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A study of correlation of suicide note in relation to the manner of deaths

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Abstract

Background & Aim: The aim of the present study is to the correlation of suicide note in relation to the manner of deaths. All the suicidal deaths occurred in the, GGH, Guntur and its surrounding area by suicide brought to the mortuary. In our study, the suicide notes are taken and an attempt to analyse the psychological, social, economic conditions leading to the suicide of the person. The suicide note is analysed in terms of the number of pages, number of lines per page, number of word per line, the font size of the words, grammatical errors, the language, the number of hand writing, the manner of addressing etc which are having significance in analysing the mental status of the concerned individual.

Results: A total of 30 suicide notes were available. A majority of suicide note was in age group of 15–40 years (76%) and most were men (50%). All suicide notes were handwritten, the majority (70%) in regional language Telugu. Length of notes varied from just few words to few pages. Contents of suicide notes included apology/shame/guilt (80%), love for those left behind (55%) and instruction regarding practical affairs (23%). Most have blamed none for the act (50%). 23% mentioned that they are committing suicide to prove their innocence. 32% mentioned a last wish.

Conclusion: The majority of suicidal note contained “guilt” which is a strong indicator of possible depression in deceased. Creating awareness about suicide among public and ensuring access to professionals trained in suicide prevention is need of the hour in this part of the world.

Keywords: Suicide, hand writing, language, psychological, graphology

Introduction

“Happiness is the life, Sadness is Death”. As the saying goes, there is so much importance of happiness in life and it cannot be measured in any terms. Likewise the sadness will have its own impact over the person resulting in degrading himself losing all his valuable time, career, health or sometimes life. The characteristic features of sadness or his mental condition prior to death can be in many ways like psychological disturbance, feeling loneliness, withdrawn from the relationship are a few to mention. All these features ultimately provoke the person to end his life by suicide. The means of expression of those features before the suicidal act are through phone calls, suicide notes or videography.

In our study, the suicide notes are taken and an attempt to analyse the psychological, social, economic conditions leading to the suicide of the person. The suicide note is analysed in terms of the number of pages, number of lines per page, number of word per line, the font size of the words, grammatical errors, the language, the manner of hand writing, the manner of addressing etc which are having significance in analysing the mental status of the concerned individual.

Graphology is the study of analysis of hand writing of person. The hand writing is analysed for different parameters and assess the behaviour of the person, his attitude, the type of personality. The study is done by taking the suicide notes in suicidal death cases brought to the mortuary, GGH, Guntur, for post mortem examination during the period from June 2017 to May 2018. Every individual differs in suicide or suicide attempts due to diverse social and personal circumstances and biological predispositions [1]. Variations in suicide risk factors in different cultures and periods are known [2, 3]. Common psychosocial causes of attempted suicide in Southeast Asia includes problems in interpersonal relationships, family conflicts, domestic violence, academic failure, disappointment in love, recent bereavement, and other stressful life events [4-8].

Study of suicide note may also have implication in developing strategies for future research in this area and strategies for prevention of suicide and suicide attempts. Suicide notes may have a therapeutic role in helping the surviving relatives [9]. Indian studies on suicide notes are sparse. A practical proforma is prepared with the preamble, including his/her educational status, economic status, occupational, marital status, the order of the children's in the family, any previous attempts, any previous family history, any drug history and the history of hospitalisation. Hence, aim of the present study to analyse the correlation of suicide note in relation to the manner of death.

Materials and Methods

Type of the study

Prospective analytical study.

Place of the study

Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Guntur Medical College, Guntur, AP, India.

Duration of the study

1 year (From June 2017 to May 2018).

Objecives of the study

To study the predisposing factors for committing suicide with the help of suicide notes.

Inclusion criteria

- All the suicidal deaths occurred in the GGH, Guntur and its surrounding area by suicide brought to the mortuary, GGH, Guntur.
- Suicidal deaths which are having suicidal notes.

Exclusion criteria

- Deaths occurring other than suicides
- Any suspected cases of suicide.

