Suicide and Epilepsy

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A study found that the annual rate of suicide among people with epilepsy was 22 percent higher than that of the general population, and that people with epilepsy who died by suicide were twice as likely to use poison as people without epilepsy. The authors recommended that (1) health care providers screen people with epilepsy for depression and treat them appropriately, (2) caregivers of people with epilepsy learn to recognize and respond to mental health crises, and (3) health care providers and caregivers work together to reduce access to harmful substances among people with epilepsy who have attempted suicide or show signs of suicidal ideation.

This study used data from the 17 states included in the National Violent Death Reporting System from 2003 to 2011. It estimated that 1.2 percent of the people aged 10 and older who died by suicide had epilepsy and that the average annual suicide rate of individuals with epilepsy was 16.89/100,000. Poison was used by 38 percent of people with epilepsy who died by suicide, compared to 17 percent of the general population. Of the people with epilepsy who died by poison-associated suicide, six percent used anti-epileptic drugs, which the authors pointed out was much lower than estimates made by other studies. Among people with epilepsy, women aged 30 to 39 and men aged 50 to 59 were most at risk for dying by suicide.