



A Study of Recent Stressful Life Events in Attempted Suicide

Authors

Dr Jayaraman S¹, Dr Asokkumar M², Dr Gandhibabu R³

¹Postgraduate, Department of Psychiatry, Rajah Muthiah Medical College and Hospital, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu

²Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry, Rajah Muthiah Medical College and Hospital, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu

³Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Rajah Muthiah Medical College and Hospital, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu

Abstract

There is an increase in rate of suicide in the past decades, which has become a burden to the family members and the society. So, it is the need of the hour to know the complete knowledge about the reason behind the suicide attempt. This study intends to study the recent stressful life event that has led the person to attempt for suicide. For this, 90 suicide attempters admitted in Rajah Muthiah Medical College Hospital is assessed with self-innovative proforma. Underlying psychiatric illness and substance abuse were also studied.

Results: *Out of 90 subjects 23 (25.6%) had conflict with family members, 22 (24.4%) had interpersonal conflict with spouse and alcohol related issues in 13 (14.4%). Break up with friend and financial crisis were seen in 9 (10.0%) each. Other than that, physical illness in 4 (4.4%), education related issues in 3 (3.3%), loss of dear ones in 2 (2.2%) and other reasons in 5 (5.6%). Out of 90 subjects 70 (77.8%) has adjustment disorder, 16 (17.8%) has depressive disorders and 4 (4.4%) has bipolar affective illness. Out of 90 subjects 34 (37.8%) has alcohol dependent syndrome as comorbid illness.*

Conclusion: *With or without the major psychiatric illness and problem drinking of alcohol as the baseline problem, the recent stressful life event makes the person progress from suicidal ideation to suicide attempt. Alcohol plays a direct or indirect (conflict with spouse / family members) role as major recent stressful life event. The future strategies for prevention of suicide should take these issues.*

Keywords: *suicide attempt, stress, life event.*

Introduction

In India, in 2018, 134,516 people die by suicide. It is estimated that 1 in 60 persons are affected by suicide⁷. For every death by suicide, on an average, 25 people attempt to die by suicide. In 2016, approximately 5.75 million people attempted to die by suicide in India^{8,9}.

The Recent Stressful Life Events (RSLE) occurring on the day or some time prior to the

suicide attempt, found to trigger the attempt for suicide. While the RSLE includes breakup with a friend, unemployment, legal issues, financial crisis and serious personal injury, interpersonal conflict with spouse or family members tops the chart^{1,3}.

These RSLE were implicated in the increased level of progression from suicidal ideation to

suicidal attempt of first time². Literatures support the link between RSLE and suicidal behavior³.

Mann JJ et al., proposes a model called as stress-diathesis model⁴, “In the stress-diathesis model, the diathesis is understood as a predisposition to think about suicide or engage in suicidal behavior when exposed to stressors”. The diathesis can be a psychiatric illness, substance abuse, reduced decision making capacity and traits such as aggression, hopelessness and impulsivity.

The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide by Joiner et al., in 2005 proposes that⁶ “stress involving the disruption of relationships and social support (i.e., interpersonal loss) and overt rejection or exclusion (i.e., humiliation) is implicated in developing key cognitive-affective states—namely, perceived burdensomeness (i.e., belief that one is a liability to others) and thwarted belongingness (i.e., loneliness and alienation)—that fuel serious suicidal desire and eventual attempts”.

The Three Step Theory by Klonsky and May in 2015 proposes that “general life stress contributes to proximal states (i.e., psychological pain and hopelessness) necessary for developing ideation. However, individuals are at greatest risk for attempts when the severity of these states exceeds connectedness (i.e., attachment to things that provide a sense of purpose or meaning). The loss of interpersonal relationships may reduce connectedness, and thus, the 3ST insinuates such losses may be implicated in attempts among ideators”⁵.

Interpersonal theory of suicide suggests that RSLE involving loss of dear ones and humiliation plays the major role in development of desire to die, which acts as a precursor to attempt. Integrated Motivational Volitional Theory of suicide proposes that any type of stress can lead to attempt from transition.

These theories posits that the progression from suicide ideation to attempt needs special capability. This special capability is acquired by RSLE characterized by pain, danger and fear.

