

Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Suicide is the second leading cause of death worldwide for individuals aged 15–29 years, and college students are the subpopulations who are receiving less attention. The suicide crisis in India's school and colleges is worsening, reaching the highest suicide rate in the world among youth standing at 35.5% per 100,000. Suicide reported every 15 minutes in India, one is committed by a youth in the age group of 15-29 years. The environmental and social factors unique to college students includes social, academic, psychological, and existential. This major life transition as well as specific risk factors may exacerbate existing psychological difficulties or trigger new ones that can ultimately lead to suicide. **Methodology:** Aims: Present study has been under taken with the aim to identify relationship between suicidal ideation and affect among college students. Sample: The surveying approach under the descriptive method was adopted. 200(140 females and 60 males) undergraduate students within the age range of 18-26years were selected randomly from 3 different colleges of Imphal-west district of Manipur through multistage sampling method and informed consent was taken from the participants. **Tools:** Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASIQ) to assess the frequency of occurrence of suicidal ideation within the past month and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Expanded Form (PANAS-X) were utilized in the present study. **Results and conclusion:** Results indicated the presence of suicidal ideation among college students. Among the 200 participants, 10% participants were having suicidal ideation of which 8 male and 12 female participants exhibited suicidal ideation representing 10% of the 200 participants. Basic negative affect such as fear, guilt, sadness were the important variables that statistically correlated with suicidal ideation among the participants. It can be concluded that better understanding of the underlying factors leading to suicide would focus on potential target for early intervention for college students.

Keywords: *Affective States, Suicide*

Suicide is the second leading cause of death worldwide for individuals aged 15–29 years (WHO, 2016), and college students are the subpopulation who are receiving less attention. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2016) quoted that every hour one students commit suicide in India. The suicide crisis in India's school and colleges is worsening, reaching the

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Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

highest suicide rate in the world among youth standing at 35.5% per 100,000. More than half of college students have had suicidal thoughts, and 1 in 10 students seriously consider attempting suicide. Most importantly 80-90% of college students who die by suicide were not receiving help from college counseling centers. Despite the high rate of suicide in this population, the risk factors associated with suicide ideation and attempts have not been studied in college students as a distinct group from the general population.

Multiple, additional factors are implicated in risk for suicidal ideation, including distal risk factors, such as temperamental characteristics (e.g., impulsivity; Askenazy et al., 2003), cognitive factors (e.g., negative cognitive style) (Stange et al., 2015), emotional competence (Kwok and Shek, 2010), and proximal risk factors, such as life events (Rew et al., 2016) and perceived stress (Cole et al., 2015). Moreover, prior studies have shown that affect has repeatedly been identified as a key predictor of suicidal ideation (Law et al., 2015). Individual experiences of different affective states have been linked to suicidal ideation, after controlling for other factors, such as personality (Liu, 2004). Negative affect, including depression and anxiety, is strongly related to suicidal ideation (Isacsson, 2000; Guillaume et al., 2011). Traditional mental health models have focused on negative affect, conceptualizing mental health as the absence of negative affect or disability. Nevertheless, research evidence is increasingly suggesting that positive affect has independent, beneficial effects on mental health (Dockray and Steptoe, 2010) and physical functioning (Koval et al., 2013). Studies have found that hopelessness, which is 1.3 times more important than depression for explaining suicidal ideation, is driven more by low levels of positive affect than by high levels of negative affect (Bryan et al., 2013). A cross-cultural study involving six developing countries suggested that individual differences in the experience of affective instability was linked significantly to depression, which was the key predictor of suicidal ideation (Hawton et al., 2013). Similarly, individuals with higher levels of affective instability were more likely to experience suicidal ideation, perhaps because they did not utilize positive coping styles (e.g., seeking help) when facing major life events (Rudd, 2006). Negative affect, positive affect and affective instability should be taken into consideration when assessing the suicidal risks. Such information should enable organizations to develop more systematic, comprehensive interventions to increase the positive affect of people at risk and decrease their affective instability in order to protect them against suicide.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The surveying approach under the descriptive method was adopted. 200(140 females and 60 males) undergraduate students within the age range of 18-26years were selected randomly from 3 different colleges of Imphal-west district of Manipur through multistage sampling method and informed consent was taken from the participants.

