

Navigating Uncertainty: A Qualitative Exploration of Psychiatrists' Approaches to Suicide Risk Assessments

4. Ethical challenges

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Abstract text

Background: Psychiatric suicide risk assessments are regularly carried out in order to stratify individual patient risks into specific classes (such as minimal, moderate, high or very high). Yet, the evidence for how suicide risk assessments should be carried out, and which clinical decisions they should entail, are vague. Hence, lived experiences of this uncertainty is a defining feature of suicide risk assessments, as has been shown in earlier research. Our aim is to further explore and characterize psychiatrists' approaches to the uncertainties of suicide risk assessments, and how they are dealt with in actual clinical practice.

Material and Method: Qualitative, semistructured, in-depth interviews have been conducted with 14 specialists in psychiatry. The data has been analyzed in accordance with a qualitative content analysis. Further interviews will be conducted in order to reach so-called saturation.

Preliminary results: In the initial analysis, we have identified five categories of approaches (or rather, comportments), in relation to the uncertainty of suicide risk assessments: a search for minimizing the uncertainty; sharing the uncertainty with the patient; ambivalence towards guidelines; acceptance of the limits of suicide risk assessments; and questioning the use-value of suicide risk assessments. In a second future analytic step, the material may be subject to an Ideal-type Analysis, with the aim of constructing a typology of these comportments.