

### *Suicide (Prevention) Notes*

### *Vol. 2, No. 9*

**Conclusion:** The purpose of the current study was to undertake a systematic literature review to assess the current state of the research literature to examine the prevalence of suicidality (defined as a suicide attempt and non-fatal self-harm behavior in which an individual inflicts pain on his or her body in efforts to reduce negative emotions) among individuals with ASD, related demographic and clinical profiles, and associated risk and protective factors. Although the inconsistency in methods of assessing both suicidal behavior and ASD, as well as a lack of adequate comparison groups limits the generalizability of the findings, there are several important findings to consider in conducting assessments of individuals with ASD.

**Title of Paper:** "What Do We Know About Suicidality in Autism Spectrum Disorders? A Systematic Review" by Magali Segers and Jennine Rawana. INSAR Literature Review: Autism Research, 2 5 May 2014

*NOTE: Due to copyright laws, we are unable to provide the full article with these notes.*

#### **Key Findings:**

- The occurrence of ASD in larger suicidal adult populations ranged from 7.3 to 15%, highlighting the fact that as a subgroup, individuals with an ASD diagnosis made up a substantial portion of individuals who engage in suicidal behaviors.
- Adults with ASD who were hospitalized for suicidal behaviors tended to use more aggressive and lethal means (i.e., cutting, stabbing, carbon monoxide poisoning), resulting in greater bodily harm and longer hospital stays compared with the rest of the sample. The ASD sample were less likely than the typically developing sample to use drug overdose as a method (58 vs 79%) and also used other methods such as jumping and poisoning.
- Individuals with ASD were less likely to make a suicide attempt based on precipitating events occurring within the last 24 hours, whereas this was the case for almost half of the typically developing sample.
- Peer victimization occurred in a large percentage (38-75%) of the samples reported here and anecdotally was a trigger for suicidal behaviors in many individuals with ASD. Other characteristics that appear to be associated with individuals at a higher risk of suicidal behaviors are substance abuse, (7.7%), behavioral problems, and taking psychotropic medications.
- Clinicians should be aware of the importance of screening for depression and other mental health issues in individuals with ASD, particularly when suicidal behaviors are present.
- Individuals with ASD who attempted suicide (a) had persistent rather than spontaneous stressors, (b) used more lethal means, and (c) were less connected to psychiatric services.
- Reviewed studies suggest that patients with ASD may actually be more likely to succeed in their first suicide attempt and, therefore, should be taken extremely seriously when suicidal behaviors are present (Kato et al., 2013).

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- **Clinicians should assess individuals with ASD for suicidal ideation and behaviors with special consideration of the social circumstances that may as protective (e.g., care-givers, support systems) or risk factors (e.g., social isolation, peer victimization).**

**Important Research Items:**

- **For the purposes of this review, "suicidal behaviors" was defined in its broadest sense, which included suicidal ideation, self-harm behaviors, suicidal attempt, and completed suicide. Researchers should consider teasing apart these constructs and measuring them as separate entities to better understand the complex issue of suicide.**
- **Considering that only 10 separate studies and 3 case reports were considered appropriate for this review, there is significant room for continued investigation in this line of research.**

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NOTE: Each issue of "Suicide (Prevention) Notes" is prepared by a member of the IOL's Executive Committee.  
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