Tools

1. **General Health Questionnaire-12**(Goldberg & Williams, 1988) was utilized to measure psychological morbidity, intended to detect psychiatric disorders in community settings and non- psychiatric settings.
2. **Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASIQ)** (Williams, 1991) consists of 25 items that assesses the frequency of occurrence of suicidal ideation within the past month was also utilized in the present study. Multiple items within a range of thoughts severity are included and frequency of occurrence over a month-period allows for reasonable assessment of an individual's current level of active suicidal ideation. The scale has separate norms for college students and adults. Alpha

Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

reliability coefficient is 0.96 for adult sample and for college student is 0.91 both for males and females. The item-to-total scale correlation (content validity) ranges from 0.60 to 0.70.

- 3. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Expanded Form (PANAS-X)** (Watson & Clark, 1994) were utilized. This schedule measures different emotional states. It contains 60 items to assess two original higher order scales- General dimension scales of positive and negative affect and also measures the 11 specific emotional states and categorized as basic positive emotion, basic negative emotion and other affective states: Fear, Sadness, Guilt, Hostility, Shyness, Fatigue, Surprise, Joviality, Self-Assurance, Attentiveness and Serenity thus providing mood measurement at two different levels; ranked on Likert point scale from 1-5 and subjects are required to give response to each items using 5 point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much”. It provides scores for two primary factors; positive affect and negative affect on a continuous scale from 10-50. Higher the scores for each factor indicate greater positive and negative affect, respectively. The Internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) ranging from 0.83 to 0.90 for positive affect and 0.85 to 0.90 for negative affect with convergent correlations ranging from 0.90 to 0.95 for positive affect and 0.92 to 0.95 for negative affect and discriminant correlations ranging from -0.02 to -0.28 for positive affect and from 0.00 to -0.16 for negative affect.

Procedure

The study was conducted after getting permission from the Director of the Department of Education (U), Manipur and the subjects were then contacted personally in their respective educational institution for collection of data. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and provided informed consent. The participants voluntarily and individually completed all questionnaires in a single session lasting about 1-2hours and the study was conducted during the year 2013-2015.

RESULTS

Suicidal Ideation among College Students

Table 1: Suicidal Ideation of College Students on Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire

Suicidal Ideation	No.of cases	Percentages	Gender		
			Male	Female	Total
Presents	20	10%	8	12	20 (10%)
Absents	180	90%	52	128	180 (90%)
Total	200	100%	60	140	200(100%)

Table 2 shows the presence of suicidal ideation among college students. Among the 200 participants, 10% participants were having suicidal ideation within the past one month and 90% participants were not having suicidal ideation. Further analysis indicated that 8 male and 12 female participants exhibited suicidal ideation representing 10% of the 200 participants.

Relationship between Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedules and Suicidal Ideation among College Students

Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

Table 2. shows Correlation between General Positive and Negative Affect and suicidal Ideation among College Students

Positive & Negative Affect	Suicidal Ideation	Mean \pm S.D (N=200)	Pearson Correlation
	General Positive Affect(GPE)	29.7 \pm 6.03	0.007(ns)
	General Negative Affect(GNE)	22.5 \pm 5.9	0.127(ns)
	Basic Negative Emotion Scale		
	Fear	13.16 \pm 3.9	0.257**
	Hostility	12.96 \pm 3.57	0.135(ns)
	Guilt	11.83 \pm 4.22	0.263**
	Sadness	11.19 \pm 3.88	0.206**
	Basic Positive Emotion Scale		
	Joviality	21.82 \pm 7.18	-0.057(ns)
	Self-assurance	15.61 \pm 4.21	-0.077(ns)
	Attentiveness	12.88 \pm 2.98	-0.099(ns)
	Other Affective State		
	Shyness	9.65 \pm 2.51	0.079(ns)
	Fatigue	10.51 \pm 2.77	-0.058(ns)
	Serenity	7.79 \pm 2.69	0.021(ns)

