



TEACHERS' VOICES ON STUDENT SUICIDE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN DIR LOWER, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

Sher Shah¹, Fazal Haq², Muhammad Raza Hadi³

Abstract

The finishing of own life and being aware of the consequences before doing this act is common globally. This is not a chronic pandemic or calamity, but still people according to WHO 16.7 people per one lakh attempt suicide. Globally numerous researchers carried out studies to know the causes of suicide. In addition to that, the current research is conducted in Malakand Division District Dir lower to understand the causes of suicide through teacher perspectives. A qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study. While in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 teachers, the data was thematically analyzed. The research revealed that academic pressure, parental expectations of high grades, family dynamics, feelings of low worth (inferiority complex), and deprivation were the leading causes of student suicide. It has been suggested by the researchers, that awareness sessions of mental health/problems, establishment of psycho-social support centers in educational institutions, personalized educational approach, and development of a supportive family environment to minimize these problems to a high extent.

Keywords: Student suicide, Causes of student suicide, Remedies, Teacher perspectives.

Introduction

Life is precious in this world; nobody wants to quit it soon but we live here for a very short period and every living thing embraces death and accepts the eternal truth of death. People die every day by natural death, accidental death, or disaster but the most shocking thing and reality that exists everywhere in this world is the killing of own self. Every day we hear that someone has committed suicide. The finishing of own life by any means and way is known as suicide. It is a Latin word introduced in the 17th century combined of two words; sui (oneself) and caedere (to kill). WHO in 1998 defined suicide, according to this definition it is the act of killing oneself intentionally or self-harming and knowing the situation and being aware of the consequences before doing this act (WHO,1998). In addition, Silverman & Maris (1995) explain this act of killing own self is a death that is caused by deprivation or feeling to be deprived in society rather than a disease or illness.

According to a WHO report, annually 16.7 people per one lakh attempt suicide. This number varies across nations in eastern Europe there is a higher number of suicide attempts than in Central and South America where there are few cases. Similarly, the United States and Western Europe have higher cases as compared to Central and South America but less from Eastern Europe (WHO.2007). In addition, the variation in suicide rates among genders also exists; Males have a higher ratio

¹ Incharge officer Shelter Home, Department of Social Welfare Charsadda. Email: shershahsworker@uop.edu.pk

² Social caseworker at the Government Institute for Children with Hearing and Speech Impairments, Department of Social Welfare Charsadda.

³ Social caseworker at the Department of Social Welfare Peshawar.

than females. In India male and female ratio is 1.3: 1, while in China 2.0:1 and Hong Kong 2.0:1 respectively (Nock et al, 2008).

Similarly, In Pakistan, suicidal behavior and attempts are an upsetting concern for people. Authentic and official statistics are not available regarding the rates of suicide in the country but rapidly increased in recent years (Shekhani, Perveen, Hashmi, Akbar, Bachani& Khan, 2018). However, a study conducted by Shakeel (2019), reports portray the picture of the Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where the suicide rate among students increased in recent years. The figures show that in the first eight months of 2018 total of 222 cases were registered in the Malakand division. In Swat district, 73 cases were registered. Similarly, in Buner district, 26 cases were registered, while in Shangla, Chitral, and Dir Lower, 9, 15, and 9 cases were registered with concerned hospitals and departments. According to the report overall ratio of suicide attempts in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa is 8.9% with which highest number being students. The report further explains that the highest number of suicide attempts was due to exam failure whose ratio is (23.6%).

However, the number of cases may be greater due to a lack of reporting and cultural norms and values. Some cases are registered in hospitals and social media but most of the cases were not reported due to societal and religious norms and social stigma (Farooq, 30 August, The Express Tribune). Furthermore, the facts and figures show that this issue exists and increasing day by day. However, the debates and studies regarding the causes of suicide among people and students are ongoing in our society but in this study, we trying to specifically focus on students and study through teacher's perspectives on this issue to attain a thorough understanding of the causes of suicide among students.

