

Unemployment and Suicidal behavior: a preliminary study

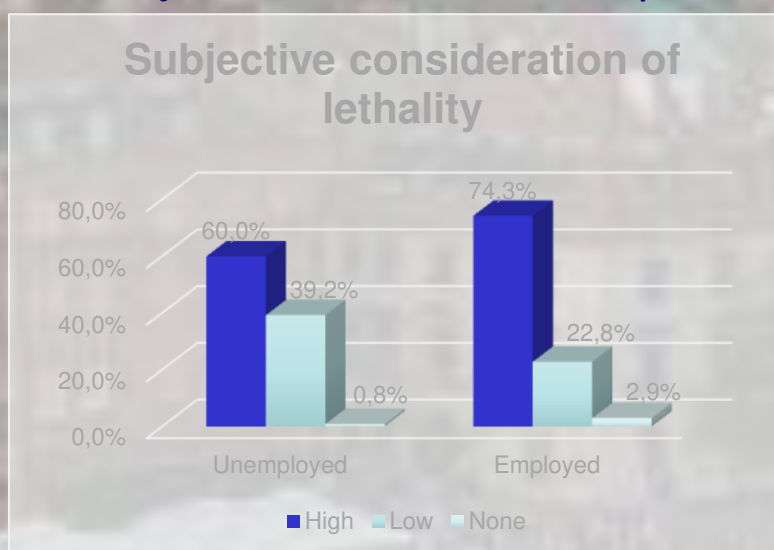
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Suicidal behavior is determined and influenced by several micro and macro factors. Many studies of the last decade, following the European economic crisis begun in 2008, have found a correlation between unemployment and the suicide rate. Stuckler and colleagues (2009) with a European population-based study demonstrated that an increase of 1% of the unemployment rate corresponds with an increase of 0.79% of suicides in individuals under 65, arguing that the occupational factor, alone, can influence the suicide rate, regardless of all the other micro and macro factors. Conversely, according to Preti and Miotto (1999), official statistics would be affected by a marked overestimation of the occupational factor by media, relatives and authorities, in attempt to justify a so thorny and inexplicable event. Indeed, important international researches affirm that the occupational status should be considered a precipitant factor rather than the main cause of suicide in individuals affected by physical or mental disease. Moreover, according to these studies, a stable relationship would be a protective factor toward the risk of Suicide due to difficult socioeconomic situations. In light of this, the present study aims to examine the impact of the occupational status in individuals who attempted suicide and to compare individuals with and without employment based on demographics and on a set of variables related to the suicide attempt.

METHODS 282 subjects who attempted suicide and came to the emergency room of the hospitals involved in the study (Cesena, Chieti, Bologna, Modena) were recruited and divided in two age/gender-matched groups (141 employed vs 141 unemployed). Each group was composed of 74 F and 57 M, and aged from 16 to 63, with a mean age of 42 (SD = 10.81).

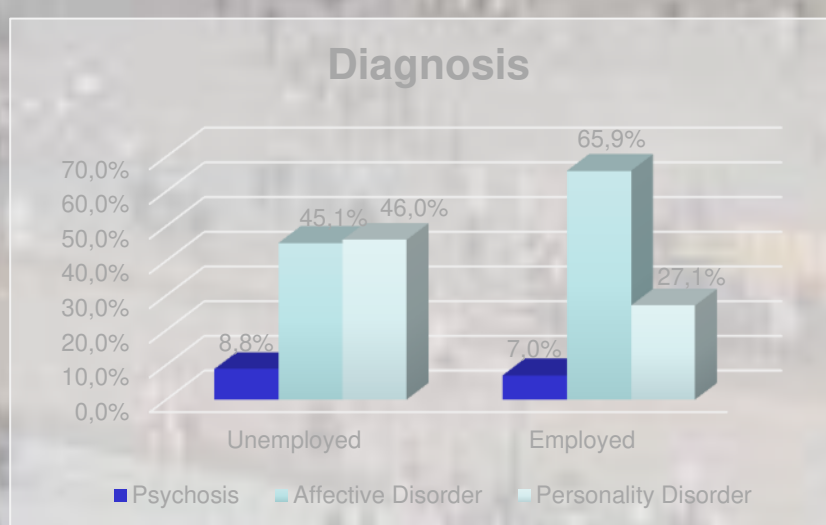
Demographics and a set of clinical variables related to the suicide attempt were collected, including the intentionality, the lethality, the consideration of the lethality in the patient's point of view, other suicidal behaviors in anamnesis (none, 1,2 or 2+), the alcohol abuse or addiction. The lethality of suicide attempts was measured using the items of the scale "Risk" of the Intent Score Scale and was considered high with a score of 3 or more, low with a score of 2 or less. The intentionality and the subjective consideration of the lethality were rated as high, low or absent based on the clinical session with the patient. Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated, using a set of crosstable and chi-squared test for the variables related to the suicide attempt, with a significance level fixed at .05, two-tailed. Unemployed (U) and Employed (E) individuals were compared in order to understand whether the occupational status can entail differences in intentionality, objective and subjective lethality and in the anamnesis of suicide attempts, taking into account the effect of the marital status. Then, the relation between occupation and alcohol abuse/addiction was examined. Moreover, the relation between the occupational status and the diagnosis (affective disorder, psychosis, personality disorder) was explored.

