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The relationship between attachment styles and suicide ideation: the study of Turkmen students, Iran

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between attachment styles and suicide ideation in samples of students in Turkmen Sahra, Iran. Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and Beck Suicide Scale Ideation (BSSI) were used in this study. Findings suggest that there are positive statistically significant correlation between adolescents unsecure attachment style with suicide ideation and negative statistically significant correlation between secure attachment style and suicide ideation. Attachment styles are an important predictor of suicide ideation. Interventions designed to reduce suicide ideation may help reduce suicide ideation in adolescents.

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Keywords: Attachment styles, suicide ideation, adolescents.

1. Introduction

During last three decades, attachment theory has been one of the most influential theories of social- emotional development in modern psychology stimulating a great amount of research in the fields of developmental, clinical and social psychology (Meyer & Pilkonis, 2001). It has demonstrated that attachment behaviours is a major component of the human behaviour equipment life, and that early experience plays a determinative role in the emergence and organization of secure- base behaviour (Posada et al, 1999). According to Bowlby (1969, 1980), attachment behaviours are innate and promote survival of the species because they allow adaptation of the environment. Attachment figures allow the child a secure base from which to explore, afford the child safety when threats are encountered, and permit the child to learn to regulate her or his level of stress. Attachment behaviour is conceived as any form of behaviour that results in the attainment or retention of proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual. Attachment behaviour contributes to the individual's survival by keeping her or him in touch with caregivers, thereby reducing the risk of harm (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). According to this theory, attachment styles can be secure, insecure- ambivalent or insecure-avoidant, and would impact on the child's development and ability towards relatedness throughout the life. Mikulincer and Florian (1998)

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described secure attachment as an inner resource that may help a person positively appraise stressful experiences, constructively cope with stressful events, and improve his or her wellbeing and adjustment. People with avoidant attachment styles tend to hold more pessimistic views about relationships, themselves, and others (Feeney & Noller, 1990). Finally, anxious-ambivalent attachment results in people who tend to hold a more negative view of the self (Collins & Read, 1990).

Bowlby's theory of attachment provides a way to conceptualize the propensity of human beings to make strong affection bonds to significant others and to explain many forms of mental health problems. One of the mental health problems is Suicidality. Suicidality refers to the occurrence of suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour. Suicidal ideation, defined as having thoughts or fantasies about killing oneself, can range from transient thoughts about death to more severe rumination and creation of a plan to take one's life (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Suicidal behaviour includes acts of self harm with lethal intent, usually having the purpose of ending intolerable emotional pain. The outcome may be suicide or attempted suicide.

The limited literature to date examining the role of attachment organization in adolescent and young adults' suicidality suggests that attachment representations may be helpful in distinguishing among a high-risk sample those at the greatest risk for suicidality (Adam, 1994). A recent study conducted by Adam and colleagues (1996) on adolescents in psychiatric treatment examined the overlap between a history of suicidal behaviour and specific attachment patterns. They hypothesized that youth who had failed to resolve attachment-related trauma (e.g. death of a parent, or abuse or separation from a parent), as evidenced by their disorganization in reasoning when discussing the trauma, would be more likely to have a history of suicidal behaviour. They also predicted that preoccupied youth would be more likely than dismissing youth to have a history of suicidality. Results confirmed these predictions and showed that the preoccupied status, in interaction with unresolved-disorganized attachment, was significantly associated with a history of suicidality, whereas dismissing attachment was associated with an absence of such history in youth.

Secure attachment during adolescence is related to fewer mental health problems, including Lower levels of depression, anxiety and feelings of personal inadequacy (Paterson, Pryor, Field, 1995). Securely attached adolescents are less likely to engage in substance abuse, antisocial and aggressive behaviour, and risky sexual activity (Cooper, Shaver, Collins, 1998). They demonstrate less concern about loneliness and social rejection than do insecurely attached adolescents and they display more adaptive coping strategies (Florian, Mikulincer, Bucholtz, 1995).

