

Relationship Between Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression Among Adolescents

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Abstract

Suicide Ideation refers to an individual's thoughts about ending his/her own life and carrying out related suicidal behavior. Given the myriad psychological and physical changes that occur during adolescence, this age is most sensitive for developing such negative cognitions. Depression and Hopelessness are identified as the major risk factors for developing suicide ideation. The current study was conducted in order to explore the relationship between Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression. Data were collected from 200 adolescents in the age group 16-19 years (Mage = 18.8 years). Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck & Steer, 1991), Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck & Steer, 1993) and Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961) were used to measure between Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression respectively. Correlation analysis was used to study the relationship among the three constructs. All the three variables were found to be significantly positively correlated ($p < 0.01$). The partial correlation between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness after controlling for Depression was also significant ($p < 0.01$). Significant difference was found between the two correlations. The obtained results are discussed along with empirical evidence.

Keywords: *Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness, Depression*

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Introduction

The age of adolescence is considered to be a period of turmoil as it is accompanied by various physical and psychological changes. Various studies have been taken up that investigate the role of psychopathological changes and their consequent outcomes in this stage of one's life. One of the major concerns for the society these days are the rising figures of suicides and suicide attempts among adolescence. India ranks number one in suicide and accounts for around 30 percent of deaths worldwide due to suicide (Lu, 2017). The rate of suicide in the age group between 15- 24 years has increased manifold in recent times and suicide is the third highest cause of death in this age group (Anderson & Smith, 2005). It has thus become more than ever necessary, to study the causes that lead to such behavior. Suicide Ideation refers to the ideas and thoughts about suicide and the related suicidal behavior

(Johnson, 2006). It incorporates the cognitions of an individual about his/her approach towards suicide. Moreover it is the detailed approach towards ending one's life including planning for the act, thoughts of self-harm, reasons for doing so, etc. Suicide Ideation comes from the negative cognition of an individual arising from an emotionally charged event in his/her life or from the negative approach one has towards the future. The prevalence of internalizing and externalizing problems in adolescents has increased, and along with, the research on exploring the relationship between such problems and suicidal behavior is also increasing.

Adolescence is a sensitive phase for development of internalizing symptoms like depression (Saluja et al., 2004). Depression and hopelessness are identified as the common risk factors for suicide (Papakostas et al., 2003). Beck's Cognitive Triad (1976) states three

types of negative cognitions of an individual viz. towards himself, towards the world and towards the future. Hopelessness is one such negative cognition of an individual where he/she feels worthless and forms a negative approach towards the time that is yet to come. Feelings of self worthlessness and uncertainty of future often lead to forming negative cognitions, with a majority of them ending up in thoughts of suicide. Various studies have established link between Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation in different populations (Konick & Gutierrez, 2005; Palmer & Connelly, 2005; Britton et al., 2008). Depression is another major cause leading to suicidal thoughts and engaging in suicidal behavior. Periods of depression and depressive symptoms are strongly related to negative cognitions of which suicidal thoughts ranks the highest. The prevalence of such thoughts is higher in adolescents, given their sensitive age and difficulty in coping with the major life changes. Higher depression levels are associated with increased risk of suicidal behaviors and suicide ideation (Garlow et al., 2008; Singh & Joshi, 2008). A meditational hypothesis suggests that Hopelessness mediates the relationship between Depression and Suicide (Weishaar & Beck, 1992).

Hopelessness and Depression are two entangled constructs and there exists a bi-directional relationship between the two. McGinn (2000) reported that during times of emotional turmoil, those who have negative cognitions are more prone to depression as they feel worthless and flawed to cope with the event and thus form dark opinions about the future as well. Depressed individuals are more likely to indulge in thoughts of worthlessness and thus exhibit high levels of hopelessness. Even though there is a strong link between the two constructs, there exists conflicting opinion in literature as to their independent role in predicting suicide and suicidal behavior. Some studies point out that once depression is controlled, hopelessness alone does not share a strong relationship with suicide ideation and suicidal behaviors and it tends to act as a risk

factor only when an individual suffers from depression as well (Dori & Overholser, 1999; Esposito, Johnson, Wolfsdorf & Spirito, 2003). Whereas few other investigations point out that hopelessness bears a strong relationship with suicide as an independent factor (Menon et al., 2000; Kuo et al., 2004).

