Abstract

Problem statement-Psychological Autopsy (PA) has been widely used to elicit psychiatric diagnoses and psychosocial risk factors leading to the suicide deaths. However, the unavailability of suicide victims for direct inquiry makes it intangible to demonstrate the validity of the PA. An indirect check on its validity would be to interview suicide attempters with a range of psychiatric diagnoses and psychosocial risk factors, and then for another interviewer to conduct parallel interviews with the proxy-informants. This is known as the 'Best-estimate methodology'.

Research question-To exam the validity of 'Best-estimate methodology' for making psychiatric diagnoses and determining potential psychosocial risk factors in a suicide attempters' cohort.

Materials and methods-71 subjects and their proxy-informants were interviewed separately by two trained psychiatrists to obtain the subjects' SCID diagnosis and other clinical data including socio-demographic characteristics, suicide profiles, social network, physical health, service utilization and stressful life events. The validity of information provided by the proxy-informants was assessed by sensitivity, specificity, percentage of agreement and kappa statistic.

Results-The level of agreement on psychiatric diagnoses was substantial (kappa = 0.66). On other psychosocial risk factors the level of agreement was dependent on

domains. Level of agreement was substantial for objective and "externalizing" characteristics such as social network and psychiatric diagnoses. Modest level of agreement was found for subjective or "internalizing" characteristics such as perceived well-being in general health.

Conclusions and implications-Results support the validity of the best-estimate methodology for assessing psychosocial risk factors and making psychiatric diagnosis among suicide attempters. The results also indirectly shred light on the validity of psychological autopsy study. These observations have potential implications in planning for the semi-structured interview used in future PA study, with more questions being focused on objective and "externalizing" characteristics.

Keywords-Best-estimate methodology, psychological autopsy, validity

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