

A Cross-National Study on Gender Differences in Suicidal Intent

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Introduction

- Suicide accounts for over 58,000 deaths in Europe per annum¹, where the rate of suicide attempts is estimated to be 20 times higher²
- The female-to-male ratio of suicide attempts is between 1.2:1 and 2:1³
- Males have been found to have an excessively higher rate of completed suicides and disproportionately lower rate of suicide attempts compared to females³
- Many studies have sought to explain this gender gap in completed and attempted suicides by addressing gender differences in lethality⁴, psychiatric morbidity and unemployment⁵, however ambiguous findings have paved the way for suicidal intent to be at the forefront of research into gender differences in suicidal acts

Aims and Objectives of the Study

- To explore the Gender Differences in Suicidal intent
 - Across the entire sample
 - Across different Age Groups
 - Across countries
 - Within the most utilised methods of Attempted Suicide

Standard rates by sex, male: female ratio (2011)¹

Completed Suicides:



Suicide Attempts (SA):

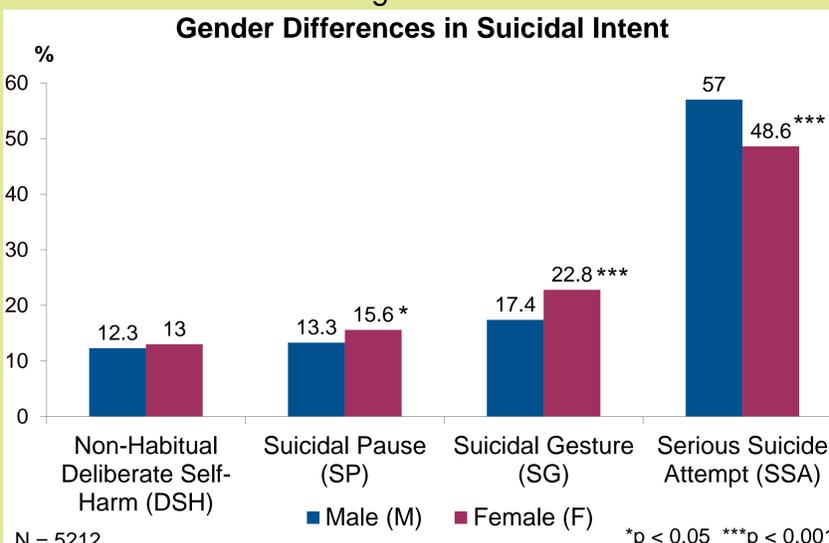


Methods

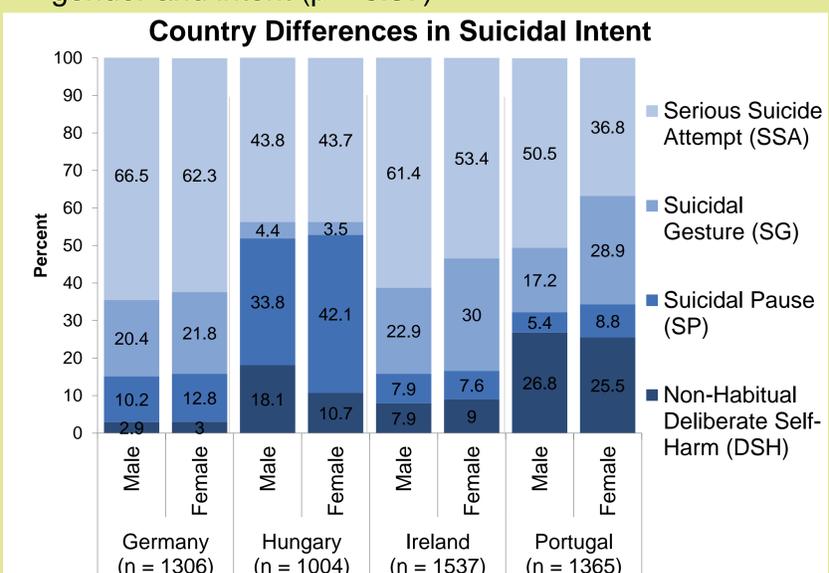
- Data from the OSPI-Europe Project (Optimizing Suicide Prevention Programs and their Implementation in Europe) was utilized for this study. OSPI-Europe is a multilevel intervention programme that was implemented in eight regions within four countries in Europe with the aim to reduce suicidal behaviours
- Data on suicide attempts (SA) was obtained from the participating eight regions in Germany, Hungary, Ireland and Portugal
- Suicide attempts were registered through hospital admissions. Data on the nature of suicidal intent was collected via retrospective analysis of patient records or via interview
- Suicidal intent was measured based on the clinical judgement of the assessor using the Feuerlein scale. Different levels of Suicidal Intent were classified as:
 - **Non-Habitual Deliberate Self-Harm (DSH)**
 - **Suicidal Pause (SP)**
 - **Suicidal Gesture (SG)**
 - **Serious Suicide Attempt (SSA)**
- A standardised questionnaire for the registration of SA and a codebook listing the associated variables was employed by all regions
- χ^2 -tests, Binary Logistic Regression and Multinomial Logistic Regression were used to analyse gender differences in intent for age group, country and method of suicide attempt

Results

- Significant associations between suicidal intent and gender ($p < 0.001$) were identified
- Male SA were rated as SSA significantly more often than female SA ($p < 0.001$), and female SA were rated as SP ($p \leq 0.02$) and SG ($p < 0.001$) significantly more frequently than males. There was no significant difference between the genders in DSH



- A significant difference in suicidal intent was found for gender in Hungary, Ireland and Portugal. No significant difference was found in Germany between gender and intent ($p = 0.37$)



- There was a significant association between age and intent within both males (mean age of attempters rated as [SG < SSA, DSH]; $p < 0.001$) and females (mean age of attempters rated as [SSA > DSH]; $p < 0.001$)

- A significant interaction effect between gender and age group regarding suicide intent was identified ($p = .014$)
- An analysis of suicide methods revealed that in the most utilised method of SA (poisoning by drugs, N = 3542), SSA was rated significantly more for males, and DSH and SG significantly more for females ($p = .0041$; suicidal intent x gender)
- The odds of being rated as a SSA was more likely for a German male, over 45 years ($p < .001$), whereas the odds of being rated as a DSH increased for Portuguese females, under 45 years of age ($p < .001$)

Limitations

- This study only involves cases of SA that were registered through hospital admissions
- There were a large number of excluded cases due to missing data

Conclusion

- Male suicide attempts are generally more serious than female suicide attempts, even within most utilised method of choice
- Findings call for the introduction of standardized assessments of suicidal intent which would inform the appropriate clinical management of patients who attempt suicide
- Results encourage the emphasis on gender when conducting research on suicidal behaviours
- Findings have practical implications which may guide policy makers and health services to implement gender-targeted prevention and intervention measures

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