

Youth Today: Hopelessness as the Key Mediator between Depressive and Suicidal Tendencies

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A phase of identity formation is taken over by a turmoil and negative ideation during the adolescent years. The youth is experiencing a challenging time, due to redefinition and reorganization of relationships and societal constitution, driving them towards maladaptive patterns of coping which result in suicide ideations. Thoughts of suicide are regarded as a precursor to suicide completion. A study reports that transition from suicide ideation to suicide plan occurs in 34% and from plan to an attempt in 72%. This study is thus, focusing on the adolescents belonging to the age group of 15-22 years as this is the most vulnerable period in the present times, and exploring the role of depression and hopelessness contributing to suicide ideations. 400 adolescents are a part of this study with almost an equal number of males and females. Various studies have formulated mediational models with suicide ideation as the outcomes and the correlates being depression, hopelessness, insomnia and reasons for living (Bagge, Lamis, Nadorff, & Osman, 2014; Woosley, Lichstein, Taylor, Riedel, & Bush, 2014). The current study is thus, an attempt to find out the mediational role of hopelessness in relationship between depression and suicide ideation among Indian adolescents. The psychological tools administered on the adolescents are Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974), and Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck, Steer, & Ranieri, 1988). Simple Mediation Analysis is used to study the causal relationships in understanding suicide ideations in the youth today and the role of hopelessness in mediating the relationship between depressions. The mediation model was run using AMOS 21 and all the regression weights predicting suicide ideation were significant and positive. Hopelessness was found to mediate the relationship between depression and suicide ideation and indirect effects were found to be significant ($p < 0.01$). The results are discussed in light of theoretical framework and empirical research.

Keywords: Youth, Hopelessness, Depression, Suicidal Tendencies

A crucial and vulnerable phase in the life of individuals is the adolescent period which is marked by confusion, chaos, transformations and reorganization of relationships, bodily changes, emotional upheavals and many other significant developments. It is a time when adolescents have strengthening of their identities and personal constructs. The thought processes are on a rise and there is a possibility that suicide ideations develop too. These ideations can be passing thoughts, transient in nature and can also be recurring self-destructive thoughts which may involve concrete plans.

Globally, there is one completed suicide every 40 seconds and talking of India alone,

37.8% of Indians who commit suicide are below the age of 30 years. In 2010, almost one million people committed suicide, which corresponds to a mortality rate of 16 per 100,000 people. The latest annual suicide rates estimates are 98 out of 100,000 for India, which is the second highest in the world. The severity of the problem has increased in our country in recent years. India is second, China is facing this problem more, with the estimate rates of 99 out of 100,000. India, being a developing country, has been afflicted with the suicide problem, reporting more than 16,000 suicidal deaths within the last three years (Indian Health Ministry, 2008).

A study reports that transition from suicide ideation to suicide plan occurred in 34% and from plan to an attempt in 72 percent (Sroufe, 1997). There are approximately 100-200 suicide attempts for every completed suicide among young adults aged 15-24 years and suicide accounts for 12% deaths annually for the same age group. Suicide ideation figures are not clearly documented even though suicide ideation is a clear predictor of suicide. Nock et al. (2008) have stated that 9.2% adolescents experience suicide ideation, 3.1% plan to commit suicide and 2.7% attempt suicide.

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, progression, if such progression occurs, it will develop fairly rapidly. Thus, it is important for practitioners and wellness experts to understand the factors and reasons of why these ideations and attempts are especially taking place in young adults and adolescents. In order to understand the predictive factors, it is first important to understand the terminology of suicide ideation and what are the most important associative factors associated with it.

Suicidal ideation refers to thoughts about suicide that include serious intent and/or a formulated plan. Suicide ideation involves thoughts and cognitions about suicidal behavior. It involves thoughts related to desire, intent or method of committing suicide. 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.

