INTRODUCTION

Bereavement is considered to be a common precursor of death by suicide. Currently, there is concern over the number of deaths by suicide across the UK and Europe. As a result, an increasing number have been exposed to bereavement by suicide. Studies suggest those bereaved by suicide may be particularly vulnerable to suicide themselves. It remains unclear how these deaths might impact on future suicide rates.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine a two-year cohort of deaths by suicide to report on bereavement amongst those who died by suicide
2. To assess the bearing of death by suicide on those bereaved by suicide and suggest postvention options

METHOD – SOCIOLOGICAL AUTOPSY COHORT

DEATHS BY SUICIDE

Coroner’s files provided data on 403 deaths (all confirmed suicides in Northern Ireland over 2 years)
Linkage to GP records to gather data on demographics, help seeking and life events

RESULTS

Suicide deaths
- 15% n=61 of suicide deaths featured a bereavement
- 8% n=31 indicate suicide contagion

Those bereaved by suicide commonly experience suicidal thoughts as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression
- 49% (n=31) moderate-severe symptoms (HADS)
- 48% (n=30) had become suicidal
- 39% (n=24) sought no help (some showed resilience)
- 25% accessed both GP and voluntary sector support
  - 17% sought primary care
  - 19% sought voluntary sector
- 26% (n=16) reported family communication breakdown

NEXT OF KIN

Face-to-face interviews (n=78) took place 18 months to 5 years after being bereaved by a suicide death.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To develop and test suicide bereavement interventions for use in public mental health and in clinical practice
2. To avoid one-size-fits-all, to provide improved access to a variety of flexible support options when need is greatest and people are receptive, including psycho-education, avoiding singular medical approaches

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