

Influence of Self Esteem on Suicidal Ideation among Youth in Universities in Nairobi County

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Abstract: Suicidal ideation is a thought process in which an individual thinks about suicide but does not intend or plan to commit suicide. The constant thought about suicide is considered a factor of concern because the thought can lead to suicidal behavior as well as attempted and completed suicide. This study sought to study self esteem on suicidal ideation among the youth. The main objective of the study was to determine the influence of self concept on suicidal ideation, the influence of self efficacy on suicidal ideation, on suicidal ideation. These factors play a significant role in the development of a quality life of a young adult and are therefore influential factors in the day to day activities of a university student. A descriptive questionnaire design was adopted for this study. The study established that there is a positive correlation between low self esteem and suicidal ideation. This means that the lower the self esteem the higher the chances of suicidal ideation. It was also established that individuals with high efficacy experience less suicidal ideation compared to those with low self efficacy.

Keywords: Suicidal Ideation, Self Esteem, Self Efficacy, Self Concept, Suicidal Behavior, Youth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Suicidal ideation is the thought, intent, plan and imagination of an individual concerning their wish to commit suicide. When looking at suicidal ideation we do not look into suicide attempts or complete suicide but the thought of an individual concerning suicide. Suicidal ideation is a common phenomenon among all individuals irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, race, academic performance or even social status. Most people feel that suicidal behavior constitutes a tragedy that should be prevented -however, how does one prevent such a tragedy when the understanding of the underlying aetiology and prediction is still imperfect (Schlebusch, 1995); and when the factors leading to suicidal ideation, and attempted or completed suicide are diverse and touch on every part of our life. There has been much development in trying to understand the phenomenon of suicidal behavior throughout the world but, despite the accomplishments, much remains to be done in the field of management, prediction and prevention (Grossman & Kruesi, 2000). Since suicidal ideation occur among variety of people (young and old, rich and poor, educated or less educated), it can be very difficult to pin point a typical suicidal ideation profile among youth.

Such worldwide problem of suicidal ideation has been considered a significant factor leading to death according to many researchers. Nock, Borges, Bromet, et al., (2008) affirms that between 22% and 38% of young adults have suicidal thoughts at some point in their developmental life stages. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2007), suicidal ideation is the precedent factor of suicide which is the second leading cause of death among (25-34) year olds and the third leading cause of death among (15- to 24) year olds, and accounts for 12.2% of all deaths annually in U.S.A.

It is strongly believed that suicidal behaviors affects many among university students and young adults all over the world. Self-defeating thoughts and poor self-esteem may lead to suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation among university youth have unique circumstances due to the stress that occur in university life, including changes in family and peer relationships. Self- esteem levels can be an important issue during the first year of university students' life. People with low self -

esteem develop a feeling to harm themselves because they are not living up to their expectations that may be developed internally by the students and externally by other (Kaur, & Rani, (2012). Suicidal ideation among first-year college students in the USA indicated that 6% of them had current suicidal ideation as reported by Arria, Grady, Caldeira, Vincent, Wilcox, and Wish (2009). People usually preoccupied with the thoughts of suicidal ideation to overcome and block unbearable emotional pain, caused by a wide variety of stressful life problems (Whitlock, & Knox, 2007).

Studies have reported that self-esteem is a powerful internal protective factor against adolescent suicide behaviors (Eskin et al., 2007; Grøholt, Ekeberg, Wichstrøm, & Haldorsen, 2005). Fergusson et al. (2003) found that resiliency to suicidal behaviors was associated with increased self-esteem among young people. Researchers have argued that external resources in terms of availability of social support, especially from the family, can reduce the risk for suicidal behavior and can be invaluable during periods of increased stress (Compton, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2005; Meadows, Kaslow, Thompson, & Jurkovic, 2005). In this context, Harris and Molock (2000) found that higher levels of family cohesion and family support were associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation among African American college students. Flouri and Buchanan (2002) documented that adolescents who attempted suicide tended to report lower self-concept and parental involvement compared with adolescents who had not attempted suicide.

