

Suicidal Ideation and Distress in Family Members Bereaved by Suicide in Portugal

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The present study assessed the impact of suicide and distress on suicidal ideation in a sample of 93 Portuguese family members bereaved by suicide. A control community sample of 102 adults also participated. After controlling for educational level, those bereaved by the suicide of a family member were found to have higher levels of suicidal ideation. Forty-two percent of family members had Suicide Ideation Questionnaire scores at or above the cutoff point. General distress, depression, anxiety, and hostility related to suicidal ideation, whereas time since suicide also interacted with general distress and depression in predicting suicidal ideation.

Exposure to suicide carries with it a number of adverse consequences (e.g., complicated grief, distress, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorders) with the increased likelihood for one's own suicide, being, perhaps, the most disturbing (Jordan & McIntosh, 2011a). In fact, several worldwide studies have reported that losing someone close to you to suicide increases the risk for both suicidal ideation and behavior. Crosby and Sacks (2002) reported that Americans who knew someone who had died by suicide in the previous year were more likely to report suicidal ideation and suicide plans and attempts. Hedstrom, Liu, and Nordvik (2008) found that Swedish men who were exposed to a suicide in their family or at the workplace were more likely to die by suicide. Rostila, Saarela, and Kawachi (2013) also found an increased risk of mortality by suicide among Swedish people who had experienced the death of a sibling by suicide.

In Denmark, a series of studies based on national health records illustrated a strong association between

a family history of suicide and current suicide (Agerbo, Nordentoft, & Mortensen, 2002; Qin, Agerbo, & Mortensen, 2003). De Leo and Heller (2008), using data from large-scale studies conducted in Australia and in several European countries, found that exposure to suicide increases the risk for suicide behavior and death by suicide, particularly in young people. Cerel and Roberts (2005) concluded that adolescents who have been exposed to family member suicide attempts and deaths are likely to engage in risk behaviors, to experience suicidal ideation, and to attempt to kill themselves. Research conducted with Micronesia citizens indicates that familiarity with suicide leads to an acceptance of the act by peers, who become prone to reproduce it (Rubinstein, 1983). In addition, several other studies (e.g., Agerbo et al., 2002; Cheng, Chen, Chen, & Jenkins, 2000; Kim et al., 2003; Kuramoto et al., 2010; Qin, Agerbo, & Mortensen, 2002; Runeson & Asberg, 2003) have demonstrated that suicide survivors (suicide bereaved individuals)—“someone who experiences a high level of self-perceived psychological, physical, and/or social distress for a considerable length of time after exposure to the suicide of another person” (Jordan & McIntosh, 2011a, p. 7)—often exhibit a higher risk for suicide than the general population.

Received 7 January 2014; accepted 28 June 2014.

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