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Table 2 reflects correlation between general positive and negative affect and suicidal ideation and insignificant relationship has been found between general positive and negative affect and suicidal ideation (GPE: Mean= 29.7, S.D=6.03, $r=0.007$, $p<0.05$; GNE: Mean =22.5, S.D=5.9, $r=0.127$, $p<0.05$). Result signifies that college students with general positive and negative affects exhibited no suicidal. Further, analysis of basic negative emotions such as fear (Mean = 13.16, S.D=3.9, $r =0.257$, $p>0.01$); guilt (Mean =11.83, S.D=4.22, $r =0.263$, $p>0.01$); sadness (Mean = 11.19, S.D=3.88, $r = 0.206$, $p>0.01$) have been found significant relationship with suicidal ideation however, insignificant relationship has been observed between hostility and suicidal ideation (Mean=12.96, S.D=3.57, $r = 0.135$, $p<0.05$). This signifies that college students who have basic negative emotion especially fear, guilt and sadness exhibited suicidal ideation rather than negative emotion hostility. Furthermore, analysis of basic positive emotion and suicidal ideation, insignificant correlation has been found between basic positive emotion and suicidal ideation signifying college students having basic positive emotions like joviality (Mean= 21.82, S.D=7.18, $r = -0.057$, $p<0.05$); self-assurance (Mean = 15.61 S.D=4.21, $r = -0.077$, $p<0.05$); and attentiveness (Mean=12.88 S.D=2.98, $r = -0.099$, $p<0.05$) exhibited no suicidal ideation. While analyzing the other affective states, insignificant relationship has been found between other affective states and suicidal ideation. Result signifies that college students having affective states like shyness (Mean = 9.65, S.D=2.51, $r = 0.079$, $p<0.05$); fatigue (Mean=10.51, S.D=2.77, $r = -0.058$, $p<0.05$); serenity (Mean=9.37, S.D=2.30, $r= -0.064$, $p<0.05$); surprise (Mean =7.79, S.D=2.69, $r = 0.021$, $p<0.05$) exhibited no suicidal ideation.

DISCUSSION

Relationship between Positive and Negative Affects and Suicidal Ideation

The results from this study contribute to our knowledge regarding the correlates of suicide ideation among college students. The main findings are as follows. First, the present study evaluated suicidal ideation considered as an important precursor to latter attempted and completed suicide. Among the participants, 10% students have potentially at high risk for suicide and self-destructive behavior. This finding implies that 1 in about 10 students have

Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

potentially high level of suicidal ideation, and female students are having more suicidal ideation than male students but the variation shows no significant difference between gender and suicidal ideation. Previous studies do suggest that about 9- 12.5% of the student had high suicidal ideation (Amelia et al, 2009; Fergusson et al, 2003).

Second, the study revealed the relationship between positive & negative affect and suicidal ideation among college students which are shown in table 2 which can be discussed differently according to the subscale of the tool. Insignificant relationship was found between general positive and negative affect and suicidal ideation among college students. The reason for insignificant relationship between general/ higher order affect could be due to specified instruction given to the college students to indicate how they have felt during the past few weeks but not how they generally felt. It can be stated here that general/higher order affect (considered as trait) relates to various measures of personality and emotionality. Trait Negative Affect is substantially correlated with measures of Neuroticism or Negative emotionality. Conversely, trait Positive Affect is strongly related to Extraversion and Positive Emotionality. At the trait level, Positive affect (PA) is a dimension reflecting one's level of pleasurable engagement with the environment. Trait PA is a corresponding predisposition conducive to positive emotional experience; reflects a generalized sense of well-being and competence, and of effective interpersonal engagement. In contrast, Negative affect (NA) is a broad and pervasive predisposition to experience negative emotions that has further influences on cognition, self-concept, and world view (Watson & Clark, 1984).

