

Young black men are at higher risk of suicide than their white counterparts

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A study examining suicide rates and pre-suicide clinical symptoms in people from different ethnic groups, has found that rates of suicide vary between ethnic groups with young black men aged 13 to 24 at highest risk.

The research, published today in the medical journal *Psychiatric Services*, suggests that symptoms traditionally associated with suicide are less common among some ethnic groups, and cannot be relied upon for predicting suicide.

Led by Kam Bhui, Professor of Cultural Psychiatry and Epidemiology at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, the study looked at the four largest ethnic groups in England and Wales – black Caribbean; black African; South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), and white. A comparison between ethnic groups was made of the symptoms that clinicians consider increase the risk of suicide: suicidal ideas, delusions and hallucinations, depressive symptoms, deliberate self-harm, emotional distress, hopelessness, and hostility.

Researchers examined data from the National Confidential Inquiry (NCI), which receives data on all potential suicides from the United Kingdom's Office of National Statistics, and investigates suicides within 12 months of contact with mental health services in England and Wales.

The black African and black Caribbean people who committed suicide suffered from high levels of delusions and hallucinations and deliberate

self-harm, but had low rates of other clinical indicators of suicide at the last contact they had with a mental health services professional.

Schizophrenia is the most common diagnosis among black Africans and black Caribbeans who commit suicide, and they are less likely to have suicidal ideas and depression than the other groups.

South Asian people who committed suicide had high levels of hopelessness, psychotic symptoms, and depression, but low levels of suicidal thoughts compared with the white group. Immediate risk of suicide was perceived to be highest among white people.

Suicides within 24 hours of professional contact were most often reported among black Caribbeans, and suicide within one to seven days was most commonly found among black Africans.

The study found high levels of suicide among black African and black Caribbean men aged 13 to 24, living in England and Wales. Clinicians reported that suicide was preventable in 31 per cent of black Caribbeans who committed suicide, and in 18 per cent of South Asians who committed suicide.

The findings offer advice for future strategies and research to prevent suicides. Professor Bhui said: “Suicide is proportionally more common among young black African and black Caribbean men. Untreated psychosis and ethnic differences in symptoms that usually predict suicide may explain these findings, especially the suggestion by clinicians that a third of suicide in the black Caribbean group were preventable. These findings argue for a more mature and informed cultural study of suicide and self harm, alongside more effective engagement and culturally appropriate interventions.”

Source: Queen Mary, University of London

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