

Impact of Social Support on Symptoms of Depression and Loneliness in Survivors of Suicide

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IDENTIFIED PROBLEM

- In the U.S. suicide is the 11th leading cause of death, accounting for about 36,000 deaths annually
 - Estimated that there may be 10 survivors to every completed suicide
 - A survivor of suicide is a family member or friend of a person who died by suicide
- Death of a family member or loved one by suicide is a traumatic incident that impacts a survivor's ability to function
- Compounding this trauma is a lack of bereavement programs & lack of research re: their effectiveness
- Even less evidence is available regarding defining a survivor of suicide's social support network, their emotional reactions and quality of life

SPECIFIC AIM

- To determine if there is a correlation between depressive and loneliness symptoms and the social support available in this cohort of survivors
- It was hypothesized that a positive correlation will exist between significant social support and decreased levels of loneliness and depression

METHODOLOGY

- Design
 - Descriptive, correlational secondary data analysis
 - Analysis from 2 pilot studies that investigated text-messaging as a method of enhancing social support and reducing symptoms of depression and loneliness in survivors of suicide.
- Sample/Setting
 - Non-probability, purposive sample of 44 individuals over the age of 18 from Pittsburgh area
 - 75% were female
 - Ages ranged from 20 to 70, with a mean of 44
 - 73% were Caucasian, 22.7% African-American, and 4.5% Hispanic.
 - 57% of participants earned at least college degrees

INSTRUMENTS/PROCEDURE

- Measures
 - Demographic and Mobile Literacy Questionnaire
 - Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI II)
 - UCLA Loneliness Scale
 - Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire (NSSQ)
 - SF-12v2 Health Survey
- Procedure
 - The above scales were completed to assess for a correlation between the scores on the depression and loneliness scales and the social support scale

DATA ANALYSIS

- Analysis was performed using version 21 of Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
- Descriptive statistics examined demographic information
- Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient
 - Explored the relationship between social support network and depression and loneliness

RESULTS

- Multiple linear regression model
 - BDI as the outcome and personal network (Norbeck 1=amount of members listed) and relationship score (Norbeck 2=identifies type of relationship with an amount of support) as the predictors
 - Significant at the 95% confidence level, $F(2, 39) = 3.48, p = 0.04$
 - Thus, higher personal network and relationship scores are statistically associated with lower BDI
- Simple linear regression models:
 - BDI as the outcome and total support score as the predictor
 - Total Support Score=How much each support member provided in affection, affirmation, and aid-ranges from 89-799
 - Achieved significance at the 99% confidence level, $F(1, 40) = 10.43, p = 0.002$
 - BDI as the outcome and "physical 1" as the predictor
 - The model was significant at the 99% confidence level, $F(1, 42) = 10.02, p = 0.003$
 - Less difficulty with physical health is statistically association with lower BDI

DISCUSSION

- Results of this study expand on earlier findings that discuss the clinical importance of how the bereavement process differs in survivors of suicide
- Findings suggest that social support identified by survivors of suicide and optimal physical health are associated with lower levels of depression
- Participants' depressive scores decreased when less difficulty with physical health was reported and these findings are consistent with the current literature

LIMITATIONS

- This study has several limitations:
 - Self-report instruments
 - Correlation does not imply causation
 - Small and generally homogenous sample

IMPLICATIONS

- Literature suggests that survivor's apparent social support is coupled with a reduced amount of grief and hopelessness
- Opportunities to aid patients in identifying social support include:
 - Assisting survivors in working through their period of grief
 - Strengthening the relationship between patients and providers
- A key focus of mental health professionals' assessment and intervention strategies should integrate:
 - Health promotion techniques (exercise/nutrition) in order to have their patients achieve optimal physical health

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Larger and more diverse sample
 - Allow conclusions to be more generalizable to the target population
- Longitudinal study
 - Support if long term associations with support groups exist in survivors and how they ultimately influence the grief process
- Identifying other types of social support
 - Technology as a form of communication which may allow a more comfortable setting to divulge how the survivors are progressing during their period of bereavement

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