



Suicide Attempt Survivor Perspectives on Mental Health Care

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Suicide attempt survivors can provide a valuable perspective on the factors that contribute to positive experiences with mental health care services. They can also offer important recommendations for system improvements.

Researchers reviewed the narratives of 96 suicide attempt survivors whose personal stories of suicidality appeared on the Live Through This website. Live Through This is a project that collects the personal stories of attempt survivors to increase public understanding of suicidal experiences. The researchers identified factors that contributed to positive and negative experiences with mental health care.

Most of the narratives (93.7%) described using mental health services and most (74.4%) described having both positive and negative experiences in treatment. Positive experiences included provider-related factors, like a strong therapeutic alliance, and treatment-related factors, like therapies that offer new perspectives, effective psychiatric medications, and evidence-based services. Other positive factors included having support from family members or friends.

Negative experiences in care were due to provider issues, like poor collaboration or feeling shamed or belittled, and infrastructure issues, like limited access or cost and poor follow-up coordination. Treatment-related issues were also a factor, such as negative experiences with medications and perceptions that treatment was ineffective. While very few narratives offered recommendations for improving care, several suggested that connecting with other attempt survivors may be beneficial.

Mental health care for suicide attempt survivors may be improved by following evidence-based practices for treatment, encouraging family and friend involvement in care, and offering opportunities for survivors to connect with the lived experience community.

Hom, M. A., Albury, E. A., Gomez, M. M., Christensen, K., Stanley, I. H., Stage, D.'R. L., & Joiner, T. E. (2019). Suicide attempt survivors' experiences with mental health care services: A mixed methods study. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. Advance online publication. doi.org/10.1037/pro0000265

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