RESULTS A significant difference between E and U was found in the subjective consideration of the lethality of the suicide attempt ($\chi^2_2 = 9.50$; $p = .009$). E tend to consider higher the lethality of their suicide attempt than U.

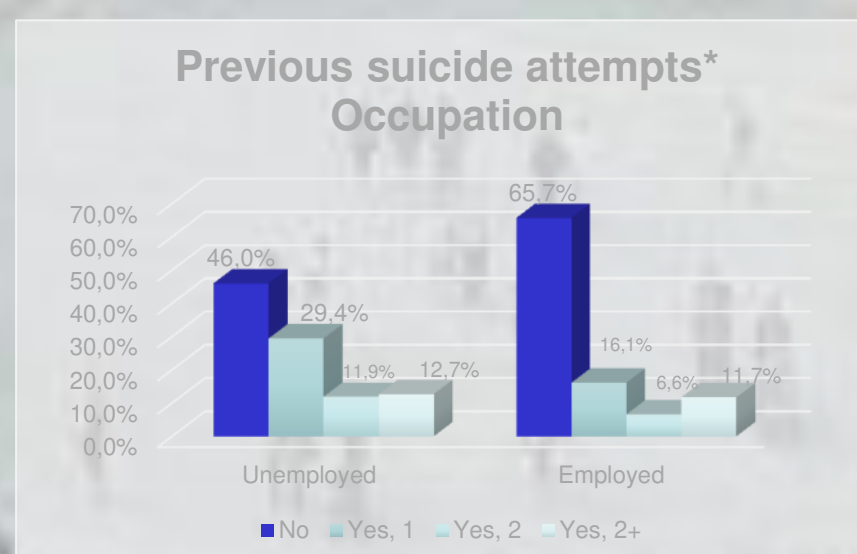
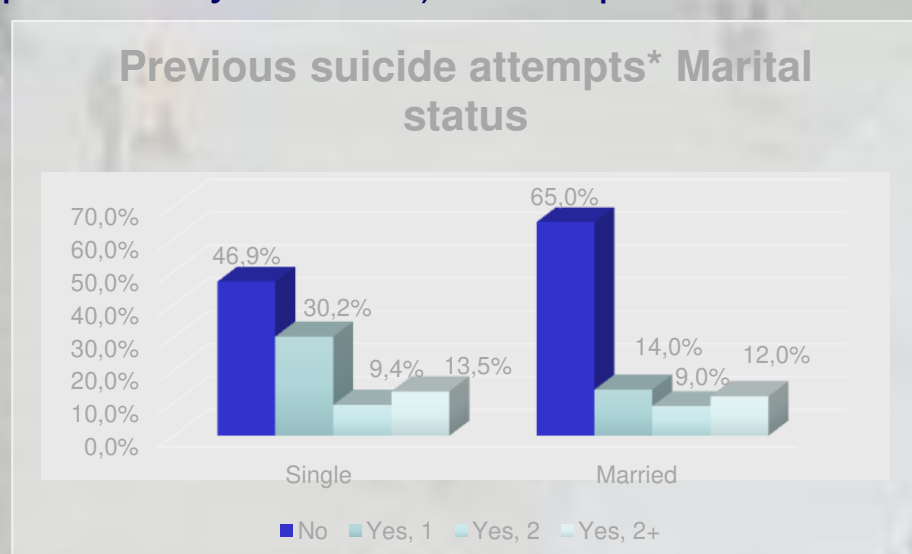


This difference was confirmed even considering the marital status ($\chi^2_1 = 5.86$; $p = .016$). Specifically, married and employed individuals tend to consider higher the lethality of their suicide attempt.

No differences were found between U and E for what concerns the objective lethality and the intentionality of suicide attempts.



A significant difference was found in clinical diagnosis ($\chi^2_2 = 10.86$; $p = .004$). Individuals with personality disorders are more frequently unemployed, whereas individuals with affective disorder tend to have a job.



CONCLUSIONS

In our sample, in line with Stuckler (2009), unemployment seems to be a risk factor for multiple suicide attempts and shows a greater influence than the protective factor of a stable relationship which, even having a positive effect, can't neutralize the occupational factor.

We found that U tend to consider low the lethality of their suicide attempts. This data may be due to an understatement of the risk as, in our sample, suicide attempts are related with alcohol intoxication and multiple suicide attempts (Joiner).

Moreover, U showed to be alcohol addicted more frequently than E. The relation between these factors may be bidirectional: the job lost can lead to a decrease in self-esteem, deflection of mood and alcohol abuse/addiction just like the alcohol addiction can affect the health and the ability to maintain a job.

More studies are needed to understand the impact of other possible confounding factors.

