



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

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Pesticide poisoning focus for \$1.3m bid to cut rural suicides

Research to prevent suicides from pesticide poisoning has received a major funding boost.

Experts have been awarded \$1.3m to set up a new Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention at the University of Edinburgh.

The Centre aims to improve regulation of pesticide use in low and middle-income countries, to reduce the number of preventable suicides in these areas.

Researchers hope to emulate progress in Sri Lanka, where the total number of suicides has dropped by 75 per cent over the last 20 years with no apparent impact on agricultural output.

This drop in suicides has been attributed to revised policies on the availability and composition of pesticides within small rural communities, as well as improved poisoning treatment.

Experts will work with the United Nations, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation, to strengthen pesticide regulation across low and middle-income countries.

Teams will work with partners in each country to identify the particular pesticides and formulations causing most deaths, as well as any barriers to regulation and provide technical support to help overcome these.

Highly hazardous pesticides – such as organophosphorus insecticides – have been widely used in rural communities since the 1960s, when high-yield crop varieties were introduced into agricultural practice around the world. Unfortunately, these rural communities do not have the capacity to store them safely.

Easy access to these poisons by people at times of stress has led to a global epidemic of suicides. At least 150,000 people take their own lives each year by ingesting pesticides, with most cases occurring in rural communities of Africa and Asia-Pacific regions.

Most of these suicide attempts involve little planning. People often report thinking about it for less than 30 minutes before ingesting pesticides. Many die before getting to hospital for potentially life-saving treatment.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The grant was provided by the Open Philanthropy Project at the recommendation of GiveWell, a nonprofit dedicated to finding outstanding giving opportunities through in-depth analysis. This recommendation is part of GiveWell's Incubation Grants program that supports the development of potential future top charities.

Professor Michael Eddleston, Director of the Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention at the University of Edinburgh, said: "Recent research has shown that regulation and restriction of highly hazardous pesticides is the single most effective intervention to save lives from pesticide suicide worldwide.

"This generous donation will allow us to start working with collaborators in India and Nepal to better understand the problem there and to provide evidence that can guide their future regulation. An effect as great as seen in Sri Lanka worldwide will save many tens of thousands every year."

For more information please contact:

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Further information on the Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention can be found at www.centrepssp.org

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