The study further revealed that positive relationship has been found between basic/lower order negative emotion (fear, guilt and sadness) and suicidal ideation but not with basic negative emotion-hostility indicated that basic negative emotion i.e., fear, guilt and sadness have a role with the development of suicidal ideation among college students but not with negative emotion-hostility. The present study also indicated no relationship between basic/lower order positive emotion i.e., joviality, self-assurance, attentiveness and suicidal ideation. The study further analyzed the relationship between other affective states such as shyness, fatigue, surprise, serenity and suicidal ideation and no relationship has been observed. So, from the results of the present study, it can be said that negative emotions such as fear, guilt and sadness are the only emotions associated with suicidal behaviour in this population. Similar findings have been observed by previous researchers (Cynthia, 2006; You at al., 2014). However, a numbers of studies have indirectly linked trait negative affect (general negative emotion) commonly measured in the form of neuroticism dimension of Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) Or the Five factor Model (FFM) inventory and regularly demonstrated having relationship between neuroticism and suicidal ideation same holds true for neuroticism and attempted suicide and completed suicide. So, it can stated here that individuals who express suicide ideation, generally experience negative emotions (Useda et al., 2004; Nock & Kazdin, 2002); the basic negative emotions-fear has been linked to STAI state anxiety scale; sadness and guilt with Beck depression inventory and hostility with the state form of the State-Trait Anger scale (Spielberger et al.,1983). Such basic negative emotions are relatively of short term, have fluctuation in mood and significantly related to state measures of depression and anxiety which have been found associated with suicidal ideation.

However, the present study further indicated that hostility- a negative emotion that can also be considered as state anger has been found no relationship with suicidal ideation among these populations which is contradicting with previous findings (Geigling at al.,2009; Simon et al.,2011; Doihara et al.,2012; Wang et al.,2014). Various researches have been conducted

Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

on the role of cognition in suicidal thoughts and behaviors, but there has been as less research conducted on the role of affect. This study was an attempt identifies the role of affect on suicidal ideation and to determine if affect contributes additional information to suicide over and above cognition. The goal was to have more holistic understanding of the affect for those who considered ending their lives. The inability to regulate mood or affect is most often in reaction to a life stressor that brings about an intense affective or emotional reaction, and suicidal behaviors may be one way to attempt to cope with this state. This is a strong and perhaps unique finding of this study that showed relationship between basic negative emotion like fear, guilt and sadness and suicidal ideation. The finding further highlights the importance of more scientific study to understand the role of affect on suicidality with large sample. It can be mentioned here that the differences in findings may be due to geographical and cultural differences; and moreover due to small sample size, the time frame and the methodology used in the study.

CONCLUSION

The present study could be concluded that there is relationship between basic negative emotion and suicidal behavior of the study samples. The finding indicated that basic negative emotion i.e., fear, guilt and sadness have a role with the development of suicidal ideation among college students but not with negative emotion-hostility. Individuals high in negative affect exhibit, on average, higher levels of distress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, and tend to focus on the unpleasant aspects of themselves, the world, the future, and other people, and also evoke more negative life events. Affective dysregulation is another potential contributory factor for suicidal ideation among college students which is marked by an inability to regulate emotions appropriately and susceptible to irritability and negative affect. In stressful situations, affectively deregulated individuals experience a confluence of negative emotions (i.e., fear, sadness and anger) in a way that causes them to react in an overly aggressive manner. Ineffective utilization of positive coping styles (e.g., seeking help) when facing major life events could also make them more susceptible to suicide. This was an attempt to improve the assessment and treatment of suicide through a more holistic understanding of the affect for those considered ending their lives.

Limitation and Implication

The present study addressed on the nature of the relationship between suicide ideation and affect among college students of Manipur. The findings of the study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The sample size was small, larger sample in the future research will be helpful in generalization of result. Present work was related to assessment only. In future, research program may be planned to the participants having indication of suicidal ideations, thoughts etc. Findings of the study will be helpful to chart out management plan for college students indicating suicidal ideation. It also provided the empirical basis for future research and can be considered as step toward accumulating knowledge on suicidal behavior which could contribute to clinical practice, intervention strategies, and prevention efforts.

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Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

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Affective States: A Potential Mediator of Suicidal Ideation among College Students

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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