Overall suicide attempters are those one who had expressed more RSLE than the ideators, especially of the interpersonal conflict / loss and violent trauma⁵.

The intend of this study is to identify the Recent Stressful Life Events of the suicide attempters admitted in hospital.

Materials and Methods

Study Setting

Study will be conducted in Rajah Muthiah Medical College Hospital (RMMCH), Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu.

Sample

Consecutive 90 suicide attempters who are all admitted in RMMCH from 01.01.2019 to 30.06.2019 and referred to Department of Psychiatry for assessment.

Study Design

Observational study – Cross sectional study

Inclusion Criteria

- Suicide attempters of both sexes are included
- Suicide attempters who fulfilled the criteria
- Suicide attempters who are willing to participate in the study

Exclusion Criteria

- Suicide attempters who are not willing to participate in study
- Suicide attempters those who are seriously ill and could not participate in the study

Interview

Study will be conducted on the suicide attempters those who are referred for psychiatric evaluation. Will be evaluated for psychosocial, situational and clinical risk factors using following materials

Materials Used

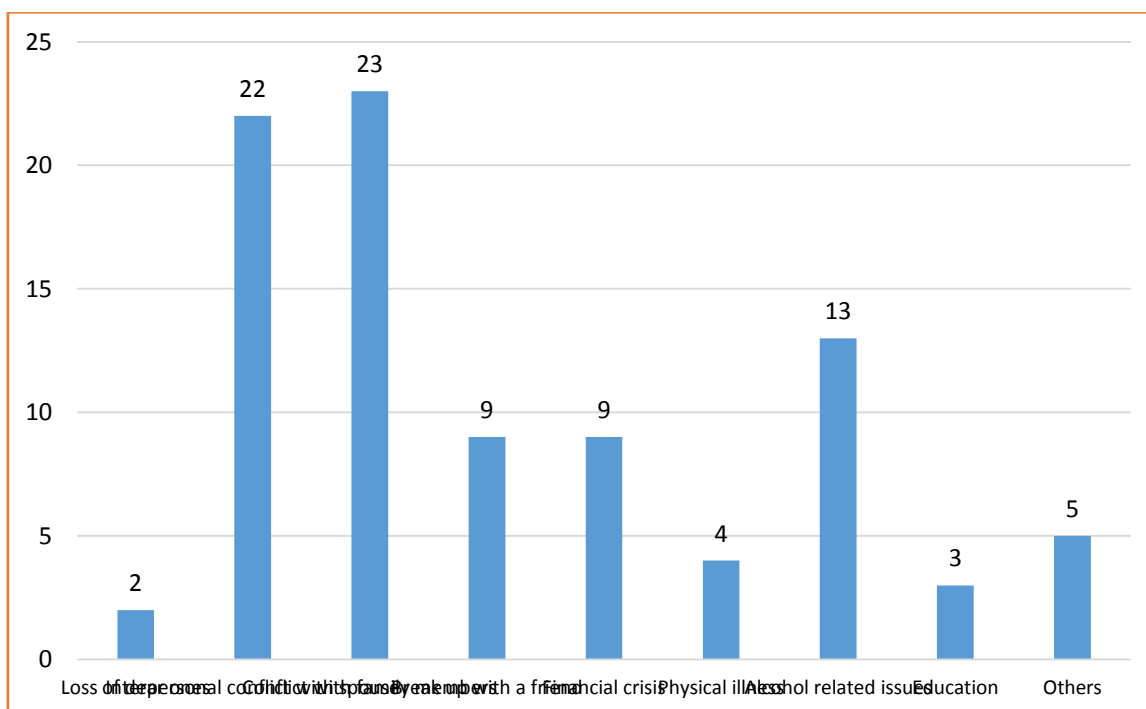
1. Self-innovated proforma to elicit the Socio Demographic data
2. ICD-10 – classification of Mental and Behavioral disorders

Results

Table 1: Distribution according to Presence of recent stressful life events among those who had attempted suicide

