Suicide Attempts and Anxiety Disorders

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Researchers examined suicide attempts among a group of individuals diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, whom they followed for up to 12 years. Six percent of this group made a suicide attempt at some point in the study. The authors identified factors that increased suicide risk among this group, finding evidence that “mood disorders and past history of suicide attempts are the most powerful predictors of a future suicide attempt” in people experiencing anxiety disorders. They recommend that clinicians evaluate patients with anxiety disorders for mood disorders (e.g., depression) as well as for a history of suicide attempts. Both major and intermittent depressive disorders were found to raise the risk for suicide attempts in people with anxiety disorders, independent of their history of past suicide attempts.

Neither physical health nor general social and work functioning was found to add to the predictive value of mood disorders (i.e., ill health or poor psychosocial functioning did not significantly increase suicide risk among people already experiencing co-existing mood and anxiety disorders). Neither the type of anxiety disorder (e.g., generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social phobia, or agoraphobia) nor the presence of more than one type of anxiety disorder seemed to affect suicide risk. However, in univariate analysis, the following variables were all found to be significantly associated with increased suicide risk: post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, intermittent depressive disorder, epilepsy, pain, and poor work and social functioning.