Self-esteem is the sum of attitudes which depend on perceptions, thoughts, evaluations, feelings and behavioral tendencies aimed toward ourselves, the way we are and behave, and our body's and character's features. The biggest influence on self-esteem is parenting, acceptance, and control. In other words, it's one self's evaluative perception. Young children have relatively high self-esteem, which gradually declines over the course of childhood. As children develop cognitively, they begin to base their self-evaluations on external feedback and social comparisons. As they grow older, they form a more balanced and accurate appraisal of their academic competence, social skills, attractiveness, and other personal characteristics. Self-esteem continues to decline during adolescence which has been attributed to the adolescent body image and other problems associated with puberty. Adolescence is the critical period for the development of self-esteem and self-identity, and low self-esteem may endanger adolescents' emotional regulation (Tsang, Yip, 2006). Robins et al. (2001) described adolescence as a critical stage in the lives of individuals, in which one consolidate their values and identity and they conquer autonomy, achievements that frequently lead to psychological and relational tensions and the risk of problematic or maladaptive behaviors. Young adults life is highly determined by the developmental and how effectively they maneuvered through these stages. With self esteem a majority of the youth tend to have a positive self concept if the stages of development were well addressed. A majority of individuals who suffer low self esteem can be traced back to a past relationship that may have influenced the feelings.

According Baumrind (1983) an authoritarian parenting style tends to produce children who are quite and unhappy. They fear than love their parents due to little emotions of comfort and affection displayed by the parents and this is more likely to produce a child with deviant tendencies. The child portrays lower social competence and self esteem. The uninvolved parents are both uncaring and inadequate to meet the needs of children. Authoritative parents, balances clear, high parental demands with emotional responsiveness and recognition of child autonomy producing happy, capable and successful children. Hence, authoritative parental style produces children who have better psychosocial skills and display better emotional well being than do the offspring of parents who are not Authoritative (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Parker & Gladstone, 1996). The negative parental behavior grossly inflicts emotional damage to their children. These effects will eventually interfere with the development of the child's self esteem and their social competencies.

.Self -esteem is considered the backbone of a person's wellbeing. The quality of an individual's life is highly influenced by their self-esteem. Self-esteem of an individual is highly associated with the behaviors of an individual. Low-self-esteem is seen as the cause for a wide range of personal and social ills, from crime and drug addiction, educational under-achievement and a feeling of general wellbeing (Baumeister *et al.*, 2003). The family places an integral part in the development of effective relationships and when the family relationships are ineffective these may affect the self-esteem of an individual as well as lead to suicidal ideation. There is scanty information concerning suicide as well as self-esteem among the youth in Kenya. Self-esteem has been believed to generate negative feelings of which with time can manifest itself as suicidal tendencies as well as other psychopathologies. The fact that this kind of information is very scanty, justifies the need for such and similar studies to be carried out. The researcher hopes that the information generated from the study will aid in formulation of policies to help in prevention of suicide ideation among youth in private universities. The researcher hopes the information generated from the study will help in development of programs in the county and country that can help address suicidal ideation among youth in Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Self esteem has been defined by different authors. Each of these others have outlined one common aspect concerning self esteem. They all believe that it is how an individual views him or herself in comparison to those around them. Self concept is made up of three major areas of concern. The ideal self, the self-worth and the self-image these three areas have been identified as integral parts of the self concept. Here are some of the definitions of self-esteem.

Reese (1997) defined self-esteem as the extent to which one prizes, values, approves, or likes oneself. He argues that self-esteem is relatively high in childhood, drops during adolescence (particularly for girls), rises gradually throughout adulthood, and then declines sharply in old age. It is widely assumed that levels of self-esteem are consistent over time within individuals. It is recognized as a basic personality characteristic of positive and productive behavior. Smith and Mackie (2007) define self esteem as “the positive or negative evaluation of the self”. The concept of Self esteem can therefore be applied specifically to a particular dimensions or a global context. It is often regarded as a personality trait. Instances of self esteem are referred to as self worth, self regard, self respect and self integrity. These factors play a significant role in the development of how people perceive themselves and how others perceive them thus forming an outline of who we are in the society.

