Predictors of short- and long-term recurrence of suicidal behavior in borderline personality disorder

Rodante DE, Grendas LN, Puppo S, Vidjen P, Portela A, Rojas SM, Chiapella LC, Daray FM. Predictors of short- and long-term recurrence of suicidal behavior in borderline personality disorder.

Objective: To evaluate the incidence of suicidal outcomes and risk factors for short- and long-term recurrence of suicidal behavior (SB) among high-risk borderline personality disorder (BPD) patients during a 24-month prospective follow-up period.

Methods: A multicenter prospective cohort study was designed to compare data obtained from 136 patients admitted to the emergency department for current suicidal ideation (SI) or a recent suicide attempt (SA). Subjects were clinically evaluated and monitored for a new SA or suicide.

Results: The incidence of a new SA was 25.63 events/100 persons-year, and one patient died by suicide. Child sexual abuse (CSA) was the only significant predictor throughout the complete follow-up period. The absence of prior psychiatric treatment predicts the recurrence of SB in the first 6 months of follow-up. Patient age, poor psychosocial functioning before hospitalization, age at first SA, and having multiple suicide attempts increased risk of SB recurrence at the long-term period (24th months). In addition, there was an interaction between CSA and poor psychosocial functioning that increased risk of SB.

Conclusion: The risk of recurrence was higher during the first 6 months. Risk factors at 6 and 24 months vary. These findings are important for implementing suicide strategies.

Significant outcomes
- Almost 33% of patients with BPD experienced a SB recurrence by 24 months of follow-up.
- Some risk factors for SB recurrence vary with time while other maintain stable during the entire 24-month follow-up period.
- There was an interaction between history of child sexual abuse and poor psychosocial functioning that increased risk among patients with BPD.

Limitations
- Patients were hospitalized for active SI or SA, and findings may not generalize to healthier clinical samples.
- The sample contains a high percentage of women.
- Although several key factors were measured via validated instruments, some predictors were measured via a semistructured retrospective interview.
Introduction

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is the most diagnosed and studied personality disorder among clinical population. It is also the most diagnosable personality disorder among hospitalized patients (3). Specifically, 1.7% of the general population, up to 10% of the psychiatric out-patients, and 28% of in-patients are diagnosed with BPD (4–6). Repeated suicide threats, gestures, and suicide attempts, a defining diagnostic criterion for BPD, are prevalent among patients with BPD (7, 8). The lifetime risk of suicide among patients with BPD is up to 10% (9, 10), a suicide mortality rate 50 times higher than the general population (11–14). Over 70% of patients with BPD have a history of suicidal behavior (SB) (15–17). Given the high rate of SB (18) and potential lethality of suicide behavior (SB) among patients with BPD (8), it is highly relevant to identify risk factors with prospective longitudinal studies using multidimensional assessments and systematic follow-up. Nonetheless, only a handful of prospective cohort studies among patients with BPD have been published. To date, all work has been completed with patient populations from North America (8, 19–21).

When conceptualizing SB, there are static risk factors (non-modifiable) which mark a chronic baseline risk of suicide (22–24) and dynamic risk factors (potentially modifiable) (25). Dynamic risk factors vary in intensity or presence across time (25). Efforts to understand and predict SB begin with the study of potential risk factors (26), given suicide rates may be reduced by systematic identification and treatment of modifiable risk factors (27). Suicide-specific interventions should be conceptualized according to how risk factors vary across time; however, the literature in this area is scarce (19).

In cross-sectional studies, some conditions such as comorbid major depressive disorder (MDD) (28), substance use disorders (29), younger age (30), and childhood sexual abuse (CSA) (31) are correlated with SB among patients with BPD. Longitudinal prospective studies evidence MDD, poor psychosocial functioning, CSA, absence of previous psychiatric treatment, and number of previous suicide attempts as predictors of SB among patients with BPD (19). The change in these risk factors over time and the interaction between them has been poorly studied. Understanding how these risk factors change across time and how they interact could help inform suicide prevention strategies among patients with BPD and recurrent SB.