There exists contradiction in the independent role of Hopelessness leading to suicide ideation, suicidal behaviors and ultimately the act of ending one's life. The investigation of the same has become increasingly important in adolescence because of the rising number of deaths due to suicide in this age group. The current study is thus an aim to find out the relationship among Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression in adolescence.

OBJECTIVES:

The study was conducted keeping in mind the following hypothesis:

1. To measure Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression in adolescence.
2. To explore the relation among Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression in adolescence
3. To find out the unique relationship between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness after controlling for Depression.

On the basis of review of literature the following **hypotheses** was formulated:

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression
2. Hopelessness will have a significant positive relationship with Suicide Ideation independent of Depression

METHOD

SAMPLE: For the current investigation data were collected from 200 adolescents between ages 16-21 years (Mean = 18.8 yrs). The sample comprised of equal number of males and females. Incidental sampling was deployed for the purpose of data collection. The data were collected from various public schools situated

in the city of Amritsar. The sample is more or less homogeneous in nature.

TOOLS USED:

1. Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck & Steer, 1991):
The scale is a reliable, self report measure of suicide ideation in an individual. There are a total of 21 items in the scale. The items measure various facets of a person's thoughts about suicide and related behavior. The responses are marked from 0-2 on each statement. Higher score in the scale indicates high suicide ideation. The test is reported for high reliability and validity.
2. Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck & Steer, 1993):
The scale is designed to measure feeling of Hopelessness in individuals. It consists of a total 20 statements and the responses are recorded as True/False. The statements measure feelings of Hopelessness such as uncertainty about future, pessimistic thoughts and feelings of self worthlessness. Scoring is done as per the scoring key and the total score denotes the level of Hopelessness in an individual. Higher scores mean higher level of Hopelessness.

3. Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961):
The scale is a widely used scale for measuring level of depression in individuals. The scale consists of a total of 21 items. The responses are marked from 0-3. The different items measure feelings and symptoms associated with depression such as loss of interest in people, weight loss, suicidal thoughts, disrupted sleep, etc. The total score for all the items denotes the score on depression. Higher the score more is the severity of depression in an individual. The scale is reported for high internal consistency reliability ranging from 0.72 to 0.93 (Beck, Steer & Garbin, 1988).

RESULTS:

To explore the relationship between suicide ideation, hopelessness and depression, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed. The correlation is presented in Table No 1. Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness were positively correlated $r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$. Depression and Suicide Ideation were also positively correlated with each other $r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$.

Table No 1

Correlation between Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression		
Variables	Hopelessness	Depression
Suicide Ideation	0.53* N (200)	0.47* N (200)

*Note. * = p < 0.01*

Further, to partial out the effect of depression, partial correlation was computed between suicide ideation and hopelessness, controlling for depression. The results of partial correlation are presented in Table No 2.

Table No 2**Partial Correlation between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness**

Control	Variable	Hopelessness	z score
Depression	Suicide Ideation	0.36*	2.7*
df (197)			

Note. * = $p < 0.01$; df = Degrees of Freedom

The two variables are positively correlated after controlling for the effect of depression on the relationship, $r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$. The value of correlation coefficient has decreased from 0.53 to 0.36 after controlling for depression. To see the significance of difference between the correlations as calculated above, Lee and Preacher's (2013) method was used that is based on Steiger's Equation (1980). The formula is used to calculate the significance of difference between two dependent correlations i.e. using the same sample and not independent of one another. The computation revealed $z = 2.7$, $p < 0.001$. Thus the relationship between suicide ideation and hopelessness is significantly different with depression as the third variable and after controlling for its effect.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the current investigation was to explore the relationship between suicide ideation, hopelessness and depression. The aim was to investigate the effect on the relationship between suicide ideation and hopelessness after controlling for depression. To meet the objective, data were collected and the correlation analysis was carried out.

