

PERSISTENCE OR CHANGE? FOCUSING ON THE RELATION BETWEEN SUICIDE METHODS OF LAST ATTEMPTED AND OF COMPLETED SUICIDE

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Introduction: Research on suicide method substitution between last attempted and completed suicide is scarce (five studies).

Objectives: The results are conflicting (three studies report persistence and two studies report switch).

Aim: To investigate this topic studying a sample of suicide victims from Greece.

Methods: We studied all recorded cases of completed suicide of the period November 2007-October 2009 in Athens Department of Forensic Medicine. We performed phone interviews with relatives of the deceased focusing, among other topics, on the characteristics of prior attempts.

Results: 335 individuals were recorded as suicide victims: 250 men (74.7%) & 85 women (35.3%). Interviews were conducted with the relatives of 246 victims: 24% had history of prior attempts (59 cases), 39 men (66.1%) & 20 women (33.9%). Most frequent last attempted suicide methods were: self-poisoning (57.6%), jumping from a height (20.3%), wrist-cutting (15.3%) & hanging (6.8%). 74.6% of the attempters became completers using a different method ($p=0.016$). Individuals with previous attempt by self-poisoning or wrist-cutting died by hanging or jumping while attempters by hanging or jumping became completers primarily by the same methods.

Conclusion: Most of the suicide completers had never been attempters in the past. Those who had attempted with low lethality methods- committed suicide choosing a different, more lethal method. Restrictions in the availability of lethal means may result in more surviving attempters while some suicides could also be prevented because a particularly lethal method is not in hand.