

RELATIONSHIP OF SUICIDE IDEATION WITH DEPRESSION AND HOPELESSNESS

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ABSTRACT

The current study was designed to examine the role of depression and hopelessness in suicide ideation. 100 males and 100 females in the age range of 15-17 years completed Beck's Suicide Ideation Scale, Beck's Depression Inventory and Beck's Hopelessness Scale. The measures of suicide ideation, depression and hopelessness were correlated. The study reveals that suicide ideation correlated with depression ($r = .48, p < .01$). The correlation between suicide ideation and depression remained significant for males even when the role of hopelessness was partialled-out. The correlation between suicide ideation and hopelessness ($r = .53, p < .01$) remained significant even after partialling-out the role of depression. Hopelessness as measured by Beck's Hopelessness Scale has emerged as a salient variable. The correlations, however, differed for males and females.

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behaviour is complex. It is an irrational desire to die. Suicide effects are tragic and felt long after the individual has taken his own life. A person who dies by suicide leaves behind a tangled confusion of family members and friend who try to make sense of a senseless and a purposeless act. It is usually second or third cause of death among teenagers, and remains one of the top ten leading causes of death well into middle age. The rationale behind suicide, which is defined as intentional taking of one's own life, can be as simple or as complex as life itself. The primary motivation to suicide is depression which is characterized by mood disturbance, feelings of sadness, despair and discouragement, resulting from personal loss and tragedy.

The concept "suicidality" refers to thoughts and plans of suicide, suicide attempts and completed suicide, and thus comprises a wide range of phenomena. A concept synonymous to "suicidality" is "suicidal behaviour" (which thus not only refers to acts but also to thoughts). "Suicidal ideation" refers to suicidality without action, i.e. all types of suicidal thoughts and plans. Suicide Ideation refers to the thoughts about taking one's own life with some degree of intent (Johnson, 2006). A "suicide attempt" not only refers to an unsuccessful suicide but also comprises deliberate acts of lower lethality and intention. Several definitions have been proposed over the years to define a suicide attempt. Suicidal ideation is a common medical term for thoughts about suicide, which may be as detailed as a formulated

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plan, without the suicidal act itself. Suicidal Ideation have incorporated different thoughts as attitudes to suicidal behavior, for example, considering the suicidal act as a potential coping option, and contemplated plans and preparations for self-harm.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-to-24 year olds (Anderson & Smith, 2005) and the second leading cause of death among college students (Schwartz, 2006). Worldwide, suicide is among the top five causes of mortality in the 15- to 19- year age group. In many countries it ranks first or second as a cause of death among both boys and girls in this age group. In the last three decades (1975 to 2005), the suicide rate increased by 43%.

Suicide can be understood from many different perspectives, from religious, philosophical, and sociological to psychological and biological. Historically, the meaning of suicide has reflected the religious tradition of given culture (Stevenson, 1988). Depression and suicidality are deeply entangled. Suicidality is a diagnostic symptom for major depression, and depression is the most common mental disorder leading to suicide, although substance abuse and schizophrenia are also major contributors (WHO, 2001). Major depression affects 3 to 5 percent of children and adolescents. Depression negatively impacts growth and development, school performance, and peer or family relationships and may lead to suicide. A successful theory of depression must explain suicidality, and the bargaining model, building on the work of, Watson and Andrews (2002), Brown (1986), Giddens (1964) does. Suicide permanently removes oneself as a source of valuable benefits for the group. Suicide threats are therefore threats to impose substantial costs on group members and can be viewed as a means to signal cheaply and efficiently to a large social group that it may suffer such costs if assistance or change is not forthcoming.

Hopelessness is one of the major components of Beck's negative cognitive trait i.e. negative cognitions about future. When confronted with a negative event, individuals with a negative thinking process are vulnerable to depression, because they will infer that negative consequences will follow from this negative event and that occurrence of that event means that the individuals themselves are worthless or flawed (McGinn, 2000). The expression of hopelessness in conjunction with a mental disorder such as depression represents a very dangerous warning sign and always needs to be taken very seriously. It is a feeling that conditions will never improve, that there is no solution to a problem, and, for many, a feeling that dying by suicide would be better than living. Most people who feel hopeless have depression, and untreated depression is the number one cause for suicide.

There is a high association with hopelessness in long-term suicide risk. Not specific to depression, hopelessness can accompany demoralization with a number of other syndromes: schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, and chronic conditions, including medical condition According to Beck's formulation, hopelessness is a core

characteristic of depression and serves as the link between depression and suicide. Furthermore, hopelessness associated with other psychiatric disorders also predisposes the patient to suicidal behavior. The central role of hopelessness in the development of suicidal ideation has been supported by empirical research (Dyer and Kreitman, 1984; Nekanda-Trepka, Bishop, Blackburn, 1983; Bedrosian and Beck, 1979; Minkoff, Bergman, Beck et al., 1973). Wetzel et al. (1980) reviewed studies addressing the relationships among depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation and concluded that the preponderant evidence supported the linkage of hopelessness and suicide intent.

The current study expands the existing literature by incorporating various improvements and refinements in the methodology. The relationship suicide ideation with depression and hopelessness has been examined separately for male and female adolescents.

Objectives

- 1) To examine the relationship of suicide ideation with depression.
- 2) To examine the relationship of suicide ideation with hopelessness.
- 3) To examine the relationship of suicide ideation with depression after partialling out the influence of hopelessness.
- 4) To examine the association between suicide ideation with hopelessness after partialling out the influence of depression.

