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Depression, Hopelessness, Emotional Autonomy and Hardiness as Predictors of Suicide Ideations among Male Adolescents

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Abstract

Adolescence is a transformational phase of one's life, given the physical and psychological changes that occur during this phase. Adolescent suicides are on a rise and adolescents have thoughts and cognitions about suicidal behavior. Suicide ideations involve thoughts related to desire, intent or method of committing suicide. A very important characteristic of suicide ideation is that it fluctuates and is fluid in nature. There is a rapid onset but a high level of unpredictability. Research on suicide ideation has established strong links between depression and hopelessness and suicidal ideations. Depressed adolescents are reported to be highly vulnerable to suicide ideations and these ideations can be strengthened by social reinforcement. In addition to depression and hopelessness, familial variables like autonomy from parents or personality characteristics such as hardiness are also important for the outcomes like suicide ideation. The present study aims to find depression, hopelessness, emotional autonomy and hardiness as predictors of suicide ideation in male adolescents. A sample of 158 males in the age group of 15 – 22 years is taken. Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Steer and Brown, 1996), Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974), Personal Views Survey (Kobasa and Kahn, 1982), Emotional Autonomy Scale (Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986) and Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck, Steer and Ranieri, 1988) are used to collect the data. The data is first factor analysed so as to obtain independent factors. The factor scores from this factor are further used in linear regression in order to predict suicide ideation in male adolescents. Regression analysis revealed that the Cognitive-Personality factor is a significant predictor of suicide ideation. The obtained results have been elucidated.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of suicide, suicidal actions, and suicidal thoughts is a complex one. With an increase in number of suicides and suicidal behaviors world over, the research in this area has also increased, aiming to explain the rationale behind such behavior. Suicidal Ideation differs from suicidal behavior in the sense that the former refers to suicidality without action. It has been defined as the thoughts about ending one's own life with some degree of intent (Johnson, 2006). It has been reported that suicide ideation has a significant role to play in detecting and preventing suicide (Palmer, 2004).

Depression has been considered as a persistent risk factor for suicide in early and late adolescents (Nemeroff et al., 2001). A model for studying risk factors leading to suicidal ideation has been proposed by Harter, Marold and Whitesell (1992). It involves

various factors like scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, peer support and parental support in combating suicide ideation. An important risk factor identified in the model is the depression composite which consists of self-worth, general hopelessness and affect. The study reported for high positive correlation between depression and suicide ideation among adolescents, thus, providing evidence for positive relationship between the two in adolescents.

Hopelessness is a widely researched correlate of suicide ideation and suicidal behaviors. Hopelessness is the feeling of self-worthlessness and that person himself, as well as his/her situation is flawed. It has emerged as a central trait in developing suicide ideation across a number of studies (Khan, 2015). Hopelessness is one of the major components of Beck's

negative cognitive trait i.e. negative conditions about future. When confronted with a negative event, individuals who have negative thinking will be more vulnerable to depression. They will infer that negative consequences are going to follow them from this negative event and that occurrence of that event means that individuals themselves are worthless (Mc Ginn, 2000). The combination of hopelessness and depression is dangerous and is something that needs to be taken seriously. These individuals also feel that conditions will never change or improve and that there is no solution to the problem. They even have this thought that dying by suicide is better than living with these feelings. Hopelessness is the core condition of depression and will cause suicide.

According to the hopelessness theory of depression, hopelessness is considered as a subset of helplessness. This theory is also formulated from the helplessness model of Abramson et al. (1989), which states that the negative attributional style is a major risk factor for causing depressive symptoms and these are termed as hopelessness depression. This theory also hypothesizes that there will be an association of negative attributional style with depressive symptoms in the presence of negative events but not in the absence of negative events.

