

RISK FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL SUICIDE ATTEMPTS IN PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To explore the socio-demographic factors of successful suicide attempts in Punjab, Pakistan.

Methodology: Archival research design was used to gather data in the form of reports of successful suicide commitment were collected from "Daily Express" for ten months from September, 2014 to June, 2015. All possible information related to gender, age, marital status, causes of suicide and mode of suicide was gathered. Data in only one newspaper was included to avoid repetition of news. News with missing important demographic information was excluded. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results: Out of total 87, more male 50(57.5%) than females 37(42.5%) committed suicide. Most victims of suicide fell in the age range between 20-29 years i.e., 26(29.9%). Mostly unmarried individuals 43(49.4%) committed suicide in comparison with the married individuals who were 33(37.9%). Most of the suicides were committed because of domestic quarrels 45(51.7%). Among different modes of committing suicide, use of poison pills (used as pesticides for wheat) were the highest 48(55.2%).

Conclusion: Young males, unmarried individuals and domestic problems were the leading factors for successful suicide attempts. Use of poison pills was the commonest mode of suicide.

Key Words: Suicide, Socio-demographic, Domestic problems, Poison pills

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is an Islamic country where suicide and attempting suicide are considered as criminal offenses. Pakistani law imposes punishment against attempted suicide. This has led to both suicide and attempted suicide being undiagnosed and unreported. Because of this, in Pakistan, suicide is understudied topic and neither national suicide statistics are assembled nor reported to World Health Organization¹. However, Khan et al², studied successful suicide rates committed by women in the Ghizer District of Northern areas of Pakistan. The researchers found that during the years 2000 to 2004, 49 women committed suicide. The researchers also took mean population for women as 65, 783 for five years and they also found annual crude suicide rates for women as 14.89/100,000/year. For women over the age of 15 years, rates were 33.22/100,000/year; age-specific rates for 15-24 years were 61.07/100,000 per year. The researchers found these figures are considerably higher than suicide rates in other parts of Pakistan and may be related to high psychiatric morbidity in Pakistani women.

In Pakistan, the suicide cases (either successful or unsuccessful) are regularly reported in newspapers with some biographic information of the victim. In one study based on the newspapers' information, Khan and Reza³ reported two years analyses of 306 suicide cases. These suicide cases were reported from 35 cities which show that men (n=208) outnumbered women with the ratio of 2:1. More unmarried men committed suicide in comparison of married men where as more married women committed suicide. The researchers found that most of the victims were under the age of 30 years. In reporting reasons, the researchers found domestic problems were the most common reasons for committing suicide.

Empirically, it is found that suicide is among the top ten causes of death in almost every country. Suicide is also a foremost cause of death in adolescents and young people with the age range of 15-35 years. The social and psychological impact of suicide on society and family is inestimable. It is considered that a single incident of suicide closely affects about six people around. But the figure becomes in hundreds when suicide is committed in a work place like school¹. In another study, the researchers⁴ investigated suicide attempts

and the victims (n = 1397) in a nationwide autopsy study in Finland within a 12-month research period in 1987-1988. Overall, 56% of suicide victims were found to have died at their first suicide attempt, more males (62%) than females (38%).

Some researches show that most individuals who complete or attempt suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric illness, with depressive disorders most often diagnosed^{5, 6}.

Blackmore et al⁷ did an epidemiological survey of 36984 respondents whose age was fifteen years and above. They found being women, divorced and marital separation, being unemployed, experiencing a chronic physical health condition and experiencing a major depressive episode were significantly associated with suicidal act.

Literature shows that suicide is the cause of almost half of all violent deaths and results in almost a million fatalities every year⁸. It is also evident that a previous suicide attempt is one of the strongest predictors of future completed suicide or subsequent attempt as well as being an indicator of extreme psychological distress⁹.

According to WHO¹, Suicide is an understudied topic in Pakistan. Pakistani law enforces punishment against unsuccessful attempted suicide which led the attempted suicide being unreported most of the time. These unreported attempted suicides make harder to investigate the underlying psychological factors.

The objectives of the present research were to find out demographic characteristics i.e., gender, age, marital status of individuals who committed successful suicide attempts and to find out social risk factors in cases of successful suicide attempts.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was exploratory research study which used archival research design. Socio-demographic information related to the sample (N=87) were gathered from "Daily Express" Newspapers for ten months

from September, 2014 to June, 2015. Socio-demographic information included gender, age, marital status, causes of suicide and mode of committing suicide were explored in detail. Daily Express is a newspaper that reports successful suicide attempts in detail. The news reporters report only those cases which are filed in jails. Only one newspaper was used to explore the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample who committed successful suicide. The other newspapers were excluded because of the overlapping of the news from one newspaper to the next. It was done to avoid repetition of news that is to be included in the sample. The researcher gathered socio-demographic information related to the sample who committed successful suicide attempts. All possible information was derived from the newspapers. It was found that the newspapers have given information related to gender, age, marital status, causes of suicide and mode of suicide only which were analyzed by using descriptive statistics i.e., frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

Firstly, gender-wise description of the sample was calculated and the results showed that there were 50 (57.5%) men and 37 women out of total 87 persons who committed successful suicide in Punjab during the study period. Age-wise statistics of the sample are given in table 1.

