

ABSTRACT

Despite alarmingly high suicide rate in Sri Lanka, research on the subject and services available to patients at risk are scanty.

This study attempts to find out demographic data of patients admitted with deliberate self poisoning to the General Hospital, Colombo; psycho-social management practices of these patients in general medical wards; attitudes and knowledge about Deliberate self poisoning among doctors who manage them, and their perceived training needs.

This descriptive study consists of two parts. Part 1 examines a randomly selected sample of 276 case notes from the Record Room, General Hospital, Colombo, from 1st January 1993 to 31st December 1993. Information was extracted using a structured format. Information extracted were demographic data - age, sex, ethnicity, marital status, occupation; assessments done in the medical wards- method used for deliberate self poisoning, past psychiatric history, past medical history, behaviour in the ward, mood, past suicidal attempt and precipitating factors; Outcome of admitted patients, and duration of stay in ward. Assessments were rated using the scale used by Black and Creed in the assessment of self poisoning by psychiatrists and junior medical staff.

Part 2 of the study was conducted in December 1993 and January 1994 using a self administered questionnaire administered to doctors of medical wards, medical intensive care unit and medical officers of the accident and emergency service. Questionnaire consists of 14 items. Four questions were designed to test the knowledge on deliberate self poisoning in Sri Lanka. Ten questions and statements were adopted from Patel's study on attitudes towards self poisoning. These questions and items examined attitudes and training needs. Response rate from the medical section was 62% and overall response rate was 69%.

A pilot study was carried out. Statistical comparisons were carried out using Epi-info version 6.02 programme to obtain z and p values.

Results showed, in the year 1993, poisoning patients constitute 0.7% of hospital admissions. Referral rate to psychiatrists was 4%. There is a female preponderance (Female:Male ratio of 1.2;1) in the study sample. Majority were between 15 to 44 years. A variety of substances found in urban households were used as poisonous agents by this group. Overall record keeping was poor. Ethnicity had been totally neglected. Marital status and occupation were recorded only in 14% and 12% respectively. Overall quality of assessments were poor in the areas assessed, but comparatively medical history had been recorded fully

than other areas. There were no statistically significant factors found leading to referral to psychiatrists except the assessment of precipitating factors. Doctors who responded to the questionnaire had basic knowledge on deliberate self harm in Sri Lanka. Majority of them felt these patients should be referred to a psychiatrist. These doctors felt deliberate self poisoning patients receive least sympathy as compared to traditional medical illnesses, by themselves and by general medical staff. Two thirds of the responders felt deliberate self harm patients should be dealt with by the general physician. Responders felt that internship training and undergraduate teaching are good ways of getting information regarding deliberate self harm.