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Patients with epilepsy: relationship between their psycho-emotional status and suicidal behaviour

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Background and Aim: The studies show that epileptic patients (EP) have a stronger tendency toward suicide than healthy people. It should be noted that family doctors are rarely interested in these patients' emotional status and seldom ask about their suicidal ideation. The aim of this study is to assess the relationship between psycho-emotional status of EP and their suicidal behaviour.

Methods: The cross-sectional study was performed in the Epilepsy Centre of Vilnius University Hospital and in two outpatient Centers in 2013-2015. 966 patients with epilepsy (average age 36.35 ± 14.12) were interviewed. The socio-demographic, clinical (duration of epilepsy, frequency of seizures) data including questions about suicidal ideation and attempts were analyzed. Beck Depression Inventory Scale (1961) and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (1983) was used.

Results: Only 359 (37.2%) EP were working or studying. 670 (69.4%) suffered from epilepsy for more than 5 years. The average seizure frequency was 6 times per month. 481 (49.8%) had anxiety, which in 282 (79.4%) of them could be described as moderate or severe. 305 (31.6%) had depression, 236 (24.4%) of them - moderate or severe. Every fifth of all EP had suicidal ideation ($n=199$; 20.6 %). 66 (6.8%) individuals admitted having tried to commit a suicide. The suicidal ideation occurred more in EP with moderate anxiety ($\chi^2=90.35$; $p<0.001$), attempts to commit a suicide were significantly more frequent in EP with severe anxiety ($\chi^2=46.8$; $p<0.001$). Suicidal ideation and attempts to commit a suicide were prevalent in EP with moderate depression.

Conclusions: The symptoms of moderate and severe anxiety in epileptic patients dominate more than moderate and severe depression. Suicidal ideation was more prevalent among people with moderate symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. Suicidal attempts were found to be more frequent in those with severe symptoms of anxiety and moderate symptoms of depression.