

Suicides During the Pandemic: A Retrospective Study

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Abstract

Suicide is defined as a fatal self-injurious act with some evidence of intent to die.¹ Suicide occurs more often in older than in younger people, but is still one of the leading causes of death in the late childhood and adolescence. Every year, more than 1,00,000 people commit suicide in our country.¹ Suicide accounts for 1.4% of all deaths, and is the 15th leading cause of death globally.^{2,3} Suicide is associated with an impulsive nature. Several risk factors concerning family structure and interactions have been linked to a suicidal behaviour. Direct conflicts with parents and siblings, Occupational status and social acceptance have a great impact, but so do the absence of communication and a lack of empathy.¹² Interpersonal losses are also strongly associated with suicide cases. But in developing countries one of the major reason always remains unemployment and poverty. There are different rates of suicides and suicidal behaviour between males and females (among both adults and adolescents). While females more often have suicidal thoughts, males die by suicide more frequently.⁵ Hence, this study was planned with a purpose to know the magnitude and the socio-cultural factors of the problem of suicides, so that a sound prevention program could be suggested, planned and implemented for reducing the incidence of suicides.

Keywords: Suicide; pandemic; unemployment.

Introduction

Suicide is defined as a fatal self-injurious act with some evidence of intent to die.⁶ Suicide is a fatal act which represents the individuals wish to die.⁶ The latin word suicide denotes "self-murder". Most of the victims plans it for days, weeks, months even years; but for some it is an impulsive act.³ Suicide occurs more often in older than in younger people, but is still one of the leading causes of death in the late childhood and adolescence.⁴ Every year, more than 1,00,000 people commit suicide in our country.¹ Several risk factors have been linked to a suicidal

behaviour. In developing countries one of the major reason is unemployment and poverty. Majority (71%) of suicide in India are by persons below the age of 44 years which imposes a huge social, emotional and economic burden.¹⁰ Poisoning, hanging and self-immolation (particularly women) were the methods to commit suicide.⁴ Physical and mental illness, disturbed interpersonal relationships and economic difficulties were the major reasons for suicide.¹⁰ The vulnerable population was found to be women, students, farmers etc.¹⁰ There are different rates of suicides and suicidal behavior between males and females (among both adults and adolescents).^{5,10}

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While females more often have suicidal thoughts, males die by suicide more frequently.⁵ Two large epidemiological verbal autopsy studies in rural Tamil Nadu reveal that the annual suicide rate is six to nine times the official rates.¹² It includes both, those who have attempted suicide and those who have been affected by the suicide of a close family or friend.¹² Thus, suicide is a major public and mental health problem which demands urgent action.⁴ It is believed that the most dramatic increase in suicide mortality will be observed in third world countries because of socioeconomic and behavioral factors⁽¹¹⁾. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB); state of Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka have registered a consistently higher number of suicidal deaths during the last few years and together accounted for 56.2% of the total suicides reported in the country⁽¹¹⁾. The approach to understanding suicide must be multidisciplinary, involving psychologists, psychiatrists, toxicologists, physiologists and physicians, because suicide is a multi-faceted and complex event.⁸ Hence, this study was planned with a purpose to know the magnitude and the socio-cultural factors of the problem of suicides, so that a sound prevention program could be suggested, planned and implemented for reducing the incidence of suicides.

Material and Methods

This retrospective study was conducted in the department of Forensic Medicine, Silchar Medical

College and Hospital during the period from 1st July 2020 to 30th June 2021, amidst the prevailing Covid Pandemic situation. During the period a total number of 730 cases were brought for Autopsy, out of which 290 number of cases were found to be of suicidal intent.

The accompanying persons and attendants of all such cases were interviewed for relevant information that can be gathered regarding the motive of suicide, any previous medical & Psychiatric History or previous attempts at committing suicide. RTPCR test for COVID-19 suspected cases was done on a routine basis as and when needed.

Aims and Objectives

1. To find the total number of suicide cases during the period.
2. To find the sex ratio.
3. To find out different methods adopted for suicide.
4. To find out the cause of death.
5. To find out the underlying cause of such step (If found relevant).

Observations and Results

In the present study it was found that out of 730 cases, 290 cases were deaths due to suicide.

Out of 290 cases 152 cases were male. Which is similar to the findings of other studies on suicide.

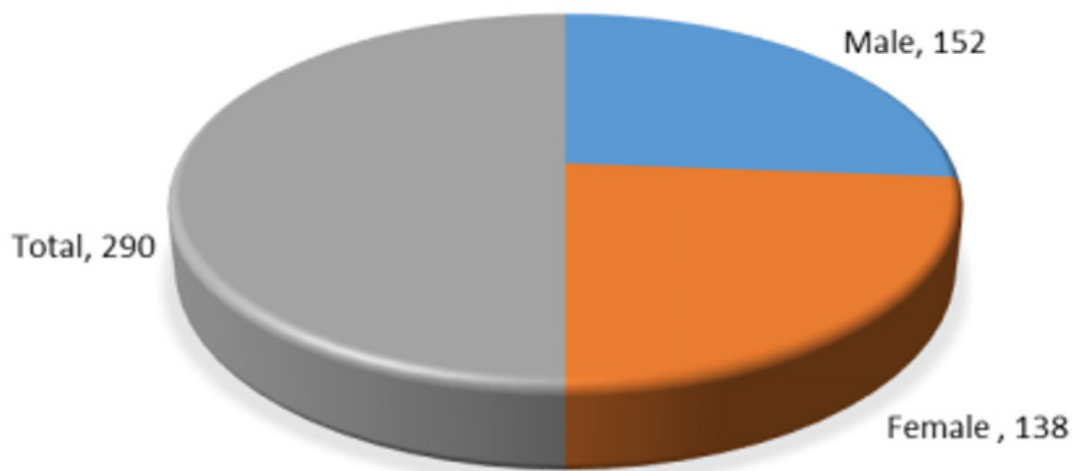


Figure 1: Showing the Sex Ratio of the cases.