Predictors of recurrence of suicidal behavior in BPD

Aims of the study

The aims of the present study were as follows: (i) determine the incidence of SB (suicide reattempts and death by suicide) among high-risk BPD patients, (ii) identify predictors for short- and long-term recurrence of SB, and (iii) measure change in predictors across time and interactions that increase SB risk.

Material and methods

Study design

The present study used data obtained from patients enrolled in a multicenter prospective cohort study conducted in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The cohort was recruited from three different hospitals: (i) the ‘Braulio A. Moyano’ Neuropsychiatric Hospital, (ii) the ‘José Tiburcio Borda’ Hospital, and (iii) the ‘Hospital de Clínicas José de San Martín’, in the city of Buenos Aires. All hospitals in the current study serve a large urban catchment area in Buenos Aires and predominantly treat low-income, uninsured patients. The cohort study began in 2012 with the collection of baseline data finishing in December 2016. The current study utilized data obtained at the following time points: (i) at baseline, (ii) at 6 months, and (iii) 24 months of follow-up. The Institutional Review Board at each participating hospital approved the study protocol.

Patients

Participants were patients who were admitted to the emergency department of one of the three hospitals for current suicidal ideation (SI) or a recent suicide attempt (SA). SI was defined as any current self-reported thought of engaging in suicide-related behavior (32), and SA was defined as a potentially self-injurious behavior with a non-fatal outcome, for which there was evidence (either explicit or implicit) that the person intended at some (non-zero) level to kill him or herself (33, 34). Participants were patients who presented with active suicidal ideation or who had a SA in the last 72 h prior to the admission.

Eligible participants were (i) aged 18–65 years, (ii) hospitalized for SI or a SA within the last 72 h, (iii) sufficiently alert and able to respond with fluency in Spanish, and (iv) could provide written informed consent to participate. Participants were excluded if they were (i) unable to respond autonomously (i.e., due to sedative effects of medication or language limitations) or (ii) were transferred to another institution.
All participants gave written informed consent to participate in the study. Participants were included in the study if all relevant measures were completed at the baseline assessment. After discharge, subjects who were recruited as in-patients received treatment as usual in the community.

**Measures**

**Baseline data.** At baseline evaluation, each participant underwent a semistructured interview conducted by one of three psychiatrists in the emergency departments. All psychiatrists on the research team had at least 5 years of clinical experience and were trained in the semistructured interviews and data-gathering procedures of the study. The semistructured interview included questions specific to clinical and demographic variables. The Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis II Disorders (SCID-II) (35) was used to determine the diagnosis of BPD, and The Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI) (36) was used to determine other psychiatric diagnoses. Participant history of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), family history of SA, age of first SA, hospitalizations due to SA, and psychiatric illness was assessed during a semistructured interview. The Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) (37, 38) was used to obtain further details regarding a participant’s lifetime and most recent SA. Impulsivity was measured by the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) (39). The Buss–Durkee Hostility Scale (BDHS) was used to evaluate the different aspects of hostility (40). The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) was used to assess aspects of hopelessness (41). Recent stressors were assessed with the Brugha Stressful Life Events Scale (List of Threatening Experiences) (LTE) (42). Social adjustment was assessed with the Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale (SASS) (43).

The following variables, (i) number of stressful events, (ii) impact of stressful events, (iii) hopelessness, (iv) hostility, (v) impulsiveness, and (vi) psychosocial functioning, were classified as high or low according to the median value of the 136 patients (i.e., low if the value was less than the median, high otherwise).

The number of previous suicide attempts was categorized into three groups: (i) no attempt, (ii) one or two attempts, and (iii) three or more attempts (44, 45). The suicide attempt lethality and the highest lifetime suicide lethality were measured with the C-SSRS (37, 38). Scores of 0, 1, and 2 in the C-SSRS were considered low lethality, and scores of 3 or 4 points were considered high lethality. In addition, cases of admission due to SI were considered as very low lethality.