Studies on Indian sample have also provided evidence for high level of hopelessness leading to suicide ideation among mid and late adolescents. In a comparative study conducted on Indian and Malaysian adolescents, there were significant differences on hopelessness between the two groups. Indian adolescents reported higher level of hopelessness as compared to Malaysian adolescents and consequently higher suicide ideation (Khan, Ahmad, Hamdan, Mustafa, and Tahir 2014). Another such comparative study on American Indian students and Native American students was conducted by

Manzo, Tiesman, Stewart, Hobbs and Knox (2015), in which they concluded that American Indian students were at higher risk for suicide showing higher level of hopelessness and consequently higher suicide ideation.

India has one of the world's highest suicide rates for youth aged from 15 to 29, according to a 2012 Lancet report. Failure in examinations led to 2,413 suicides by students in 2016 — or seven every day — accounting for 25 per cent of student suicides. Around 23,000 student suicide deaths (30 per cent) between 2007 and 2016 have been attributed to failure in examinations. Maharashtra reported the most — 1,350 — student suicides in 2016, or four every day, followed by West Bengal (1,147) and Tamil Nadu (981). Around 75,000 students committed suicides in India between 2007 and 2016.

A number of studies that investigate the antecedent factors of suicide ideation and suicidal behaviors, take into account the role of parental support, familial factors and emotional autonomy from parents among adolescents as one of the major forces (Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986). Family environment and parent-child relationship are detrimental to development of such negative cognitions and consequently suicidal behaviors. Emotional autonomy, in a manner is the psychological move of the adolescents, away from their parents, thus resulting in separation, detachment and alienation. It is strongly linked with suicide ideation among adolescents (Pace and Zappulla, 2010).

Hardiness is a psychological variable that is found to be associated with effectively dealing with any stressful situation and having better mental and physical health (Philips, 2011).

Hardiness is also linked with better coping of stressful life situations. More

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hardy individuals appraise stressful situations in their life as less threatening and more controllable, than non-hardy (Gaillard, and van Dam, 2010). Thus, hardiness is found to play a positive role in combating suicide ideation.

In this study the emphasis will be on male adolescents as nowadays it is considered as the most vulnerable population for suicidal ideations. Suicides among young males are four times more common than among young female, and they are occurring among ever younger males. Little is understood about what motivates boys and young men to take their lives in such numbers. Another concern is that little effort has been made to understand the trend.

The relationship between fathers and sons, in particular the impact on young males of not having had a father during boyhood can be a factor. Other common topics are body image and relationships with women. Late adolescence is a time of identity consolidation, it is thought that being unable to answer the question "Who am I, really?" is a critical feature among college age men who consider suicide. It is also known that young males are more impulsive than females and often act without giving the

Objectives:

1. To understand the relationship of depression, hopelessness, emotional autonomy and hardiness with suicide ideations.
2. To understand depression, hopelessness, emotional autonomy and hardiness as predictors of suicide ideations.

Hypotheses:

Keeping in mind the above objectives, the following hypotheses are framed:

individuals, who may resort to means like suicide in such times (Delahajj, consequences of their acts much thought. This might include taking a drastic decision to leave this world.

Suicidal thoughts can lead to completion of suicide, therefore, the focus of this study will be on suicidal ideations. This study will also highlight a crucial variable of emotional autonomy which will enable us to study depression and hopelessness in context of familial dependencies and relinquishing of these dependencies. Hardiness will also be studied in relationship with these variables. There are numerous factors which can account for suicide ideation, for example, unemployment, poverty, bullying, domestic violence, loss of loved ones and other social factors but the psychological determinants play an equally important role. In fact, if a psychological intervention is given at the right time, adolescents can be easily helped to overcome their feelings of hopelessness and depression which can curb suicidal ideations. This study will be significant for mental health counselors in schools, colleges and clinics to improve quality of care for this vulnerable population and to provide interventions at the right time.

