

Attempt Survivor Families' Views on Criminalizing Attempted Suicide in Ghana

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Abstract : Decriminalizing suicide is one of the major goals of suicide prevention worldwide. In Ghana, suicide is legally prescribed and there is a wide-spread societal condemnation of the act, the survivor and families share the stigma. Evidence and advocacy continue to mount towards pressuring the government, the legal fraternity and lawmakers to consider decriminalizing the act. However, within this discourse, the views of families of attempt survivors are absent. The purpose of this study was to explore from relatives of suicide attempters their reactions towards the criminality of suicide attempt in the country. A total of 10 relatives of suicide attempters were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. We found that there were divergent views from families on decriminalizing suicide. We generated two major themes; Out-group bias versus In-group bias. Half of the participants opined that suicide attempt should not be decriminalized and others advocated for help and mental health care for victims of the suicide attempt. It was generally observed that although all 10 participants were cognizant that suicide attempt is a crime in Ghana, they preferred their relatives were spared from prosecution. The findings indicate incongruity, especially when participants want their relatives to avoid jail term but want the law that criminalizes suicide to remain. Findings are explained using the Fundamental Attribution Error and the concept of Kin selection. Implications for public education on decriminalization and advocacy are addressed.

Keywords : decriminalization, families, Ghana suicide, suicide attempt

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