

# FINDINGS FROM A STUDY ON CHRONIC PAIN AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

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## *BACKGROUND*

Death by suicide in the US has increased 35% in the last 20 years

People with chronic pain have an elevated risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts

## *METHODS*

20 phone interviews with adults aged 24-65 in California and Oregon

All participants had chronic pain and dealt with suicidal ideation

Interviews took place from Jan. 2022– Jan. 2023

## *FINDINGS*

1

Relationships were important sources of joy and support and were often complicated by pain and illness.

2

Working while dealing with pain and illness was a continuous challenge and participants faced workplace discrimination.

3

Participants found healthcare difficult to access and navigate, expensive, and out of touch with their needs and preferences.

4

Dealing with chronic pain and illness was stressful and exhausting. Participants dealt with this creatively, producing and using diverse coping strategies.

# FINDINGS

1

Relationships were important sources of joy and support and were often complicated by pain and illness.



*“And I used to try to keep up with people. And now I’m like, You know what? I’m going to walk my own pace. I’ve had tiffs with people because of that. They’re like, you really can’t walk faster than this. And it’s like, oh, I can walk faster than this. But it causes me pain.”*

*“People that know me know how hard I fight to live, and they’ll pray with me. That helped me tremendously.”*

*“Oh yes, my husband, he’d get up in the morning to rub my hands.”*

*“And I think at that time I fell into depression because I was thinking of ways in which maybe I can help my family out and make sure that we’ll be okay. And I couldn’t think of anything....I was just thinking that I’m a failure and I could not do anything for my family.”*

*“I’ve definitely had a couple of friends that are like, I can’t talk about this. It’s too heavy. It’s too dark.”*

# THEMES

2

Working while dealing with pain and illness was a continuous challenge and participants faced workplace discrimination.

*“And then with with work, it's like, if my stomach's flaring up, and you're always the person calling in late, eventually you don't have that job. And that really sucks.”*

*“I suck it up for the most part. I get paranoid about losing my job or people being mad at me. So, I try to always go to work. At the same time, I have my depression and I don't want to go to work. I don't want to leave my bed.”*

*“I've never had the kind of work where I could earn enough to really be comfortable. So, it's decades and decades of being low income. The accumulation of all of that has a, you know, as an effect.”*



*“And it just feels like trying to put a square peg in a round hole, I can't figure out how to make it work so that finances aren't a stress and I'm working on something that feels good and is practical for my pain.”*

# THEMES

3

Participants found healthcare difficult to access and navigate, expensive, and out of touch with their needs and preferences.



*“I feel like I get maybe half of what I need. I’m not going to push it I’m not going to ask for not one more because I get scared I’m going to get cut off.”*

*“I’ve seen gastroenterologists and blah, blah, blah, and they’re very myopic, and most of them will not expand further into functional or integrative medicine to really help bridge those gaps.”*

*“I wish more naturopathic services than are currently covered, though it's better than it was. Yeah, it's not. I wish ketamine therapy was available.”*

*“When I was in crisis, like more than once a week would have been nice to see a therapist and stuff like that. Somebody to talk to.”*

# THEMES

4

Dealing with chronic pain and illness was stressful and exhausting. Participants dealt with this creatively, producing and using diverse coping strategies.

*“Each day is hard...they pile on top of each other.”*

*“It's just... never gonna go away. I've been in a lot of pain, and just the thought that like, this is, this is existence.”*

*“All those things that I just mentioned, you know, like, the pain, the pandemic, the financial stress, when it was kind of like a perfect storm, all those things would happen at once.”*



*“I went through a crisis group, and they helped me get a different perspective on life. Things I can change things I can't change. Realizing that happiness isn't baseline, being just okay, is baseline.”*

*“I find other ways to create a shift, just going out in nature. Just looking for anything that will spark a little bit of joy... just open my heart or listening to some music uplifts me or takes me to a different feeling.”*

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