In recent times, researchers have started to diagnose the prevalence of suicidality in youth with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). After the meta-analytic review of different research on suicide, Mayes, Calhoun, Baweja, Feldman, Syed, Gorman and Siddiqui (2015) testified that 15.8% of youth have ADHD (with or without comorbid disorder/psychopathology) and practice suicidal ideation, while 5.5% of youth have suicide attempts. Furthermore, adolescents having Attention Deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), comorbid sadness, and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) are significantly more vulnerable to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Youth having the Victims of ADHD with sadness and Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) are 11 times more susceptible to suicide attempts than youth having ADHD alone. From the study, it has been concluded that suicide ideation and suicide attempts are directly connected with mental health disorders and aggression (Foley, Goldston, Costello, & Angold, 2006).

Research Question

1. What are the teacher's perceptions regarding the causes of suicide among students?

Literature Review:

Suicide is a common mental, social as well as a medical problem that exists in our society. It may take lives of more than 800,000 per year. Ironically, 75% of these cases occur in poor and middle-income countries. Similarly, Pakistan is a poor country that faces this problem and affects the whole social structure of society and the social well-being of the whole family. Some people commit suicide due to low levels of self-esteem while, in some cases, society and people compel a

person to commit suicide (Sualeha, Shekhani, Perveen, Hashmi¹, Akbar, Bachani, and Khan, 2018).

In addition, Muirtigue and Naiker, (2018), carried study on the causes of suicide among students in Fiji where suicide was very high. They found that most college and university students cannot achieve higher academic scores than their intellectual capacity, which may lead to suicide. Besides, financial burdens social stress, and pressure which badly affect their psychological immune system and decision-making power are also leading factors in suicide attempts.

Furthermore, a study was conducted on the suicide rate among gender and different age groups in Canada; the study reveals that the suicide rate among males and females was stable between 1985 and 1990. While suicide attempts and thoughts were down 24% between 1981 and 2017. They further revealed statistics that 11.4 per 100000 individuals in 2017 and more than 4000 registered cases from 2013 to 2019. Most of the registered cases were male which is three times more than female suicide. They further explain that the suicide ratio among adults was high and for the age of 18 to 45 years it was a predominant cause of death, in addition, a small ratio of suicide also registers at the age of 10 to 19 years. Besides, they also revealed in their study about methods of suicide that in 2018 the most dominant method was hanging and strangulation which was about 53.2%, while poisoning and firearms were 18% and 13.7% respectively (Pollock, Liu, Margo, Wilson, Record, Power, Mulay, Karaivanov, & Tonmyr, 2021).

Additionally, in the United States, the Youth Risk Behaviors Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) revealed a high ratio of 18% of high school student suicides in 2015 (Kann, 2016). Similarly, data shows the highest ratio of 20.6% in central Thailand aged 12-19 years have suicidal ideations. On the other hand, Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among school students in Thailand (Kittiteerasack, 2012). Furthermore, suicidal ideation is upraised due to emotional and psychosocial imbalance. This is further the result of school workload societal and familial pressure, and future career caused by failure. Moreover, students intending to higher education must have passed the rigorous entry examination, i.e. O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) and A-NET which expedite the social and emotional pressure among students (Tasai, Reuchutakuln, Thumamaporn, 2009).

Likewise, the suicide ratio among white Americans is higher than those of African American adolescents. The suicide rates among African Americans are due to strong cultural, and religious beliefs that consider suicide to be an inexcusable sin, the strong role of extended family, and consider the aged person of the family as an important asset. In comparison, Asian Americans have the lowest suicide rates compared to African American youth. Because of the collectivist culture, suicide ideation is generally considered as a selfish and disrespectful behavior within the family. Most of the suicides among Asian American youth are due to Parental conflicts (Appleby, 2016).