1. Depression, Hopelessness, Emotional Autonomy will have a significant positive relationship with Suicide Ideation.
2. Hardiness will have a significant negative relationship with Suicide Ideation.
3. Depression, Hopelessness, Emotional Autonomy will significantly predict Suicide Ideation in male adolescents. The direction of association will be positive.
4. Hardiness will significantly predict Suicide Ideation in male

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adolescentsVZ. The direction of association will be negative.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In the present study, male adolescents of various schools and colleges of Amritsar city were taken as subjects. The choice of the sample was based on the convenience of availability of the subjects and the co-operation extended by the authorities as well as the students. The subjects who were not enthusiastic about participation were therefore not selected. Thus, incidental sampling is employed in this study. As the focus of the study was to analyze the relationship between different variables, so the criteria of random selection are not strictly taken into account. There are 158 males in the sample belonging to the age group of 15 to 22 years. The mean age of males is 18.36 with a standard deviation of 1.66.

Tools used:

The various tests employed in this study are:

1. Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II)-Beck, Steer and Brown (1996)
2. Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)- Beck et al. (1974)
3. Personal Views Survey (PVS)-Kobasa and Kahn (1982)
4. Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS)-Steinberg and Silverberg (1986)
5. Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation- Beck, Steer and Ranieri (1988)

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II)-Beck, Steer and Brown (1996)

BDI-II is a 21 multiple choice question based inventory that measures various aspects of depression in an individual like guilt, hopelessness, helplessness, weight loss, etc. The individuals in this version of BDI are asked to rate how they are feeling since past two weeks. The reliability of the test stands at $r=0.93$ while the internal consistency is on

higher side i.e. $\alpha = .91$ as suggested by the test maker.

Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)- Beck et al. (1974)

It is a 20-item self-report inventory that was designed by Beck, Weissman, Lester and Trexler (1974) to measure negative attitudes about the future as perceived by adults. It measures three major aspects of hopelessness: feelings about the future, loss of motivation, and expectations. The test is designed for adults, age 17-80. It measures the extent of the respondent's negative attitudes, or pessimism, about the future. The Kuder Richardson reliabilities are .92, .93, .91, .82, .92, .92 and .87 (Beck and Steer, 1988).

Personal Views Survey (PVS) – Kobasa and Kahn (1982)

This is one of the most important scales used to measure psychological hardiness in individuals. This scale consists of 12 items. The scale measures an individual on the three major dimensions of hardiness i.e. control, commitment and challenge. It is a multiple choice inventory. The reliability of this scale is 0.628 and the validity is 0.543 as calculated by the test maker.

Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS) – Steinberg and Silverberg (1986)

This measure of emotional autonomy was developed by Steinberg and Silverberg keeping in mind Blos's perspective on individuation as a guiding framework. There are four components of emotional autonomy: Two relatively more cognitive components:

1) Perceives parents as people 2) De-idealization 53

Two relatively more affective components:

3) Non-dependency on parents 4) Individuation

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The items were based on the contemporary perspective that de-emphasizes the storm and stress of adolescent detachment, rebellion and conflict but lays more stress on the processes of individuation. A total of 20 items constitute the test and are presented in declarative statements. The internal consistency as determined by Cronbach's alpha is .75.

Beck scale for Suicide Ideation (BSSI) - Beck, Steer and Ranieri (1988)

This scale is a self-report measure and has 19 items that assess suicidal ideations, planning and intent to commit suicide in the past week. If a subject gets a high score that shows that he has higher suicide ideations. He has active thoughts of killing himself. Review has found a high concurrent validity between a high score of BSSI and experience of suicidal attempts (Beck, Brown and Steer, 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total scores for hopelessness, depression, hardiness and emotional autonomy were factor analyzed for the sample of boys (N = 158). Results revealed a single factor of cognitive-personality explaining almost 46% variance for the male adolescent sample. The factor loadings of the predictor variables on single factor are given in Table 1. Cut-off point for factor loading was taken as 0.35 keeping the sample size in mind.