Results revealed that out of 87 cases, 33 were found to be married and 43 persons were unmarried while 11/87 were missing.

Figure 1 showed the frequencies and percentages of causes of suicide of the sample. Results showed that most of the suicides 45 (51.7%) were committed due to domestic problems.

Results showed that most of the suicides (55.2%) are committed by taking poison pills. The second major mode of suicide was killing by pistol firing. 17.2% of the cases committed suicide by killing them with pistol firing. Thirdly, 12.6% of the individuals hanged them-

Table 1: Age wise frequencies and percentage of sample (n=87)

Age	Frequencies	Percentages
19 years and below	6	6.9
20-29	26	29.9
30-39	8	9.2
40-49	5	5.7
50-59	2	2.3
60 and above	1	1.1
(Unknown) Missing cases	39	44.8
Total	87	100

Figure 1: Risk factors of suicide: frequencies and percentages of the sample (n=87)

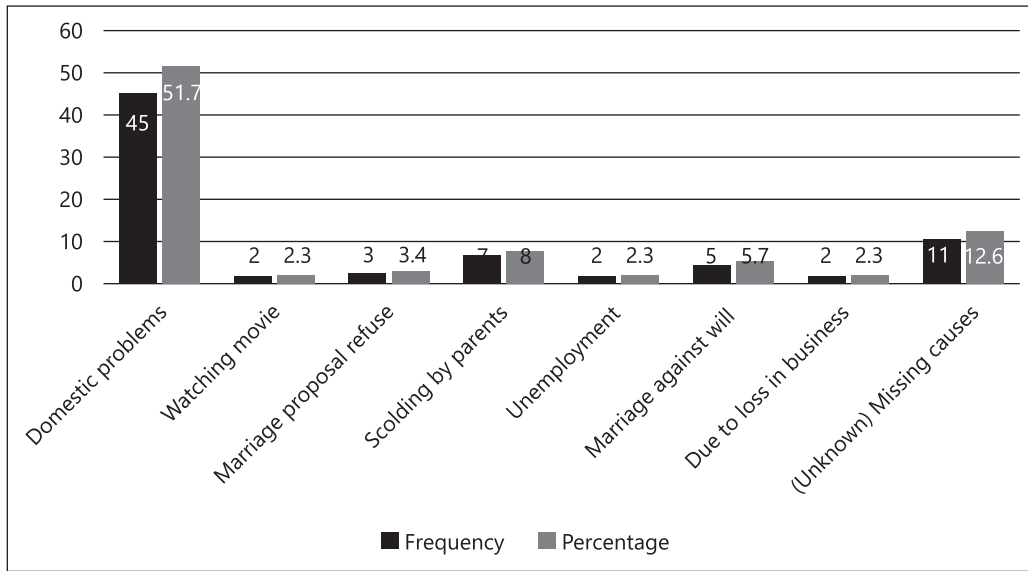
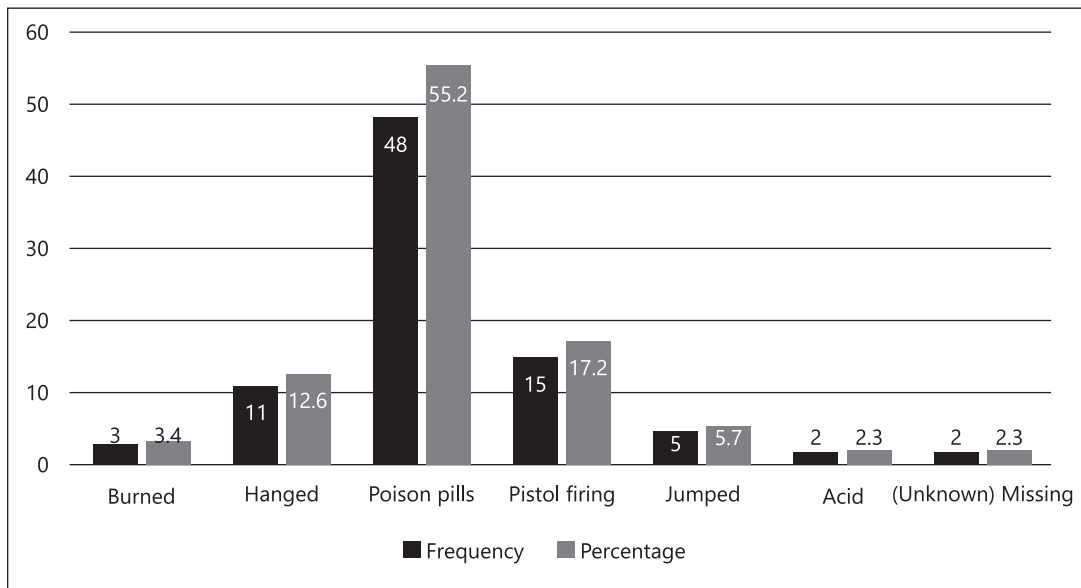


