



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Epidemiological characteristics in suicidal adolescents seen in the emergency department^{☆,☆☆}



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KEYWORDS

Attempted suicide;
Poison;
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Abstract

Introduction: Suicide attempt in adolescents is a major global health problem. In order to prevent them, the risk factors need to be identified. The present study evaluates the clinical and epidemiological aspects of adolescent patients after attempted suicide, who were seen in an emergency department.

Materials and methods: Description of retrospective study of patients younger than 18 years who visited emergency department unit after a suicide attempt, during the period from 2008 to 2012.

Results: A total of 241 patients were included, of whom 203 were female. The median age of the patients was 15.6 years. Psychiatric history was present in 65.1% of the patients. The most frequent suicide mechanism was drug overdose (94.2%). Attempted suicide ideation was more common in males and in patients with previous attempts, and were also more related to sequels. Moreover, patients with an overdose were associated with psychiatric history and clinical toxicity.

Conclusions: Patients with any of the following characteristics; male, psychiatric history, a history of previous suicide attempts and/or clinical toxicity at the time of the visit in the emergency centre, were more associated suicidal ideation before the attempt. Therefore, they had greater severity and risk repeating the attempt. They require a careful psychiatric evaluation and close monitoring.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Tentativa de suicidio;
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voluntaria;
Adolescencia

Características epidemiológicas de las tentativas de suicidio en adolescentes atendidos en Urgencias

Resumen

Introducción: La tentativa de suicidio en adolescentes es un grave problema de salud a nivel mundial. Para desarrollar medidas preventivas es necesario identificar factores de riesgo. El objetivo del estudio es describir y analizar las características epidemiológicas y clínicas de los pacientes que acuden al Servicio de Urgencias Pediátrico (SUP) tras presentar una tentativa de suicidio.

Materiales y métodos: Estudio retrospectivo de los pacientes menores de 18 años visitados en un SUP tras tentativa de suicidio entre 2008 y 2012.

Resultados: Se obtuvo una muestra de 241 pacientes, 84,2% mujeres, con una mediana de edad de 15,6 años. El 65,1% de los pacientes presentaba antecedentes psiquiátricos, siendo el más frecuente el trastorno depresivo (61 pacientes). El mecanismo suicida más frecuente fue la intoxicación medicamentosa con 94,2% de los casos.

La presencia de ideación suicida estable previamente a la tentativa fue más frecuente en los varones y en pacientes con tentativas previas, y se relacionó con la aparición de secuelas en mayor proporción. Además, en los pacientes con intoxicación se relacionó también con presentar antecedentes psiquiátricos y con la aparición de clínica de toxicidad.

Conclusiones: Los pacientes varones, con antecedentes psiquiátricos, con antecedentes de tentativas suicidas previas y/o con clínica de toxicidad en el momento de atención en el SUP presentan con más frecuencia ideación suicida estable previa a la realización de la tentativa y, por tanto, mayor gravedad y riesgo de repetirla. Requieren, por tanto, una valoración psiquiátrica cuidadosa y un seguimiento estrecho.

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Introduction

The incidence of attempted suicide in adolescents is difficult to determine. According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Institute of Statistics), the rate of suicide in youth (15–19 years) in 2012 was 2.38 per 100,000 inhabitants.¹ It is estimated that for every completed suicide, there are between 10 and 40 suicide attempts.² Suicide attempts in youth are associated with impulsivity, the pessimistic perspective of introverted adolescents, the onset of psychiatric disorders and the start of substance use.^{3,4} The most frequent method used for attempting suicide in Spain is medication overdose, and differs from other types of paediatric pharmaceutical poisoning in the longer time elapsed until medical care is sought, a higher proportion of combined drug intoxication, and the clinical manifestations.⁴ The management of these patients in Paediatric Emergency Departments (PEDs) must be interdisciplinary and include a thorough psychiatric evaluation. This evaluation will assess the current risk of suicide, the presence of psychiatric comorbidities, and the type of treatment and followup that patients will require after emergency care. The aim of our study was to describe the epidemiological and clinical characteristics of suicide attempts and to differentiate patients that attempted suicide on impulse from those in whom suicidal ideation preceded the attempt. We also analysed patients that attempted suicide by self-poisoning.

Materials and methods

We conducted a retrospective analytical and observational study in the PED of a tertiary women's and children's hospital that serves a population of 1,300,000 inhabitants and receives 100,000 paediatric visits per year. A psychiatrist is available around the clock to see patients that have been referred specifically for psychiatric assessment. The study included adolescents (12–18 years) that attempted suicide between 2008 and 2012. We collected data for the following variables: age, sex, previous psychiatric history, previous attempts, suicide method, referral for psychiatric assessment, sustained suicidal ideation prior to the attempt, and outcome of the attempt. For patients with poisoning that received care at the PED (excluding those referred for psychiatric assessment), we also collected data pertaining to: ambulance transport, time elapsed between exposure to the toxic substance and PED care, presenting symptoms, management of the poisoning and need for admission. We analysed whether there were clinical or epidemiological differences between patients that attempted suicide on impulse and patients that had prior sustained suicidal ideation. We assessed the impulsivity of the attempt based on the judgement of the psychiatrist that provided emergency care. The study was approved by the research ethics committee of the hospital. We performed the statistical analysis with the application SPSS v 20.0 for Windows (IBM Corporation; Armonk, USA).

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