Table 1: Factor loadings of predictor variables on a single factor in Male Adolescents

VARIABLES	FACTOR 1
Hopelessness	.79
Depression	.80
Hardiness	-.60
Emotional autonomy	.44
Eigen Value	1.83
% variance	45.97

The table shows that all the four predictor variables viz. hopelessness,

depression, hardiness and emotional autonomy significantly load on one factor which is thus named as **Cognitive-Personality**. Depression has the highest loading on the factor (.80), followed by hopelessness (.79). Hardiness shows a significant negative loading on the factor (-.60) while emotional autonomy exhibits significant positive loading on the same (.44). The analysis reveals that all the four predictor variables are significantly correlated to one another for the sample of adolescent boys and form a single factor explaining around 46% variance.

Among the cognitive variables, depression loads the highest on the factor thus contributing maximum to the cluster so formed. It is significantly associated with feeling of hopelessness in adolescent boys. Results from factor analysis reveal that depression and hopelessness have the highest significant loading on the same factor, thus assuming a crucial role in the cognitive dimension in boys. In previous literature, strong interaction between depression and hopelessness has been discussed, in further predicting suicide ideation (Rhodes, Bethell, and Bondy, 2006).

Even though some studies place one variable over the other in predicting suicidal behavior in adolescents, yet the interaction of the two negative states cannot be ignored in leading to negative outcomes for adolescent boys such as suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Males are more aggressive and are high on externalizing behaviors and therefore, develop suicidal tendencies.

The Cognitive model of Depression (Beck, 1967) also discusses that depressed individuals are more likely to have distorted thoughts and tend to think pessimistically. They indulge in negative thinking about oneself, the world and one's future which translates into high level of hopelessness. In prediction of suicide ideations, previous studies have also discussed the combined role of

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depression and hopelessness (Gibb, Andover, and Beach, 2006).

The factor so obtained in sample of adolescent boys, shows significant positive factor loading for the variable of emotional autonomy. This indicates that emotional autonomy is positively correlated with depression and hopelessness in boys. Emotional autonomy encompasses both cognitive as well as affective sub-dimensions. In the cognitive sub-dimension, deidealization of parents and perceiving parents as people are included. The affective sub-dimension includes non-dependency on parents and individuation. These also tend to increase the negative cognitions like those of depression and hopelessness in boys, as they are still battling with identity related issues in their adolescence stage. Emotional autonomy among adolescents is discussed as negative family functioning and loss of love and support from parents (Oliva, 2009), both of which significantly contribute towards adolescent depression and feelings of hopelessness among them. Previous literature has also discussed the positive association between depression, hopelessness and emotional autonomy in adolescents (Allen, Porter, McFarlan, McElhaney, and Marsh, 2007).

The predictor variable of hardiness has a significant negative loading on the factor, Cognitive-Personality thereby indicating that in adolescent boys, hardiness acts as a protective factor against the negative cognitions like depression, hopelessness and emotional autonomy, which can further lead to development of suicide ideation. Hardiness as a personality trait helps individuals to combat stressful situations and are less likely to exhibit negative outcomes that may develop during such phases. Previous literature has discussed hardiness as a person's inner resource or capacity (Westphal and Bonnano, 2007) against developing depression or similar negative emotional states.

Thus, the current factor, named as Cognitive-Personality in sample of adolescent boys reveals that the cognitive facet comprising of depression, hopelessness and emotional autonomy can further predict suicidal behaviors among them. On the other hand, the personality trait of hardiness serves as a protective factor, negatively associating with the cognitive variables. The scores on the factor will be further used in linear regression analysis, to see how the cluster of the predictor variables, can predict suicidal ideations in boys.

Regression analysis

The factor scores on the single factor obtained in preceding analysis were used in linear regression analysis to predict suicide ideation among male adolescents. The results from linear regression are reported in Table 2 which shows R^2 , Adjusted R^2 , Regression Coefficient, Standardized Regression Coefficient and F ratio when suicide ideation is regressed on the variable of Cognitive-Personality dimension. Results reveal that the factor explains 22% variance in suicide ideation in males and has a significant regression coefficient (1.68), in predicting suicide ideation. Further, the beta coefficient is also significant (.47, $p < 0.01$) thereby showing, that the dimension of Cognitive-Personality is significant in predicting suicidal ideation among males.

