CHAPTER-VI

SUMMARY

Suicides have been reported throughout history with several biblical references to self-destructive act. Reports of suicidal behavior have been found in most ancient literary texts but the root of the religious prohibition against suicide comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition. As the frequency of suicide among early Christians began to increase, the Church introduced the concept that suicide was both a sin and a crime. In the fourth century, Saint Augustine rejected suicide as an option and reasoned that it precluded the possibility of individual repentance and violated the fifth commandment related to killing. Saint Augustine was perhaps the first to codify Christian values against suicide, to make the commendation of suicide absolute through his assertion that suicide was a violation of the sixth commandment of God, “Though Shall Not Kill”.

Society’s attitudes towards suicide and suicide act reveal a wide range between a rational one of acceptance, an irrational one of superstition, and a hostile one of punishment. The good and evil of suicide – the meaning of suicide – lies not in the minds and hearts of the individuals who contemplate and commit suicide but more so in those of the people left behind to think, justify and understand.

Though suicide is ancient, undoubtedly as ancient as humanity, its study did not advance much before the middle of the nineteenth century, when the psychopathology of the individual became an active field of research. Research on suicide attempts in the recent past revealed that the phenomenon has now assumed the proportions of a major health problem. The burden on the medical services of caring for suicide attempters is of growing concern to medical and mental health professionals*

*Suicide is now regarded as an act whose empirical and theoretical dimensions can be investigated scientifically. Scientific research and theory of a sociologic, psychological and statistical nature began to appear in the literature towards the end of the nineteenth
Realizing the gravity of the phenomenon of suicidal behaviour there is an ongoing debate concerning the rationality of feelings of wanting to die, assisted suicide and euthanasia. The phenomenon has been attracting the attention of a wide variety of medical and social disciplines including philosophy, theology, history, psychology, sociology, psychiatry and criminology (e.g. Shukla, Verma, & Mishra, 1990, Venkoba Rao, 1977). It continues to provoke curiosity, to awaken sentiments of pity and terror and to offer rich paradoxical material for discussion.

OVERVIEW

The discussion reveals that a number of attempts have been made to identify the social and psychological aspects of suicidal behaviour. Most of the research on suicide behaviour has utilized adult clinical populations. Much of this work, however, has been concerned with people who have actually attempted or completed suicide. Because of the difficulty in obtaining data on completed suicides, studies actually focus upon surviving suicide attempters. But it is a well known fact that attempted suicides which come to the notice of clinical workers form a very small proportion of the suicidal population. As a result most investigators utilize small clinical samples of surviving attempters. To circumvent the methodological constraints associated with small clinical samples, some researchers have begun to study suicide ideation in the general population (Vandivort and Locke, 1979; Paykel et al., 1974; Schwab et al., 1972). Studies of suicide ideation assume that suicide behaviour forms a continuum ranging from suicidal ideas to suicidal acts (Bedrosian and Beck, 1979; Paykel et al., 1974; Beck and Greenberg, 1971). This continuum does not imply that all or even most individuals who contemplate suicide make an attempt. Ideation is viewed as a preliminary stage to the more life threatening stage on the continuum, although
the majority of persons who manifest suicidal ideas do not seem to progress to the last stage. This contention is supported by the findings of Carlson & Cantwell (1982). In a study of adolescents, they found that 42% of the respondents with severe ideation and 34% of those with slight ideation had made a suicide attempt while virtually none of the respondents who reported no suicide ideation have made an attempt. Suicidal thoughts appear to be a precursor to more extreme suicidal behaviors and this suggests that one can learn something about the factors that set the stage for suicidal acts by identifying the causes of suicide ideation. Kandel, Raveis, & Davies (1991) found that 41% of the females and 16% of the males who scored high on the suicidal ideation scale reported having made attempts to kill themselves. Understanding the dynamics of suicidal ideation in non-clinical samples has important public health implications, since suicide ideation is a strong predictor of suicidal attempts, especially among females (Bonner & Rich, 1987).

A review of literature reveals that suicidologist have focused almost exclusively on either clinical patients or those who have attempted or completed suicide. While there is obvious merit in such studies, many have lacked adequate control groups. Further, those who study clinical patients miss those who do not seek help, while investigators who focus on those who have attempted suicide may be looking at persons who have changed simply because they survived the attempt. Social scientists may be able to obtain valuable information about the precursors in non-clinical populations in greater depth.

Although researches in the recent past have provided rich information about suicide ideation, a shortcoming of most previous studies has been the tendency to determine the relationship between suicide ideation with just one or two variables. Thus, researches have tended to focus on factors such as depression, hopelessness, social support in isolation etc. As far as can be established, no comprehensive effort has been made to determine the joint effects of a range of factors (e.g. depression, hopelessness, negative automatic thoughts
and social support) on suicide ideation in a single study comprising of adolescents. Much more comprehensive research is needed on this matter.

In the light of the aspects considered above, it would be a matter of interest and great research relevance, therefore, to investigate the relationship of suicide ideation with depression, negative automatic thoughts, psychoticism, anxiety, social desirability, extraversion, and social support separately among male and female college students scoring high and low on hopelessness.