If we look at the cognitive perspective, the Hopelessness theory of depression by Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy (1989) states that hopelessness is the main cause of suicide. Hopelessness is found to be the best predictor of suicidal behavior and it is considered better than depression too. Beck (1967) states, that

the interpretation of events is another reason for this behavior. It is actually how suicidal people view the events in their environment as stable characteristics. They feel that nothing in their environment is going to get better. They are also poor problem solvers.

The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behavior (Van Orden, Merrill, Joiner, and Thomas, 2005) proposes that an individual will not die by suicide unless he has both the desire to die by suicide and the ability to do so. The theory asserts that when people hold two specific psychological states in their minds simultaneously, and when they do so for long enough, they develop the desire for death. The two psychological states are perceived burdensomeness and a sense of low belongingness or social alienation.

The Interpersonal Theory includes the assumption that thwarted belongingness is a dynamic cognitive-affective state, rather than a stable trait, that is influenced by both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. These include an individual's actual interpersonal environments (e.g., number of individuals in the social network, activated interpersonal schemas (e.g., proneness to interpret other's behavior as indicative of rejection) and current emotional states (e.g., depressed mood). Thus, the theory presumes that an individual's degree of belongingness is likely to vary over time.

The Hopelessness Theory (Abramson, Metalsky, and 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.

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. Most people who feel hopeless have depression and depression will lead to suicide. Hopelessness is the core condition of depression and will cause suicide.

Literature on youth suicidal ideation is linked to depression and feelings of hopelessness (Steer et al., 1993; Rhodes, Bethell, and Bondy, 2006; Kumar and Pradhan, 2003; Singh and Joshi, 2008) and interaction of depression and hopelessness is the strongest predictor of suicide completion (Chioqueta, and Stiles, 2005). 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. Moreover, the mediation role of depression leading to suicide ideation was confirmed based upon the level of support received from parents and peers. Thus, the complex relationship between the two variables, depression and suicide ideation, is affected by variety of risk and protective factors.

In a study conducted by Gibb, Andover and Beach (2006), depressive symptoms were reported to have a strong correlation with suicide ideation in college students. Results from hierarchical regression from the study revealed that depressive symptom was the strongest predictor of suicide ideations in college students. In addition to this, the study also confirmed the role of hopelessness in moderating the relationship between depressive symptoms and suicide ideation among males.

Dieserud, Roysamb, Ekeberg and Kraft (2001) tested a model for suicide attempt explain the cognitive and psychological variables related with the same. Late adolescents and adults were used as sample in the study. Findings confirmed that depression and hopelessness lead to suicide ideation and the cluster acted as a mediator in predicting suicide attempts. Thus, we can say that increased depression leads to strong suicide ideations and suicide attempts follow.

In a recent investigation undertaken by Dueueke and Schwartz-Mette (2018), a model was proposed in order to predict suicide and suicidal behaviors based upon the level of depression symptoms in college students. The relationship was mediated by social cognitions and interpersonal behaviors, which are affected by level of depressive symptoms. The results of the study revealed that depression among college students leads to distorted social cognition and maladaptive behaviors, which further mediate the relationship between depressive symptoms and suicidal risk.

In light of the literature reviewed, theoretical models as well as empirical evidence show that hopelessness as a significant role to play in the relationship between depression and

suicide ideation. But its precedence in the model is unclear. Therefore, the following model was proposed to check for mediating role of hopelessness in Indian adolescents.

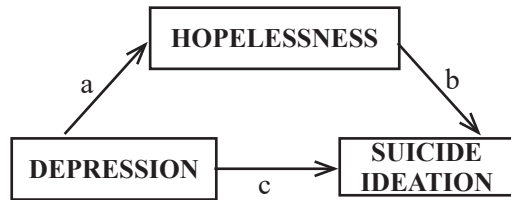


Figure 1: Hypothesized model depicting mediating role of Hopelessness in the relationship between Depression and Suicide Ideation

Objective of the Study

The major objective of this study is to study the role of Hopelessness as a mediator variable between Depression and Suicide Ideation.

