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FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AMONG ADOLESCENTS WITH LOW AND SEVERE SUICIDAL IDEATION

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Abstract

In this study an attempt was made to find the difference in family environment between female and male adolescents with low and severe suicidal ideation. It was hypothesised that there will be significant difference between gender of low and severe suicidal ideation. A sample of 120 college going students of age varying between 16-19 years were selected from three different colleges of Bengaluru. Modified Scale for Suicidal Ideation (MSSI- Miller) was administered and students were classified into low and severe suicidal ideation adolescents based on the scoring system of Modified Scale for Suicidal Ideation. 30 each of males and females respectively belonging to categories of low and severe suicidal ideation group was selected were considered for the study (total sample being 120). Family Environment Questionnaire (Bhatia and Chadha) which measured 8 dimensions on family was administered. The results were analysed using t test to study the significant difference in family environment for low and severe suicidal ideation between the genders. The findings indicated that significant difference found only on the family dimension of recreational orientation for male and female with low suicidal ideation. Females and males with severe suicidal ideation differed significantly on different dimensions of family environment except on the areas of family conflict and organization.

***Keywords**: Adolescents, suicidal ideation, family environment.*

Introduction:

Suicide or self directed violence is increasingly becoming a notable global public health problem which has become the 10th leading cause of death worldwide (Howton, 2009). According to WHO data a suicide is committed every 40seconds or the global mortality rate is of 16 suicides/100000 people. Globally suicide ranks among the top three leading causes of adolescents mortality (WHO, 2001), with rates steadily increasing in this age (Cheng and Jiang, 2005). In many low and middle income countries, suicide is emerging as a major public health issue especially among young people. Young children and adolescents are not untouched by this epidemic.

Suicide is considered to be the second most common cause of death in adolescents in industrialized countries, and high rates are reported from India as well. The suicide rate among young teens and young adults has increased by more than 300% in the last three decades.

An adolescent's home environment also weighs heavily on an adolescents ability to cope with problems they encounter. Adolescents with family problems commonly manifest suicide attempts, which highlight the importance of considering family environmental factors when assessing suicide risk (Xing, 2010).

Strong family support decreases the fewer experiences of suicide ideation (Treniece Lewis Harris-2000). Higher levels of family cohesion and family support were associated with lower levels of suicide ideation. Parental attachment reduces adolescents tendency to engage in a wide range of activities, (wrights & Aileen, 2001), including suicidal behaviours (Essau 2004; Bose 2006). Lack of parental support and alienation from and within the family were considered key risk factors (Grob, 1983).

Family cohesion act as risk and protective factor for suicidal behaviour (Brent 1988; Wagner 1997).Girls come to internalize ideals such as familism from an early age may react to parental demands, rules and expectation in ways that are culturally acceptable to parents. This affiliative obedience may lead to greater family cohesion and lower family conflict (Algeria, Sribney, Woo, Torres and Guarnaccia, 2007).Youth with lower levels of familism leads to greater family conflict and less family cohesion. Reasons may be cultural mismatch between parent and adolescent (Pena et al, 2008; Sorenson and Shen, 1996). Lack of social activities for girls reveal high suicide risk (Peltzer, 2008). Adolescents perceiving their parents having more control exhibit suicidal behaviour (Pifia 2014 and Florenzano et al, 2011).

Adolescents perceiving their parents as less caring and having more control exhibit severe suicidal behaviours (Diamond et al, 2005; Pifia-Watson 2014; Freudnstein, et al, 2011) where the finding says, adolescents with severe suicidal behaviour tend to perceive their mothers as less caring and overprotective compared to those with no or mild suicidal behaviour.).

Studies shows gender difference in family environment with suicidal behaviours. Freudstein et al (2011), states that females with severe suicidal ideation perceive their family members to be less caring and supporting. An article published in 2010 by Zappulla and Pace found that suicidal ideation in adolescent boys is exacerbated by detachment from the parents when depression is already present in the child.

