

Anxiety Disorders and Suicidality in the National Comorbidity Survey

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Background:

- Associations between anxiety disorders and suicide have not been extensively studied, with the exception of panic disorder, which remains an area of controversy in the literature.
- Much of the controversy surrounding possible associations between anxiety disorders and suicide stems from the issue of comorbidity and its influence on these associations.

Objective:

- To examine the relationships between specific anxiety disorders and suicidal ideation or attempt when comorbidities are stringently controlled for.

Methods:

- Data were obtained from the National Comorbidity Survey (N=5,877) dataset.
- Two multivariate logistic regression analyses were performed, with suicidal ideation and suicide attempt as dependent variables. Independent variables were sociodemographics, lifetime mood, anxiety, substance use disorders, non-affective psychosis, antisocial personality disorder, and presence of 2 or more DSM-III-R diagnoses.

Table 1: Multiple logistic regression with lifetime suicidal ideation (n=754) as the dependent variable.

Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Lower 95% Limit OR	Upper 95% Limit OR
Agoraphobia without panic disorder	1.16	0.86	1.63
Generalized anxiety disorder	0.86	0.59	1.25
Panic disorder with or without agoraphobia	1.32	0.83	2.10
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*	2.53	1.89	3.49
Simple phobia	1.16	0.86	1.57
Social phobia	0.93	0.70	1.23
Major depression*	3.88	3.05	4.92

* = p<0.05; adjusted for age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, non-affective psychosis, antisocial personality disorder, bipolar disorder, & presence of 2 or more lifetime DSM-III-R diagnoses

Table 2: Multiple logistic regression with lifetime suicide attempts (n=271) as the dependent variable.

Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Lower 95% Limit OR	Upper 95% Limit OR
Agoraphobia without panic disorder	1.24	0.79	1.97
Generalized anxiety disorder*	1.56	1.02	2.38
Panic disorder with or without agoraphobia	1.20	0.68	2.13
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*	2.71	1.84	3.98
Simple phobia	0.81	0.55	1.18
Social phobia	0.89	0.62	1.28
Major depression*	3.24	2.33	4.50

* = p<0.05; adjusted for age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, non-affective psychosis, antisocial personality disorder, bipolar disorder, & presence of 2 or more lifetime DSM-III-R diagnoses

Results:

- After adjusting for sociodemographics and comorbidity, lifetime PTSD was the only anxiety disorder associated with lifetime suicidal ideation.
- After adjusting for sociodemographics and comorbidity, lifetime PTSD and lifetime GAD were associated with lifetime suicide attempts.

Discussion:

- Our findings support previous publications that have found no unique association between panic disorder and suicidality, and are consistent with suggestions that the reported association is related to disorders that may occur comorbidly with panic disorder, such as depression.
- PTSD is by far the anxiety disorder most robustly associated with both suicidal ideation and attempts in this nationally representative sample.
- The strength of the association found between PTSD and suicidality has important clinical and public policy implications.

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