

Effects of Self- esteem on Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The study under report focuses on the effects of self-esteem and on suicidal ideation among adolescents. It was hypothesized that self-esteem would exert differential effects on suicidal ideation among adolescents. In all, 480 adolescents (males = 265 & females = 215) from eastern U.P. within the age range of 14 to 19 years participated in the present study. The participants were administered Suicidal Ideation Scale and Self-esteem Scale. The descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data obtained in the study. Results revealed that varied levels of self- esteem exert differential effects on suicidal ideation among the adolescents. Results suggest that higher the level of self-esteem lower the chances of indulging in suicidal behaviour and vice versa. The results are thoroughly discussed and interpreted in the light of available literature on the covered variables. Besides, limitations of the study and the suggestions for future researches are also given.

Keywords: *Suicidal ideation, Self-esteem, Gender, Adolescents*

The survey reports on suicidal deaths and behavior reveal that suicidal behavior is a major public health problem and presents significant challenges to individuals, families, and public health systems throughout the world (Bertolote & Fleishman, 2002). Suicidal behavior, ranging from suicidal ideation to suicidal acts such as parasuicide, attempted suicide, and completed suicide, is widely pervasive and has reached critically wide-ranging proportions (Fergusson et al., 2000; Fanous et al., 2004). According to WHO estimates, one million people worldwide commit suicide every year, accounting for more deaths than homicide and war combined. In the year 2000, a suicide was completed every 40 s and attempted every 3 s worldwide (Moosa et al., 2005). Furthermore, according to the WHO estimates based on current worldwide trends, for the year 2020, ~1.53 million people will die from suicide and 10-20 times more people will attempt suicide, representing an average of one death every 20 s and one attempt every 1-2 s (Bertolote and Fleishman, 2002). Suicidal thoughts are not uncommon among young people. It is estimated that between 22% and 38% of adolescents have thought about suicide at some point in their lives, and between 12% and 26% reporting

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having had such thoughts in the previous year (Nock et.al. 2008). According to a WHO report, every year in India more than 14,000 students commit suicide. It is surprising but true to note that 70% of students are under stress and even youngsters can also be the victim of stress and it is one of the potential causes of students' suicidal deaths.

No doubt, it has become a worldwide health epidemic (Mallet, et al., 2012). Suicidal deaths, attempts and suicidal ideation may have a number of correlates. The personality and its related aspects like self-esteem are assumed to be among the potential determinants of suicide and suicidality.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude towards the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself, as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame (Hewitt, 2009). Self-esteem is an attractive social psychological construct because researchers have conceptualized it as an influential predictor of certain outcomes, such as academic achievement (Yagual, 2015; Orth & Robbins, 2014).

Suicidal ideation

Suicidal behavior is an umbrella term as it includes suicidal ideation, suicide planning, and suicide attempt that may lead to suicide. As regards suicidal ideation, it may be defined as the thoughts of suicide that can range in severity from a vague wish to be dead to active suicidal ideation with a specific plan and intent. It is a potential precursor to later attempted and completed suicide (Brent, Johnson, Bartle et al., 1993). People in the grip of suicidal ideation often feel that life isn't worth living. It ranges in intensity from fleeting thoughts through to concrete, well thought-out plans for killing oneself, or a complete preoccupation with self-destruction or self-harm. Favazza (1989) states that suicidal ideation is a useful indicator of identifying at population level, its prevalence in the suicide rates among adolescents. It is characterized as a personality disorder or with the character of emotional blackmail (Ahmad et al., 2014; Abasse et al., 2009).

There may be some symptoms of suicide in individuals to which the parents and other related persons should give due attention to manage the affected cases on time. It may include threatening to hurt him/herself or suicide, looking for ways to suicide e.g. seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means, deliberately hurting him/herself i.e. by scratching, cutting, or burning. talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, hopelessness, rage, anger, seeking revenge, acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking, feeling trapped, like there's no way out, increasing alcohol or drug use, withdrawing from friends, family or society, anxiety, agitation, changes in sleep or appetite, dramatic changes in mood, no reason for living, and no sense of purpose in life etc (Silva et al.,2014; Schweitzer er al., 1995).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been conducted some studies which offer valuable insight into the prevalence and risk factors associated with suicidal ideation and attempts among general population and also among adolescents. For example, violent behavior, alcohol consumption, and smoking among adolescents are said to be directly related to suicide ideation, possibly because they perceive such behaviors as a possible solutions to stressful events (Park, 2013; SouzaI, et.al., 2010). It has also been reported that there is complex interrelationship of stress, depression, social support and parent-child conflict with suicide ideation (Aralia et.al., 2009; Mallett et al. 2012), But as regards the role of self-esteem in suicidal ideation, it has not received the adequate attention of the researchers which it really deserves.

Silva et.al (2014) have pointed out some trajectories to follow in the observation, mapping, and intervention on suicidal ideation. They point to the need for actions aimed at adolescents, especially females, and greater attention to violent behavior and illicit drug use as a major concern for the prevention of suicide among males. McAuliffe et al. (2003) found that almost one-third of the students surveyed had lifetime suicide ideation.