Self-esteem, is the evaluations an individuals make about the self (Harter et al., 1992), is shaped by individuals' appraisals of how they are perceived by significant others (Sullivan, 1953). Therefore, the quality of feedback received from the environment significantly affects ones functioning. As such, negative feedback about the self, is detrimental to the self-esteem (Sullivan, 1953). Thus, it would be logical to assume that self-esteem is a powerful resource for combatting the effects of stress and suicidal ideation.

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A negative view of the self may involve seeing the self as worthless and the future as hopeless. The adolescent with low self-esteem may see life as not worth living and may perceive everyday stressors as overwhelming. Low self-esteem has been found to be important in the prediction of suicidal ideation among high school students (Dukes and Lorch, 1989). The presence and severity of suicidal ideation in adolescents with affective disorders has been related to low self esteem (Brent et al., 1986). Low self-esteem is also implicated in suicide attempts made by adolescents (Kienhorst et al., 1990). Furthermore, negative self-evaluations were associated with increased suicidal tendencies, number of suicidal gestures, seriousness of suicidal intent, and medical lethality of the attempt in a study of 64 adolescent psychiatric inpatients (Robbins and Alessi, 1985). Thus, self-esteem deficits appear to be directly related to suicidal tendencies, including both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in adolescents.

The self-concept plays a role in the development of the self esteem. Rogers (1959) believes that the self concept has three different components. These components are discussed below.

Self Image

The self image does not necessarily have to reflect reality. A person's self image is affected by many factors, such as parental influences, friends and the media.

Kuhn (1960) investigated the self-image by using The Twenty Statements Test. He found that the responses could be divided into two major groups. These were social roles and personality traits. The social roles was described by the objective aspects of an individual such as daughter, teacher, student, while the personality traits were used to describe the internal aspects of oneself such as humorous, patient, generous.

Self Esteem and Self Worth

Self esteem refers to the extent to which we like accept or approve of ourselves or how much we value ourselves. Self esteem always involves a degree of evaluation and we may have either a positive or a negative view of ourselves.

Argyle (2008) believes there are 4 major factors that influence self esteem.

i) Reaction of others:- If people admire us, flatter us, seek out our company, listen attentively and agree with us we tend to develop a positive self-image. If they avoid us, neglect us, tell us things about ourselves that we don't want to hear we develop a negative self-image.

ii) Comparison with others:- If a person compare our self with others who appear to be more successful, happier, richer, better looking than ourselves we develop a negative self image but if they are less successful than us our self image will be positive.

iii) Social roles: - Some social roles carry prestige and this promotes self-esteem or stigma. Social roles such as doctors, professors present a successful individuals thus improving self esteem while others such as prisoners unemployed, thief are treated with stigma thus presenting a negative self esteem or low self worth.

iv) Identification: - Roles we hold play a role in the personality we have. The roles we hold tend to identify with the positions we occupy, the roles we play and the groups we belong to. Thus making the individual attached to a given role making them part and person of our daily lives. A teacher exists in the role of teacher even after retirement because their identity is connected to the role they played teacher and thus remains as part and person of an individual even after they no longer play the role.

Ideal Self:

The ideal self is the person we would like to be. If there is a mismatch between how you see yourself (e.g. your self image) and what you'd like to be (e.g. your ideal self) then this is likely to affect how much you value yourself. Therefore, there is an intimate relationship between self image, ego-ideal and self-esteem.

Self-efficacy:

Self-efficacy refers to the confidence and belief that an individual can act in a certain way for the purpose of meeting a goal or coping effectively in stressful situations (Bandura 1977). Studies confirmed that self-efficacy has a significant effect on the behavioral style, effort, and persistence of an individual (Bandura 1986). Self efficacy plays a role in the development of effective relationship due to the positive nature of an individual. Individuals with self efficacy are often identified as optimistic people due to their high confidence and self belief that does not falter even when thing seem to be going on the negative trend. Studies also show that individuals with high self-efficacy show better health, achievement, and social integration (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). On the other hand people with low self-efficacy usually feel powerlessness, in contrast to those with high self-efficacy who are more controlled and less nixes in stressful situations.

