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Suicidal Behavior in Immigrant Populations

A. Hankir¹, R. Zaman², D. Bhugra³

¹Psychiatry, Bedfordshire Center for Mental Health Research in association with Cambridge University, Bedford, United Kingdom ; ²Psychiatry, Cambridge University, Cambridge, United Kingdom ; ³Psychiatry, King's College London, London, United Kingdom

Culture is a dynamic and complex phenomenon that can affect how vulnerable or resilient people are responding to psychiatric disease, trauma and other factors that can precipitate suicidal behavior. Some cultures glorify suicide (i.e. historically the notorious Japanese Kamikaze pilots and more recently the radicalized suicide bombers with their own interpretations of religious scripture and ideologies); others prohibit it (i.e. certain religious groups such as Islam and Catholicism).

Immigrants, particularly refugees, have long been treated as a stigmatized and socially excluded people from their destination culture. This and other issues such as poverty, acculturation stress and unemployment that immigrants may encounter can have profound effects on their mental health so much so that they may resort to tragically ending their lives with their own hands.

The 'idioms of distress' that immigrants use may not necessarily match diagnostic criteria and although culture is being homogenized by globalization, there are no universal models of psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy for the treatment of mental illness that may be heralded by suicidal behavior. To summarize succinctly: one size does *not* fit all. Mental healthcare providers need to receive training in cultural competency in order to effectively assess and treat an immigrant who may present in a crisis.

The focus of this presentation is suicidal behavior in migrant groups. We will discuss and analyse the social and cultural factors that influence suicidal behavior in this population. We will also identify the barriers to treatment and early intervention, prevention and management strategies targeted at this specific group.