



One of the messages that South African Depression and Anxiety Group is trying to preach to youngsters. 'You are beautiful, strong, worthy and brave.'
PHOTO: SADAG

Anti-suicide week hears: it's harder being a teen now

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IT is more stressful to be a teenager now than a decade ago.

This is the view of Anthony Pillay, a professor at the Department of Behavioural Medicine in Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine and Fort Napier.

South Africa is currently observing National Teenage Suicide Prevention Week and organisations such as South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag) are going all out to battle the scourge of teenage suicide.

In a dreadful irony, this week finds a family from kwaMashu in mourning after 16-year-old Qiniso Mqadi killed herself on Tuesday.

She hanged herself and left a goodbye note for her family.

Qiniso's uncle, Mzwandile Mqadi, says the family think his niece's suicide was triggered by the fact she was accused of stealing chocolate at a supermarket. She was subsequently handcuffed by se-

curity guards and held for several hours. She was released without any case being opened against her.

According to Sadag, 9,5% of all teen deaths in the country are due to suicide.

Meryl da Costa of Sadag said a third of all hospital admissions for suicide attempts involve teens.

"One in five teens have attempted suicide, and 20,7% of teens have considered attempting suicide and 23,6% of teens have had sad or hopeless feelings," she said, "and this is the info that we do know, there are a lot of suicides that are not reported," Da Costa said.

But Da Costa believes that the numbers could be higher. She said teenagers nowadays are dealing with a lot more problems than teens from 10 or 20 years ago. "There is more pressure on them to make adult decisions and to behave and think like an adult, many are exposed to violence, trauma, abuse and rape ... With the high rate of separation and divorce in families, the increase in poverty

and chronic illness, it is difficult for them to cope or feel as if they can turn to someone for help."

The actual cause for suicide is never due to one particular reason, according to Da Costa, but is a combination of issues that the teen is going through, such as relationship problems, bullying at school, family problems, parents getting divorced, domestic violence and abuse.

Pillay said more females engage in suicide attempts than males, while considerably more males actually kill themselves.

In the mind of a suicidal teenager, there appears to be no way out of the problems they face, and the young person cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, Pillay explained.

But the crux of the matter, according to Pillay, is that many teenagers find it difficult to deal with life's challenges. According to research, with teenage girls, for example, one in three girls felt that life's problems were too much to cope

with. That is why Pillay believes children should be taught from a young age to constructively deal with conflict and be armed with coping skills.

"The world has changed so much, where adolescents have more demands and stresses — more than we did. The world is more demanding for young people, especially if they don't have sufficient coping skills."

Some of the pressures include doing well in school, keeping up with peers, managing relationships and pleasing parents.

Pillay stressed the importance of seeking professional help when feeling depressed or suicidal.

"We need to take suicidal threats or thoughts seriously and avoid trying to contain or deal with it within the home if you're not a professional," he insisted.

• If you are a teenager or if a family member is a teenager or student and feeling depressed or suicidal, call Sadag on 0800 567 567 for free counselling.