

# Disorders and suicidal behaviour in South Africa.

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## Abstract:

There is relatively little data on the relationship between lifetime mental disorders and suicidal behaviour in low and middle income countries. This study examines the relationship between lifetime mental disorders, and subsequent suicide ideation, plans, and suicide attempts in South Africa. **METHOD:** A national survey of 4185 South African adults was conducted using the World Health Organization Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) to generate psychiatric diagnoses and suicidal behaviour. Bivariate, multivariate and discrete-time survival analyses were employed to investigate the associations between mental disorders and subsequent suicide ideation, plans, and attempts. **RESULTS:** Sixty-one percent of people who seriously considered killing themselves at some point in their lifetime reported having a prior DSM-IV disorder. Mental disorders predict the onset of suicidal ideation, but have weaker effects in predicting suicide plans or attempts. After controlling for comorbid mental disorders, PTSD was the strongest predictor of suicidal ideation and attempts. There is a relationship between number of mental disorders and suicidal behaviour, with comorbidity having significantly sub-additive effects. **CONCLUSION:** Consistent with data from the developed world, mental disorders are strong predictors of suicidal behaviour, and these associations are more often explained by the prediction of ideation, rather than the prediction of attempts amongst ideators. This suggests some universality of the relevant mechanisms underlying the genesis of suicidal thoughts, and the progression to suicide attempts.