Manani and Sharma (2013) studied the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation and found that there was negative correlation between self- esteem and suicidal ideation among students. A negative view of the self may involve seeing the self as worthless and the future as hopeless. This type of feeling gives rise to suicidal ideation and also to the suicidal attempts. Srivastava (2007) found that people with high self-esteem are relatively more resistant to suicidal thoughts and more competent in coping with negative circumstance. Wilburn and Smith (2005) obtained significant negative relationship between self- esteem and suicidal ideation. Swann et al. (2007) are also of the view that uncertainty about self-worth predisposes to negative mood states leading to the probability of suicidal acts.

Bhar and Ghahramanlou-Holloway (2008) examined the association of self-esteem with suicidal ideation after controlling for depressed mood and hopelessness. Self-esteem is operationalized as beliefs about oneself (self-based self-esteem) and beliefs about how other people regard oneself (other-based self-esteem). Both the aspects of self-esteem were found to be negatively correlated with suicide ideation after controlling for depression and hopelessness. Uncertainty about self-worth and negative self-concept shake individual's confidence and ability to prove himself/ herself as competent in such situations. Creemers, et al. (2012) examined whether explicit and implicit self-esteem, the interaction between these two constructs, and their discrepancy are associated with depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and loneliness. They found that the interaction of implicit and explicit self-esteem was associated with suicidal ideation, indicating that participants with high implicit self-esteem combined with a low explicit self-esteem showed more suicidal ideation.

It is obvious from the review that suicidal ideation is a big challenge to human life, social and family peace, the educationists and also the administration. So it needs to be studied from different points of view. There may be a number of factors giving rise to suicidal behavior

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and all such factors should be identified for the proper management of suicidal thoughts and suicidal deaths also. The personality aspects should be given priority to screen the people likely to indulge in suicidal behaviour. No doubt, there have been conducted some studies in this area, but most of these studies are based either on foreign samples or on small samples. Besides, self-esteem seems to be relatively less explored in this context, and the available findings regarding the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation make our knowledge contradictory and inconclusive. In view of the above, this study was conducted to ascertain the differential effects, if any, of self-esteem on suicidal ideation among the adolescents.

Objectives

- To ascertain the effects of self- esteem on suicidal ideation among adolescents.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were examined in the present study.

H1- Self-esteem would exert differential effects on suicidal ideation among adolescents.

H2- Self-esteem based groups would differ significantly in suicidal ideation with one another.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The randomly selected 480 adolescents enrolled in some of the Intermediate colleges of Jaunpur district in U.P. comprised the sample. Their age ranged between 14 and 19 years and the mean age being 16.36 years and their education ranged from High school to Intermediate standard. There were 265 male and 215 female participants belonging to either rural or urban areas. They were divided into High, Moderate and Low self-esteem groups (three levels).

Inclusion criteria

The participants below 14 and above 19 years and having any psychopathological problem were not included in the study.

Informed Consent

They were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and the adolescents not willing to participate, were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Three tools were used in the present study

- 1. Personal Information schedule-** A personal schedule was used to obtain information about the participants such as age, gender, locale and health status etc.
- 2. Self- esteem Scale:** Singh and Srivastava (2004). It is prepared in Likert format and consists of five alternative responses (very much, much, average, low and very low. Higher the score on this scale higher the self-esteem and vice versa. The positive items are scored on the pattern of 5,4,3,2, and 1 and the negative items are scored in reverse order. Its reliability (0.80) and the validity (0.89) are high.

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3. **T-S Suicidal Ideation Scale:** Singh and Thakur (2004). This scale consists of 20 items accompanied by 5 alternative responses. Its reliability by odd-even method is 0.78 and by spilt-half method is 0.82 while the validity is 0.78. It provides global score. Higher the scores higher the tendency of suicidal ideation and vice-versa.

Procedure

The participants were unambiguously informed about the work they had to do and good rapport was established for this purpose before the testing was started. They were seated comfortably and the procedure of responding to the items was properly explained to them. The scales were collected from them after getting their responses and they were relieved from testing with thanks for their cooperation.

RESULTS

The variations in the mean scores of three self-esteem based groups on suicidal ideation scale are easily observable from table 1. The low self-esteem group scored higher on suicidal ideation scale (M= 49.51) as compared to moderate self-esteem group (M= 47.09) and high self-esteem group (M= 39.49). This suggests that persons with low self-esteem are much more vulnerable to suicidal indulgence than the persons with higher self- esteem.

Table-1: Mean and SD values of low, moderate and high self-esteem groups on Suicidal ideation scale

Self-esteem Groups	N	Percentage	M	SD
LSE	135	28.12%	49.51	10.42
MSE	205	42.71%	47.09	9.17
HSE	140	29.17%	39.49	9.35

Table- 2 shows that the three groups formed on the basis of self-esteem differ significantly in suicidal ideation ($F=13.49$; $P>.01$). Thus the level of self- esteem emerged as an important risk factor for suicidal ideation, hence the first hypothesis is accepted. In other words, the differences between three self-esteem groups are real, not attributable to chance variable.