Self-efficacy help individuals cope with stress and inducing positive effects in time. An inverse relationship between self-efficacy and acute stress reaction disorder has been found, which is also consistent with results of other studies (Benight, Harper, 2002). Till et al, (2011), demonstrated the associations between coping styles and individuals approaching toward films portraying the suicide of the protagonist. They also found out that individuals tend to identify with the drama's protagonist and tried to find out behavior patterns in the movie against life events. In another words, according to Social-learning theory, imitations from films can also affect their favored coping strategies, enhance their self-efficacy and eventually defend against suicide behavior. The opposite is also noted. Those with low self efficacy can choose to imitate a celebrity who they feel drawn to thus making contagious suicidal behavior common. This findings are also supported by King et al.(2011), stated that the self-efficacy of a student lowered his suicidal tendency. As mentioned previously, both self-efficacy and dispositional optimism are cognitive constructs. Dispositional optimism is composed of positive expectations regarding future outcomes and self-efficacy is one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations. Thus, people with high self-efficacy and optimism can combat stress better. As a result, self-efficacy and dispositional optimism have both direct and indirect roles in the correlation between stress and suicide ideation. It is therefore important to note that self-efficacy provide protection from effects of stress in suicidal ideation. Moreover, studies have found that high self-efficacy have a strongly negative effect on suicide ideation (King et al. 2011). It is therefore important to focus on individual self-efficacy, which means that it can be adopted in interventions and counseling that promote self-efficacy to address suicide ideation.

Influence of Self-concept on suicide ideation:

Both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts may be related to persistent negative views of the self. A negative view of the self may involve seeing the self as worthless and the future as hopeless. The adolescent with low self-esteem may see life

as not worth living and may perceive everyday stressors as overwhelming. Low self-esteem has been found to be important in the prediction of suicidal ideation among high school students (Dukes and Lorch, 1989). The presence and severity of suicidal ideation in adolescents with affective disorders has been related to low self esteem (Brent et al., 1986). Low self-esteem is also implicated in suicide attempts made by adolescents (Kienhorst et al., 1990). Furthermore, negative self-evaluations were associated with increased suicidal tendencies, number of suicidal gestures, seriousness of suicidal intent, and medical lethality of the attempt in a study of 64 adolescent psychiatric inpatients (Robbins and Alessi, 1985). Thus, self-esteem deficits appear to be directly related to suicidal tendencies, including both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in adolescents.