Hypotheses

On the basis of existing literature, the following hypotheses are framed:

1. Depression will predict Suicide Ideation significantly.
2. Hopelessness will mediate the relationship between Depression and Suicide Ideation.

Method

Sample

In the present study, 400 adolescents of various schools and colleges of Amritsar city are taken as subjects. The choice of the sample is 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. There are 158 males and 242 females 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 and the mean age of females

is 19.14 with a standard deviation of 1.76.

Psychological Measures

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 tests are 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).

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

The data was analyzed in AMOS 21 using Path Analysis. Hopelessness was taken as the mediator variable between Depression and Suicide Ideation. A mediator variable is that variable in the study that either changes the

Table 1: Regression Weights between various paths in the model

Path	Regression Weight	Standardized Regression Weights	Std Error
Depression → Hopelessness	.19*	.53	.015
Depression → Suicide Ideation	.18*	.33	.025
Hopelessness → Suicide Ideation	.52*	.34	.073

* $p < 0.01$

strength or direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variable, or it increases the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (MacKinnon, 2008).

As seen in the above table, Depression (Path c = .18) and Hopelessness (Path b = .52) both significantly predict Suicide Ideation among adolescents. (a = 2.63). Thus, hypothesis 1 is accepted. There is positive relationship between the variables under study. It denotes that as the level of Depression and Hopelessness increases, there is a rise in the Suicide Ideations as well. Moreover, Depression is also seen to significantly and positively predict Hopelessness in the current sample (Path a = .19).

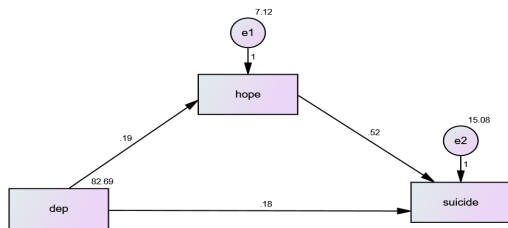


Figure 2: Output for the model run for mediation in AMOS21

Further the model were checked for mediation of Hopelessness in the relationship between Depression and Suicide Ideation. Table 2 shows the direct, indirect and total effects of mediation. Our prime focus is on the indirect effect of Depression on Suicide Ideation as it is the mediated effect of Hopelessness .

The mediated effect of Hopelessness can be seen in the indirect effect of Depression on Suicide Ideation. As seen in Table 2, the total effect from Depression to Suicide Ideation has increased (Total effect = .27) and the increase

is significant (p < 0.01). Hopelessness as the mediator variable that has caused the relationship between Depression and Suicide Ideation to increase in strength. Bootstrapping was used in order to see the direct and indirect effects of the proposed paths. As noted in the table, the UL and LL values are same in their direction for all the three proposed paths and the values aren't too far apart from one another. Hence we accept hypothesis 2.

Discussion

The results of path analysis denote that Depression significantly predicts Suicide Ideation and Hopelessness in the current sample of adolescents. It is evident from the results that there is a significant and positive relationship between the variables under study. As level of Depression or depressive thoughts increase in the adolescents, there is a rise in their negative cognitions especially that of suicide and such acts of self harm. Therefore, depression and depressive thoughts/symptoms lead to consolidation of suicidal thoughts thereby causing an increase in the same. Earlier studies have also reported depression to be a constant risk factor in increasing suicide ideations (Harter, Marold and Whitesell, 1992; Nemeroff et al., 2001; Gibb, Andover and Beach, 2006; Dueweke and Schwartz-Mette, 2018).

Depression has been an essential component of various theoretical models that study suicidal behavior and suicide ideations across various samples. The Interpersonal Theory and Beck's cognitive triad have laid stress on feelings of depression and increased level of same, to be a significant cause leading to suicide ideations ending up in acts of self harm. What is even more significant in the current results is that mean age of sample yielding these results. In adolescence stage, there is onset and offset of such emotions due to the psychological and

Table 2: Table showing direct, indirect and total effects of mediation

Relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Depression → Hopelessness	.18*	-	.18*	.15	.21
Depression → Suicide Ideation	.17*	.09*	.27*	.22	.32
Hopelessness → Suicide Ideation	.52*	-	.52*	.38	.68

Note. * = p < 0.01; CI= Confidence Intervals; LL= Lower limit; UL= Upper limit.

physical changes one undergoes. But in the later half of adolescence, where our cognition begin to take definite shape, it is all the more alarming to have high levels of depression as it would lead to development of negative cognitions and the process is self-reinforcing.

