

Suicide (Prevention) Notes

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Effect of acute alcohol use on the lethality of suicide attempts in patients with mood disorders.

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Summary of Abstract: Acute alcohol use is an important risk factor for attempted and completed suicide. We evaluated the effect of acute alcohol intake on the lethality of suicide attempts to test the hypothesis that acute alcohol intoxication is associated with more lethal suicide attempts. This retrospective study included 317 suicide attempters enrolled in mood disorders protocols. Demographic and clinical parameters were assessed. The use of alcohol at the time of the most lethal suicide attempt was determined. On the basis of their responses participants were classified into three groups:

"Alcohol" (A)

Participants who reported "Enough alcohol intake to impair judgment, reality testing and diminish responsibility" or "Intentional intake of alcohol in order to facilitate implementation of attempt"

"Some Alcohol" (SA);

Participants who reported "Some alcohol intake prior to but not related to attempt, reportedly not enough to impair judgment, reality testing"

"No Alcohol" (NA)

Participants who reported "No alcohol intake immediately prior to attempt"

- Lethality of the most lethal suicide attempts was higher in the A group compared to the SA and NA groups.
- Prevalence of patients with alcohol use disorders was higher in the A group compared to the SA and NA groups.
- SA participants reported more reasons for living and lower suicide intent scores at the time of their most lethal suicide attempt compared to the A and NA groups.
- Acute alcohol use increases the lethality of suicide attempts in individuals with mood disorders.

Questions for on-going discussion:

- 1) What is our initial reaction and process of thinking when we hear about an alcoholic having a prior suicide attempt while intoxicated.
- 2) Is a suicide attempt under the influence a marker for lethality or a mitigating factor allowing us to explain and mitigate the seriousness of attempt since the patient when sober minimizes intent.

NOTE: Each issue of "Suicide (Prevention) Notes" is prepared by a member of the IOL's Executive Committee. This issue was prepared by Dr. Samuel Silverman, Medical Director, Addiction Services, Rushford.