Liu (2005) goes on to explain the relationship found between closeness with the opposite sex parent and the child's risk of suicidal thoughts. It was found that boys are better protected from suicidal ideation if they are close to their mothers through early and late adolescence; whereas girls are better protected by having a close relationship with their father during middle adolescence. Males often outnumber females in worldwide youth suicide statistics, which varies between different countries.

Family factors being and having an important role in suicidal behaviour among adolescents asks us to formulate a comprehensive method to prevent and to give care to suicidal adolescents considering the gender issues according to the reviews stated above. So the present study is pioneered to find the gender difference in family environment among adolescents with low and severe suicidal ideation.

Objectives:

To study the difference in family environment between male and female adolescents with low and severe suicidal ideation.

Hypotheses:

- Male and female adolescents with low suicidal ideation will differ significantly in family environment.
- Male and female adolescents with severe suicidal ideation will differ significantly in family environment.

Variables:

Independent variables: Female and male adolescents with low and severe suicidal ideation were considered as independent variable.

Dependent variable: Responses on Family environment Scale was considered as dependent variable.

Sample:

Table1: Showing the sample size of adolescents group with low and severe suicidal ideation

Groups	Female	Male	Total
Low suicidal ideation	30	30	60
Severe-suicidal ideation	30	30	60
Total	60	60	120

A sample of 60 each from low and severe suicidal ideation was taken from college going student's age ranging from 16-19yrs from different colleges of Bangalore city.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: College going adolescent boys and girls age ranging from 16-19yrs were considered for the study. Adolescents with physical disability, major physical

illness, individuals with past history of psychological treatment like psychotherapy and counselling and married adolescents were not considered for the study.

Tools:

1. **Modified Scale for Suicide Ideation (MSSI- Miller, 1991):**

The MSSI is an 18-item structured interview that assesses severity of suicidal ideation over a 48-hour period, including intent, competence to attempt suicide, and amount of talking/writing about death (Miller, Bishop, Norman, & Dow, 1986). The measure is a modified version of the original Scale for Suicidal Ideation (Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979). Each question is rated on a 4-point scale and responses are summed to derive a total score. Severity ranges on the MSSI are as follows: 0–8 = none/low, 9–20 = mild/moderate, 21+ = severe. Each item is comprised of four statements rated on a 4 point scale, ranging from 0-3, on the basis of escalating intensity. Total scores may thus range from 0-54. Research has shown that the scale possesses good internal consistency (.94), adequate test-retest reliability (.65), and high inter-rater reliability (.99) (Clum & Yang, 1995; Miller et al., 1986)

2. **Family Environment Scale (Bhatia and Chadha, 2005 revised):**

This family environment scale is based on the family environment scale by Moos (1974).This scale consists of three dimensions which are taken from Moo's scale. Relationship dimensions consisting of 4 sub scales like Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, Acceptance and Caring. Personal Growth Dimension includes two sub scales of Independence and Active Recreational Orientation. Dimension of System maintenance includes two sub scales of Organization and Control. Total 69 items were included under 8 sub scales. Each sub scale has many positive and negative statements. Five response options are provided for each statement like Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly disagree. Positive items will be scored 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1.Whereas negative items will be scored 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Accordingly statements will be added to obtain raw scores. Overall Test Reliability Coefficient fir the scale is o.95.

Procedure:

Permission was obtained from three college principals and students in Bangalore to collect the data from the sample. The sample was selected randomly by administering Modified scale for suicidal ideation by Miller (1991) first and was grouped into low and severe suicidal ideation according to the scoring key. Later Family environment scale measuring 8 dimensions on family was administered. The results were analysed using t test to study

significant difference in family environment for low and severe suicidal ideation between the genders.

Results and Discussion:

Family environment scale measures 8 dimensions on family and the results of the study in terms of gender difference for individuals with low and severe suicidal ideation are described below.

