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Life After Non-Fatal Self-Poisoning: A Qualitative Study on Relationships and Life Circumstances After Non-Fatal Self-Poisoning

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OBJECTIVES: The objective of this study was to explore life experiences, especially with regards to relationships and life circumstance, 6 months following the attempt of self-poisoning.

METHODS: This was a qualitative study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty four participants, six months after their attempt of non-fatal self-poisoning. A maximum variation sampling method was used. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

RESULTS: Participants were aged between 16-64 years and 16 were female. The qualitative exploration generated the following three major themes regarding individual and social experiences following the act of non-fatal self-poisoning: One theme was the impact of the act of self-poisoning on the individual's life - several positive life changes including positive changes of behavior and thinking patterns of individuals and development of a closer relationship with their family was identified after the self-poisoning act. Another prominent theme that emerged was the reactions and responses of others towards the self-poisoning act: family members were often negative and highly critical of the self-poisoning behavior. However, they had also made more effort to show their love and caring for the individual. From the wider society, mixed responses such as sympathy, advice, help and also criticism of the individual were reported. The third theme was personal attitudes regarding the act of self-poisoning: A majority of participants felt regret and analyzed the negative consequences of the act. Most of them also had a fear of stigma and tried to keep the self-poisoning incident a secret.

CONCLUSION: Participants appear to have undergone significant changes in their lives after the act of non-fatal self-poisoning. The supportive role of close family, after the act, was a significant factor. The findings suggest that strategies to improve communication and understanding between young people, and their immediate family members, may be helpful in minimizing self-poisoning.