**Follow-up data.** Two trained psychiatrists performed the telephone follow-ups. Participants were contacted by telephone every 6th month during a 2-year follow-up period following their baseline assessment in order to detect whether an unfavorable event (suicide or a suicide attempt) occurred during any time of the evaluated follow-up period. If participants could not be reached, calls were made on alternate hours and days for one week. If contact was still not achieved, interviewers contacted two reference numbers that were provided upon enrollment. If contact was still not possible, an e-mail was sent. If contact was not established during the follow-up assessment points, the medical record of each participant was reviewed at the three hospitals in search of an unfavorable event. If information was not in these records, the participant was declared as ‘loss to follow-up’.

Interviewers contacted the participants or the reference person to primarily assess whether participants experienced a new SA or suicide during the follow-up period. According to previous work, the predictive factors of recurrence found during the first 6 months of follow-up were considered predictive factors of short-term recurrence and those found at 24 months were considered long-term predictive factors (8, 19, 24, 46–50).

**Statistical analysis.** Patients who had data at least for one follow-up period after study entry were included in the present analysis. Suicide attempt or suicide was considered the event of interest. Participants without a SA or suicide throughout the follow-up period were censored, either by the end of the study or by death because of the causes not related to the event of interest. The number of days elapsed between entering the study (date of hospitalization) and the event or censorship was calculated.

The mean and standard deviation (mean ± SD) were used to describe the quantitative variables. The absolute and percentage frequencies corresponding to each category of the qualitative variables were calculated.

Relative risk and their respective 95% confidence intervals (CI 95%) were calculated to compare baseline qualitative variables for patient sociodemographic and clinical characteristics according to whether or not they completed at least one follow-up after hospitalization. For the quantitative variables, the differences in the means of each group and their respective CI 95% were
calculated. The same procedures were used to compare the characteristics of the patients with follow-up data according to whether or not they experienced a recurrence of SB.

To analyze the time elapsed until the event of interest, survival curve was estimated using the Kaplan–Meier method. Subsequently, a Cox model was adjusted to analyze the possible relation between the baseline characteristics of the patients and their survival time at 6 and 24 months after the event that resulted in their entry to the study. A backward algorithm was used until finding the best fit model, considering a significance level \( P < 0.05 \) for each variable. For the adjustment of the models, only information of patients with complete data corresponding to all the variables included was considered.

The hazard ratios (HR) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (CI) were estimated for all the variables that were statistically significant. Appropriate diagnostics were carried out to test goodness of fit, collinearity, and atypical observations in each model. Assumptions in the model by means of exploration of residual behavior were verified for all cases. The threshold for statistical significance was \( P < 0.05 \).

In order to analyze the time elapsed until the event of interest of patients with or without CSA and low psychosocial functioning, survival curve was estimated using the Kaplan–Meier method. The sample was divided into four groups: (i) subjects who reported both CSA and poor psychosocial functioning \( (n = 27) \), (ii) subjects who reported CSA and have high psychosocial functioning \( (n = 33) \), (iii) subjects who have low psychosocial functioning but denied CSA \( (n = 29) \), and (iv) subjects who have neither risk factors \( (n = 29) \). The stratification of the sample was selected a priori. Statistical analysis was carried out using SAS University Edition software.

### Results

One hundred and thirty-six participants \( (M_{\text{age}} = 33.16 \pm 9.79 \text{ years}) \) met inclusion criteria and provided informed consent to participate. All participants met diagnostic criteria for BPD. 119 were female (87.50%), approximately 50% reported a history of CSA, and 80% reported at least one prior SA when entering the study. Fourteen percent of the patients had a comorbid bipolar disorder. Other clinical and demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

A total of 123 (90.44%) participants completed at least one follow-up assessment after the date of study entry. Participants who completed a follow-up assessment did not differ in any of the clinical or demographic variables as compared to participants lost during the follow-up period (Table 1).

The survival curve (Fig. 1) shows that most of the suicidal behavior recurrence occurred during the sixth-month follow-up period (23 patients; 18.70%). At the end of the follow-up period (24 months), 39 patients had a new SA (31.71%), and one patient died by suicide (0.81%). Participants who did not report a SA or suicide by the date of the last follow-up were censored \( (n = 83, 67.48\%) \). The incidence of a new SA during the follow-up period was 25.63 events/100 000 persons-year, and one patient died by suicide. The participant who committed suicide was a 44-year-old woman with diagnosis of recurrent MDD and comorbid substance abuse disorder, no history of CSA, and no history of prior psychiatric treatment; at the time of entering the study, she had no previous suicide attempts.

