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PARACETAMOL AS THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN PARASUICIDES IN A SINGLE CENTRE IN MALAYSIA

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Introduction: Paracetamol is one of the most frequently used drugs in intentional overdoses. Countries that limit the quantity of paracetamol available in a single purchase generally report lower rates of paracetamol related morbidity and mortality.

Objectives: To determine the socio-demographic characteristics of those who intentionally overdosed on paracetamol and associated psychiatric illness (identifying high-risk groups).

Aims: To improve mental health care delivery and propose a restriction of pack sizes of paracetamol in a single purchase.

Methods: This study was a retrospective, descriptive analysis study. Cases of parasuicide in the year 2008 were identified through our database and their case notes studied by completing questionnaires pertaining to details of the act.

Results: Of the 437 cases of parasuicide, 195 cases overdosed on paracetamol (44.6%). Indians made up 41.0% of cases, followed by Malays (31.8%) and Chinese (20.5%). Of the Malays, 63.3% overdosed on paracetamol, compared with other means of parasuicide. 72.8% of those who overdosed with paracetamol were female, 54.4% were single and 69.7% purchased paracetamol over the counter. With increasing age, the incidence of paracetamol overdose declines, being highest (55.2%) in the age group 16-25. Of those who overdosed on paracetamol, 46.2% had a diagnosis of adjustment disorder, 26.2% of acute stress reaction and 21.0% of depression. 42.1% of them had a history of paracetamol overdose.

Conclusions: Paracetamol continues to be commonly used in parasuicides. Legislation restricting pack sizes of paracetamol in a single purchase is the most pragmatic means of reducing paracetamol related parasuicides and suicides.