Self Determination Theory Another perspective on self-esteem comes from Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000). I wish to address SDT's perspective on self-esteem because authors from this perspective have been critical of the interpersonal approach taken by both ST and TMT (Ryan & Deci, 2004). A fundamental postulate of SDT is that humans have three innate psychological needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Competence refers to feeling effective in interacting with one's environment. Autonomy refers to feeling that one's behavior is freely chosen. This concept is often confused with individualism, or behaving separately from others. However, in the SDT framework, behaving in line with others can be autonomous so long as the individual feels that behavior is chosen freely. Finally, relatedness refers to the desire to be connected to others. SDT argues that conditions that are supportive of these three needs will foster behavior that is self-determined, or motivated by personal choice rather than external control. Such self-determined behavior is related to higher levels of well-being (Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). SDT's perspective on self-esteem suggests that it is important to distinguish between two types of self-esteem: contingent and true (Deci & Ryan, 1995). This perspective argues that contingent self-esteem is self-worth that fluctuates based on success in meeting certain standards of excellence. Contingent self-esteem is described as unstable and fragile, and results from conditions that are unsupportive of some or all of the three posited psychological needs. Under these conditions, individuals defensively pursue self-worth by attempting to match themselves to standards that reflect external control or only partial internalization. In contrast, true, stable self-esteem reflects self-worth that does not fluctuate as a function of one's accomplishments. Under conditions supportive of the three posited needs, the individual does not feel the need to prove her or his self-worth and behavioral regulation emanates from the individual's authentic self. These authors argue that when the three needs are woven into self-regulation self-esteem is not a salient priority. Only when these needs are not being met is the pursuit of self-worth posited to be a salient goal. Thus, Ryan and Deci (2004) argue that any interpersonal theory of self-esteem is incomplete because such a theory suggests that the pursuit of self worth reflects only the satisfaction of relatedness needs. These authors also suggest that any theory that frames self-esteem exclusively as an anxiety buffer ignores human tendencies for growth. From the SDT perspective, ST and TMT describe partial need satisfaction and thus can only explain contingent, but not true, self-esteem. To understand the nature of the differences between the interpersonal perspectives (ST and TMT) and SDT, it is important to be clear on their different foci. SDT is explicitly a theory about conditions that promote growth, integrity, and psychological well-being. Thus, SDT's interest in self-esteem is not centered on why humans have self-esteem or what the motivation underlying self-esteem reflects beyond its value as an indicator of well-being. From the perspective of self-esteem as a pre human motivation elaborated by a self-construction process, SDT focuses on how the process of constructing the self influences the functioning of the motivational mechanisms underlying self-esteem. On the other hand, the interpersonal perspectives are explicitly theories about the evolved nature of the motivational mechanisms underlying self-esteem. In the sociometer framework, process-oriented terms like contingent self-esteem are not the focus; instead, the focus is on the nature of self-esteem motivation.

Low self-esteem was also associated with depression, hopelessness, and high perceived stigma, but not with degree of psychotic symptoms. Recognizing oneself as competent and worthy confers self-acceptance, self-respect and life satisfaction. High self-esteem may allow individuals to overcome difficulties and stressful life events, and protects against suicidal behaviors by decreasing vulnerability to depression (Sharaf, Thompson, Walsh, 2009).

Self concept plays a role in the development of self esteem, self-effluence and the self image. These three areas play a significant role in the development of an individual's quality of life as well as value of life. The self worth of a person is highly motivated by how they feel about themselves and is therefore necessary in the development of coping strategies against suicidal ideation.

3. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research was adapted for this study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) observe that descriptive survey research design enables the researcher to explain as well as explore the existing status of two or more variables of a phenomena or population. The use of the descriptive survey research design for this study allowed me to gather data directly from the students and practitioners in their natural environment for the purpose of studying the influence of self esteem on suicide ideation. With this design, I was afforded the opportunity to view the phenomena through the eyes of the students in appropriate social context through in-depth questions. The explorative nature of the research required that the participant's knowledge, views, understanding, interpretations, experiences and interactions be considered in order to construct situational knowledge of the influence of self esteem on suicidal ideation among youth in private universities in Nairobi County.

The study was carried out in Nairobi county. University students were chosen due to their availability and representation of Kenyan youth population. It was also influenced by the heterogeneous composition which was believed to represent most of Kenya's ethnic and cultural groups compare to a using an outright adult population.

Within the Universities, participants Universities were choses from different criteria's. For instance:-

- i. the university had to be a private university
- ii. Was the university an accredited university
- iii. What were the foundering principles of the university
- iv. Does the university have a diverse population of students
- v. the university had to be in the Nairobi county

With these factors in mind universities were then approached on random and requested to participate in the study.

The respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the use of the data being collected and their free will to reject to participate. They were also informed of the confidentiality of the data collected. These data would only be used for research and kept confidential.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The authority to conduct research was obtained from the National council of science and technology. Confidentiality of the study respondents was ensured throughout the execution of this study. All the information obtained was used only for the purpose of this study. The study respondents were required to give their own individual voluntary consent of participation in this study

5. RESULTS

The study indicated that 15% of the respondents had high self-worth, 13.6% had a positive attitude towards life, 27.1% identified that they were satisfied with themselves, 27.1% also believed they were only as good as their grades, and 17.1% had low self-worth. These findings show that a majority of the youth respondents have a moderate self-esteem.

