Ailments contribute to low life expectancy after first suicide attempt

People who have attempted suicide tend to live shorter lives than others, even though their deaths are mostly caused by disease.

People who had been in treatment for suicide attempts or self-injuries have a shorter life expectancy according to a new Swedish study.

“Suicide is of course very common among this vulnerable patient group, but a closer look at the numbers shows that the higher mortality rate is caused by non-psychiatric disorders,” says Jussi Jokinen, psychiatrist and professor at Umeå University, in a press release.

He is one of the researchers who has studied registry data covering 185,000 persons in this type of treatment in Sweden from 1971 to 2010.

Dying of other diseases

The results show that 20-year-old men who were in treatment after attempting their own lives at least once lived on average to the age of 61. This is much shorter than the life expectancy for their general age group in Sweden, which was 79.

Suicide comprised a greater share of the cause of death for those in the study than for the general population. About one percent of all Swedes take their own lives and about 20 percent of Swedes who have been in treatment after a suicide attempt end up dying by their own hand.

Most of the suicidal Swedes who had been in treatment died of what can be called natural causes such as heart attacks, strokes, cancer and other diseases.

“Our results show a lack of satisfactory treatment because it seems that psychiatric patients do not get the help they need,” says Rickard Ljung, a doctor and assistant professor at Sweden’s Karolinska Intitute, and one of the researchers behind the study.

Gender differences

Women who had attempted suicide lived shorter lives than the average Swede, but the difference was not as large for all groups. Women who had been in treatment following a suicide attempt prior to age 20, had a life expectancy that was 11 years shorter than the rest of the population.

When the first suicide attempt came later in life it still had an impact on life expectancies. But here the difference was less, both between the sexes and between these suicidal persons and the average Swede.
Men and women who had been in treatment for their first suicide attempt after the age of 70 lived four years less than the general population.

**Hard to treat as a homogenous group**

The Swedish study of life expectancy after the first suicide attempt points out that such persons have comprehensive problems. This makes it difficult to treat them as a unified group. Previous research has also pointed out the complexity of troubles in this group.

ScienceNordic.com’s partner forskning.no has written that many who take their own lives in Norway have done so without ever attempting to get help from the health services.

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Read the Norwegian version of this article at forskning.no. [5]

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**Swedish researchers have perused data relating to 185,000 persons who have been in treatment for suicide attempts and self-injuries in Sweden in the years from 1971 to 2010.** (Illustrative photo: Shutterstock / NTB scanpix) [6]

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