

## **Letter to the Editor. Suicide calls to the 112-emergency number – what to say when someone’s life is in danger**

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### **Emergency number 112**

Emergency Notification Center – Emergency Number 112 is a single number valid throughout the European Union and is used to report situations of danger to health, life, or property. Such situations include traffic accidents, fires, electrocution, sudden fainting, or injury [1]. The key, however, is to tell yourself whether there is a need for urgent intervention by the Police, Ambulance or Fire Department at the scene. Most people identify 112 as an emergency number to connect to emergency services in emergency situations, but nevertheless many calls are directed to this number that do not bear the characteristics of emergency calls [2]. In 7,605,779 cases, or 35.97% of all calls, the call was classified by the Operators as unfounded, not requiring service intervention. Substantiated calls accounted for about 37% of calls, and nearly 27% were canceled calls, i.e., those in which the caller hung up before the call was assigned to the operator’s desk [3]. Calling the 112-emergency number without justification blocks the phone line to a person who may need immediate assistance at that very moment. All calls directed to the 997, 998 and 999 numbers also go to the 112 operators. The operators select and segregate the calls. In the case of the most urgent notifications, the caller is immediately given first aid instructions and the appropriate services are notified.

In a situation where health and life are at risk, but you are unable to make a phone call and convey by voice that help is needed, it is worth using the Alarm112 mobile application. It makes it possible to transmit an emergency call to the Emergency Notification Center by people who are unable to make a voice call – especially deaf and hard of hearing people. The Alarm112 application selects the appropriate pictograms,

which specify the type and location of the incident, and indicates the services whose assistance seems necessary. The information thus provided enables the Emergency Number Operator to forward the incident to the appropriate, due to the type and location of the incident, emergency services. To use the free Alarm112 mobile application it should be downloaded and registered [4].

### **Suicide calls to the 112-emergency number**

In 2021, emergency call centers recorded a total of 7,852,875 incoming calls classified as legitimate. Among the categories of emergency incidents, road traffic incidents led the way (824,315), followed by interventions – other (708,912), ill health – other (697,349) and public order disturbances (556,176). Relatively high numbers of incidents in the category domestic intervention (521,968) and pain category (491,036) were also transmitted. There were also 54,575 reports directly classified as suicide attempts – 48,888 were transferred to the Police, 5,054 to the Fire Department and 47,196 to the Emergency Medical Service, which means that one report of a suicide attempt triggered the actions of more than one service. The number of such calls to 112 oscillates around 60,000 each year. However, it is worth noting that there are also such categories of calls as trauma (199,766) or hemorrhage, bleeding (141,042), which may include events that have the hallmarks of a suicide attempt, and which were not initially classified by the Operator in this group of events [3].

According to suicidologists, the number of suicide attempts is 10 to 20 times higher than the number of completed suicide [5]. According to the Police Headquarters, there were 5,201 suicides in 2021 [6]. According to the cited theory, it can be estimated that there were between 50,000 and 100,000 suicide attempts last year. 112 statistics confirm these figures. Calls classified as suicide attempts are both calls directly from people experiencing a suicidal crisis, as well as from people who have information about or accompany a person who has expressed a wish to end his or her life. However, calls from people who are in the planning stages of suicide are rare. Rather, suicide attempts that have already been made or completed are reported. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of reports from teenagers who were concerned about the condition of their peers, who had specific and sometimes clearly justified fears for the lives of their friends and acquaintances–based, for example, on social media posts. Each time, information about such a report goes to the police and the police officer on duty decides whether to take further action on the case [7].

When the report concerns a suicide attempt, the Operator acts in accordance with the procedure, attempting to determine the location and circumstances of the report. The operator attempts to convince the reporting person to increase his or her own safety in the situation, e.g., put down the tool, move away from the window. The conversation with the person reporting suicidal thoughts or intentions has its own dynamics – tailored to the reporting person, his or her current location, the individual suicidal process, the information the reporting person is willing to provide. The role of the

Operator is to make an initial assessment of what stage of the process the reporting party is at – whether at the stage of thoughts, plans or action. Such a conversation takes time and requires building the right relationship with the reporting person. It is a difficult task that requires reconciling the implementation of required procedures, time pressures and talking to often uncooperative notifiers who do not want to be located but call because they want to be heard. Operators are prepared at the training stage to conduct such calls effectively, however, they are not a professional group dedicated to providing psychological support. They undertake this, knowing that they can sometimes be the last person the reporter talks to and therefore the one who can trigger the necessary help [7].

### **How to cooperate with the Operator when reporting that someone's life is in danger?**

If the decision has been made to use Emergency Number 112, after dialing, ensure that:

- the place of the call is near the scene of the incident and allows for a calm conversation with the operator (without interference),
- the call was made by a person directly at the place of danger or another person witnessing the event,
- wait patiently until the Operator reports, do not hang up until the call is not taken (the call is free, so it does not generate costs for the person reporting the event),
- briefly describe the event or situation that you have witnessed in order for the Operator to call the appropriate service, give your name,
- indicate the location/address where the event or situation took place; if possible, indicate the fastest way to get to the place of the event,
- provide additional information to questions asked by the Operator,
- follow the instructions/instructions given by the Operator,
- do not disconnect until specifically instructed by the Operator due to the need to communicate the most important information about the incident,
- quickly notify the Operator if the situation suddenly changes or deteriorates,
- try to temporarily not use the phone from which the call was made in case the Operator tries to contact again to verify the information or provide other additional information [7].

### **How to talk to a person in suicidal crisis?**

Persons professionally engaged in helping people in suicidal crisis are insufficient in relation to the growing social needs in this area. This necessitates the creation of a non-professional but informed social support network. However, many people are

afraid to enter a conversation with a person in crisis, not wanting to make the interviewee feel worse with their behavior and words. Often the fear is so paralyzing that one does not hear the other person's cries for help and quickly tries to change the topic of conversation. However, it is worth remembering that people in crisis want to be heard, so it is better to respond as you can than not to respond at all. How to behave and what to say when someone informs us that he or she wants to take his/her own life?

- Remain calm and soft-spoken when initiating contact.
- Invite the person in suicidal crisis to talk to you, asking:
  - “How can I help you?”
  - “What will make you feel better?”,
  - “What has helped you so far in overcoming your difficulties?”.
- Listen without judging, show understanding.
- Offer support, time, attention.
- Help dissipate negative thoughts, e.g., suggest going for a walk together, going to the movies, shopping, going to the gym, going for a bike ride, etc.
- Help look for different options to get out of the crisis, e.g., suggest seeing a specialist – a psychologist, psychotherapist, educator, psychiatrist.
- Help reduce anxiety and increase a sense of security, e.g., by accompanying you to see a specialist.
- Help plan small steps which will be feasible at the moment.
- If you don't know what to do or how to help, call help phone numbers and consult specialists.
- In case of a life-threatening emergency, call 112! [8].

## References

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