Correspondingly, a study conducted by Shah, Sajid, and Ashiq, (2022) revealed that student suicide is directly related to less social control and illiteracy of parents. The suicide survivors parent's expectations are high regarding the educational achievements of their child but they were mostly unaware of the mental stress, emotional imbalance, and socialization of the child. Due to high expectations anarchy is established in the mind of the child and he is unable to cope with such a situation which compels him to attempt suicide.

Methodology

This study was conducted in District Dir Lower. The study aims to reveal the teacher perspectives regarding student suicides at District Dir Lower. A qualitative research methodology was adopted to accomplish the study. The total number of respondents involved in the study is 17 teachers from middle and high school at District Dir Lower. The respondents were selected from a schools having suicide cases. The data on suicide cases were gathered from Tehsil Headquarters Hospital (THQ) Chakdara and District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) Timergarah District Dir lower. Moreover, considering the problem's sensitivity, in-depth interviews with open-ended questionnaires were used as a tool for data collection. Detailed interviews were held with each respondent regarding suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among students.

Analysis and Discussion

Suicide is a universal social, emotional, and psychological problem that affects not only a single life but tends to affect the whole family's life. Likewise, in other religions, suicide is strictly forbidden in our religion Islam. The suicide ratio among the students at Malakand Division is increasing rapidly. It gained great concern from the researchers that a global chronic problem is affecting our local society and youth. This grabs the attention of the researchers to dig out the teacher perspectives regarding student suicide. In the light of the Hadith, Narrated by Abu Huraira R.A *"whoever purposely throws himself from a mountain and kill himself, will be in the (hell) fire falling into it and abiding therein perpetually forever, and whoever drinks poison and kill himself with it, He will be carrying his poison in his hand and drinking it in the (hell) fire wherein he will abide eternally forever, and whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, will be carrying that weapon in his hand and stabbing his abdomen with it in the (hell) fire wherein He will abide eternally forever"* (Sahih al-Bukhari 5778, Vol. 7, Book 71, Hadith 670)" the Hadith indicates the sin and negative impacts of the suicide on social, emotional psychological and spiritual life of a person.

Additionally, each Muslim knows the sin of Suicide in Islam but they made this sin. The findings indicate that there is a misinterpretation of the teachings of Islam. We should struggle to learn and bring Islamic teachings into our social lives. It is revealed from the teacher's interviews that most suicide victims were middle class and not economically sound. Mostly the parents were illiterate with a simple source of income in shops, agriculture, and daily wagers. From the socio-economic background of the parent, it is concluded that their children are deprived of proper socialization and education. As the social scientist said, an individual learns 70% from his/her social environment. Due to poor socioeconomic conditions, the children are deprived of a positive social environment, which results in multiple mental health problems in the children's lives.

Teacher perceptions.

[I am one of the teachers of suicide survivors. He was an average student and obtained 55% to 63% marks in their academics. Further, He is a proactive student and indulges in multiple extra activities in the school. He belongs to a middle-class family; his father's occupation is agriculture. Mostly he is avoided by his family members, especially his cousins, and brothers who spoil a fun of him. Thus he considers himself a burden on his family and wants to overcome this situation which led him to suicide attempts].

[I am Haider, graduated in Botany. Yes, unfortunately, I am the teacher of the suicide survivor. The victim was not enough studious but He was an obedient and

calm person. In addition, he continuously takes part in extracurricular activities. When I heard about his suicide attempt, I couldn't believe it Because He was so nice and obedient student. But when I asked their parents about his suicide, they replied that we daily advised him to work hard in your studies and get good grades. But we didn't know the pressure of our daily advice, the main reason for his suicide was parental pressure regarding good grades in academics].

[My name is Bilal Khan, and I have an MPhil in Statistics. Yes, he was my student, and He was a creamed student. He was so studious and hardworking. He also used to gossip with teachers and their mates. His average marks were between 75% to 83%. He belongs to a well-known and noble family. I was amazed when I heard the suicide news of him. I have visited multiple time to his parents and found that their parents pressured him to work hard in his studies and get good grades which is beyond his capacity. Thus he is compelled to commit suicide].