Table-2: Summary of ANOVA between three Self-esteem groups on Suicidal Ideation Scale

Sources of variation	df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F	P
Between groups	2	2142.30	1071.15	13.49	.01
Within groups	477	37851.08	79.35		
Total	479				

Table-3: Significance of difference between three self-esteem (SE) groups in suicidal ideation

SN.	SE Groups compared	t	p
1	Low vs Moderate	2.28	.05
2	Low vs High	8.42	.01
3	Moderate vs High	7.52	.01

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Whether the three self-esteem based groups really differ with one another in suicidal ideation, t-test was applied to answer this question. Table-3 shows that significant differences have been obtained in all the comparisons. So, the second hypothesis is also accepted. The results suggest that lower the self-esteem, higher the probability of suicidality and vice-versa.

DISCUSSION

Self-esteem is assumed to be a major determinant of achievement, adjustment and success in human life. Self-esteem is a personality dimension and it indicates the extent to which a person believes in himself / herself capable of performing different types of tasks and deal with various situations in life. Some people aren't able to cope with problems and issues in their lives as effectively as some other people can do. Their self-esteem drops and they take it out on themselves. They may punish themselves for what they are feeling inside and in this situation self-esteem may play a significant role in facing the difficult moments of life. This feeling may influence the tendency of suicidal ideation among people possessing inadequate self-esteem (Bhar & Ghahramanlou-Holloway, 2008).

The findings of the present study obviously suggest that self-esteem and suicidal ideation are related, i.e., lower the self-esteem higher the problem of the feeling that life is not worth living. So in such a situation, the probability is that persons with low self-self-esteem may develop negative view about their life and also the outcomes (Pathak, & Singh, 2016). If it happens to be so, their behavioural efficacy will deteriorate and as a consequence of it, they may be dominated by negative affects like frustration, pessimism, worthlessness, low self-regard and the feeling that life is not worth living (Srivastava, 2007). Such negative emotional complexities will hamper their ability to adjust in challenging situations, which in turn may cause indulgence in suicidal behavior. So it becomes imperative for the parents and other care givers to be attentive to their negative emotional thoughts resulting due to frustrating circumstances and failures in life (Arria,et al.,2009; Afifi, Cox & katz,2007).

Low self-esteem is a significant risk factor for suicidal ideation, as low self-esteem may lead to depression in challenging situations which may make people vulnerable to suicidal ideation. It is felt that adolescents should be trained to set realistic goals and being problem focused in coping with failures and frustrations in life, as failure leads to negative self-concept among them and its persistence may give rise to suicidal ideation and other suicidal behaviours (Manani & Sharma, 2013; Marsh,1990). Since high self-esteem is helpful in managing depression, whereas low self-esteem leads to depression, so people should be prepared to face the stressors and challenges in life. High self-esteem is more helpful in dealing with troubling situations, anxiety, stress and psychosomatic problems. People with high self-esteem tend to be more enterprising in facing the problems, as they take the problems as challenges and try their best to manipulate the environmental demands for their better well-being. Their positive attitudes play instrumental role in coping with the problems and they are also intrinsically motivated to meet the stressing events and experiences (Wilburn and Smith, 2005; Swann et al., 2007; Amelia et. al., 2009).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study unambiguously suggest that self-esteem is a significant factor in suicidal ideation. The higher level of self-esteem enhances the confidence of people and helps in dealing with adverse situations in life whereas low self-esteem shakes the confidence and interferes with coping ability and increases the probability of indulgence in suicidal behaviour. The adolescents should be skilled in developing high self-esteem, resilience, optimism and self-confidence which will help them in meeting the frustrating circumstances in life. It will reduce the probability of vulnerability to suicidality. The adolescents with low self-esteem in particular need to be counseled for enhancing their coping efficiency in adverse circumstances of life. Adolescence is the phase of storm and stress as during this developmental phase, the adolescents are not properly matured to deal with their problems of life. Not only this, they also do not like to be directed frequently for different activities and behaviours. So it is imperative for the parents and other related persons to extend the positive feedback and social support, so that they could develop matured psychological approaches and behavioural efficacy to deal with various conditions of life. Such approaches will help them in cognizing that escaping from problems or making an end of life is no solution of any problem, problems are to be taken as challenge and every problem has a solution, provided one tries to solve them tactfully.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study is based on a single shot approach and covered only one psychological variable as the independent variable and data collection was limited to a particular area of eastern U.P. It is advised that the future researches may target a relatively larger sample of varied age groups from different ecological and socio-economic backgrounds extended in different zones of society. It would be more useful if other psychological variables, such as depression, anxiety, competitiveness, aggression, frustration, resilience and so on, are tapped in studies as the predictor variables and suicidal ideation is measured as criterion variable. Besides, intervention based studies and emotional intelligence can be of high implication in managing suicidal ideation.

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