Suicidality, interpersonal trauma and cultural diversity:
a review of the literature

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Abstract

There are substantial bodies of literature focusing on suicide and interpersonal trauma, and on suicide across cultures. There is also a growing body of knowledge relating to interpersonal trauma across cultures. However, there is a marked gap in the literature that brings these three areas together. Studies that specifically investigate the prevalence of suicidality in relation to experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault and childhood abuse in a cross-cultural context are indeed scant. Moreover, inconsistencies in data collection and reporting and considerable variability in results among the few existing studies highlight substantial methodological limitations and definitional differences in the research. The identification of at-risk groups is thus hampered, as is an examination of possible risk and protective factors. What is clear is that interpersonal trauma and suicide are linked in significant and complex ways. What is less evident is how culture mediates this inter-relationship. It is suggested that gender and cultural biases in suicide research may well account for our limited understandings in this area. Implications for practice include the need for alternative research perspectives and more inclusive frameworks that promote greater cross-discipline dialogue and intersectoral collaboration. There is thus ample scope for further research in this area so as to elucidate the implications for suicide prevention, intervention and postvention work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Keywords

suicide, suicidality, culture, interpersonal trauma, domestic violence, sexual assault, childhood abuse, mental health