Results

Suicide is a psychological, medical, and social problem that has negative effects on an individual, family, and society as a whole (Shah, Sajid, and Ashiq, 2022). The current study was conducted and multiple cases of suicide were studied to explore the causes of suicide among students through teacher's perspectives and to know how they perceived and experienced those students' suicide cases. It has been found from the study that multiple indicators are contributing to student suicide.

The number of suicide cases is consistently high from previous studies, which indicates the level of low self-esteem, impatience, and mental health problems of the students. From the teacher's perspective, it has been concluded that there are multiple indicators promoting suicide among the students.

The most common factors were academic pressure, Family dynamics, students' low self-esteem (inferiority complex) daily advice from their parents and elders. Academic pressure is the leading cause of suicide among the students in the present study. It is developed by the parents and family members, expecting high grades from their child without understanding his struggle and capacity, which becomes a source of enormous pressure. It emphasizes communicating sympathetically and giving deep attention to the distinctive needs of students while giving academic advice. Additionally, family dynamics are also a contributing factor to student suicide. Mostly students are avoided and ridiculed by their families, siblings, and cousins which indicates a lack of emotional support and an absence of the true place within the home. This loneliness is tied to academic pressure, exaggeratedly contributing to feelings of inferiority complex and inadequacy which is a contributing factor to student suicide. Lastly, the above two problems contributed to a perception of self-burden and inferiority complex. The student perceives that he is a huge burden on his family, reflecting an inferiority complex. These perceptions arise from academic pressure and familial dynamics and likely play a vital role in student suicide attempt decisions.

Suggestions:

- **Promotion of mental health awareness:** we as a society are less sensitive to mental health problems and most of the treatment and patients are stigmatizing and relate it to madness, coward, laziness, and idle members of society. Most people hide their mental health problems and do not share them with other people even with family members. However, treatment with medicine is practiced to some extent while treatment through therapies and counseling is not practiced even among

literate people. So awareness among teachers, parents, and students about mental health problems and their treatment is crucial and significant for individuals and society as a whole. All of society should be aware of the seriousness of the problem.

- **Creation of psycho-social support centers in educational institutions.** Through the research, it has been dug out the significance of mental health problems and their consequences. The psycho-social support centers in educational institutions particularly in high schools, will not only decline the suicide ratio but also raise awareness about mental health problems. The centers should consist of one psychologist and one school social worker who plays a role as a bridge between teachers, families, and students. Through this association, the psychologist and School social worker will know the mental, social, and emotional health of the students, which will help in the reduction of mental, social, and parental pressure.
- **Personalized and critical approach to education.** Family, teachers, and society must know the intellectuality, strengths, and weaknesses of the students. We should acknowledge and recognize every student as different and unique. It is significant to provide a supportive and peaceful environment for students who are experiencing low self-esteem and being the victim of an inferiority complex.
- **Supportive and friendly family environment.** The manifest function of the family is to provide support and protection to their children/members. The family must build an acceptable and soft environment to increase support and inclusiveness which encourages the whole family members to share their thoughts, and problems frankly. In addition to cultivating a sense of belonging and worth among members.

Conclusion

The killing of own self deliberately is the harshest reality that exists globally. Since the first act of suicide, everyone has had different explanations and interpretations till yet. However, it is well known to all of us that it is a psychological, social, and medical problem that has negative effects on individuals, families, and society as a whole. In this study, the researchers tried to interpret and explain the causes of suicide among students through teacher perspectives. The qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with teachers of suicide-committed students concluded that young students who fail to cope with the heavy academic pressure, family dynamics, low worth, and low self-esteem lose their battle and commit suicide. This tragedy gives us an alarming reminder about the importance of mental health awareness, coping and counseling, and international strategies. In addition, a holistic approach to the building of a friendly and supportive family environment with sensitivity and empathy. Furthermore, a realistic personalized approach to education where everyone is accepted according to their ability and resources that value individual well-being.

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