

A Contemporary Meta-Narrative Realist Review of Population-Level Suicide Prevention Strategies

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Abstract

Introduction: Suicide is a multifactorial and worldwide phenomenon that represents a significant public health burden. While there is a strong evidence base for a variety of individual-level suicide interventions [1], few studies have evaluated suicide prevention from a global- or population-level perspective.

Aim: The aim of this review was to identify and collate evidence on population-level strategies for suicide prevention.

Methods: A three-pronged search strategy was employed to identify publications relating to population-level suicide interventions; databases accessed include PubMed, CINAHL, Embase and Scopus. After assessment for eligibility and data quality, articles were coded into one of three interventional categories: means restriction, education and surveillance, and therapeutic intervention. Primary outcomes for each intervention included efficacy and feasibility, with additional qualitative data extracted on cultural and demographic factors. The resulting dataset was presented in the form of a meta-narrative review.

Results: 1564 unique records were identified through the initial database search. Of these, 75 articles were included in the final study, encompassing 28 unique interventions and over 50 countries. There was strong support for means restriction in international suicide prevention, including firearm legislation and suicide barrier initiatives [2]. Education and surveillance were similarly substantiated, with gatekeeper training and risk stratification programs demonstrating the greatest potential for sustainable global implementation [3]. While there was limited evidence on therapeutic intervention and delivery, mobilization of psychiatrists and mental health services may help address the disproportionate suicide burden experienced by disadvantaged communities [4]. Notably, the study was limited by a bias towards retrospective English-language data. Nonetheless, initial results present a number of strategies with promising efficacy and feasibility in global suicide prevention.

Conclusion: This review outlined several data-driven options and recommendations for population-level suicide prevention. Common elements of successful suicide prevention strategies include a multifaceted approach, as well as selection of an appropriate target population.

References:

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