Help-Seeking Behaviours Amongst B.C. University Students With Suicidal Plan and Intent

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Background
• Post-secondary students are at increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours1,2,7
• Mental health service utilization is limited amongst suicidal individuals1,2,7
• Perceived need for services, preference for self-management approaches, fear of hospitalization, and structural factors such as lack of time or monetary resources have been identified as key barriers to help-seeking amongst this population3,4,5,6,7

Objectives
• Identify general trends in suicidality amongst B.C. university students
• Understand help-seeking behaviours amongst university students at increased risk of suicide
• Examine the acceptance of an outreach approach to connect these students to counselling services

Methods
• Interim analysis was performed with 7574 responses from an ongoing, repeated cross-sectional student mental health and substance use survey administered weekly at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University
• Students who reported a suicide plan in the past 12 months and indicated that they were “likely” or “very likely” to act on it in the coming year were identified as a subpopulation at increased risk of suicide and flagged by the survey software
• This triggered the associated risk mitigation protocol to offer them an expedited appointment to university counselling services
• Anonymized risk mitigation protocol data was used to calculate the proportion of these students who provided their contact details and consented to be contacted by university counselling services

Results

| Prevalence of Lifetime and 12-Month Suicidal Ideation, Plan and Attempt |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Suicidal Ideation | 28.6% | 49.0% |
| Suicide Plan | 11.3% | 23.4% |
| Suicide Attempt | 1.0% | 6.5% |

0.8% of respondents (n=60) were flagged as high-risk for suicide by:
• reporting a 12-month suicide plan, and
• indicating that they were likely or very likely to act on it in the coming year

52% of them wanted to be connected to university counselling services when offered an expedited appointment

Discussion
• The prevalence of suicidal ideation, plan and attempt amongst B.C. university students is relatively high compared to international estimates in existing literature1,2
• 0.8% of all students surveyed were flagged for high-risk of suicide, revealing a small yet substantial proportion of students with imminent need of risk-assessment and mental health support
• Of this group, 70% reported not currently receiving mental health treatment, despite the vast majority of individuals acknowledging that they had an emotional or substance use problem
• Our survey’s risk mitigation protocol provides a targeted approach to outreach for students at increased risk of suicide, demonstrating that when prompted, approximately half of these students will accept connection to university health services
• Further research should explore potential protocol modifications to increase uptake and examine the effectiveness of this connection in providing care and improving mental health outcomes

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References