Hanging was the most common method adopted by most of the victims, followed by poisoning.

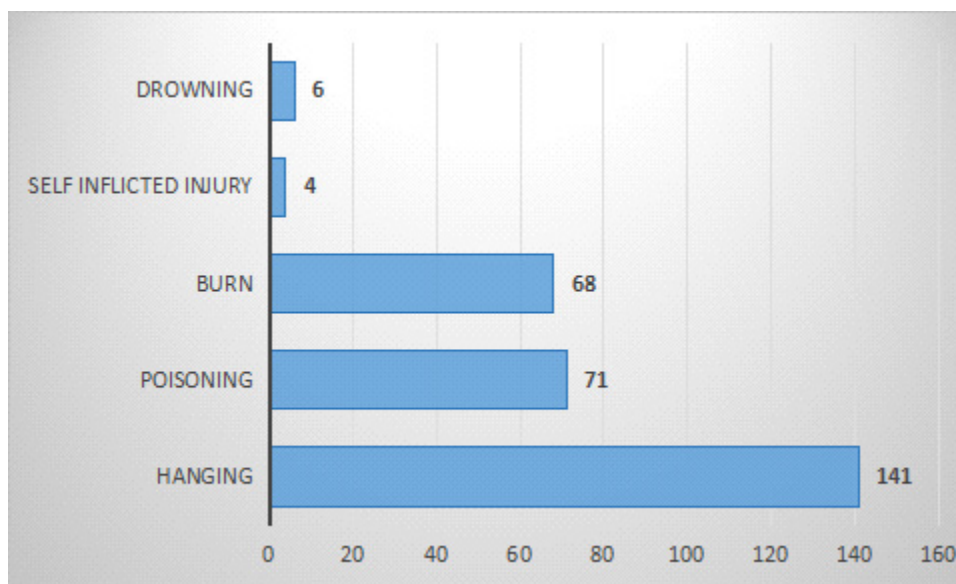


Figure 2: Showing the various methods adopted for suicide.

Asphyxia was the most common cause of death found in the suicide cases.

Most of the victims were self-employed. Some of the victims were house wives and some were daily labours.

Out of 290 cases, attendants of 94 cases gave history of covid 19 like symptoms, but none of them were found to be positive on RAT test and RTPCR test.

A history of depression was common in most narratives by the respective attendants. Poor economic condition, pre-existing and also influenced by the prevailing situation of unemployment and the Pandemic were also mentioned by a few.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to find any possible effects of pandemic as a stress factor on the suicide victim cases. The family members, relatives and friends were interviewed to find the mental state of the victims during that period. In case there was any history of Covid 19 like symptoms RTPCR test was performed in such cases. Nearly 1/3rd cases were found to be death due to suicide.

Males accounted for more than 60% of the cases, possibly due to the traditional role of being the bread winner of the family. This finding is similar to the other studies conducted on suicide earlier. The

finding is different from the finding of Patel V et al. who found that women are commonest victim.⁹

Most common age group involved were between 30 to 45 Years, which is different from the findings of Dasgupta SM, who found 11 to 30 Years as the common age group involved¹² and Gad ElHak S. et al. who found the 20-30 yaers as the commonest age group involved.⁷ Patel V et al found the age group involved to be 15-29 Years.⁹

Hanging was the most common method adopted followed by poisoning. This finding is different from the finding of Bhagabati D, Dasgupta SM and Gad ElHak S. et al who found poisoning to the commonest mode adopted.^{11,7}

Most of the victims were self-employed (157 cases out of 290 cases), which is different from the findings of Bhagabati D.

A history of Depression, Failed ventures and Social embarrassment was found associated, in most of the victims.

Conclusion

In a Developing country like ours, a substantial percentage of the population is still under the poverty line and they earn their livelihood on a daily wage basis. A possible scenario during the Pandemic was the loss of sources of income and livelihood which may have contributed towards a depressed mental

state. The percentage of people committing suicide showed an increase in the numbers as compared to the previous year, although the general numbers also showed a substantial increase. Government agencies and NGOs have been very forthcoming and pro-active in providing relief and minimizing the losses and have been instrumental in bringing back the lives of the common man on track, but the scars of the Pandemic, when nothing was known about the prognosis, fate and outcome of the disease, that positively contributed in a major way towards development of a negative mind-set and a sense of hopelessness in such individuals.

A sense of social obligation and empathy towards understanding the mental set up of such individuals, specially in those who are known to be suffering from such a condition by the family, close contacts and society as a whole would help in bringing down the numbers of such unfortunate deaths and shall be a great leap towards a healthy society.

Conflict of Interest: Nil.

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Ethical Clearance: Taken from Institutional Ethical Committee.

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