



DEPRESSION, HOPELESSNESS, EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY AND HARDINESS AS PREDICTORS OF SUICIDE IDEATIONS IN FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

Dr. Rupan Dhillon

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, (India)

Nishtha Mehra

Project fellow, Department of Psychology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, (India)

Abstract

Adolescence is a crucial phase of one's life, given the physical and psychological changes that occur during this phase. Number of adolescent suicides are on rise and a large number of adolescents report higher suicidal ideations during this phase. Suicide ideation involves thoughts and cognitions about suicidal behavior. It involves thoughts related to desire, intent or method of committing suicide. Research on suicide ideation has established strong links between depression and hopelessness with suicidal thoughts and tendencies. Depressed adolescents are reported to be highly vulnerable to develop suicide ideations. In addition to depression and hopelessness, familial variables like support from parents and emotional bonding with them is detrimental to such outcomes like suicide ideation. The present study thus aims to find depression, hopelessness, emotional autonomy and hardiness as predictors of suicide ideation in female adolescents. A sample of 242 females in the age group of 15 – 22 years was 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) were used to collect the data. **The data** so obtained for the predictor variables was first factor analysed so as to obtain independent factors. The factor scores from this factor were

further used in linear regression in order to predict suicide ideation in female adolescents. Regression analysis revealed that the factor was a significant predictor of suicide ideation. The obtained results have been elucidated.

Introduction

It is important for practitioners and wellness experts to understand the reasons of why the suicide ideations and attempts are especially taking place in young adults and adolescents. We know that adolescence is a period of stress where the adolescents form coherent sense of identity. It is a time when they are giving voice to their emotions. The cognitive processes too are supporting the regulation of emotions. Adolescents experience situations of heightened emotionality and complexities and the feelings of depression and hopelessness emerge when they face these emotions. There can be many reasons responsible for these thoughts and emotions. Sometimes these negative pressures may trigger feelings of suicide ideations.

Suicidal ideation can be expressed in many ways and also reflects many tendencies to act. Adolescents may be discontent with their living conditions or it may act as a warning signal for individuals in situations which are perceived as stressful. It may also be a mental preparation for the act. It reflects hopes and illusions about the future. It reflects evaluations about the quality of life which co vary with life events and changing conditions of living. It reflects threats adolescents experience to their self-esteem. How rapidly do thoughts about suicide progress to either plans or attempts? When such progression occurs, it usually happens within a year after the onset of suicidal thoughts. In other words, when a young person develops thoughts of self-harm, the



progression may take him to the level of suicide ideations or even attempts.

It's also important here to understand the terminology of suicide ideations. Suicidal ideation is a common medical term for thoughts about suicide, which maybe deliberately constructed to fail or be discovered or maybe fully intended to succeed. Suicide is self-inflicted death, where a person makes a conscious effort to end his life.

O'Carroll et al. (1996) define suicide as "self-inflicted health from injury, poisoning or suffocation where the deceased committed the act with intention to kill himself or herself".

Suicide ideation involves thoughts and cognitions about suicidal behavior. It involves thoughts related to desire, intent or method of committing suicide. It includes serious intent and/or a formulated plan. It can be a very natural and a harmless thought in young adolescents who during this transitional period face emotional and social conflicts for the first time. It may be a transient thought which can just be portrayed as a solution to their problem and some adolescents may consider it as a coping strategy.

The term suicidal ideation refers to the occurrence of any thought about self-destructive behavior, whether or not death is intended. Such thoughts may range from vague ideas to the possibility of ending one's life at one point of time in the future to very concrete plans of committing actual suicide. Suicidal behavior is associated with wide range of self-destructive behaviors with a non-fatal or fatal outcome which are described by the terms attempted suicide and suicide.

A common characteristic of attempted suicide is that people inflict harm on themselves, or poison or injure themselves leading to a non-fatal outcome. Suicide attempts are undertaken with the view and expectation that acute self-harm or unconsciousness will be a means to realize changes in one's life through acute or intended consequences. Their aim is to escape from stress or to mobilize help.

Literature on youth suicidal ideation is linked to depression and feelings of hopelessness (Rhodes, Bethell, & Bondy, 2006) and interaction of depression and hopelessness is the strongest predictor of suicide completion (Chioqueta, & Stiles, 2005). Freud's (1920) hypothesis on suicide is an extension of theory of depression. When a person loses someone, the feelings of anger are directed toward oneself and he will commit suicide. The hopelessness theory (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989) and the Cognitive Distortion Theory (Beck, 1967) state that hopelessness is the primary predictor of suicide, even better than depression. The problem with such individuals is that they are unable to interpret events correctly. There are shifts in pattern of thinking, individuals become preoccupied with problems, lose perspective and see suicide as the only solution. These are irrational evaluations of events. They develop a pessimistic belief that their situation will not change. The socio cultural perspective states that there are individuals who commit suicide because they are not able to integrate into the society. Such individuals are loners, with no social network to see them through the period of stress and hence have ideas of suicide. The feelings of depression and hopelessness and lack of coping strategies to deal with their problems result in such passive thoughts of suicide.

