



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

SUICIDE IN ADOLESCENTS AS A BIOETHICAL PROBLEM

(17th July 1998)

abstract

The NBC analyses the question of the increase of suicide attempts in teenagers within the framework of the changes in society and collective mentality in the contemporary world. The increase in suicides in this age group seems to be particularly affected by the transformation of the family structure and the weakening of the traditional 'socialisation agents' (starting with the school), to which an adequate social support network has not been given. Adults do not always appear to be aware of being models of identification and often do not pay sufficient attention to transmitting to children the importance of making moral choices, which are the foundation of their existence. The Committee urgently recommends the adequate professional training of social workers.

In a context of the disintegration of the social and cultural environment, it is increasingly difficult to communicate the sense of ethical values to adolescents. The very impact of the mass media is experienced uncritically, contributing to worsening an overall climate of violence and unrest. Over the last few years this unrest has aggravated to such a point as to generate real forms of maladjustment in weak subjects. In consideration of the extent and complexity of this scenario, the NBC deemed it opportune to offer points on which to reflect, aimed at the general understanding of suicide and the predicament of today's adolescents, with particular attention to the condition of those at risk or in difficulty. It is with this objective that the document highlights some of the factors of suicide risk and the bioethical guidelines necessary to deal with the phenomenon in all its amplitude.

Action to prevent suicide is therefore essential, entrusted to services like family advice centres, social centres for teenagers and young people, educational projects specifically aimed at this age group, programmes linked to sports or summer camps, drug addiction services, community centres, local health units and psychiatric departments, as well as the prospects of intervention of an experimental nature (education on the road, education at work, proposals for self-managed spaces). The NBC invites us to reflect on the responsibility of the whole society with regard to the future of the growing generations.