Suicide is a significant health problem among adolescents and young adults. In 2000, suicide was the third leading cause death among 15 to 24 year olds, following unintentional injuries and homicide (Minino et al, 2002). Further, there are between 8 and 25 attempted suicide per every suicide death (Moscicki, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate relationship between attachment styles and suicidal ideation in a sample of college students. We chose to focus our investigation on suicidal ideation because clinical experiences with this population indicated that this is a relatively common phenomenon that frequently must be addressed in providing therapeutic care for these groups (Lessard, Moretti, 1998). This focus is also supported by the findings of recent epidemiological research that the vast majority (i.e. 88%) of adolescent suicide attempts are premeditated, that suicidal ideation is a strong predictor of future suicide attempts even after controlling for its association with current depression, and that the presence of any degree of suicidal ideation serves as a risk factor for future attempts, with level of the risk augmenting linearly as a function of the intensity and duration of suicidal ideation (Lewinsohn et al., 1996).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study subjects included 125 undergraduate students (70 girls; 55 Boys; Mean age 22.1 years; Standard Deviation = 3.21) that were randomly selected from three universities in Golestan province, Iran.

2.2 Instruments

Participants completed the Beck Suicide Scale Ideation (Beck, Kovacs, Weissman, 1979). This 19-item scale is designed to assess prior suicide ideation and behaviour, frequency of suicide ideation, threats of suicide, and likelihood of attempting Suicide someday. The BSSI has been used in several investigations with adolescents and young adults. The internal consistency of the scale via Chronbach Alpha method was estimated at 0.95 (Anisi, Ashtiyani & Salimi, Ahmadi, 2006). This scale was used for different communities in Iran and revealed an acceptable reliability and validity.

The second instrument was Adult Attachment Questioner (AAQ) that developed on the base of Hazan and Shaver's (1987) self-classification items for assessing attachment styles. This 15-item scale is designed to assessing Secure, Avoidant and Ambivalent attachment styles. The reliability and validity of AAQ has been assessed among Iranian students in Tehran University. The internal consistency of the scale via Chronbach Alpha method was estimated at 0.70 (Nadi, Sajadiyan & Sajadiyan, 2009). This scale was used for different communities in Iran and revealed an acceptable reliability and validity.

2.3. Data analysis

Spss 16.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package was used in the analysis of the data obtained from the implementation. Correlation, t- test and descriptive statistical analysis have been implemented in order to get the results.

3. Results

The results are presented in the tables as follows:

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation for suicide ideation on attachment styles type

variable	Secure attachment		Avoidant attachment		Ambivalent attachment	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Suicide ideation	4.51	1.1	7.33	2.28	9.47	4.58

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation,

Table 1 present the mean and standard deviations of suicide ideation on different attachment styles. According to this table average score of suicide ideation in insecure attachment styles (i.e. avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles) is higher than average score of secure attachment style.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Suicide Ideation in Boys and Girls

variable	Boys			Girls		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Suicide ideation	6.51	2.08	55	5.39	1.66	70

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, N.S= No Significant differences

Table 2 present mean and standard deviation of suicide ideation in Boys and Girls. The result of the t- test showed that there is no statistically significant difference between Boys and Girls in Suicide ideation.

Table 3: Correlation between types of attachment styles and suicide ideation

variable	Secure attachment	Avoidant attachment	Ambivalent attac
Suicide ideation	-0.58**	0.45**	0.66**

**P<0.001

The result in table 3 showed that there are positive relationship between avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles with suicide ideation. Also, there is negative relationship between secure attachment style and suicide ideation.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between attachment styles and suicide ideation in samples of undergraduate Turkmen students in Iran. Suicide is the most severe and final manifestation of psychological pain. It is a significant health problem among adolescents and young adults. The inability to predict suicide and its inestimable consequences make the understanding of this behaviour of utmost priority to mental health practitioners.

In this study, the undergraduate students were the subjects. For further researches, working with high school students and adult samples is recommended. In addition, studying with samples from different populations and different backgrounds could provide a broader picture on the relationship between attachment styles and suicide ideation. There are a limited number of training and studies on prevention of suicide in Iran; therefore, it is valuable to conduct effective programs and training strategies for countering suicide. Addressing the related factors to suicide is crucial for adolescents and adults. Therefore, the educators, psychologists, counsellors and who work with these populations should be trained and educated on these fields.

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