Table 2 shows the comparison of baseline variables among patients with reattempters \( (n = 40) \) and non-reattempters \( (n = 83) \) (Table 2). The reattempters had a greater number of previous suicide attempts \( (P = 0.03) \) and a higher prevalence of a history of CSA \( (P = 0.04) \). There were no other significant differences for the clinical and demographic variables.

The analyses of the predictors that significantly explained the time to recurrence at 6 months and 24 months are shown in Table 3. The final model of data at 6 months of follow-up was adjusted with information from 123 patients and those corresponding to 24 months with 114 patients. After six months of follow-up, there was an association between the time to the event of interest and the history of previous psychiatric treatment and history of CSA. The patients without a history of prior psychiatric treatment in last month have about 2.5-fold higher risk of recurrence than patients with such history \( (HR: 2.42, 95\% CI: 1.06–5.54) \). The patients with a history of CSA showed about three-fold higher risk than those without history of CSA \( (HR: 2.86, 95\% CI: 1.16–7.04) \).

At the end of the follow-up (24 months), the relation between time to SA recurrence and CSA remained significant. At 24 months of follow-up, new predictors appeared: (i) psychosocial functioning, (ii) number of previous attempts, (iii) age at admission, and (iv) age at the first attempt (Table 3). Patients with low psychosocial functioning evidenced about two-fold higher risk for suicidal recurrence than individuals with high psychosocial functioning \( (HR: 2.17, 95\% CI: 1.12–4.24) \). Patients with 3 previous or more suicide attempts \( (i.e., \text{multiple attempters}) \) had almost six-
fold higher risk of recurrence than those with no history of SA (HR: 5.97, 95% CI: 1.31–27.27). Comparisons between those who had 1 or 2 previous attempts vs. the other groups did not significantly differ. For each year of increase in patient age, a 5% reduction of the HR for SA
Table 2. Comparison of baseline variables among reattempters and non-reattempters