The correlation analysis between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness revealed that the two variables were strongly correlated with one another. The correlation was positive and significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that as feeling of Hopelessness increases in an individual, he/she is more like to increase on the dimension of Suicide Ideation. Occurrence of Suicidal thoughts and ideas are likely to increase with increased feeling of negativity about one's future. Especially in case of adolescents, they are vulnerable to having negative cognitions about their future during periods of emotional turmoil. The consequent outcome for such feelings of hopelessness about the future is increase in suicide ideation. The results of the current study are in line with earlier findings (Konick & Gutierrez, 2005; Palmer & Connelly, 2005; Britton et al., 2008). Perusal of Table 1 shows that the correlation

between Depression and Suicide Ideation is positive and significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that as severity of depression increases, prevalence of suicide ideation in adolescents also rises. Depressed adolescents are more likely to indulge in suicidal thoughts and behaviors. In a state of depression, adolescents may have increased thoughts of ending their lives. It is during this phase that they give in to the thoughts of self harm and they may indulge in behavior like planning for the act. Depression is identified as the major risk factor for suicide. The current study reveals that increase in severity of depression will lead to increased Suicide Ideation among adolescents. The outcome is similar to the one found in literature (Garlow et al., 2008; Singh & Joshi, 2008).

Further, the investigation was carried out with an objective to see the relationship between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness after controlling for Depression. Perusal of Table 2 shows the partial correlation between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness after controlling for Depression. The partial correlation is significant at 0.01 level. It can be hence inferred that Hopelessness shares a positive significant relationship with Suicide Ideation independent of Depression.

Hopelessness and Depression are closely related to each other as both stem from increased negative cognitions of an individual. The two have emerged as significant predictors of Suicide Ideation across various studies. But the independent role of Hopelessness in its association with Suicide Ideation remained a question, given the conflicting nature of results in literature. Hopelessness is assumed to have no significant effect on Suicide Ideation once Depression is controlled (Dori & Overholser, 1999). The current study reveals opposite results, that Hopelessness shares a unique relationship with Suicide Ideation which is not affected by whether an individual suffers from Depression or not. The partial correlation is positive and significant. This indicates that a rise in feeling of hopelessness will lead to rise in Suicide Ideation and related suicidal thoughts. Kuo et al. (2004) reported similar results in their findings. The results from current investigation bear a strong implication for adolescent health and behavior. Hopelessness alone has an independent effect on Suicide Ideation and if not checked, it may lead to development of other internalizing disorders like depression which intensify Suicide Ideation.

The significance of difference between the simple correlation and partial correlation between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness was analyzed. The z scores are significant ($p < 0.01$). This denotes that the two correlation coefficients are significantly different from one another. The simple correlation between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness is affected by the level of Depression experienced by individuals. This relationship translates the combination of Depression and Hopelessness in bearing a strong association with Suicide Ideation. The partial correlation controls for Depression and explores the relationship between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness. The significant difference in the two correlations indicates that the relationship of Hopelessness with Suicide Ideation varies when Depression is controlled. The association between the two weakens after controlling for

Depression and the reduced effect is significant. Due to the sensitivity of Suicidal Ideation and the dangerous consequences it may have, there is a need to highlight these differences as suicidal behavior still remains a complex phenomenon and efforts should be made to inspect the same.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted in order to explore the relationship between Suicide Ideation, Hopelessness and Depression in adolescence. The relationship between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness was investigated after controlling for depression. The results show significant positive relationship among the three variables. There is a significant difference in simple and partial correlations between Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness. Thus, we may conclude that both Hopelessness and Depression bear a strong association with Suicide Ideation. Hopelessness independently shares a relationship with Suicide Ideation independent of Depression.

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