Methodology

The study will be conducted by selecting the deaths occurring in the GGH, Guntur and its surrounding area by suicide brought to the mortuary, GGH, Guntur. A proforma is prepared with all the vital data. The hospital records, the police records and other relevant medico legal documents are used for the collection of data.

Informed consent: will be taken from the relatives of the deceased

Statistical analysis

The collected data analysed with suitable statistical tool and to find out the significance of the results.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Suicide cases according to age and sex

Age group	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
<15	00	00	00	00	00	00
15-30	15	50	08	26.66	23	76.66
31-44	3	10	2	6.66	05	16.66
>45	1	3.33	1	3.33	02	6.66
Total	19	63.33	11	36.65	30	100

Table 2: Occupation

Occupation	No	%
Student	06	20%
Labour	04	13.33%
Farmer	06	20%
Housewife	04	13.33%
Government employ	4	13.33%
Unemployed	6	20%

Table 3: Educational Status

Educational status	No	%
Illiterate	05	16.66
Primary Education	06	20
Any graduation	10	33.33
Higher education	09	30

Table 4: Socio-economic status

Income status	Number	%
Low income group	15	50
Middle income	10	33.33
High income	05	16.66

Table 5: Marital status

Marital status	No	%
Un married	15	50
Married	08	26.66
Divorce	04	13.33
Widow	03	10

Case 1: There is suicide note written by a son to his mother. The suicide note contains a single page with 15 lines of matter addressing himself as one of the frustrated, useless person presenting for his act. He was blamed for noting by a girl and her relative's which caused social disturbance and agony to his family. Hence he described briefly about her and his inability to handle the situation and ended his life. The letters in the note are legible, in the proper order in a ruled paper in his local language without any deviation of the size of fonts or lines. At the end he has put the signature which shows that he is mentally stable fully conscious about the act which he is doing. His letter shows that he has tried to his best to solve the problem but he has not succeeded. He has mentioned the request to forgive his act which shows the gratitude and affection toward his mother.

Case 2: This is a suicide note written by a mother to her son. The suicide note contains 3 pages from a diary which is having ruled pages. The letter is addressed to her son asking for the pardon for her act. She was drowned in huge debts in her professional career which she cannot meet the demands. She has clearly described the amount to be given to different persons. She has repeated so many times asking for the pardon to her son and uncle. The fonts are legible written in alternate lines which shows that she is fully aware of the situation. She has instructed her uncle to clear the debts by selling her property which denotes her transparency in her work. The repeated statement of asking the pardon shows that she is very much affectionate and emotionally bonded. Hence she described briefly about her inability to handle the situation and ended her life by means of hanging.

Case 3: This is a case of suicide by hanging of a doctor who cannot cope up with the burden of work resulting in depression state of mind and insomnia and ending up of the life. The suicide note contain the expression of forgiveness to the family and taking the whole responsibility of the incident upon him. He also stated that he has no interest in life and there is no other go. The matter is expressed in two paras and not addressed to any one with 5 lines in one para and 3 lines in another para. The signature is short in abbreviated form with no date and time. The note is written on scribbling pad of a private company.

Case 4: The suicide note is written on a white paper addressed to no body. It contain name of Lord Sri Rama and Sanskrit symbol of Om at the top indicating the belief in God. Because of the illhealth since 4 to 5 months he mentally got upset and depressed. He took whole responsibility of the consequences and he is stated that it is his own decision to end up his life. The incidence is also planned and he took a room and got poison bottle and mixed with cool drink in the night. There is signature at the end in the abbreviated form which is erased and full signature without date and time.

Case 5: This case belongs to death by hanging because of infidelity. The deceased was living together with a female divorcee and they had a daughter who got married subsequently. The deceased suspected infidelity over the female at the place of work and out of revenge he killed her and ended his life by hanging.

Case 6: This is a case of suicide by railway run over because of the feeling of loneliness resulting in the addiction to the alcohol, depressive attacks. He lost his spouse 7 months back and abandoned by his son. The suicide note contain the address written on back side and confess that no body is responsible for the suicide act. Further he wished that the funeral rights should be performed by both of his sons.