| Variables                        | Non-reattempters | Reattempters | Comparison                  | Difference or relative risk (CI 95%) |
|----------------------------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| No. of study participants        | 83               | 40           |                             |                                      |
| Age (years), mean ± SD           | 34.06 ± 10.17    | 31.85 ± 9.62 | Non-reattempters – Reattempters | 2.41 (−1.40 to 6.22)                  |
| Sex (%)                          |                  |              |                             |                                      |
| Women                            | 71 (85.54)       | 37 (92.50)   | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.72 (0.66–4.76)                     |
| Family history (%)               |                  |              |                             |                                      |
| Any psychiatric illness          | 70 (84.34)       | 36 (80.00)   | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.45 (0.59–3.57)                     |
| Suicide or SA                    | 47 (56.65)       | 24 (60.00)   |                             | 1.10 (0.65–1.85)                     |
| Suicide history                  |                  |              |                             |                                      |
| Attempted previously (%)         |                  |              |                             |                                      |
| None attempts                    | 19 (22.89)       | 2 (5.00)     | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | –                                    |
| 1 or 2 attempts                  | 31 (37.35)       | 15 (37.50)   |                             | 4.55 (0.94–20.00)                    |
| 3 or more attempts               | 33 (38.76)       | 23 (57.50)   |                             | 6.67 (1.41–33.33)                    |
| Age at first attempt (years), mean ± SD | 24.43 ± 11.25 | 23.76 ± 10.45 | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 0.65 (−3.57 to 4.80)                  |
| Lethality index SA (%)           |                  |              |                             |                                      |
| Very low                         | 24 (29.92)       | 12 (30.00)   | Non-reattempters vs. Reattempters | –                                    |
| Low                              | 46 (55.42)       | 23 (57.50)   |                             | 1.00 (0.43–2.35)                     |
| High                             | 13 (15.66)       | 5 (12.50)    |                             | 1.30 (0.38–4.50)                     |
| Highest lifetime SA lethality (%)|                  |              |                             |                                      |
| Very low                         | 3 (3.80)         | 1 (2.63)     | Non-reattempters vs. Reattempters | –                                    |
| Low                              | 45 (56.96)       | 14 (35.64)   |                             | 1.07 (0.10–11.14)                    |
| High                             | 31 (39.24)       | 23 (60.53)   |                             | 0.45 (0.04–6.50)                     |
| Rating scale scores (N, %)       |                  |              |                             |                                      |
| High Impulsivity (BIS)           | 40 (50.00)       | 19 (50.00)   | Non-reattempters vs. Reattempters | 1.00 (0.78–2.16)                     |
| High Hopelessness (BHS)          | 42 (52.50)       | 25 (64.10)   | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.16 (0.91–1.49)                    |
| High Hostility (BDHI)            | 36 (43.73)       | 23 (57.50)   | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.19 (0.93–1.45)                    |
| High Number of recent stressors (SLE) | 46 (58.23) | 22 (57.89)   | Non-reattempters vs. Reattempters | 1.01 (0.95–1.07)                    |
| High Impact of Recent stressors (SLE) | 40 (50.63) | 19 (48.72)   | Non-reattempters vs. Reattempters | 1.05 (0.83–1.36)                    |
| History of Child Sexual Abuse (%)| 36 (43.73)       | 25 (62.50)   | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.69 (1.02–2.88)                    |
| Poor psychosocial functioning (%)| 34 (43.04)       | 22 (56.41)   | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.43 (0.85–2.38)                    |
| Any previous psychiatry treatment (%) | 52 (62.65) | 25 (62.50) | Non-reattempters - Reattempters | 1.00 (0.59–1.70) | Reattempters vs. Non-reattempters | 1.72 (0.80–3.68) |
| Bipolar disorder (%)             | 11 (13.41)       | 7 (17.50)    |                             |                                      |

Rating scales: BIS = Barratt Impulsiveness Scale; BHS = Beck Hopelessness Scale; BDHI = Buss–Durkee Hostility Inventory; SLE = Stressful Life Events Scale; SASS = Social Adaptation Self-evaluation Scale. CI = confidence interval.

Table 3. Significant baseline characteristics according to time of evaluation of the survival function

| Period | Significant variables | Comparison | Hazard Ratio [CI 95%] |
|--------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 6 months | Previous psychiatry treatmen | Without vs. with | 2.42 (1.06–5.54) |
| (n = 123) | | | |
| History of Sexual abuse | With vs. without | 2.86 (1.16–7.04) |
| 24 months | Psychosocial functioning | Low vs. high | 2.17 (1.12–4.24) |
| (n = 114) | Previous attempts | 1 or 2 vs. 3 or more | 0.56 (0.29–1.13) |
| | | 1 or 2 vs. None | 3.36 (0.74–15.19) |
| | | 3 or more vs. none | 5.97 (1.31–27.27) |
| Age | One year of increase | 0.95 (0.91–0.99) |
| Age at first attempt | One year of increase | 1.05 (1.01–1.10) |

CI, confidence interval.

Predictors of recurrence of suicidal behavior in BPD

recurrence was observed (HR: 0.95, 95% CI: 0.91–0.99). Regarding age at the first SA, for each year of increase there was an increase of 5% in the hazard of reattempt (HR: 1.05, 95% CI: 1.01–1.10).

The interaction between history of CSA and psychosocial functioning is shown in Fig. 2. Among the group of patients with no history of CSA, no significant difference was found in the HR of recurrence when comparing those with low psychosocial functioning vs. those with high psychosocial functioning (HR: 0.99, 95% CI: 0.35–2.83). However, within the group of patients with a history of CSA, those with low psychosocial functioning at baseline presented about three-fold higher risk than those with high psychosocial functioning (HR: 2.58, 95% CI: 1.15–5.75).