The study also revealed Depression significantly predicting Hopelessness which further aggravates this relationship between Depression and Suicide Ideation. Depression and Hopelessness are studied in unison when it comes to predicting suicidal behavior and suicide ideations. Hopelessness was taken as mediator variable to study its role in the relationship between Depression and Suicide Ideation. The path from Depression to Hopelessness in the model was significant and positive indicating that these negative cognitions are highly correlated. Depressive thoughts would lead to feelings of hopelessness about self, and about one's future, which has severe consequences for one's mental state. Various studies have linked depression and hopelessness and depression has been labeled as a strong predictor of hopelessness (Beck et al., 1993; Kumar and Pradhan, 2003; Rhodes, Bethell, and Bondy, 2006; Singh and Joshi, 2008).

The mediating role of Hopelessness and interaction of depression and hopelessness was the main objective of the study and previous literature has quoted this relationship to be the strongest predictor of suicide completion (Chioqueta, and Stiles, 2005). Perusal of Table 2 shows the meditational role of hopelessness in increasing the strength of relationship between depression and suicide ideation. The total effect from depression to suicide ideation increased due to hopelessness. Depression in isolation predicts suicide ideation but the presence of feeling of hopelessness strengthens the relationship even more. Not only does hopelessness mediate this relationship, but the dynamics get more complicated as individuals with high feeling of hopelessness also tend to give up on combating the negative state of their mind. They have poor coping skills and thus the feelings of depression keep on rising, leading to heightened suicide ideations.

Hopelessness in isolation also significantly and positively predicts suicide ideation and these results are in line with previous research

(Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy, 1989). It is evident that negative feelings about self, one's environment as well as one's future are bound to reinforce leading to thoughts and ideas about ending one's life. But the combination of hopelessness and depression is even more lethal leading to such dire consequences and negative mental state.

There has been debate on depression being a stronger predictor of suicide ideation or hopelessness and different perspectives have given out different viewpoints. Nonetheless, the essential component of both depression and hopelessness is similar, which is evident from the strong correlation between the two. The current study has brought out the meditational role of hopelessness leading to strengthened relationship between depression and suicide ideation. The indirect, direct and total effects of the mediating path, all are significant ($p < 0.01$), concluding that hopelessness would not only predict suicide ideation in adolescents, but would also tend to reinforce such negative cognitions that are predicted by depressive thoughts and depression. Similar models have been studied to predict suicide ideations on base these two variables (Dieserud, Roysamb, Ekeberg and Kraft; 2001; Dueweke and Schwartz-Mette, 2017).

Depression alone does lead to formation of suicidal thoughts and ideas, but is the feeling of hopelessness in an individual, stronger will be possibility of developing suicide ideation and that too of high intensity. Furthermore, statistics have predicted that such ideations often lead to completed act of suicide and self harm which is even more alarming. Thus, we may conclude that Hopelessness is a strong mediator of relationship between depression and suicide ideation and it would tend to aggravate such negative cognitions in adolescents.

Conclusion

The current study was carried out to see the meditational role of hopelessness in predicting suicide ideations from depression in a sample of Indian adolescents. Results from mediation analysis reveal that depression is a strong predictor of both hopelessness and suicide ideation. Significant and positive role of hopelessness was found, as a mediator which strengthened the relationship between

depression and suicide ideation. The study can be further expanded for gender differences to see how the dynamics are different in girls and boys. Period of adolescence can be studied as early, mid and late adolescence to spot variations in these ideations.

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