Stressful life event	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of dear ones	2	2.2
Interpersonal conflict with spouse	22	24.4
Conflict with family members	23	25.6
Break up with a friend	9	10.0
Financial crisis	9	10.0
Physical illness	4	4.4
Alcohol related issues	13	14.4
Education	3	3.3
Others	5	5.6

Fig 1: Bar chart showing distribution of presence of recent stressful life event among those who had attempted suicide



In table 1, among the suicide attempters (n 90), 23 (25.6%) had reported conflict with the family members and 22 (24.4%) reported interpersonal conflict with spouse as a recent stressful life event that leads the list. Alcohol related issues were seen in 13 (14.4). Break up with a friend and financial

crisis were seen in 9 (10%) each as recent stressful life event. Physical illness 4 (4.4%), education related issues 3 (3.3%), loss of dear ones 2 (2.2%), were the other recent stressful life event that leads to suicidal attempt.

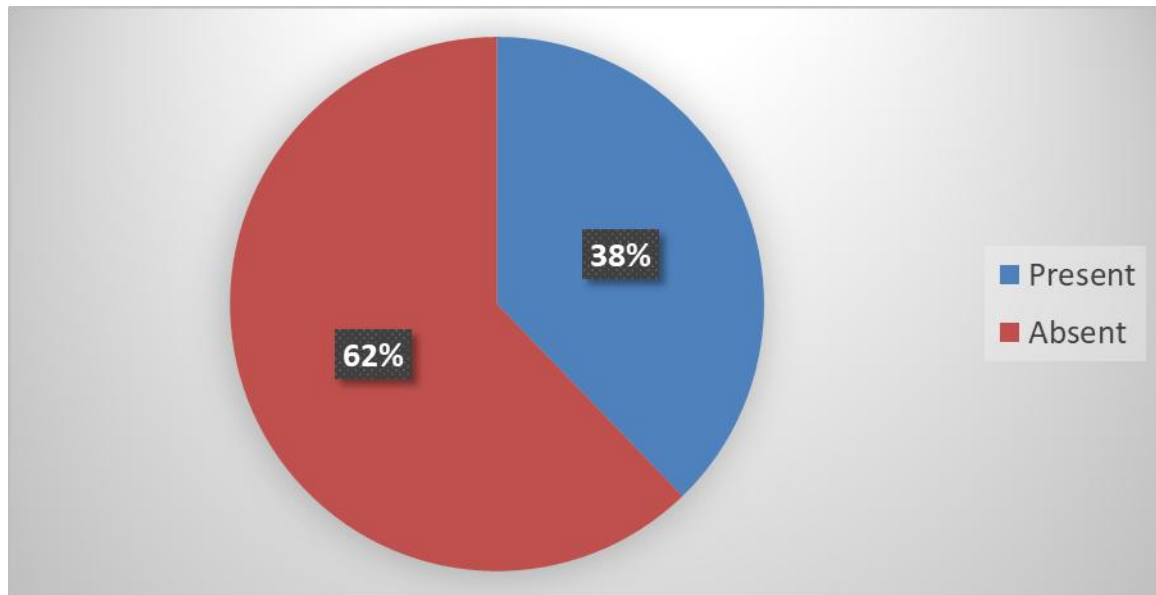
Table 2: Distribution according to diagnosis among suicide attempters

Diagnosis	Frequency	Percentage
Adjustment disorder	70	77.8
Depressive disorder	16	17.8
Bipolar affective disorder	4	4.4

In table 2, among the suicide attempters (n=90), 70 (77.8%) is currently diagnosed with adjustment disorder. 16 (17.8%) is diagnosed with depressive disorders and 4 (4.4%) is diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder.

Fig 2 shows that out of 90 suicide attempters 34 (38%) had the co-morbid illness of alcohol dependent syndrome.

Fig 2: pie chart showing the distribution according to the presence of ADS among suicide attempters



Discussion

In this study 90 consecutive patients admitted in the hospital for suicide attempt was assessed for the recent stressful life event that led them to attempt for suicide. About 25.6% had conflict with family members, 24.4% had interpersonal conflict with spouse. In these persons, the major reason for the conflict with spouse and sometimes conflict with family members used to be related to problem drinking of alcohol. Other than this, 14.4% had alcohol related issues directly act as the recent stressful life event leading to suicide attempt. Breakup with a friend and financial crisis act as recent stressful life event in 10% each. Other recent stressful life events were physical illness in 4.4%, education related issues in 3.3% and loss of dear ones in 2.2%. This list of recent stressful life events were similar to the one discussed by Currier D et al³. Since half of the subjects (50%) in this study has interpersonal conflict (spouse / family members), The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide by Joiner et al., in 2005 proves to be true⁶.