Table 2: Regression Analysis in Male Adolescents

Predictor Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Regression Coefficient	β	F ratio	p value
Cognitive-Personality Dimension	.221	.216	1.68	.47	44.23	0.01

The results of linear regression as shown in Table 2 indicate that the factor with significant loadings on depression, hopelessness, hardiness and emotional autonomy, significantly predicts suicide

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ideation among boys in the period of adolescence. Positive regression coefficient indicates that an increase in this one factor in boys, will cause the suicide ideations among them to rise. The factor is positively indicated by depression, hopelessness and emotional autonomy and has negative loadings on hardiness. Thus, we can say that the cognitive variables contribute positively to suicide ideation among boys, whereas hardiness acts as a buffer against such negative outcomes. The results point out a significant finding that all the predictor variables, in unison, predict ideas about suicide in sample of male adolescents.

The factor has highest positive loading on depression, followed by hopelessness. It indicates that depression is the most significant variable, presence of which predicts higher suicide ideation in boys. Depression and depressive symptoms are commonly reported during adolescence stage. The interplay between risk behaviors and depression causes a rise in suicide ideations and this relationship is more crucial in adolescent boys (Rowan, 2011).

The variable with the second highest positive loading on the factor, is hopelessness. It also indicates that along with depression, rise in feelings of hopelessness about oneself, and the world around, will cause heightened negative thoughts, consequently leading to suicide ideations among boys. Hopelessness causes individuals to have distorted views, hampering their ability to reason and think clearly. Moreover, the interaction between depression and hopelessness causes suicide ideations among adolescent boys, to rise. Adolescent boys are at high risk for developing pessimistic views, given the challenges of the phase and their constant battle to establish their identities. A number of studies support similar findings stating that hopelessness is a strong predictor of suicide ideation in adolescents (Smith, Alloy, and Abramson, 2006).

Emotional Autonomy is another cognitive and affective variable, contributing

positively to the factor, thus leading to increased suicide ideations among boys. In the adolescent stage, loss of support, love and cohesive sense, is highly crucial and detrimental to developing negative outcomes like depression and suicide ideation. Increase in feeling of emotional autonomy is positively related to negative cognitions in adolescents like depression and hopelessness. It further contributes to distorted cognitions of adolescents and in absence of support from parents, adolescent boys tend to indulge in suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Studies have discussed autonomy as a characteristic of negative family functioning (Oliva, 2009). Moreover, autonomous individuals are more likely to experience conflicts in life as compared to others.

Theoretical models pertaining to suicide ideation and negative family attachments point out the fact that loss of emotional attachment with parents, unavailability of parents or loss of sense that adolescents can discuss their problems with them leads to unresolved issues and boys tend to indulge in risky behaviors like suicidal acts.

The variable of hardiness loads negatively on the factor thus showing that it negatively predicts suicide ideation among adolescent boys. It can be taken as a protective factor, against development of such negative ideations such as suicidal thoughts. Hardy people are less likely to be affected by negative events in their life, and also have resources to cope with the same. By its very nature, hardiness has been discussed as a resiliency trait which enables an individual to utilize the internal resources to combat with stressful situations. Prior studies have established a strong negative association between hardiness and depression (Bahamin, Taheri, Moghaddas, Sohrabi, and Dortaj, 2012).

Conclusion, the results indicate that Depression, Hopelessness and Emotional Autonomy are the significant predictors of suicide ideation. These variables have a positive association with suicide ideations.

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Hardiness is a significant predictor of suicide ideation and has a negative association with it. In future, this study can be spread to the girls sample. Gender and age differences can also be studied for the same.

Implications

This study is helpful for mental health counselors outside school settings and in community settings. The adolescents can be taught to build a healthy lifestyle and rational thinking which can eliminate these ideas from their minds. The counseling sessions should be focused on increasing the communication patterns between the adolescent boys and their parents. Awareness campaigns can be initiated in schools for students to seek counseling if they have these ideations.

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