**HYPOTHESES**

On the basis of the review of literature presented in the proceeding paragraphs, the current study starts with the following hypotheses:

1. Suicide ideation will be positively related to depression, negative automatic thoughts, anxiety, psychoticism, social desirability in case of participants high on hopelessness than participants low on hopelessness.

2. Suicide ideation will be related negatively to social support in case of participants high on hopelessness than participants low on hopelessness.

   These two hypotheses derived their rationale from the following sets of observations:

3. Defined as a negative expectation toward the future hopelessness as a symptom has been found to be a strong predictor of completed suicide, Beck, Steer, Kovacs, & Garrison (1985) found that hopelessness predicted eventual suicide in patients hospitalized for depression; especially, in predicting future suicide among suicide ideators.

4. In earlier researches the criteria for hopelessness focused on dysfunction, with little or no attention given to healthy functioning. Consequently if the study of hopelessness is limited to the prediction of psychopathology, application of the results would also be limited. On the other hand the positive effect of a lack of hopelessness has not been explored. Kashani et
al. (1989) found that in the no hopelessness group there were no suicidal children and in contrast one-third (33.3%) of the high hopelessness group.

METHOD

The present investigation was designed to test various hypotheses concerning “Correlates of suicide ideation among adolescents at two levels of hopelessness”. The empirical verification of the proposed hypotheses is dependent, firstly, on reliable measurements of the variables of ultimate interest; and secondly, on the methods and procedures employed for deriving conclusions from such measurements. This required:

(d) Selection of an adequate sample;
(e) Selection of appropriate tools that could be profitably used for reliable measures; and
(f) Selecting suitable statistical techniques for analyzing the data.

Thus, it is pertinent to describe the sample, the specific tools, and the methods and procedures employed in completing the research being reported.

The description of the sample (providing data for testing the proposed hypotheses) is given in the subsequent pages. This chapter also describes the tools, which have been used for collecting data; in addition the information concerning administration and scoring of the tests used is also given in subsequent pages, and the procedure of analyses has also been discussed in this chapter.

SAMPLE

The initial sample comprised of 1500 (750 males, 750 females) adolescents in the age range of 17-20 years was selected from different colleges of Chandigarh. The initial sample was further classified into four categories on the basis of their scores on Hopelessness. The final sample was as follows;

1. Male adolescents high on hopelessness (N-150)
2. Male adolescents low on hopelessness (N-150)
3. Female adolescents high on hopelessness (N-150)
4. Female adolescents low on hopelessness (N-150)

The following variables were taken into consideration for the purpose of selecting of sample;

1. The sample was non-clinical in the sense that subjects were not receiving psychiatric treatment.
2. There was no evidence of drug addiction or alcoholism.
3. All the subjects were regular students of different colleges.
4. The subjects belonged to intact families.

TESTS

The following tests were used:

(A) **Self Report Measures of Depression**

   Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961)

(B) **Cognitive Assessment Measures.**

   1. Automatic Thought Questionnaire (Hollon & Kendell, 1980);
   2. Hopelessness Scale (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974);
   3. Dysfunctional Attitude Scale: Form A (Weissman, 1978; Weissman & Beck, 1978);

(C) **Measures of Social Support**


(D) **IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (Cattell & Scheier, 1963)**

(E) **Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975)**

(F) **Suicide Ideation Scale (Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979).**
DATA COLLECTION

The tests were administered in a uniform sequence as follows:

A) Beck Depression Inventory.
B) Automatic Thought Questionnaire.
C) Hopelessness scale
D) Dysfunctional Attitude Scale
E) Social Support Questionnaire
F) Eysenck Personality Questionnaire.
G) IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire
H) Scale For Suicide Ideation

All the questionnaires were presented one after the other with standard instructions for each questionnaire.

The tests were administered to subjects in a group of 10-15 subjects. The general testing conditions were satisfactory. Sincere efforts were made to establish rapport with the subjects in order to elicit reliable and authentic information. All of them were assured that the information given by them would be kept confidential and would be used for research purpose only.

ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed as follows:

1) Descriptive Statistics.
2) Correlation.
3) Factor analysis.

The analyses were done separately for four groups formed on the basis of gender (males VS females) and hopelessness (high VS low):

1) males high on haplessness
2) males low on hopelessness
3) females high on hopelessness
4) females low on hopelessness
CONCLUSION:

It is interesting to note that mediational role of hopelessness in suicide ideation has been found different for male and female adolescents. For male adolescents, suicide ideation failed to correlate with the most important variable, namely depression, when hopelessness was used as mediational variable. For female adolescents, suicide ideation showed positive association with psychoticism, negative automatic thoughts, and depression, suggesting that hopelessness failed to reveal its mediational role. The results of the current study support some of the earlier researches which found that the mediational hypotheses of hopelessness and suicidal behaviour hold more strongly for some groups than for others. In order to reach more meaningful conclusion regarding the mediational role of hopelessness, additional research on different subgroups is needed.