Gender difference in different areas of family environment scale for individuals with low suicidal ideation:

As shown in table 2 on the area of cohesion the mean values for female and male are 50.93 and 49.90 respectively and the t value being .66 which is not significant at .05 level indicating no significant difference between females and males in family cohesiveness. The results indicate that there is no significant difference in aspect of help, support and the degree of commitment among family members for each other with low suicidal ideation adolescents.

On the area of expressiveness the mean values for female and male are 29.80 and 29.43 respectively and the t value being .37 which is not significant at .05 level indicating no significant difference between females and males in family expressiveness for adolescents with low suicidal ideation. This shows females and males did not differ significantly in expressing their thoughts and feelings directly as encouraged by their family members.

Table 2: shows the difference between females (N=30) and males (N=30) for low suicidal ideation on family environment:

Areas	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value
Cohesion	Female	50.93	6.68	0.66
	Male	49.90	5.30	
Expressiveness	Female	29.80	4.48	0.37
	Male	29.43	3.06	
Conflict	Female	38.83	4.58	0.45
	Male	39.30	3.36	
Acceptance and caring	Female	44.27	4.53	1.75
	Male	42.40	3.68	
Recreational orientation	Female	27.23	4.22	2.68*
	Male	29.67	2.76	
Independence	Female	28.40	4.64	0.74
	Male	29.17	3.24	
Organization	Female	7.27	2.26	0.76
	Male	7.63	1.35	
Control	Female	13.77	2.79	0.23
	Male	13.93	2.80	

*p>0.05 Level

On the area of 'conflict' the mean values for female and male are 38.83 and 39.30 respectively and the t value being.45 is not significant at .05 level indicating no significant difference between females and males in expressing aggression and conflict among the family members for adolescents with low suicidal ideation. Males show less conflict compared to females though they did not differ significantly. Males perceive less aggression and conflict among family members compared to females.

On the area of 'acceptance and caring' the mean values are 44.27 and 42.40 respectively and the t value being 1.75 is also not significant at .05 level indicating no significant difference between males and females in the acceptance and care expressed by the family members of adolescents with low suicidal ideation. Females perceive they are accepted and the care given to them from their family members is more when compared to males though statistically not significantly more than males.

On the area of active recreational orientation the mean value for female and male are 27.23 and 29.67 respectively and the t value being 2.68 indicates significant difference at .05 level. The result indicates that male's participation in social and recreational activities was significantly more when compared to females with low suicidal ideation adolescents.

On the area of independence the mean values for female and male are 28.40 and 29.17 respectively and the t value being .74 is not significant at .05 level. Females and males of low suicidal ideation did not differ significantly in being assertive and making decisions independently, though males enjoy more independence than females.

On the area of organization the mean values for female and male are 7.27 and 7.63 respectively, the t value being .76 is not significant at .05 level. Males are found to be more organised in planning activities and sharing responsibilities compared to females in the domain of organization, though the findings is not significant.

On the areas of control the mean value for female and male are 13.77 and 13.93 respectively and the t value being .23 which is not significant for family control for adolescents with low suicidal ideation. Females and males did not differ significantly in the degree of limit setting within their family though males seems to be less controlled than females.

Gender difference in different areas of family environment scale for individuals with severe suicidal ideation:

Table 3: Showing the difference between female and male for severe suicidal ideation:

Areas	Sex	Mean	Std. Dev Deviation	t value
Cohesion	Female	42.93	6.46	2.92*
	Male	36.63	9.86	
Expressiveness	Female	29.56	3.38	2.70*
	Male	26.20	5.92	
Conflict	Female	32.46	5.99	0.72
	Male	33.66	6.82	
Acceptance and caring	Female	36.60	6.68	2.85*
	Male	31.46	7.23	
Recreational	Female	23.90	4.96	3.45*

orientation	Male	28.26	4.83	
Independence	Female	28.70	3.77	3.77**
	Male	22.80	7.69	
Organization	Female	6.23	1.71	0.69
	Male	6.56	1.97	
Control	Female	12.70	1.78	2.53*
	Male	11.40	2.17	

*p>0.05 Level **0.01 Level

According to the table 3, the mean score for female and male for cohesion are 42.93 and 36.63 respectively and the t value being 2.92 indicates statistically significant difference for males and females with severe suicidal ideation. Females with severe suicidal ideation, perceive the degree of commitment, help and support among the family members for each other more compared to males with severe suicidal ideation.