Hypotheses

- 1) Suicide ideation would be positively correlated with depression.
- 2) Suicide ideation would be positively correlated with hopelessness.
- 3) Suicide ideation would correlate positively with depression after partialling out the influence of hopelessness.
- 4) Suicide ideation would correlate positively with hopelessness after partialling out the influence of depression.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consists of 100 male and 100 female adolescents in the age range of 14-19 years pursuing schooling from Chandigarh government schools. The sample was selected by the technique of random sampling. There was no evidence of substance abuse among the adolescents.

Tools

Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979): Beck's Scale for Suicide Ideation includes 21 items designed to evaluate the presence and severity of suicidal thoughts. The first 19 items measure the severity of suicidal wishes, attitudes, and plans. Patients rate each item on a scale of 0 to 2. The SSI has been found useful in quantifying the degree of suicidal ideation a person is experiencing and can serve as a key warning sign in identifying suicide risk. The SSI has demonstrated strong internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of .93 among psychiatric outpatients (Beck & Steer, 1988). Among psychiatric inpatients, the SSI has demonstrated coefficient alphas of .89 (Beck et al., 1979) and .96 (Beck et al., 1988). Studies on the psychometric properties of the SSI have shown evidence of inter-rater reliability (Beck et al., 1979), convergent validity (Holden & DeLisle, 2005), concurrent, and construct validity (Beck et al., 1988).

Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961): The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is a self-administered scale comprising of 21 items assessing cognitive, emotional, and physical symptoms of depression (Beck, Rush, Shaw et al., 1979). In each item the respondent selects one of four statements that best describe how he/she has been feeling over the past few days. Each statement receives a score of 0 to 3, with 3 indicating the highest level of severity for each item. The scale score is computed as the sum of the 21 items. Scores range from 0 to 63, with zero indicating no depressive symptoms and 63 indicating the highest level of depressive symptoms possible. The BDI demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .882$) in a study by Arria et al. (2009).

Hopelessness Scale (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974): The Beck Hopelessness Scale is a 20-item self-report measure that assesses the feelings about the future, future expectations, loss of motivation and overall hopelessness in which participants are asked to read a statement and respond true or false based on how they currently feel. In scoring the measure, each item receives a 0 or 1. Nine items are keyed false and 11 items are keyed true, so that the total hopelessness score is a sum of the scores on the individual items. The BHS score indicates severity of pessimism about the future, ranging from 0 to 20. Among psychiatric patients, the BHS has yielded a reliability coefficient of .93 (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974), and more recent data has supported comparable findings (Dyce, 1996; Young, Halper, Clark, Scheftner, & Fawcett, 1992).

PROCEDURE

After clarifying the instructions of the concerned tests Beck's Suicide Ideation Scale, Beck Depression Inventory and Hopelessness scale were administered on selected sample in groups and tests were given one by one. The correlation values were calculated for suicide ideation with depression and hopelessness and with these correlation values, the partial correlations were calculated for males and female respectively.

Analysis

Keeping in view the various hypotheses, the association between different variables was examined by computing correlations, separately for males and females.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study was primarily concerned with examining the relationship of suicide ideation with depression and hopelessness. This was done by computing Pearson's product-moment correlation separately for males and females. The correlations are shown in Table 1. Keeping in view, hypotheses 3 and 4, partial correlation between variables of interest were also computed. The partial correlations are shown in Table 2 and 3.

An examination of Table 1 reveals that for males, the correlations of suicide ideation with depression and hopelessness were .54 and .65 respectively. For females, the correlations of suicide ideation with depression and hopelessness were .48 and .57 respectively. All these correlations were found to be significant at .001 level of significance, suggesting there by that suicide ideation is associated markedly with depression and hopelessness. The same trend operates even after partial correlations were computed which shows that males are higher on relevance of suicide ideation when we partialled out the role of depression it is signifies the tendency to be hopeless in future for male adolescents as comparison of females adolescents.

Table1. Correlation of Suicide Ideation with Depression and Hopelessness for males and females

Female \ Male	Suicide Ideation	Depression	Hopelessness
Suicide Ideation	-	.54	.65
Depression	.48	-	.48
Hopelessness	.57	.40	-

Note: Correlations above the diagonal values indicating correlations for males and correlations below the diagonal values indicating correlations for females.

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Table 2. Partial Correlation for Suicide Ideation and Depression

Partial Correlation	Male	Female
$R_{12.3}$.34	.33

Table 3. Partial Correlation for Suicide Ideation and hopelessness

Partial Correlation	Male	Female
$R_{13.2}$.53	.30

The obtained results are in concordance with the earlier studies which have also found the role of depression and hopelessness in suicide ideation. Hopelessness is one of the major components of Beck's negative cognitive triad i.e. negative cognitions about future. When confronted with a negative event, individuals with a negative thinking process are vulnerable to depression, because they will infer that negative consequences will follow from this negative event and that occurrence of that event means that the individuals themselves are worthless or flawed (McGinn, 2000). The expression of hopelessness in conjunction with a mental disorder such as depression represents a very dangerous warning sign and always needs to be taken very seriously.

Since hopelessness is positively related to adolescent suicidal ideation, it is important to cultivate the sense of hope in adolescents. Local studies had found that family functioning and perceived parental control were significantly related to hopelessness (Shek, D. L. 2007). Students who are depressed are more likely to have suicidal ideation, as are students in a state of hopelessness.

The results also support the differential activation model of suicidality (Lau et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2008). The model assumes that during a depressive episode an association is formed between sad mood and suicidal and hopelessness cognitions, so that in the future, a mild mood fluctuation acts as a prime to re-activate such cognitions, increasing the risk of relapse. The unique association of the past symptoms of guilt and suicidality with current Hopelessness and Suicidal reactivity was replicated (Williams et al., 2008). This trend indicates there is a strong relationship of suicide ideation with depression and hopelessness. The results of the present study suggest that targeting hopelessness may be as important in adolescents as in adults to reduce suicidal ideation and prevent suicidal attempts.

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