THE ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN PREDICTING SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: *The objective of current study is to examine association of self-esteem and social support with suicidal ideation among adolescent college students.*

Design: *Cross-sectional survey research design.*

Place and Duration of Study: *This study was conducted in private and public colleges, Karachi, Pakistan during the period of January to March, 2015.*

Subjects and Method: *The Data was collected from 545 adolescent students of both private and government colleges. The age range was 16 to 19 years (Mean age= 17.18 years, SD=.98). Demographic Information Form, Urdu versions of Positive and Negative Suicide Ideation Inventory (PANSI), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and Sarason Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form (SSQ) were used.*

Results and Conclusion: *Logistic regression analysis was applied to estimate the relationship of self-esteem and social support with suicidal ideation. Obtained results indicated that self-esteem is a significant variable that increase the probability of suicidal ideation in targeted sample, whereas social support and satisfaction with support decrease the risk of suicidal ideation.*

Self-esteem and social support play important role in predicting suicidal ideation. Therefore, intervention and prevention programs incorporate self-esteem and social support when assessing, developing and implementing strategies to treat and prevent suicidal ideation among adolescents. Mental health professional, policy makers and other relevant authorities should take into consideration the role of self-esteem and social support when assessing, developing and implementing strategies to treat and prevent suicidal behaviors particularly suicidal ideation.

Keywords: Adolescents; Suicidal Ideation; Social Support; Self-Esteem

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, suicide has been identified as major cause of death among youth (Anderson, & Smith, 2003). In 2007, suicidal ideation was reported by 14.5% of students whereas suicide attempt was reported by 6.9% of students in preceding year in USA (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2007; Eaton et al., 2008). A study conducted on Pakistani college student, estimated 31.4% rate of suicidal ideations among overall sample, and higher among females (33%) than males (29.2%) (Khokher& Khan, 2005). These higher rates of suicidal behaviors at both local and international level underscore the need to explore personal, psychosocial and cultural factors that might lead an individual to think about suicide as way out.

Self-esteem plays an important role as both risk and protective factor in suicidal behavior. Self-esteem appeared as independent and consistent predictive variable that increase the vulnerability of suicidal behavior including suicidal ideation in adolescents (Eskin, Ertekin, Dereboy, & Demirkiran, 2007). Empirical evidences demonstrated that young people having low self-esteem may involve in use of illicit drugs (Keane & Loades, 2017) and hopelessness (Tarrier, Barrowclough, Andrews, & Gregg, 2004). Contrary to this, high self-esteem help people to construe future in positive way and enable them to be resilient against stress (McCullough, Heubner, Laughlin, 2000) as a result protect against suicidal behaviors (Oktan, 2017).

Similarly, social support plays vital role as buffer to suicidal acts. Humans have natural need to belong and get support from their close relationships but when this innate need is not fulfilled; there are chances to increase the propensity of suicidal behaviors (Van Orden et al., 2010). Connectedness and support provided by family, friends, social groups, helps to mitigate not only suicidal behavior but also non-fatal suicidal behavior such as self-harm behaviors (Dumont, & Provost, 1999; Fassberg et al., 2012). Even perceived social support from school, college, religious places, neighbors, health care institutes, etc. help to instill sense of control over the environment in turn generate optimism and improved functioning. Studies confirmed that adolescents who feel to be loved and cared by family, connected with friends, teachers as well as integrated with social systems such as school, religious organization/places appeared to be resilient against suicidal behaviors (Blum et al., 2003; Miller, Esposito-Smythers, & Leichtweis, 2015).