Developmentally, it has been stated that trends in boys and girls may differ. Pubertal onset occurs earlier for girls as compared to the boys and the biological transitional period is a risk for girls as they experience depression more than the boys. Suicidal ideations are more closely related with depression and hence it can be stated that suicide risk will be more prevalent in girls at an early age as compared to the boys. On the other hand conduct disorder is also experienced by the youth and it appears that antisocial and delinquent behavior appears earlier for boys as compared to the girls. Adolescent girl's suicide rates reach their maximum during the early



adolescence and this is earlier in comparison to the boys.

In terms of socio-demographic predictors, girls consistently rate higher than boys in suicidal ideation (Reinherz et al., 1995), but not completion (Bingham, 1994). The reason for such a scenario is that girls seek and receive help with their problems from family members and friends whereas boys commit suicide to put an end to their problems and pain. Girls mostly react inwardly by feeling helpless and lost, whereas boys react outwardly, usually in a more or less aggressive way. But these trends are changing in this fast paced society. Right now both girls and boys are vulnerable and parents lack in the ability to provide them with rational coping strategies. Thus there exist individual differences in the way these adolescents respond to situations. This study will be highlighting the predictors of suicide ideations in female adolescents.

Objective of the Study

Keeping in mind the theoretical perspectives of suicide ideations and the important predictors of depression, hopelessness, emotional autonomy and hardiness, this study is going to aim to understand the importance of these variables as associated with suicide ideations. This study is designed to study the psychological determinants of suicidal ideations in the female adolescents.

Hypotheses

- 1) Depression and Hopelessness will have a positive relationship with Suicide Ideations in female adolescents.
- 2) Emotional Autonomy and Hardiness will have a negative relationship with Suicide Ideations in female adolescents.
- 3) All four variables will significantly predict Suicide Ideations in female adolescents.

Methodology

Sample

In the present study, female 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 is not strictly taken into account. There are 242 females in the sample belonging to the age group of 15 to 22 years.

Psychological Tests

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) Deidealization

Two relatively more affective components:

- 3) Non-dependency on parents
- 4) Individuation

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, 1997).

Results and Discussion

In order to study the predictors of suicide ideations in female adolescents, factor analysis is done to obtain a single factor and then using this factor, we use regression analysis to find out the predictors.

Factor Analysis (Females)

The total scores for hopelessness, depression, hardiness and emotional autonomy were factor analyzed for the sample of girls. Results revealed a single factor of cognitive-personality explaining 51.24% variance. The factor loadings of the variables 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 single factor

VARIABLES	FACTOR 1
Hopelessness	.77
Depression	.86
Hardiness	-.66
Emotional autonomy	.51
Eigen Value	2.05
% variance	51.24



Table 1 shows that all the predictor variables i.e. 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 (.86), followed by hopelessness (.77). Hardiness shows a significant negative loading on the factor (-.66) while emotional autonomy exhibits significant positive loading on the same (.51). This further indicates that all the variables are highly correlated to one another and form a single factor.

Hopelessness has a positive relationship with depression among females. According to Beck's Cognitive Triad, depression leads to negative views about self, about the world and about one's future (hopelessness). Thus, these two variables cannot be studied in total isolation from one another as the presence of one would translate into presence of another. Results from factor analysis indicate that depression and hopelessness have the highest significant loading on a single factor, thus playing an important role in the cognitive dimension in predicting suicide ideation. The two variables form a strong cognitive base leading to negative outcomes like suicidal tendencies (Gibb, Andover, & Beach, 2006)

Depression and Hopelessness are also showing a positive relationship with emotional autonomy in females. Emotional Autonomy is the sense of emotional detachment from parents. It includes various dimensions like those of being non-dependent on parents, parental de-idealization, perceiving parents as people and individuation. Such an emotional detachment from parents and loss of emotional bond from family, gives rise to feeling of depression and consequently hopelessness.

This relationship is all the more critical in the stage of adolescence, for girls, as they are dealing with complex issues related with physical and psychological development. Feeling of non-dependency on parents and individuation, brings about a great deal of stress for girls as they have to deal with their

physical and psychological changes on their own without any emotional support from parents. Thus, it gives rise to feeling of hopelessness and depression in them. Likewise, parental deidealization and perceiving parents as people makes them lose the sense of belongingness to the family and falling on them for any emotional support.

In the personality dimension, hardiness has a significant negative loading on the factor. This implies that hardiness negatively associates with all the other three cognitive variables (hopelessness, depression and emotional autonomy). Hardy individuals possess the ability to deal with stressful situations or successfully cope with it. This personality trait acts as a protective factor against developing depression and feelings of hopelessness during stressful phases of one's life. Literature suggests, that adolescent girls are more prone to develop depression and hopelessness (Nolen-Hoeksema, &Girgus, 1994), hence, increasing hardiness among girls would combat these negative outcomes.

