How Many People With Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder Commit Suicide?

(Updated November 2014)

- The *lifetime risk* of suicide among individuals with *schizophrenia* is about 5 percent. Earlier studies which reported it to be 10 percent were in error because those studies included data only for younger individuals with schizophrenia, among whom the suicide rate is higher. Thus, most individuals with schizophrenia who commit suicide do so early in the course of the disease; as the remaining individuals get older, suicide is much less common. P. Palmer, M. Pankratz, S. Bostwick. The lifetime risk of suicide in schizophrenia. Archives of General Psychiatry. 2005; 62: 247-253.

- Support for this lower suicide rate also comes from a 38-year study of all individuals with schizophrenia and related disorders in Sweden. At the end of 5 years following their first diagnosis only 2.3% of the men and 1.5% of the women had suicided. S. Fazel et al. Violent crime, suicide, and premature mortality in patients with schizophrenia and related disorders: a 38-year total population study in Sweden. Lancet Psychiatry. 2014; 1:44-54.


- Known risk factors for suicide among individuals with serious mental illness include depressive symptoms; substance abuse; awareness of illness (i.e. absence of anosognosia); a history of violent behavior; and poor adherence to medication. For example, a study in Kentucky found that only 2 of 28 individuals with schizophrenia who committed suicide had evidence in their blood of having taken antipsychotic medication. Thus, 93 percent of them were not being treated. L. Shields, D. Hunsaker, D. Hunsaker. Schizophrenia and suicide: a 10-year review of Kentucky Medical Examiner cases. Journal of Forensic Sciences. 2007;52: 930-937.

- A study of 187 individuals with schizophrenia who attempted or committed suicide reported that “two positive symptoms (suspiciousness and delusions) were more severe among successful suicides,” suggesting inadequate treatment. W. Fenton, TH. McGlashan, BJ et al. Symptoms, subtype, and suicidality in patients with schizophrenia spectrum disorders. American Journal of Psychiatry 1997;154:199-204.
Multiple European studies have also reported that the failure to adequately treat individuals with serious mental illnesses increases the risk for suicide.