Late adolescence is considered hardest period of development due to various changes in all spheres of life including physical, psychological, social, emotional aspect and so on. Generally, adolescence develop sense of individuality in this period, struggling to follow their direction in educational setting particularly, there are even in news that student commit suicide because could not obtain good grades. Further, to work as well as striving to shape the environment at home and social settings like adults. During these transformations, any setback and criticism may cause to damage adolescents' self-evaluative thinking and it aggravate when they start to perceive situations as excruciating that they view suicide as way out (Kienhorst, De Wilde, Diekstra, & Wolters, 1995). It is important to explore factors that lead and protect an individual, particularly high risk population, from suicidal behaviors. In light of above mentioned literature, this study aimed to assess the relationship of self-esteem and social support with suicidal ideation among adolescents.

METHOD

Sample

Total sample of 545 adolescents were approached. The age range was 16 to 19 years with mean age of 17.18(.98). From entire sample, 208 were males and 337 were females, studying in different private and public colleges of Karachi. They were from any socioeconomic status.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

Information about age, gender, and education was collected by administering demographic information form.

The Positive and Negative Suicide Ideation Inventory (PANSI)

This inventory was developed to examine the positive and negative suicide ideation inventory asses the occurrence of suicidal ideation over a period of two-weeks (Osman, Gutierrez, Kopper, Barrios, & Chiros, 1998). PANSI consisted of 14 items and based on two subscales named as positive ideation and negative suicidal ideation. Example of statements that assess positive ideation is "felt life was worth living" whereas negative ideation assess by items like

thought about killing yourself because you felt like a failure in life". Each statement is scored by using 5 point likert type scale. Higher score indicate higher ideation in specific category. In Pakistani population, adapted Urdu version has shown good Chronbach alpha (α.72) PANSI-PI (Positive ideation) and .88 for and PANSI-NSI (Negative suicide ideation), respectively. Construct validity has also been established of translated version of PANSI (Yasien, & Riaz, 2015).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

This scale primarily assesses self-evaluative thinking of individual (Sardar, 1998). This is 10-items scale and rated on 4-point likert scale. Higher score indicate that person has positive self-evaluative thinking. Original version of RSES has demonstrated sound reliability (α 0.77) and criterion validity (Rosenberg, 1965)). Urdu version of RSES has been used in this study, indicating sufficient reliability .68 to use for Pakistani population (Fareed, & Akhtar, 2013).

Sarason Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form (SSQ)

This scale was designed to measure the number of people on whom a person can rely for support as well as to assess level of satisfaction with this support (Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987). Original version has showed higher internal consistency for both subscales (SSQ-N α =.89; SSQ-S α =.88). Urdu version of this scale has been used in this study which also has higher internal consistency on both subscales.

Procedure

Data was collected by administering self-report questionnaires in regular classes of private and government colleges after getting permission from concerned authorities of colleges. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, participants' identifying information was concealed; consent form was signed and also informed the participants that their participation is voluntary. After collecting data, participants were debriefed; they were also given contact detail of researcher to answer any question regarding study.

After scoring the questionnaires according to the standard procedure, the statistical packages for the social sciences (SPSS-14) was used for analysis of obtained data. Percentage, mean, SD, binary logistic regression were computed.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics was applied to calculate frequencies and percentages for socio demographic variables, shown in Table. 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Sample (N=545)

Items	N	%
Gender		
Male	208	38.2
Females	337	61.8
Age		
16yrs	154	28.3
17yrs	204	37.4
18yrs	120	22.0
19yrs	67	12.3
Mean age $\pm$ SD for total sample	17.18(.98)	
Mean age $\pm$ SD for males	17.74(.93)	
Mean age $\pm$ SD for females	16.84(.84)	
Year of Study		
Intermediate-I	434	79.6
Intermediate-II	111	20.4
Colleges		
Government	373	68.4
Private	172	31.6

The average score and SD on all measures used in this study are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Mean and SD on PANSI-NSI, RSES and SSQ (N=545)

Measures	M	SD
PANSI-NSI	1.42	.73
RSES	20.01	4.70
SSQ-N	3.10	2.06
SSQ-S	3.39	.69

Correlations among all study variables were computed and are presented in

Table 3
Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Suicidal Ideation (N=545)