Thus, on the basis of results of factor analysis for girls, we can conclude that all the four predictor variables are strongly correlated with one another and make one factor of **Cognitive-Personality** which will further be taken as a whole to predict suicide ideation among girls. Regression analysis is further used to predict suicide ideation in females from the single factor obtained in prior analysis.

Regression Analysis (Females)

The factor scores on Cognitive-Personality Dimension were used in linear regression analysis to predict suicide ideation among girls. 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 36% variance in suicide ideation in females and has a significant regression coefficient (3.25), in



predicting suicide ideation among girls. Further, the beta coefficient is also significant (.60, $p < 0.01$) thereby showing, that the dimension of Cognitive-Personality is

significant in predicting suicidal ideation among females.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Results

Predictor Variable	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Regression Coefficient	β	F ratio	P value
Cognitive-Personality Dimension	.362	.360	3.25	.60	136.46	0.01

Perusal of Table 2 shows that the factor of Cognitive-Personality, significantly predicts suicide ideation. It accounts for 36% of variance in suicide ideation in the current sample. The regression weight is positive thereby showing that increase in this dimension i.e. a cluster of depression, hopelessness and emotional autonomy (positive indicators) and hardiness (negative indicator), will cause an increase in the suicide ideations among girls. The combined factor helps us in predicting suicide ideation among girls.

Among the cognitive variables, depression has the highest significant loading on the factor, thus indicating that it is a positive predictor of suicide ideation. Presence of depression among females leads to a rise in suicidal ideations. Depressed state of mind hinders a person's capacity to reason and it further gives rise to developing such negative cognitions like thoughts of ending one's life. Primarily, it arises out of the pubertal changes (Nolen-Hoeksema, &Girgus, 1994) in girls, where girls are twice as likely to develop depression and exhibit depressive symptoms as compared to boys. Level of depression among girls in this stage provides as a sufficient cause leading to higher suicide ideation and suicidal tendencies (Lewinsohn et al., 2001; Brenzo, 2006).

Hopelessness also loads positively on the factor, thus showing that increase in feelings of hopelessness lead to a rise in suicidal ideations among girls. The negative views

about self and others increases and hence suicidal ideation tends to rise. Hopelessness is a significant variable in positively predicting suicidal ideation. Results from the current study also reveal that hopelessness is a significant cognitive dimension that contributes positively in prediction of suicide ideation among girls. A state of hopelessness translates into further negative feelings about oneself that is self-reinforcing. In such a condition, thoughts about ending one's life and committing such acts, tend to increase (Konick, & Gutierrez, 2005).

Emotional autonomy is another cognitive variable that loads positively on the factor predicting suicide ideation. Hence, the variable contributes positively in prediction of suicidal behaviors and cognitions in the sample of adolescent girls. A sense of emotional detachment from parents leads to the experiencing of negative emotions which further add to the ongoing stress in girls, thus leading to increased suicidal ideations. Adolescents from cohesive families report lower psychological issues and have better adjustments. Hence, adolescents higher on emotional autonomy are also higher on other negative psychological states leading to a rise suicidal thoughts, ideas and behaviors. Thus, presence of emotional autonomy along with other strong negative cognitions, like those of depression and hopelessness, positively predicts suicide ideation among girls.

Hardiness loads negatively on the factor, thus forming a protective factor against



development of suicide ideations. Hardiness is negatively associated with depression, hopelessness and emotional autonomy. In other words, hardiness helps an individual combat such a cluster of negative emotions, and development of suicidal thoughts consequently. Individuals high on hardiness have a strong sense of control and stay committed towards their goals. They possess the ability to deal with stressful situations without forming negative thoughts and cognitions. Moreover, such individuals are high on facing challenges without being much affected with success or failures. They tend to deal with stress more effectively as compared to those who are low on hardiness. Thus, hardiness in girls acts as a strong protective force against formation of depressive symptoms, feelings of hopelessness and ultimately suicidal thoughts. Previous literature has reported similar results showing that hardiness negatively predicts suicide ideations and behaviors (Delahajj, Gaillard, & van Dam, 2010). Hence, the current study also confirms the positive role of hardiness in dealing with suicide related ideas and acts in adolescent girls.

In conclusion, during the stage of adolescence, girls have to deal with a lot, because of cultural norms and demands. In such a situation, loss of emotional bond from parents gives rise to feeling of depression and hopelessness among them. Hardiness is one factor that can help them combat feelings of suicide ideations. This study hence suggests that all the four variables of depression, hopelessness, emotional autonomy and hardiness significantly predict suicide ideations in female adolescents. In future, the male adolescents can be studied and gender differences can be reported on the same. This study is particularly useful for mental health counselors to help female adolescents overcome feelings of depression and hopelessness. It is very important that adolescents are taught how to develop

hardiness by becoming more resilient. The traits of control, challenge and commitment can be developed in adolescents by teaching parents effective parenting styles. Schools can organize seminars for parents to enable them to understand techniques of effective parenting. Parental counseling can also enhance autonomy development in context of supportive relationships in females. This will provide them a secure base to grow and develop.

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