



John Lazar/Staff Photographer

Rick Mogil of Studio City, a program coordinator for the Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center, stands in front of a mosaic signifying life that his brother Ed created prior to taking his life.

Emotional lifeline available for families of suicide victims

By Susan Abram
Staff Writer

The notes they leave behind speak of love and a loss of will. And they almost always offer an apology — and a goodbye.

Ed Mogil left such a letter before he drove 100 miles from his Oregon home and shot himself. He was 48.

But for Mogil's brother Rick and countless others who have lost a loved one to suicide, the notes also bring a lingering torment with often-unanswered questions.

"We never really know why because we can't ask them," said Rick Mogil, a program coordinator for the Culver City-based Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center.

SUICIDE HOTLINE

To reach the suicide prevention line, call 877-727-4747. For information about an upcoming suicide bereavement support group in Sherman Oaks, call Rick Mogil at 310-895-2326.

"The real dark reason is never evident. We can never know their pain."

This year, the nation's first suicide prevention line, established at the Didi Hirsch center, commemorates its 50th anniversary. And this month, the center plans to launch an

SUICIDE/A17

SUICIDE

FROM PAGE A1

eight-week bereavement-group program in Sherman Oaks to help those left behind after a loved one's suicide.

"So often, we are the forgotten mourners," said Mogil, 61, of Studio City, who began working at the center after his brother's death. "There's been no voice for us."

Recently disclosed results of an analysis of U.S. deaths for five years through 2004 revealed that the suicide rate increased nearly 20 percent among people ages 45 to 54 — people like Ed Mogil.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also found that the percentage increase — 31 percent — was especially high among women in that age group.

The reasons for the increase remain unclear, though some suspect mood-altering prescription drugs. Others say depression among the middle-aged is often overlooked.

In all, more than 3,000 people die in California each year of suicide, while 16,000 others try. There were nearly 33,000 suicides nationwide in 2005, the last year for which data were available.

"Outreach and treatment for those 15 to 24 ... has been there longer, and their advocates have done a great job helping people," said Kita Curry, president of the Didi Hirsch center. She said the same is true for senior citizens.

Gender disparities

Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death for males and the 16th leading cause for females.



- Among males, adults ages 75 years and older have the highest rate of suicide (37.4 per 100,000 population).
- Among females, those in their 40s and 50s have the highest rate of suicide (8.0 per 100,000 population).
- Firearms are the most commonly used method of suicide among males (56 percent).
- Poisoning is the most common method of suicide for females (37.8 percent).

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Gregg Miller/Staff Artist

"People are more sympathetic to youth and older adults, but there's nothing newsworthy to being middle-aged," she said.

While requests and funding for more suicide-prevention services are increasing, Mogil and others say the loved ones left behind continue to exist in shadows, dealing alone with the pain and shame.

The biggest challenge for friends and family after a suicide often is picking up the phone and asking for help, Mogil said.

"A lot of (suicides) go unreported because of the stigma," he said. "I try to tell (callers) that going to a group is going to be the second-hardest thing you've done. The first was calling me."

Attending bereavement

groups helped San Fernando Valley resident Linda, whose husband of 29 years, a musician in his 60s, killed himself in their home. Linda, who didn't want her last name published, said he became

depressed when he was no longer able to find work as a session musician.

"The music business is a very young business," she said. "If you're 35, you're considered old. When my husband first became a musician, every television show had a live band. But little by little, those were eliminated, and he would stop receiving calls. The work began to stop."

He left a suicide note that read like a love letter, she said.

"I was devastated," she said. "If it hadn't been for the bereavement group, I wouldn't be alive. I had nothing to live for."

Indeed, thoughts of suicide can creep into the minds of those who have lost a loved one to suicide, Curry said.

"We've had people say it took 10 to 15 years to find a place where they could go," she said. "People who have had a family member commit suicide are at a higher risk, which

means we need to find them quick."

Meanwhile, the recent slump in the economy — with record rates of foreclosures, high unemployment and a roller-coaster stock market — could add to the suicide toll, Curry said.

"There's a shame to having to downsize when you had to give up a big house," she said, adding that fewer people now have medical insurance that will cover mental health care.

Mogil and his three brothers grew up in the Valley. The one who eventually killed himself always struggled with health problems.

"With Ed, his self-esteem was really low. He was picked on as a child," Mogil said. "In his teens, he started getting involved with alcohol and drugs."

Still, Ed Mogil embraced art and in 1970 dedicated a mosaic to Adat Ari El temple in Valley Village.

Before he died, he had a good job in Oregon, where he was married and had two daughters.

"He was a beautiful man. He was artistic, but he couldn't live with the pain," his brother Rick said.

Rick Mogil said he wanted to get involved with suicide-bereavement work partly because he knew how survivors feel and partly because he was suited for the job.

"Telling Ed's story was difficult in the beginning," said Mogil, who still visits the mosaic his brother created — bits of red, orange and yellow tile pieced together to symbolize the flame of life.

That flame reminds Mogil that through his brother, he found a new path in life, one that includes helping people.

"I'm sad, and I'm sorry," Mogil said he would tell his brother. "But then, thank you."

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