Model	Odd Ratios	95% CI	p
Self-Esteem	.874	.835-.916	.00
Social Support			
SS-Number of Persons	.893	.804-.992	.03
SS-Satisfaction Level	.671	.509-.884	.01

The logistic regression was applied to estimate the contribution of self-esteem and social support (i.e. number of people available to support and level of satisfaction from support received) on to suicidal ideation. The logistic regression model was statistically significant $(p<.05)$. All predictors included in the model were significantly associated with suicidal ideation. As the self-esteem increases the odds of suicidal ideation decreases. Likewise, as having social support as well as level of satisfaction from received support increases, the likelihood of suicidal ideation decreases.

DISCUSSION

The objective of present study was to explore the predictive relationship of self-esteem and social support with suicidal ideation among students which is quite neglected in Pakistan. Obtained results suggest increase in self-esteem to be associated with decreases in risk of suicidal ideation in adolescent student. In line with previous researches, decrease in self-esteem appeared as a crucial factor that increase vulnerability of suicidal ideation among adolescents (Groholt, Ekeberg, Wichstrom, & Haldorsen, 2005; Wild, Flisher, & Lombard, 2004). Baumeister (1990) and Hammen (2005) also suggested that low level of self-esteem lead an individual to construe oneself as an inept person and may increase vulnerability to think suicide as way out after any distressing event (Baumeister, 1990; Hammen, 2005). People with low self-esteem appeared to be socially isolated, shy, lacked self-confidence, fail to immerse in social interaction in turn fail to make and maintain relationship (Nicolson, & Anderson, 2003; Zhao, Kong, & Wang, 2012). Whereas, need for human belongingness is one of the basic needs universally (Baumeister, & Leary, 1995). Thus, when this need of belongingness is unmet, people consider them as socially inept, experience feeling of loneliness

and think suicide as ultimate escape (Arria et al., 2009; Stravynski, & Boyer, 2001). Nonetheless, high self-esteem is regarded as the protective factors against suicidal behavior (Çuhadaroglu-Çetin, 2001; Wild, Flisher, & Lombard, 2004) as individuals with high self-esteem tend to have higher self-worth, self-confidence, and internal resources hence are protected from experiencing suicide ideation and behavior. It is also confirmed by a study conducted on college students that perceived and enacted social support results in increased self-esteem in turn protect against suicidal ideation (Kleiman, & Riskind, 2012). It can be inferred from findings of current and previous studies that internal mechanisms e.g. self-esteem are powerful personal assets that direct human behavior and appeared as prophylaxis against challenging situations and psychiatric problems including suicidal behaviors.

Obtained results further indicated that participants of this study have satisfactory number of people who provide support and care as they perceived in turn decreases the probability of suicidal ideation. In line with current study, previous studies documented that having support from family members, friends, significant others as well as being part of connected and encouraging communities help to mitigate risk of suicidal behaviors including suicidal ideation (Blum et al., 2003; Knox, Litts, Talcott, Feig, & Caine, 2003). Even among patients with depressive disorders, perceived social support appeared as protective factor against suicidal ideation in Pakistan (Bibi, & Khalid, 2017). On the other hand, suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts were reported by those adolescents who have lower level of social support (O'Donnell, Stueve, Wardlaw, & O'Donnell, 2003). Thus, by developing and maintaining emotional attachment and supportive relation with their family, peers, and then focusing on cohesion in community, on broader level, it helps to minimize the risk of suicidal behaviors among community members including youth.

Limitations and Scope of the Study

This study has certain limitations. First, cross-sectional design was followed; therefore, conclusion about causality of suicidal ideation cannot be drawn on the basis of this study. Second, adolescent college students were targeted only; therefore, findings could not be generalized to other age groups and clinical population. Apart from these caveats, this study highlight the role of self-esteem and social support in suicidal ideation which will help mental health professional and policy makers to develop strategies to deal and prevent suicidal ideation in adolescent students.

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