Figure 2: Mode of suicide wise frequencies and percentages of the sample (n=87)



selves. Results show that newspapers did not mention the reasons committing suicide in 2.3% of the cases. The mode of suicide is shown in figure 2.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the socio-demographic risk factors which cause suicide in Punjab. Results revealed that in ten months period, the suicide rate was higher in males than in females. These findings are very similar to the results of the study⁴ which found that in the duration of twelve months, more males (62%) in

comparison with females (38%) committed successful suicide. Majority of the women in Pakistan do not work outside home and do not contribute economically. So, the men have to meet all the expenditures of their house. Unemployment is high. Business conditions are poor due to political instability, scarcity of resources i.e., heavy drop of electricity for hours, unskilled workers and oil and gas shortage. This may be because of these stresses, men are more vulnerable to commit suicide. Secondly, results showed that most of the suicides (29.9%) are committed by the persons who fall in the age range between 20 to 29 years. Young age is very

important. According to the report of WHO¹, suicide is among the top 10 causes of death in every country, and one of the three leading causes of death in the 15 to 35-year age group. High rate of suicide among this age group may be because during this period, emotions are elevated and unstable.

In Pakistan especially, youth is becoming short-tempered due to the poor socio-economic conditions, scarcity of resources, political instability and a huge gap between rich and poor. Youth can be distracted easily because of lack of proper guidance. Lack of motivation towards goal achievement or high ambitions result in failure, create frustration and may lead to suicide. Parents and teachers should be trained enough to smell if a member of their family or a student in school is under stress and needs proper guidelines so they can save their lives. For marital status, results revealed that most of the suicides (49.4%) are committed by the unmarried persons. Previous researches also have shown the same results as Batinic et al¹⁰ explored socio-demographic characteristics in the population who have committed successful suicide. The researchers found that more unmarried individuals (53.3%) than married (26.7%) committed successful suicide and most of them belonged to the age range of 20 to 29 years. In terms of causes, eleven categories had been derived from given news. Results show that most of the suicides (51.7%) are committed due to domestic problems. Secondly, 8 % of the individual committed suicide for the reason that parents had scolded them.

Domestic problems are major source of creating stresses if left unresolved. Domestic problems should be taken seriously and should be solved in shorter period of time. Issues between parents and children should be solved through negotiations and peaceful arguments instead of scolding, quarreling and bickering. So that suicide ideation due to these domestic problems and tussle between parents and children could be lessened or stopped. When mode of suicide was explored, results revealed that most of the suicides (55.2%) were committed by taking poison pills, the second major mode of committing suicide was use of pistol firing (17.2%), the third mode was by hanging (12.6%) and in 2.3% of the cases the information was missed (unknown). These results are in line with the study¹¹ which identified the intensity of the frequency of suicide in relation with the incidence such as method, duration of survival, causes of committing suicide and previous attempts to commit suicide. They found poisoning (53%) and hanging (45%) were the two exclusive methods employed for committing suicide. Most of the victims (83%) made sure shot and successful attempt to commit suicide in their very first attempt. They found that committing suicide by hanging was preferred method used by females (47%) while poisoning by male (55.1%). In another study, Nan-

di et al¹² studying in the West Bengal stated that poisoning and hanging were common methods.

Using poison pills for committing suicide is an eye opening for society. It poses certain questions i.e., why poison pills are easily available to the common people? Actually in Pakistan, anybody can purchase drugs and poison pills without the prescription from doctors. Many people use poison pills in grains to keep it safe from insects making easy availability of poison pill to general people. These issues are to be handled seriously. Government should take serious check on medical stores and they should not be allowed to sale poisonous material at any cost.

LIMITATIONS

This research is subject to some limitations. First, lots of cases were reported with missing information. For example, newspapers did not mention the age of 44.8% of the cases, marital status of 12.6% of the cases, the causes of 12.6% of the cases and the mode of suicide in 2.3% of the cases. These missing information matters a lot in the interpretation of results. It is suggested that news reporters should give complete information about a suicidal cases. Secondly, none of the newspaper had given the information if any of the victims was suffering from any mental disorder. Provision of this kind of information would help in understanding the harmful effects of these mental disorders. Information about the socio-economic status and employment status of the victims were also missing which could help to understand the correlates of suicide.

CONCLUSION

Young males, unmarried individuals and domestic problems were the leading factors for successful suicide attempts. Use of poison pills was the commonest mode of suicide.

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