The data analysis presents that a majority of the respondents believed that the way they feel about themselves plays an integral role in the development of suicidal ideation. The data shows that the way the respondents feel about themselves plays a role in the development of suicidal ideation. When looking at the relationship between the academic performance of the students and their self worth those with high self worth identified that their performance plays a significant role in their lives at the university. On the other hand low self esteem identified to play no role in the in their performance. The analysis of self esteem and suicidal ideation shows that there is a close relationship between the self esteem and suicidal ideation. These means that self esteem and suicidal ideation have a close relationship and are greatly correlated, the data shows that there is a minimal mean difference between self esteem and suicidal ideation.

These findings are in line with Kaur & Rani, (2012), who identified that Self-defeating thoughts and poor self-esteem may lead to suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation among university students have unique circumstances due to the stress that occur in university life, including changes in family and peer relationships. Self- esteem levels can be an important issue

during the first year of college students' life. People with low self - esteem develop a feeling to harm themselves because they are not living up to their expectations that may be developed internally by the students and externally by other (Kaur, & Rani, (2012). A similar study was conducted at the nursing school at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain with the aims to investigate the prevalence of suicide risk in a sample of nursing students, by examining the relationship between suicide risk and perceived emotional intelligence, depression, trait anxiety and self-esteem. The sample consisted of 93 students males and females. The results revealed that depression and emotional intelligence are significant predictors of suicidal ideation, and suicidal risk showed a significant negative association with students' self-esteem (Aradilla-Herrero,, Tomás-Sábado,& Gómez-Benito, 2014). A study was conducted in India to investigate suicidal ideation, self -esteem and perfectionism. The sample consisted of 100 university students' males (40) and females (60) ranging in age between 19-22 years old. The result indicated the following: Suicidal Ideation negatively correlated with self- esteem, perfectionism positively correlated with suicidal ideation and negatively correlated with self- esteem (Kaur, & Rani, (2012).

A study was conducted by Bhar, Ghahramanlou-Holloway, Brown and Beck, (2008) who investigated the self-esteem and suicide ideation in psychiatric outpatients revealed that depression, hopelessness, and low self-esteem are all associated factors to suicidal ideation. The results of the study indicated that low self-esteem was negatively associated with suicidal ideation and considers being a good predictor of suicidal ideation independent of depression and feeling of hopelessness.

The results show that there is a positive correlation between low self esteem and suicidal ideation among youth in private universities in Nairobi County. These means that youth who experience high self esteem are less likely to have suicidal ideation compared to youth who have low self esteem. When looking at self efficacy it was also noted that youth with high self efficacy experience less suicidal ideation compared to youth who have low self efficacy.

6. CONCLUSION

Self esteem plays an integral role in the development of a individuals quality life and is therefore an influencing factor to the day to day factors of a youths life. The self esteem of a youth is highly influenced by the family, society as well as their academic performance of an individual. These shows that the development of suicidal ideation is highly influence by the social support one receives as well as the self concept of the student. This showed that there is a positive correlation between suicidal ideation and low self esteem.

The data showed that the family plays a major role in development of self esteem and suicidal ideation. It was therefore necessary to look at the relationship between suicidal ideation and family support. It was noted that there is a clear indicator that family support can both help in avoiding suicidal ideation as well as development of suicidal ideation. The relationship between suicidal ideation and family support has been noted to have double edged impact on the youth. Individuals with very little family support have been identified as individuals facing feelings of alienation and perceived burdensome due to their constant feelings of rejection and lack of attention. These feelings have been identified as indicators of suicidal ideation. On the other hand youth with effective amounts of family support have been noted to have better coping mechanisms that help them deal with suicidality. But excessive family support has also been identified as a factor of concern due to the constant need to perform according to expectation. These feelings of pressure have also been identified as an indicator of suicidality.

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