

Frequency and Characteristics of Suicide "warners" in a Sample of Suicide Victims From Greece

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Introduction. Suicide completers have often communicated their intention to die or their deep desperation to their loved ones.

Methods. We retrospectively collected data on the suicide victims of the period 2007-2009 from the Athens Greater Area and completed psychological autopsy questionnaires after phone interviews with the victims' relatives. The specific question was: 'Has your relative expressed to you his/her suffering or the intention to end his/her life the six months prior to the suicide?'

Results. Data on this parameter were collected for 248 victims -out of a total of 335. 121 of them (48.8%) had verbally communicated their intention to die -or their immense suffering- to their relatives. Suicide 'warners' used phrases indicating extreme desperation being often very descriptive about their intentions. They were older ($p < 0.001$), more often had positive psychiatric history ($p = 0.004$) or were physically ill ($p = 0.005$) in comparison to 'non-warners'. Differences regarding sex, nationality, marital status, previous attempts, suicide note-leaving, completed suicide method and hospitalization for physical illness the year prior to the suicide were not statistically significant among the two groups. A limitation of our study is that we interviewed only one relative for every case. It is probable that the suicidal feelings could have been communicated to another relative instead, therefore rising the number of suicide 'warners'.

Conclusions. Relatives are keen observers of the suicidal feelings of their loved ones, a piece of information that health professionals should not miss. This fact, coupled with the particular characteristics of the suicide 'warners', could provide valuable insights for suicide prevention.