Field Investigation for Maternal Suicides using the Psychological Autopsy Tool for Maternal Suicides (PAMS)

Suicides of reproductive age females during pregnancy or immediate post-delivery period impart significant negative socio-economic and health effects to living children, family and community. Quantitative and qualitative review of maternal suicides contributes to preventive efforts in a wider perspective.

Every year 20 - 25 Maternal Suicides are reported in the country. Objective evaluation of these cases are essential to translate lessons learnt into policies, programs and practice.

Family Health Bureau and the Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists have developed a comprehensive maternal suicide assessment tool - The Psychological Autopsy Tool for Maternal Suicides (PAMS) (attached).

Definition of a Maternal Suicide: All suicidal deaths of women in reproductive age group (15 – 49 years) during the pregnancy period and until one year after termination of pregnancy.

All maternal suicides reported from 1st January 2016 in each MOH area should be investigated using the PAMS.

Guidelines with regard to surveillance of maternal suicides are as follows;

1. Medical Officer of Health (MOH) of the area where the suicidal death took place and/or MOH of the area where the mother is registered in the eligible family register should notify the maternal suicide within 24 hours to the Director (FHB), RDHS and Consultant Psychiatrist of the nearest hospital. Notification should be done using the format for Notification of Maternal Deaths (attached).
   (In doubtful cases, National Program Manager – McMMS at FHB should be consulted on deciding on the relevant Consultant Psychiatrist).

2. MOH (of the area where the mother is registered in the eligible family register) is the responsible officer for the field investigation. In case of an absence of the relevant MOH,
the acting MOH or MO-MCH should take the responsibility of carrying out the field investigation.

3. Under the guidance and the directions of the relevant Consultant Psychiatrist, a date should be decided for the field maternal suicide investigation.

Investigation should be carried out as a team comprising of a Consultant Psychiatrist, Provincial Consultant Community Physician (where possible), MO-MCH, MO – Mental Health, MOH, PHNS, PHM of the area and Social Worker (where possible). The team is led by the Consultant Psychiatrist.

The Investigation should commence as early as possible and should be completed within fourteen (14) days of occurrence of the maternal suicide.

The family members and other relevant persons (close associates / friends / treated GPs) should be interviewed by the investigation team in order to obtain relevant information.

4. The information collected during the field investigation should be entered in the Psychological Autopsy Tool for Maternal Suicides (PAMS) by the Consultant Psychiatrist assisted by MOH.

5. The completed and signed report should be sent to the Director – Family Health Bureau.

You are instructed to ensure the comprehensive evaluation of maternal suicides reported from the areas under your purview.

Dr. Palitha Maheepala
Director General of Health Services

Copy: DDG (PHS I & II)
DDG (MS I & II)
Director - MCH
Director – Mental Health
President - Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists
All Medical Officers of Maternal & Child Health
All Medical Officers of Health

Dr. P. G. Mahipala
Director General of Health Services
Ministry of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicine
“Suwasiri-paya”,
385, Rev. Baddegama Wimalawansa Thero Mawatha,
Colombo 10.