

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN LATE LIFE – A PROSPECTIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

Background: Elderly have high suicide rates. While attempted suicide is the strongest known predictor of suicide death, there are few controlled studies focusing on elderly attempters and prospective studies are lacking.

Aims: To examine social, psychological and psychiatric characteristics in elderly suicide attempters and in a general population comparison group. To investigate one-year outcomes and associated factors.

Methods: One-hundred and three suicide attempters (70+) (56 women and 47 men, mean age 80 years) were recruited from five hospitals in western Sweden. A population comparison group with the same sex and age composition was randomly drawn from our ongoing epidemiological studies. Sixty suicide attempters participated in the one-year follow-up study. Instruments included, the Comprehensive Psychopathological Rating Scale (CPRS), the Montgomery-Asberg Depression Rating Scale (MADRS), the Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC) and the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI). Medical records were reviewed.

Results: Both major and minor depression were associated with suicide attempt. A relationship was observed between perceived loneliness and suicide attempt. This association remained significant after adjustment for depression. A life time history of alcohol use disorder was associated with suicide attempt in both men and women. At one-year follow-up, two thirds of those who had major depression at the index attempt no longer fulfilled criteria for that diagnosis. Predictors for non-remission included higher MADRS- and BSA score, higher suicide intent and lower sense of coherence score at index attempt. Two persons died by suicide and six persons repeated a suicide attempt during the one-year observation period. One-year overall mortality was elevated more than two-fold. Suicide attempters scored higher on neuroticism and lower on extroversion than comparison subjects. However, these associations did not remain after adjusting for major depression.

Conclusions: Associations observed in this study mirrored those previously shown for death by suicide in late life in the same catchment area. Early detection and adequate treatment of depression and problematic alcohol use, as well as interventions that target loneliness may reduce suicidal behaviour in this vulnerable and growing age group.

Key words: Elderly, suicide attempt, depression, loneliness, alcohol use disorder, prospective study, remission, one-year mortality, repeated suicidal behaviour, neuroticism, extroversion.

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av

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This thesis is based on the following studies, which will be referred to in the text by their Roman numerals

- I Wiktorsson S, Runeson B, Skoog I, Östling S, Waern M.
Attempted Suicide in the Elderly: Characteristics of Suicide Attempters 70 Years and Older and a General Population Comparison Group.
American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 2010 Jan, 18 (1): 57-67.
- II Morin J, Wiktorsson S, Marlow T, Olesen P, Skoog I, Waern M.
Alcohol Use Disorder in Elderly Suicide Attempters: a Comparison Study.
American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 2011 Oct, accepted.
- III Wiktorsson S, Marlow T, Runeson B, Skoog I, Waern M.
Prospective Cohort Study of Suicide Attempters Aged 70 and Above: One-Year Outcomes.
Journal of Affective Disorders, 2011 Nov, 134 (1-3): 333-40.
- IV Wiktorsson S, Berg AI, Billstedt E, Duberstein P, Marlow T, Skoog I, Waern M.
Neuroticism and Extroversion in Suicide Attempters Aged 75 and Above and a General Population Comparison Group.
2011 Dec, submitted.



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