.

Why is hope so important?

As it stands the stats around Suicide and Depression are shocking.

- Suicide is more common than any of us would care to believe. Around 1 in 6 adults in the UK experienced some form of depression in the summer of 2021 (1).
- In fact, suicide is the biggest killer of men under the age of 45 and every day there are around 18 suicides per day in England and Wales (2)
- 52% of employees are experiencing symptoms of depression
- 61% of employees experiencing depression are female
- 33% of employees experiencing depression are aged 25-34
- Only 9% of employees are currently seeking mental health support (3)

14.3% of global deaths are due to the wholly preventable mental health pandemic (4). Even though it's such a big killer, we don't seem to have an open dialogue around what is a concerning global issue. Approximately 50,000 people died in all wars on the planet in 2020, and we lost around 400,000 to all human violence (5), however, the annual number of global deaths due to suicide is closer to 1 million (6).

In Japan alone more people took their own life in October 2020 than died of Covid19 for the whole year of 2020 (7). When people lose all hope the chances that they will seek out a permanent solution to a temporary problem significantly increases.



Despite this, we don't have round-clock news sharing cases of mental ill-health or deaths. What does this suggest? That not all lives are equal. The mainstream narrative seems to suggest human lives lost due to mental health don't have as much value or political leverage as those lost to other reasons. Shocking considering the sheer number of lives we are losing annually to this wholly preventable issue.

Stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations against people with mental health conditions are widespread in communities and care systems everywhere; 20 countries still criminalize attempted suicide (8). Across countries, it is the poorest and most disadvantaged in society who are at greatest risk of mental ill-health and who are also the least likely to receive adequate support.

Within the UK alone BAME groups receive significantly less mental health treatment with only 7% receiving help compared to 13.3% of white British people (9). Furthermore, there is regional variation in suicide rates. The Northeast of England had the highest suicide rate (13.3. per 100,000) in 2020, which has been the case in five out of the last 10 preceding years and saw an increase of 15.7% compared to 2019 (10).

As a society we are failing our most vulnerable members as far too many are lost to mental ill-health. This cannot continue.

The good news is there is a vaccine, a cultural one - it's a mixture of love, compassion, empathy, and hope. Unless we can destigmatise mental health and remove the guilt and shame associated with it; many more lives will be lost. When we understand the importance of not losing hope and the importance of community, we can start building our societies to rise together and we can reach people that are suffering mentally and emotionally long before they give up on life.

#ChooseHope

The Stress Management Society is initiating the #ChooseHope campaign to increase online positivity, share stories to inspire hope and encourage public awareness of how we can support each other to build resilience to protect against poor mental health.

As nearly a third (30%) of adults and over a third (34%) of young people said that their mental health has gotten much worse in the last year (11) this emphasises the need for a call to action.



Science behind hope

According to the “hope theory” formulated by positive psychologist Charles Snyder and his colleagues, hope gives people the will, determination, and sense of empowerment that allows them to reach their goals (12). A large body of research on hope demonstrates its power to support well-being, even more so than optimism or self-efficacy (our belief in our abilities).

The impact of hope on our social, mental, and physical well-being is widely documented. Positively correlated with higher satisfaction rates, the consensus is that hope serves as a buffer against negative and stressful life events.

But a survey of existing research on hope suggests that it serves as more than a buffer. Research over the past decade and more shows hopeful people:

- Are more likely to attain their goals
- Do better academically
- Experience higher life satisfaction
- Have a stronger sense of meaning and purpose (13)
- Choose healthier lifestyle habits, and therefore live longer (14; 15)
- Cope with and recover better from illness (15; 16)

Unlike optimism, hope is an active and effortful force requiring courage and perseverance (17). Hope urges persistent goal seeking through the process of trial and error; hopeful people utilise multiple goal paths, increasing resilience against failure (18). The Stress Management Society's #choosehope campaign intends to flood social media with the message of hope and positivity to counteract the pessimism of modern society.

As hopefulness is biased by cultural perceptions of social mobility and can be hindered by experiences of discrimination a counter narrative of hope may improve public health. As hope reduces our tendency to catastrophise scenarios, those exhibiting higher hopefulness display higher resilience to both physically (19) and psychologically painful experiences (20). As hope alters our perception of the world around us, a hopeful society equates to healthy society.



Benefits of hope

- Hope is a proven protective factor against the development of mood disorders (18) and is predictive of positive physical health (19)
- Increased hope is associated with increased psychological and social well-being, as well as improved sleep quality and physical health (21)
- Hope is found to negatively correlate with depression, anxiety, and symptoms of psychological distress (22; 23)
- Hope promotes positive lifestyle choices and reduces mortality (24; 25)
- In older populations, greater hope is linked to better health outcomes such as a reduced risk of chronic conditions and cancer (15)
- Hope increases resilience to uncertainty. Consequently, hopefulness in patients is predictive of successful cancer remission and surgery recovery, as well as reduced relapse of depressive symptoms (14)
- Hope is associated with biological health markers such as greater immune system responsiveness, cardiovascular function, and normal cortisol levels (14).

Neil Shah, the founder, and Director of The Stress Management Society has created this campaign following his battle with suicide and losing his best friend to suicide six months ago.

"In 2003 I lost all hope, I had navigated an experience that resulted in losing my business, my money, all of the people that I considered to be my closest friends, my car was repossessed and the person I was in a relationship was cheating on me. As a direct result, I experienced a breakdown, and in the depths of my darkness, I decided I was done with this life and attempted to check out. Thankfully I failed in my attempt and eventually found a chink of light in my experience – that I could use my experience to help others who find themselves in a similar situation. This is why I set up The Stress Management Society, and it's incredible to think we have reached 100's millions of people with our campaigns, programmes, and events over the last 2 decades. If I hadn't found a ray of hope none of this would have happened.

6 months ago, one of my best friends sadly lost all hope and chose to end his life. It's in my attempt to reconcile this tragic loss that I was inspired to create this campaign – I can't hear any more stories of people whose lives have been needlessly lost. We need to stop burying people and start taking action – let's not wait for someone else to fix this, we have a collective responsibility, we are the answer, so let's #choosehope!"



NOTES TO EDITORS

Neil Shah is the founder and Director of The Stress Management Society, and head of research and consultancy firm International Wellbeing Insights. He is a leading international expert on stress management, mental health, happiness, and wellbeing.

An engaging and inspiring motivational speaker and success coach, he has extensive expertise in driving and creating positive societal and organisational change, as well as proven practical strategies to promote happiness and wellbeing. Author of many best-selling books including 'The 10-Step Stress Solution'.

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The Stress Management Society

The Stress Management Society is a non-profit organisation and the UK's leading authority on stress management. Since 2003, we have been offered practical support and advice to help individuals and companies recognise and reduce stress. The organisation was founded with the purpose of creating a happier, healthier, and more resilient world. For more information, please visit www.stress.org.uk

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#ChooseHope - <http://www.choosehope.org.uk>

The Stress Management Society – www.stress.org.uk

International Wellbeing Insights - www.wellbeing.work



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