

A-40: A retrospective hospital study of attempted suicide: preliminary communication

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Sri Lanka has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. We present preliminary results of a larger hospital-based study of attempted suicide in Central and North Central Sri Lanka. Records of all patients admitted to the Teaching Hospital Peradeniya in 1990 and 1991 after attempted suicide were analysed.

212 patients were admitted after attempting suicide during this period. There were 143 (67.5%) males and 69 females. 70% of the patients were in the 16 to 35 age group and nearly 15% were under 15 years. 92.4% were Sinhalese. All suicide attempts were by ingesting a poison. Ingestion of alcohol just prior to or during the act was documented in 11 (5.2%) of patients. Although there did not seem to be a seasonal variation in the suicide attempts, 53.1% of the attempts were made between 12 noon and 6 pm. 180 (84%) patients survived, while 32 died. The mean hospital stay was 4.7 days and nearly 25% required treatment in the Intensive Care Unit. Documentation of requests for psychiatric assessment before discharge were seen in only 3.9% of patient records, while 11.1% were referred to a psychiatric clinic on discharge. The final diagnosis documented in the patient record was 'poisoning' in 92.5% of cases and 'suicide' or 'attempted suicide' as the diagnosis was mentioned in just over 3% of cases.

Our preliminary data indicate that attempted suicide occurred mainly among young Sinhalese males, and resulted in a 16% hospital mortality. This problem is a major burden on our health resources. Our study also appears to indicate that knowledge and attitudes regarding suicide were inadequate among doctors treating these patients.

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