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CHARACTERISTICS OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS IN ANOREXIA AND BULIMIA NERVOSA :
A CASE-CONTROL STUDY

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Objective: People with eating disorders (ED) are at high risk for suicidal behavior. Among different ED, anorexia nervosa (AN) has the highest rates of completed suicide whereas suicide attempt rates are similar or lower than in bulimia nervosa (BN). Attempted suicide is a key predictor of completed suicide, thus this mismatch is intriguing. We sought to explore whether the clinical characteristics of suicidal acts differ between suicide attempters with AN, BN or without an ED.

Method: Case-control study in cohort of suicide attempters (n=1563). Forty-four patients with AN and 71 with BN were compared with 235 non-ED attempters matched for sex, age and education, using interview measures of suicidal intent and severity.

Results: AN patients were more likely to have made a serious attempt (OR=3.4, 95% CI 1.4-7.9), with a higher expectation of dying (OR=3.7, 95% CI 1.1-13.5), and an increased risk of lethality (OR=3.4, 95% CI 1.2-9.6). BN patients did not differ from the control group.

Conclusion: There are distinct features of suicide attempts in AN. This may explain the higher suicide rates in AN. Deaths from suicide in AN may not be the result simply of their greater physical frailty.