Suicides among the “mentally well”: A systematic analysis of past research

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While psychiatric diagnoses are seen to play a strong role in intentional-self harm, research indicates that an appreciable number of suicides occur in the absence of any diagnosable mental illness. Whether this indicates that the subjects are “mentally well” is a subject of debate, as some researchers suggest that these people may actually be suffering from sub-threshold mental conditions, which do not reach the full range or severity of symptoms needed for a psychiatric diagnosis. Our presentation will provide a review of the studies which address the topic of suicide occurring in those persons with either no diagnosed psychiatric disorder, or “sub threshold” disorders which do not reach the full criteria for a mental illness. The databases used for the search included: Pub Med, Web of Knowledge, Scopus and Proquest. Areas of particular interest were: psychiatric diagnoses, age, and gender. We also investigated the diagnostic classification system used in the study and the region in which it was conducted. The results of this review show that a substantial number of suicides do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for a mental illness. It is also worth noting that the study design, instrument used for diagnosis, and the region in which the study was conducted, had an influence on the study results. These findings highlight the potential methodological problems in studies on psychiatric conditions and suicide. Aside from this issue, our review study suggests that suicides can occur independently of any discernable mental illness.