On the area of expressiveness the mean value for females and males are 29.56 and26.20 respectively and the t value being 2.70 is significant at .05 level indicating females with severe suicidal ideation differ significantly in expressing feelings and thoughts openly among family their members compared to males with severe suicidal ideation.

On the area of conflict the mean values for female and male are 32.46 and 33.66 respectively and the t value being .72 not significant at .05 level. Females perceive more aggression and conflict among family members when compared to males though the difference is not statistically significant.

On the area of acceptance and caring the mean values for females and males are 36.60 and 31.46 respectively and the t value being 2.85 is significant at .05 level. The results indicate that females experience more unconditional acceptance and care from family members compared to males.

On the area of independence the mean value for female and male are 3.77 and 7.69 respectively and the t value being 3.77 which is significant at .001 level for adolescents with severe suicidal ideation, indicating males perceive their family members as significantly more assertive and independent in taking important decisions when compared to females with severe suicidal ideation.

On the area of recreational orientation the mean values for females and males are 23.90 and 28.26 respectively and the t value being 3.45 is significant at .05 level. The results indicate males differ significantly compared to females. Males enjoy in participating social and recreational activities than females. In Indian culture males enjoy more freedom and power than females.

The mean values for female and male for the family organization are 6.23 and 6.56 respectively and the t value being .69 not significant at .05 level indicating no significant difference between females and males of severe suicidal ideation, with respect to planning and taking responsibilities in their families. Though males feel their family being more organized compared to females the findings are not statistically significant.

The mean values for males and females of family control area are 12.7 and 11.4 respectively, and the t value being 0.014 significant at .05 level which indicates significant difference between adolescents with severe suicidal ideation. Females feel more limitations put on them compared to males with severe suicidal ideation.

Present study aimed at finding the role of family environment among low and severe suicidal ideation adolescents. First hypothesis states that there will be significant difference in family environment among males and females of low suicidal ideation adolescents. Findings indicated no gender difference among adolescents with low suicidal ideation, on all the dimensions of family environment except in recreational orientation. This finding supports other research studies of Menesse (1990) and Philip (2011). This finding is not in congruence with the study of Hyun (2005) who indicates that suicidal ideation differed by gender. Males with low suicidal ideation differed significantly from females in the family domain of recreational orientation, probably due to the less control and more power given to males in India and other Asian countries which is supported by the research study of Upadhaya Singh (2006) thus disproving the first hypothesis.

Second hypothesis stated in this study says that there will be significant difference among adolescents with severe suicidal ideation. Findings revealed significant difference among females and males with severe suicidal ideation. Gender differences were found on different domains of family like cohesion, expressiveness, acceptance and caring, recreational orientation, independence and control. These findings were not supported for the domain Cohesion by Freudstein et al (2011) where females perceive less caring and supporting by their family members compared to males with severe suicidal ideation. There was no significant difference found between male and female with severe suicidal ideation for the family domains of conflict and organization. This finding was in congruence with the study of Lee (2006) and thus the second hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusions:

Suicide has become a great concern among children and youth population. Males often outnumber females in worldwide youth suicide statistics, though it may vary between different countries. Suicidal ideation is the first link for suicidal behaviour. The severity of

suicidal ideation lies in its persistence or temporary stability. Adequate family environment plays an important role in supporting and dealing with adolescents when they have suicidal ideation. In the present study there is no difference in gender with low-moderate suicidal ideation group on family environment. Females and males with severe suicidal ideation adolescents differ significantly on their family environment.

Implications:

It is essential to know that there are gender differences in perceiving family environment for adolescent exhibiting suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour and hence professional need to guide the families to create a conducive environment to handle issues related to suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour among adolescents.

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