Discussion

The present study is the first prospective cohort study of high-risk patients diagnosed with BPD reported outside of North America. Almost 30% of the sample reported SB reoccurrence during the 24-month follow-up period. Results indicated that the first six months was the period of highest risk for SA reoccurrence. The incidence of a new SA was 25630 events/100 000 persons-year, and one patient died by suicide. Child sexual abuse was the only predictor of a new SA that remained significant throughout the entire observation period. The absence of prior psychiatry treatment was a short-term risk factor for SB suggesting that the first six months after hospitalization is a high-risk period.
for newly diagnosed or treated BPD patients. In the long-term period (24 months), patient age, poor psychosocial functioning before hospitalization, age at first SA, and having more than three previous suicide attempts (multiple attempters) increased risk of SB recurrence. An interaction between CSA and psychosocial functioning was observed. Specifically, patients with a history of CSA and poor psychosocial functioning represented the group with the highest risk of recurrence.

The suicide rate of 0.81% during 2 years of follow-up observed in the present study is within the range of values described in the literature. A previous cohort studies in BPD did not report any suicide during the first 2 years of follow-up (19), which could be explained because the cohort included only out-patients, representing a sample with lower psychopathological severity than the one in the present study. Other cohort study with 252 patients with BPD reported 8 death, one of them by suicide (20), which represents a rate slightly lower than the rate we reported. On the other hand, two cohort studies reported rates of suicide near 4% (8, 51); however, these studies have larger follow-up periods (5 years or more) in which a greater number of suicides are expected. Finally, a recently published systematic review reported a suicide rate in BPD between 2% and 5% in cohorts with at least 5 years of follow-up (52).

The 33% rate of SB recurrence during the 24-month period of follow-up is similar to the 35% rate of recurrence described by Wedig et al. after a similar follow-up period (8). The recurrence rate in our study is higher as compared to the 25% rate of recurrence reported by Soloff & Chiappetta (20, 21). More than half of the sample in the study by Soloff & Chiappetta were out-patients, which is likely representative of a less severe population as compared to our in-patient cohort. Dissimilar to previous work, one suicide was reported in our patient cohort.

In our cohort, 18.70% (n = 23) of the patients reported a suicide reattempt within the first 6 months. After 24 months of the study follow-up period, 32.52% of the patients (n = 40) reported a suicide reattempt. Two thirds of patients with a suicide reattempt had the SA within the first six months of follow-up. These findings highlight the importance of identifying predictors of short-term recurrence of SB.

History of CSA was the only predictor that remained significant throughout the observation period. Childhood adverse events are reported by many patients with BPD (53, 54). In fact, CSA is the most frequent adverse event, reported by 40–85% of in-patients with BPD (51, 55–58). The severity of BPD psychopathology has also been linked to severity of CSA (59). History of CSA is a well-recognized risk factor for SB (60–63). Wedig et al. found CSA as a risk factor for suicide, which increased risk for SA 2 times fold during a two-year follow-up (OR: 2.27, 95% CI: 1.69–3.05). However, they did not study the short-term impact of CSA (8). Our work not only shows CSA as an important risk factor for SB recurrence in BPD, but CSA is also documented as a predictor of short-term (HR: 2.86, CI 95% = 1.16–7.04) and long-term (HR: 1.96, CI 95% = 1.01–3.85) recurrence of SB. Taking into account that CSA was a
predictor of short-term SB recurrence, it may be an important risk factor to assess for and treat via evidence-based treatments for PTSD (64, 65).

Regarding psychosocial functioning among patients with BPD, contradictory data were found throughout the literature. Links et al. found poor social adjustment was not a significant risk factor for SB among patients diagnosed with BPD (19). This difference observed in our study may in part be explained by the severity of in-patient participants as compared to out-patient participants. On the other hand, Soloff and Chiappetta found that poor social adjustment significantly elevated the risk for SA among patients with BPD in the short term and at two and six years of follow-up (20, 21). In our cohort, poor psychosocial functioning was not identified as a risk factor for short-term SA recurrence. However, patients with poor psychosocial functioning have an increased risk of SB at long-term follow-up. Fifty percent of patients with BPD reach recovery and present with psychosocial functioning, which highlights the importance of this construct (66). Dialectical behavioral therapy is a promising treatment for addressing psychosocial functioning among patients with BPD (67). Improvements in psychosocial functioning will likely reduce risk for long-term SA recurrence.

