

Lived experiences and needs of university students who have supported or are continuing to support a person following a suicide attempt or experiencing suicidal ideation

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Background

Offering better support to suicidal individuals is constantly focused on by healthcare researchers and professionals but their informal carers need support too, especially those students who are looking for a good education.

Research Question

What are the experiences and the needs of university students who were supporting or are continuing to support a person following a suicide attempt or experiencing suicidal ideation.

Aim

To present the systematic literature search and review the relevant literature.

Objective

To discuss the available literature about the experiences and needs of university students who support suicidal individuals.

Methodology

- A systematic search strategy has been developed and utilised to search relevant literature on five online databases within EBSCO: MEDLINE, CINAHL, PsycArticles, PsycInfo and AMED.
- Reference lists of the selected articles were searched as well as grey literature by using a mixture of keywords.
- The final number of the relevant academic articles was 16.



Results

Two main themes and four sub-themes identified from the literature and they are as follow:

Caregiver burden

Physical and mental health:

- Physical and psychological symptoms have been reported by those who support a person with an attempt of suicide as a result of the stress and the hyper-vigilance that is required to manage suicide risk (Chessick et al., 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2014).
- They also reported feelings like helplessness and guilt, believing that they were not providing proper support to their suicidal significant others (McLaughlin et al., 2014).
- Parents of those who attempted suicide have struggled with psychological distress, depression, anxiety, sleep problems, Inability to work and suicidal ideation (Buus et al., 2014)

Quality of life:

- Life issues like education, work and social commitments put much pressure on carers of suicidal people because they conflict with the nature of care that they provide to their suicidal people (Owens et al., 2011).
- There are observable impacts on those carers like household disruption, financial strain and impaired interpersonal relationships (Chessick et al., 2007).

Needs and Support

Needs of support:

- Informal carers of people with mental health issues including suicide have expressed a need for psychoeducation, respite, emotional and practical support and inclusion in the therapeutic process and hospitalization of their support recipient in many ways (McLaughlin et al., 2016).

Supportive services:

- Psychological interventions that included informal carers have been mainly developed for the benefit of suicidal people (Robinson et al., 2018).
- One intervention that targeted families of suicidal individuals has led to a reduction in carers' burden, distress, and anxiety (Rajalin et al., 2009) but a psychoeducational intervention did not result in any change in carers' stress or burden of care (Sun et al., 2014).

Outcome

- No literature was identified regarding either university students' experiences of supporting a suicidal person or an assessment of their needs.
- The need to explore students' experiences of supporting a suicidal person as well as their support needs as carers, is important in enhancing the support services offered to students by universities and healthcare systems.

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