The Impact of Physical Pain on Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors

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A meta-analysis of 31 studies confirmed that “physical pain is a consistent risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behaviors” and is associated with increased levels of a wish to die, current and lifetime suicidal ideation, suicide plans, suicide attempts, and suicide deaths.

The authors pointed out that, although their analysis confirmed previous findings that pain is a risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behaviors, additional research on this topic is needed. They suggested that there might be important differences between the impact of chronic and acute pain on suicidal thoughts and behaviors and that different types of pain—such as medically unexplained pain—may play different roles in suicide risk. The authors also suggested that more information is needed on (1) risk factors that could exacerbate the impact of chronic pain on suicide risk, (2) the relationship between physical and psychiatric disorders, and (3) how reactions to physical pain affect suicide risk and how these reactions vary by culture.


About Suicide: Suicidal Thoughts and Behavior, Risk and Protective Factors