Car suicides: information from confirmed cases, Queensland, 1990 to 2007.

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Around the world, a substantial proportion of car-crashes are recognised as ‘hidden’ suicides. A possible explanation for why some suicide victims choose this method is that it can be used to mask their suicidal intent. Consequently, one of problems with car-suicides is that cases can be easily mistaken as accidents. This presentation seeks to progress understandings of those who used a car to suicide, by drawing on information from over 40 confirmed cases. Data for the project is derived from the Queensland Suicide Register, which contains information from Psychological Autopsies with next-of-kin, as well as police, toxicology and post-mortem reports. Analysis focused on life circumstances and events preceding the death, physical and mental illnesses, past suicidality, and indication of suicide ‘intent’ (e.g., suicide notes or statements). Results showed that a large proportion of car suicides experienced a number of life events immediately prior to the death, including relationship conflict, legal or criminal issues, and financial problems. A substantial number of suicide cases also reported current or past treatment for mental illness. These exploratory results indicate the need to improve the recording systems of car suicides. A checklist, or ‘grid’, of risk factors for police and ambulance officers is proposed as one method through which the identification and recording of car-suicides can be improved.