A Study on the Degree of Suicidal Ideation in Old People

Yeojin Lee¹ Eunkwang Yoo²

¹Dept. of Nursing, Graduate School, Hanyang University
milbat33@empal.com
²College of Nursing, Hanyang University
222 Wangsimni-ro, Seongdong-gu, Seoul Korea
Corresponding Author:glory@hanyang.ac.kr

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the degree of suicidal ideation in the elderly and provide the basic data for finding intervention methods in order to prevent the aged from committing a suicide. The subjects who participated in this study were 1,656 individuals aged 65 years who had participated in the Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (2009). As research methodology, this study identified the experience of suicidal ideation among subjects and analyzed the degree of suicidal ideation depending on general characteristics, living habits, subjective health characteristics, and mental health state. As a result, it was found that the number of the elderly who had thought that he wanted to die over the past one year was 458 individuals (27.7%). Female in terms of gender and those in their 70s in terms of age thought about committing a suicide the most. Also, the lower the education level, unless they involve in economic activities, and unless they have their spouses, the higher they tend to think of committing suicide. Suicidal ideation depending on subjective health characteristics was higher in the group who recognized that their health status was bad and the group who felt pain and inconvenience, and suicidal ideation depending on mental health state was higher in the group who felt most stressed, the group who experienced depression, and the group who did not take adequate sleep. Also, suicidal ideation was higher in the group who had weight change for the past one year. Taken together, it is suggested that it is necessary to have intervention measures for improving the level of subjective health recognition among the elderly and reduce their pain and inconvenience as well as for improving their mental health in order to prevent their suicide.

Keywords: the elderly, suicidal ideation

1 Introduction

The suicide rate of our country ranks 1st among the OECD countries. Suicide has emerged as a serious social issue in our society. The World Health Organization announced in 2014 that the suicide rate of our country was 116.2 per 0.1 million old people aged 70 years or higher, which is higher than 12.4 of global average. In partic-
ular, with the aging population, the number of elders to commit a suicide and the suicide rate are expected to increase consistently and so it is such a serious issue.

Previous studies on the characteristics of using the medical institutions in elders who committed a suicide reported that over 70% visited a primary treatment institution one month before suicide and one third of them visited a hospital a week before suicide [1].

The factors related to elderly suicide have been explained by deterioration of health, chronic disease, physical-mental disabilities, loss of job role, economic instability, reduction in the range of social relations, loss of spouse, family discord, and depressive symptoms [2][3]. Youth suicide tends to be accidental by a single factor such as pressure of school achievement and discord within the family or with a teacher, but elderly suicide is premeditated as a last choice to escape from the long-lasting pain of life rather than occurred suddenly [4]. To prevent elderly suicide, intensive prevention and intervention are necessary by identifying the characteristics of old people who are likely to have a high risk of suicide as well as taking universal preventive measures [5]. However, there is difficulty in identifying who are likely to commit a suicide exactly because in nature of suicide, the risk of suicide is investigated around families and surrounding people after suicide is already committed. For this reason, most of the previous studies examined the suicide related factors by using the alternative concept of suicidal ideation based on the relevance between suicidal acts [6].

In this respect, this study aims to identify the general characteristics, living habits, subjective health characteristics, and mental health state of the aged based on the data from the Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey with representativeness and reliability at the national and local-governmental levels, and provide the basic data for preventing elderly suicide.

2 Methodology

2.1 Study Design

This is a descriptive study designed to identify the degree of suicidal ideation depending on general characteristics, living habits, subjective health characteristics, and mental health state of the aged by using the data from the Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (2009) which was conducted nationwide in a large scale.

2.2 Subjects

The subjects who participated in this study are 1,656 individuals who responded to the question of whether they had ever thought about suicide or not among the old people aged 65 years or higher in the Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (2009) and had no missing values.
2.3 Instruments

In this study, the dependent variable is suicidal ideation in the elderly aged 65 years or higher. The experience of suicidal ideation was analyzed according to whether they had thought about suicide for the last one year. Independent variable was classified into threes: general characteristics, living habits, and subjective health characteristics and mental health state.

2.4 Data Collection

The Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey used in this study is based on the primitive data from Korea National Institute of Health. The Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey consists of health examination survey, health survey, and nutrition survey and Rolling Sampling Survey is introduced and conducted every year in household members aged one (1) year old in Korean age or higher among 4,600 households. This study used health survey findings and data of aging population aged 65 years or higher.

2.5. Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS WIN(ver 12.0) was used to identify the general characteristics, living habits, subjective health characteristics, and mental health state of the aged and the frequency and percentage of suicidal thinking and crossover analysis was conducted to identify ideal ideation depending on each variable.

3 Results

With respect to suicidal ideation, those who experienced suicidal thinking for the recent one year was 27.7% and in terms of age, those aged 70 to 79 years thought about suicide the most at 31.0%, followed by those aged 80 years or higher at 29.1% and those aged 65 to 69 years at 22.3%, which is significant statistically (p= .01). In terms of gender, male who thought about suicide was 16.8% and female 35.5%, which suggests that male thought about suicide more than female, which is significant statistically(p= .01). In education level, elementary school graduation or less was 33.4%, middle school graduation 16.8%, high school graduation 7.3%, and college graduation or higher 6.4%, which suggested that the lower the academic ability, the higher they tend to think more about suicide, which is significant statistically (p= .01). In level of income, high-medium income level and medium-low income level were 29.1% and 33.7%, respectively, which suggested that the degree that they thought about suicide was high, and high income level was 20.6%, which suggested that the degree that they thought about suicide was low (p= .01). In presence of a spouse, those who had a spouse was 36.5% and those who did not was 22.8%, which suggested that those who did not have a spouse thought more about suicide, which is significant statistically (p= .01).
In economic activity, those who involved in economic activity was 22.1% and those who did not involve in economic activity was 30.6%, which is significant statistically (p=.01). In subjective health characteristics, those who thought that their health state was ‘worse than normal’ was 39.5% and those who thought that their health state was ‘better than normal’ was 18.4%, which suggested that those who thought that their health state was ‘worse than normal’ thought about suicide more than those who thought that their health state was ‘better than normal’, which is significant statistically (p=.01). In pain and inconvenience, those who felt pain and inconvenience thought about suicide at 38.6% more than those who did not feel pain and inconvenience at 18.0%, which is significant statistically (p=.01). In stress, those who felt much stress thought about suicide at 52.7% more than those who felt stress a little at 19.5% (p=.01) and in depressive symptoms, those who experienced such symptoms thought about suicide at 65.2% more than those who did not at 17.5%, which is significant statistically (p=.01).

4 Conclusion

This paper is a study designed to make an attempt to identify the degree of suicidal ideation among old people by using the data from the Korea National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey and finds that 27.7% of the old population experienced suicidal ideation. In experience of suicidal ideation, female was higher than male in gender, those who had a lower academic ability were higher, those who did not involve in economic activity appeared higher, and those who did not have a spouse also appeared higher. Also, those who recognized that their subjective health state was bad and those who felt pain and inconvenience thought about suicide more than their counterparts. Taken together, it seems that it is necessary to intensify our efforts to give emotional support as well as treatment of illness in the elderly who suffer from physical illness and reduce pain and inconvenience and also improve their subjective health recognition level in our planning for the future elderly health management project. To produce effective solutions against elderly suicide, the information that can be used to identify the elderly who have suicidal risk factors should be provided with professionals or general people. It is also necessary to establish a systematic cooperation system to provide the community with programs and services to discover old people who are highly likely to commit a suicide and treat them director. This study is based on the alternative concept of suicidal ideation and thus further studies are required on attempting suicide.

References