

Childhood Abuse and Deliberate Self-Harm (DSH) / Suicide: Is there a relationship?

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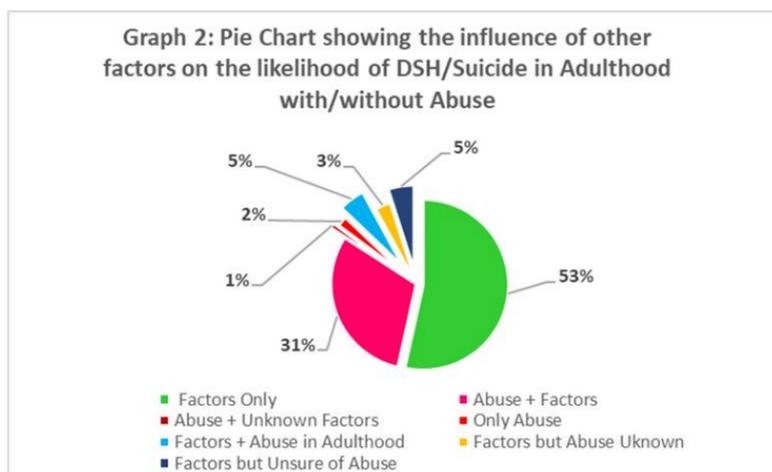
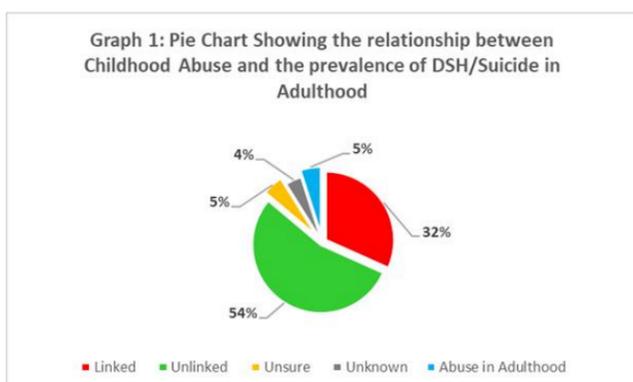
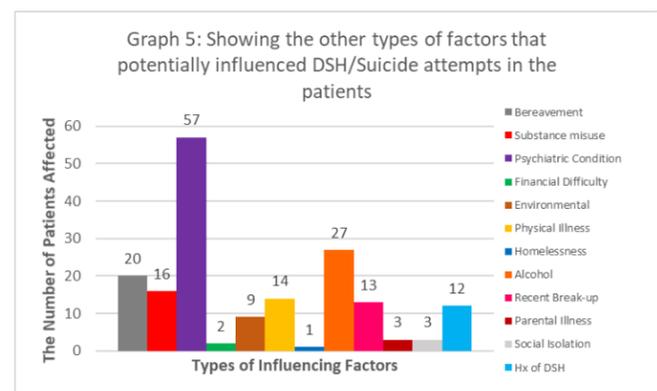
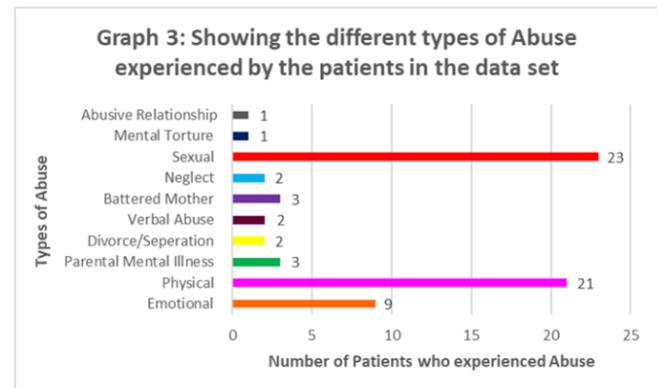
Literature suggests that there is a significant and clinically relevant link between experiencing abuse in childhood and attempting DSH/suicide in adulthood. However, other factors have also been seen to contribute to the risk. Therefore, the link between childhood abuse and DSH/suicide attempt was looked at locally to see how far this is true.

Child abuse is when a child is intentionally harmed by an adult or another child, which can be over time or a one-off action. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, or neglect. Abuse can be either in person or online. DSH is the deliberate act of hurting/harming oneself. This can be done in a variety of different ways. The most extreme form of self-harm is suicide where there is an intention to end life.

Data was obtained for all patients (101) who were admitted to Pilgrim Hospital A&E following an attempt of DSH/Suicide for the period between July 2019 and September 2019. Patient identifiers were then used to scrutinise the patient records to obtain further details of the incident and previous relevant history.

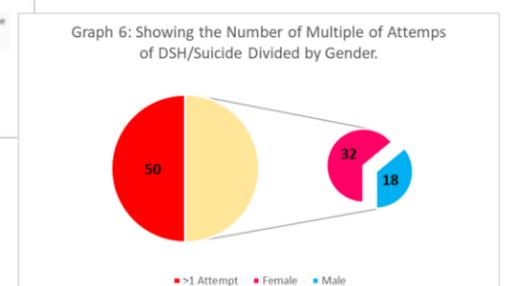
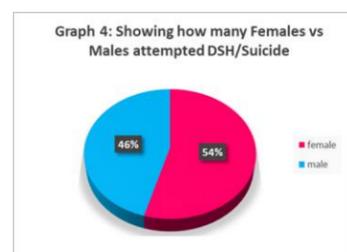
It was found that 32% of patients in the data set had experienced some form of abuse in their childhood, whereas 54% did not. 53% had other factors possibly contributing to their attempt. 31% both experienced abuse in childhood and had other factors present. All results are displayed in the graphs.

Having a Psychiatric Condition was the most common influencing factor in the decision to attempt DSH/Suicide. Sexual abuse was the most common form of abuse experienced by the patients in the data set, closely followed by physical abuse and emotional abuse. However, one thing that this study did not look at was the age of onset of abuse, according to previous studies, the earlier the age of onset of sexual abuse, the higher the likelihood of intent.



There is clearly a strong link between experiencing abuse in childhood and attempting DSH/Suicide in adulthood (32%). Abuse of any form can scar a person and be life-changing because it affects a person's self-esteem and self-worth, which in turn clouds judgement on coping techniques and moving on from the abuse. However, there seems to be a stronger link between other influencing factors and attempting DSH/Suicide compared to childhood abuse and attempting DSH/Suicide (53% : 32%).

In addition, 50% of patients in this study attempted DSH/Suicide multiple times, possibly pointing to a lack of support post-event. However, it is unclear whether these attempts are truly "cries for help" or to seek attention or to just "finish the job", something that can be looked into further. Furthermore, more females re-attempted DSH/Suicide compared to males, which is not unusual as females do tend to have other factors to consider such as childcare, so therefore, may not go through with it fully but use it as a way of calling for help. Whereas men are more known to go through with it completely, hence less chance of re-attempting. This is also reflected by the fact that more women attempted DSH/Suicide compared to men. However, this can also be due to the fact that women are more likely to suffer abuse than men making them more vulnerable to making those choices.



In conclusion, this study has supported many findings from previous studies, but has also been eye-opening in many other aspects as discussed above. Therefore, it can be said that more research is needed into why patients re-attempt or even attempt DSH/Suicide in the first place. More research is also needed into the support in place for victims of abuse and the prevention mechanisms in place for DSH/Suicide.