

Socio-demographic characteristics, clinical profile and prevalence of existing mental illness among suicide attempters attending emergency services at two hospitals in Hawassa city, South Ethiopia: A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

Suicide is a major public health problem worldwide. It contributes for more than one million deaths each year. Since previous suicidal attempt was considered as the best predictor of future suicide, identifying factors behind suicidal attempt are helpful to design suicide prevention strategies. The aim of this study was to assess socio-demographic characteristics, clinical profile and prevalence of existing mental illness among patients presenting with suicidal attempt to emergency services of general hospitals in South Ethiopia. A cross-sectional study was conducted on patients presenting with suicidal attempt to emergency departments of two general hospitals in Hawassa city from November, 2014 to August, 2015. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire which contained socio-demographic and clinical variables. The Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview version 5 was used to assess the prevalence of existing mental illness among study participants. Results: A total of 96 individuals were assessed, of whom 56 were females. The mean age of study participants was 21.5 years. The majority, 75, of the study participants were aged below 25 years. Mental illness was found in only three of the study participants. Impulsivity (the time between decision to attempt suicide and the actual attempt of less than 5 minutes was reported by 30 of the study participants, of whom 18 were males. Males were found three times more likely to attempt suicide impulsively than women. Psychosocial stressors were found as immediate reasons to attempt suicide by the majority. Conclusion: The presence of stressful life events and impulsivity behind suicidal behavior of the younger generation implies that designing suicide prevention strategies for this group is crucial. Focus research is needed to systematically examine the relationship between the presence of mental illness and suicidal attempt with a larger sample size.

Introduction:

Attempted suicide is one of the major emergencies in psychiatry. Suicide attempts are considered to be the best predictors of an eventual completed suicide. Data of patients presenting with attempted suicide to the emergency settings at mental health institute settings is scanty in India. Aims: The study was carried out to assess the socio-demographic and clinical profile of the patients with suicidal attempt attending emergency services at a teaching Mental Health Institute in Northern India. Suicide is a major public health problem worldwide. It contributes for more than one million deaths each year. Since previous suicidal attempt was considered as the best predictor of future suicide, identifying factors behind suicidal attempt are helpful to design suicide prevention strategies. The aim of this study was to assess socio-demographic characteristics, clinical profile and prevalence of existing mental illness among patients presenting with suicidal attempt to emergency services of general hospitals in South Ethiopia.

Methods:

Case records of all patients with attempted suicide attending emergency services at Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences for one calendar year were reviewed. Socio-demographic and clinical details of the patients

were retrieved on a Performa specifically designed for this study. A cross-sectional study was conducted on patients

presenting with suicidal attempt to emergency departments of two general hospitals in Hawassa city from November, 2014 to August, 2015. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire which contained socio-demographic and clinical variables. The Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview version was used to assess the prevalence of existing mental illness among study participants.

The present study was carried out at Institute of Human Behavior and Allied Sciences, Delhi, a tertiary care teaching mental health institute in Northern India which was developed after transformation of erstwhile Hospital for Mental Diseases, Shahdara. At IHBAS, psychiatry emergency services are rendered round the clock by a qualified psychiatrist and a Junior Resident on duty with support of a consultant psychiatrist on call duty. Assessment findings are recorded on an emergency case record proforma and case record file. In routine practice, the assessment of patients involves complete and comprehensive clinical assessment for risk of suicide and risk of harm to others, assessment for evaluation of lethality and intentionality of a given attempt of suicide, in order to make an objective assessment, a scale, that is,

scale for Assessment of Risk of Suicide developed by Faculty of Psychiatry at IHBAS, is used to find out the level of suicidal risk in a given case. Although majority of the patients are sent back after appropriate evaluation and management, the more serious patients having risk of harm to self or others, or severe psychopathology are either kept in short observation facility available in emergency services, or are admitted to the psychiatry wards. These patients are seen by a consultant in the same evening or next day morning when the final decision regarding the diagnosis and further management is arrived at. For this study, case records of patients who attended emergency services during a period of one calendar year were reviewed. Out of the 10913 patients who attended emergency services during this period, 56 patients were found to present with attempted suicide. Data on socio demographic details and clinical variables were retrieved from the case records of these patients and recorded in the structured proforma prepared for this study.

Results:

Of all the patients who attended emergency services during the study period, 56 patients had suicidal attempts. Majority of them were married males in the age group of 20-40 years, were from nuclear families and had urban domicile. Severe Mental Illnesses were found in about 70% of the cases with duration of illness more than 24 months in 39.2%. Thirty six patients had 1 suicide attempt while 18 had 2 or more attempts in preceding one month. In 70% - 80% of the cases, the lethality and intentionality of the index episode was found to be moderate to high. Most of the cases needed inpatient treatment. Conclusion:

Assessment and management of patients presenting to emergency room with suicidal behavior is a key factor in preventing suicide. There is a pressing need to identify the socio-demographic and clinical factors affecting risk of suicide in a given case. Every case presenting with suicidal ideations or attempt should be evaluated in detail.

A total of 96 individuals were assessed, of whom 56 were females. The mean age of study participants was 21.5 years. The majority, 75 of the study participants were aged below 25 years. Mental illness was found in only three of the study participants. Impulsivity the time between decision to attempt suicide and the actual attempt of less than 5 minutes was reported by 30 of the study participants, of whom 18 were males. Males were found three times more likely to attempt suicide impulsively than women. Psychosocial stressors were found as immediate reasons to attempt suicide by the majority. Out of the 10913 patients who attended emergency services during the study period, 56 patients were found to have attempted suicide, indicating a prevalence of 0.51% for attempted suicide among those reporting to emergency room of a tertiary care mental health institute.

Conclusion:

The presence of stressful life events and impulsivity behind suicidal behavior of the younger generation implies that designing suicide prevention strategies for this group is crucial. Focus research is needed to systematically examine the relationship between the presence of mental illness and suicidal attempt with a larger sample size.