In this study 17.8% has the depressive disorder has the current diagnosis and bipolar affective disorder is seen 4.4%. Remaining 77.8% are found to have adjustment disorders. Around 38% of the subjects are found to be with alcohol dependent syndrome as the co-morbid illness. Here, depressive disorder, bipolar affective disorder or alcohol dependent syndrome can act as a diathesis over which the stress can be added for the suicidal ideation to be progressed to suicidal attempt, as suggested by Mann JJ et al., in his stress-diathesis model⁴.

Conclusion

In some people, the psychiatric diagnosis and alcohol abuse posits to be the predisposing factor for the suicidal behavior. Adding to it, the Recent Stressful Life Event (RLES) progresses the suicidal ideation to the suicidal attempt. Interpersonal conflict with the spouse and with other family members is found to be the major recent stressful life event. Problem drinking of

alcohol directly and indirectly cause suicidal attempt in most of the patients.

Limitations

People who had attempted suicide and not admitted in the hospital and people who had succumbed to the attempt were not included in the study, which might have some influence over the result.

References

1. Liu BP, Zhang J, Chu J, Qiu HM, Jia CX, Hennessy DA. Negative life events as triggers on suicide attempt in rural China: a case-crossover study. *Psychiatry Res.* 2019 Jun;276:100-106. doi: 10.1016/j.psychres.2019.04.008. Epub 2019 Apr 4. PMID: 31035109.
2. Paul E. Proximally-occurring life events and the first transition from suicidal ideation to suicide attempt in adolescents. *J Affect Disord.* 2018 Dec 1; 241: 499-504. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2018.08.059. Epub 2018 Aug 14. PMID: 30149338.
3. Currier D, Spittal MJ, Patton G, Pirkis J. Life stress and suicidal ideation in Australian men - cross-sectional analysis of the Australian longitudinal study on male health baseline data. *BMC Public Health.* 2016 Oct 31;16(Suppl 3):1031. doi: 10.1186/s12889-016-3702-9. PMID: 28185591; PMCID: PMC5103247.
4. Mann JJ, Waternaux C, Haas GL, Malone KM. Toward a clinical model of suicidal behavior in psychiatric patients. *Am J Psychiatry.* 1999 Feb;156(2):181-9. doi: 10.1176/ajp.156.2.181. PMID: 9989552.
5. Stewart JG, Shields GS, Esposito EC, Cosby EA, Allen NB, Slavich GM, Auerbach RP. Life Stress and Suicide in Adolescents. *J Abnorm Child Psychol.* 2019 Oct;47(10):1707-1722. doi: 10.1007/s10802-019-00534-5. PMID: 31028559; PMCID: PMC6717522.
6. Van Orden KA, Witte TK, Cukrowicz KC, Braithwaite SR, Selby EA, Joiner TE Jr. The interpersonal theory of suicide. *Psychol Rev.* 2010 Apr; 117(2): 575-600. doi: 10.1037/a0018697. PMID: 20438238; PMCID: PMC3130348.
7. Accidents and suicide deaths in India : NCRB 2018 report <https://ncrb.gov.in/en/accidental-deaths-suicides-in-india>
8. Vadlamani LN, Gowda M. Practical implications of Mental Healthcare Act 2017: Suicide and suicide attempt. *Indian J Psychiatry.* 2019 Apr;61(Suppl 4):S750-S755. doi: 10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_116_19 . PMID: 31040468; PMCID: PMC6482674.
9. Dandona R, Bertozzi-Villa A, Kumar GA, Dandona L. Lessons from a decade of suicide surveillance in India: who, why and how? *Int J Epidemiol.* 2017 Jun 1;46(3):983-993. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyw113. PMID: 27255440.