Case 7: This is a case of suicide due to hanging by a girl because of love failure. The suicide note is addressed to her mother asking for the pardon. She revealed that she can't live without her boyfriend and certified that he is the best. Because of non-cooperation from her parents and assuming that she cannot convince her parents, she committed suicide. The signature is written neatly along with date.

Results and Discussion

In this study, 90% of suicide notes contained the theme "apology/shame/guilt" which replicates finding from other studies from India and Abroad [9]. These themes suggests that the deceased individuals might have suffered from despair, depression and or an inability to consider possible alternative solutions, that can be treated by timely intervention involving supportive, cognitive therapies, and appropriate medications [10]. It is known that "apology/shame" theme pervades the thinking of people contemplating suicide, it may present an opportunity for psychotherapeutic intervention.

Age and sex of suicidal deaths

In the present study, majority of the deaths were observed in the age group of 15-30. (76%). Suicidal Deaths are more

number in males (50%) than the females (26%).

Among young people, suicidal behavior was found to be associated with female gender, not attending school or college, independent decision making, premarital sex, physical abuse at home, lifetime experience of sexual abuse, and probable common mental disorders. Violence and psychological distress were independently associated with suicidal behavior. Factors associated with gender disadvantage increased vulnerability, particularly in rural women. The low prevalence of suicide among the elderly in India may be because the aged are well-integrated and respected in the family; children take responsibility for their care. Also, life expectancy in the elderly is lower in India than elsewhere, contributing to the comparatively lower suicide rate

Globally, attempted suicide is commoner in women and completed suicide is commoner in men. Men commonly use more lethal modes and plan the act more meticulously to avoid detection. In contrast, women commonly use less lethal modes, and are more impulsive, less well planned, and more likely to be found and rescued

Educational status

The present results showed more number of the suicidal deaths cases were found in graduate people and which is followed by higher education people. There is no significant difference in both illiterate cases and primary education cases.

Socioeconomic status

In the present study, major suicidal deaths were observed in low income group which is followed by middle income group. Few suicidal deaths found in high income group people. These results revealed that socio economic status influence to committing suicide.

Marital status

The present results showed suicides more prone in unmarried ones which are followed by married ones. There is no significance difference found in divorce and widow cases.

In the present study most suicidal deaths caused by hanging (70%), poison (20%), drowning (10%), fall from height (5%), Railway injuries (10%) and others (3%).

The quality of marital relationship, emotional warmth, extended family support, and ability to handle stresses related to marriage and child rearing are more important than marital status, per se, but these qualifiers of marital status are difficult to study.

Low intelligence results in a 2-3-fold increased risk of suicide. Possible explanations are that persons with low intelligence are less able to compete for jobs and therefore acquire lower income and social status. They may also be less efficient in coping with stress. Finally, neurodevelopment vulnerabilities may increase their risk of a psychiatric disorder.

There is a fairly strong association between unemployment rates and suicide, but the nature of this association is complex. Unemployment may drive up the suicide risk through factors such as poverty, social deprivation, domestic difficulties, and hopelessness.

The findings of this study lend support to Leenars view that suicide notes are "window to the mind of the deceased".

Scrutinies of suicide note themes in the light of previous research findings confirm the need for a biopsychosocial framework for suicide prevention ^[11].

Limitation

The major limitations to this study are that the available suicide notes were restricted to availability of suicide notes with Guntur district police within specified time. The sample size was relatively small; hence, it cannot be generalized to larger population. The relatives of deceased were not interviewed in this study which would have added more comprehensive information about suicide and possible suicide prevention strategies.

Conclusion

Suicide notes provide valuable insight in study of suicide that can be incorporated in prevention strategies. If all suicide notes are made available to scientific community, it may enhance current understanding about suicide. More focused research on suicide notes on wider population should be included to target prevention measures. According to the graphology, which is used by the hand writing expert, the hand writing of a person will be influenced by his psychological status and thus if the hand writing is analysed the assessment can be done regarding the psychological status of the individual.

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