Original Communication

Study of suicides among adolescents and young adults

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Abstract

Suicide is a tragic incident for the family and the society. The rate of suicide is increasing alarmingly particularly among adolescents and young adults. An autopsy study of suicides among adolescents and young adults was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine, Victoria Hospital, Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute, Bangalore from January 2008 to June 2009. Out of 5448 autopsies conducted, 266 cases belonged to suicidal victims aged between 15-24 years. Majority of the victims were females belonging to urban area and were unmarried. Majority of them were students, employees and house wives. Hanging was the commonest method used to commit suicide, followed by poisoning, burns and drowning. Family conflict was the main reason for committing suicide.

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1. Introduction

Suicide is a global problem and every year almost one million people die from suicide with a global mortality rate of 16 per 100000. It is among the three leading causes of death in the age group of 15-44 years, and the second leading cause of death in the 10-24 years age group. 1 More than one lakh persons in India lost their lives by committing suicide during the year 2010 with an increase of 23.9% compared to the year 2000. Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka account for 12.3%, 11.9%, 11.8%, 11.8% and 9.4% respectively of the total suicides in the country. 2 The rate of suicide is on the rise among adolescents and young adults due to increase in stress, educational problems and life style changes. Around 35.4% suicide victims were youths in the age group of 15-29 years. 2

An attempt is made to study the various factors associated with suicide among adolescents and young adults in Bangalore, India.

2. Material and methods

The present study was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine, Victoria Hospital, Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute, Bangalore, India from January 2008 to June 2009. The study sample comprised of the victims aged between 15-24 years brought for medico-legal autopsy with alleged history of suicide. Information regarding particulars of the deceased was collected from the relatives, friends and police. In some cases, information was supplemented by a visit to the scene of death and suicide notes.

3. Results

A total of 5448 medico-legal autopsies were conducted during the study period, of which 731
belonged to age group of 15-24 years. Among this 266 cases were due to suicide, which included 96 males (36.1%) and 170 females (63.9%) with a male to female ratio of 1:1.8. Most of the suicides occurred in urban area (66.9%) followed by semi-urban (23.3%) and rural (9.8%). Majority of the study population were unmarried (59.4%) whereas 39.8% were married and 0.8% were divorced. Majority of them were students, employees and house wives (Fig. 1). Hanging was the commonest method used to commit suicide, followed by poisoning, burns and drowning (Fig. 2). The reasons for committing suicide are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number (N=266)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic physical pain</td>
<td>32 (12.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric disorder</td>
<td>40 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problem</td>
<td>36 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>2 (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love failure</td>
<td>44 (16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry harassment</td>
<td>26 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam, failure</td>
<td>16 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family conflict</td>
<td>58 (21.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>12 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the present study, the commonest method of committing suicide was hanging, followed by poisoning, burns and drowning. This is consistent with other studies in various Indian populations. Apart from hanging, poisoning and drowning, firearms and blunt force vehicular trauma were also used to committing suicide in Canada. Hanging and poisoning are the preferred methods in India because these methods are easier to commit within the house; hanging is preferred especially by women who live in the closed atmosphere of the house and the poisonous substances used are insecticides, rodenticides etc. that are easily available over the counter. Since firearms are easily available in western countries, firearms are commonly used to commit suicide in these countries. Whereas, accessibility to firearms is limited in India because of strict rules in the sale and possession of firearms.

4. Discussion

In the present study, females were more commonly the victims of suicide when compared to males. This is consistent with a study in South Delhi, India and in contrast to studies conducted in Canada and USA. The vulnerability of females to suicides in India could be due to the reason of male dominancy in the Indian society along with low literacy and socioeconomic status. Most of these suicides occurred in urban area (66.9%) followed by semi-urban (23.3%) and rural (9.8%). This indicates that adolescents and young adults who live in the urban areas are more prone to commit suicide may be due to stress, competitiveness, and pressure to succeed.
In the present study, the majority of the victims who committed suicide were students, employees in the Government and private sectors, and housewives. The students and employees in the beginning of their life undergo lot of stress because of compulsion to succeed in the competitive examinations and professional work. Financial instability during the young years makes a person to reach to a point of self-doubt. The reason for committing suicide in the present study was mainly the family conflicts, followed by love failure, psychiatric disorders, financial problems, chronic physical pain, dowry harassment, failure in examination and loneliness. Previous suicide attempts, history of suicide in the family members, mental illness, alcohol and drug use, hostility, negative self-concept and isolation, physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse, premarital sex, individual and personal vulnerabilities, exposure to stressful circumstances, boy-girl relationships, and stress from school work were the risk factors associated with suicidal behaviour.7,9

A multifactorial approach is needed to prevent suicide among adolescents and young adults. Over all change in the personality of adolescent and young people is needed. A proper guidance by parents and teachers, a change in the educational system to reduce stress and burden of examinations on students, more stringent dowry harassment prevention rules, and creating more jobs to improve the financial instability are necessary. Timely counseling by the suicide prevention group will help in decreasing the rate of suicides.

References