Zanarini et al. found that childhood abuse was significantly related to the overall severity of psychosocial impairment and hypothesized that childhood abuse contributes to the psychosocial impairment characteristic of BPD (59). Soloff and Chiappetta suggested that child abuse and psychosocial impairment are characteristics of a poor prognosis subtype of BPD (20, 21). In our study, we analyzed the interaction of both with survival curves by grouping patients according to the presence or absence of these two risk factors for SB among patients with BPD. There was no significant difference in SA recurrence between low psychosocial functioning and high psychosocial functioning among patients with no history of CSA. However, among patients with a history of CSA, low psychosocial functioning increased risk for suicide reattempts by 2.58 times as compared to those with high psychosocial functioning. Psychosocial functioning likely fluctuates across time and should be evaluated during the course of BPD (59). Poor psychosocial functioning may impact one’s ability to engage in treatment. In fact, both psychosocial functioning and CSA reflect greater psychopathological severity and worse prognosis.

Our results also showed that the absence of prior psychiatric treatment in the last month increased risk for a SA during a short-term interval (6 months) by three times. These results suggested that the next 6 months after first hospitalization could be a high-risk period among patients with newly diagnosed BPD or engagement in treatment. Soloff et al. found patients with BPD that received out-patient psychiatric treatment prior to the SA showed a reduced risk for suicide attempts by 30% in short intervals—12 months (20, 21, 50). The absence of out-patient treatment was not identified as a risk factor at two years of follow-up, which was similar to our findings. Nonetheless, previous work evidenced three times increased risk for suicide at six years of follow-up (20, 21). It is possible that risk factors change across time, leading to different impact on SB in longer follow-up periods.

In our study, multiple attempters (three or more suicide attempts) were almost 6 times more likely to make a suicide reattempt as compared to patients with one or two suicide attempts. This is in accordance with the large body of evidence that indicates the best predictors of a future SA is the history of previous SA (68). Multiple suicide attempts could also be the expression of a determinant suicidal phenotype (19, 45). This is not only clinically relevant for patients diagnosed with BPD (44). According to Forman et al., patients with three or more suicide attempts, despite psychiatric diagnosis, likely have higher levels of hopelessness, depression, and a more accepting attitude toward their suicide attempts (44).

In our study cohort, patient age was identified as a risk factor for long-term SB recurrence. Specifically, as patient age decreased by a year there was an increased risk of 5%. Only one longitudinal study has found the same results regarding age (8). Finally, although some studies have proposed prior hospitalization and family history of suicide as factors that increase risk for future suicide attempts (19–21), our study failed to reproduce such results. Moreover, some traits such as impulsivity, hopelessness, or hostility were not related to SB recurrence in the current study. This is likely a result of a ceiling effect, given the severity of the patients enrolled in the current study.

The prospective longitudinal design is a strength of the current study as it allows for exploring predictors of short- and long-term SB among patients with BPD. The attrition rate was low in the current study, with less than 10% of enrolled patients lost during the follow-up. Patients lost to follow-up did not significantly differ in terms of clinical or demographic variables as compared to those who completed the cohort study. Despite these strengths, some limitations should be considered when interpreting our study results. First, the current study is limited to patients hospitalized for severe SI or SA.
Rodante et al.

and who met criteria for BPD, which limits our ability to generalize findings. Second, our sample contains a high percentage of women (87.5%). As such, variables of interest may be skewed toward women. Nonetheless, BDP is more commonly diagnosed among women as compared to men (6). Third, CSA history was measured via a semistructured retrospective interview, which may be more vulnerable to bias as compared to a validated scale. However, previous studies have demonstrated high agreement between a series of similar semistructured screening questions and validated scales for CSA (69).

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Declaration of interest

No coauthor or any immediate family members have financial relationships with any commercial organizations that might represent the appearance of a conflict of interest in the material reported here.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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