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Review Article

Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Suicide in Understanding Suicidal Behavior among Adolescents in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Suicidal behavior, a global public health issue, is one of the prevalent problems among adolescents in Nepal with highest rate of suicidal ideation and higher rates of suicidal attempt among the countries of South East Asia Region (SEAR). The Interpersonal psychological theory of suicide (IPTS) is a widely used and well-known theory that provides an interpersonal psychological framework which can contribute in understanding suicidal behavior. Although its application is found in international level, the lack of knowledge remains among Nepalese adolescents. Hence, this review is aimed to assess the applicability of IPTS in understanding suicidal behavior of adolescents in Nepal. A literature search was conducted using electronic databases (PubMed, Hinari, Nepjol, Research gate, and Google scholar). A scoping review of the articles published in peer-reviewed journals and grey literatures was done. We used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) in reporting the review and six-step process recommended by Arksey

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and O'Malley (2005) was adopted. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were used in search strategy which helped in combining key terms. The studies which assessed the relation between the constructs of IPTS i.e., thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness and suicidal behavior among adolescents in Nepal were included, i.e., 14 studies which met the inclusion criteria. The findings revealed various risk factors which support the use of IPTS as those relate with the constructs of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness to explain suicidal behaviors among adolescents. Therefore, the findings indicated the use of the framework provided by IPTS in understanding suicidal behavior among Nepalese adolescents as well as highlighted the importance of interpersonal risk factors to prevent suicidal behavior.

Key words: Adolescents; interpersonal psychological theory; Nepal; suicide

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behavior is a widespread public health problem. Every life matters and behind every suicide, there are many consequences and effect on family and near ones. More than 700,000 people die due to suicide every year and 77% of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021a). Adolescence is the most critical and formative period of life. Of the world's population one in six are adolescents of 10-19-year-olds, of those, one in seven experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 13% of the global burden of disease among this age group (WHO, 2021b). And it is the fact that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds (WHO, 2021b). Although the global age-standardized suicide rate in 2019 was estimated to be 9.0 per 100 000 population which represented a 10% reduction in the rate of suicide since the 2013 baseline of 10 per 100 000 population but there is far more to achieve the target (WHO, 2020). WHO mental health action plan provided the Global target 3.2, to reduce the rate of suicide by one third by 2030, and its indicator are aligned with SDG target 3.4 and indicator 3.4.2 (WHO, 2021c).

Nepal, one of the low-middle-income-country in SEAR is not free of this problem, rather it has highest suicidal ideation (14%) and higher rates of attempts (10%) in adolescents (WHO, 2017). Some studies on different parts of the country have shown the prevalence of suicidal ideation as 14% to 29% and the suicidal attempt as 10% to 14% (Pandey et al., 2019; Lama et al., 2021; Banstola et al., 2020a; 2020b; Bhattarai et al., 2020). Any focus on prevention or intervention should be based on clearer understanding of the issue, and it marks that understanding various factors that can contribute to the suicidal behavior in adolescents

is very imperative. In this regard, the interpersonal psychological theory of suicide (IPT) is a popular theory of suicidology (Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2019) which was propounded by Joiner in 2005, and later this was further expanded by Joiner and his team (Joiner, 2009, 2016; Van Orden et al., 2010). This is known as first theory of suicide as it provided the explanation of why people commit suicide and what are the pathways to development of suicidal desire and behaviors (Joiner, 2005, 2009). Moreover, this theory provides a framework with the constructs of social and psychological aspects in understanding the factors contribute to suicidal behavior, and the three major constructs of the framework are sense of thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness and capability for suicide. Thwarted belongingness refers to a lack of connection or belonging to others, and perceived burdensomeness refers to the belief that one is a burden to others. After an individual develops the sense of thwarted belongingness and /or perceived burdensome, then this leads to the development of the capacity to self-injury. The desire for death is developed as strong belief that suicide is only solution to one's problems (Joiner, 2005, 2009). Although this theory or the theoretical constructs has been applied and gaining genuine popularity in international level, (for example, Joiner, 2009; Ellis et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2017; Chu et al., 2017; Callear et al., 2021; Sallee et al., 2022), the lack in its use is found among Nepalese studies. Therefore, the purpose of this review is to examine the applicability of IPTS to understand suicidal behavior among adolescents in Nepal. More specifically, this review was planned to determine the extent to which thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness are associated with suicidal ideation and behaviors in Adolescents in Nepal.

DATA AND METHODS

A scoping review of the articles published in peer-reviewed journals as well as review of grey literatures was done. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) in reporting the review was used (Tricco, et al., 2018). The study has followed six-step process of scoping review recommended by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). A literature search was conducted using the databases PubMed, Hinari, google scholar including Nepjol, and Research gate. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) used in search strategy which helped in combining key terms. The key words used in search were interpersonal theory of suicide, thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, suicide, suicidal behavior, adolescents, and Nepal. The selection of the study was started by reading the titles followed by abstracts and then full text was reviewed to obtain

the details about a particular study. Those studies which met the given inclusion and exclusion criteria were included.

Inclusion Criteria: (1) study used the variables that relate to IPTS to examine the association with suicidal behavior of adolescents in Nepal; (2) studies published in English; and (3) published after the year 2010. To ensure that the review included recent researches on the topic, the search was limited to studies published after 2010.

Exclusion Criteria: Book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials, and commentaries were excluded.

Although we retrieved 28 full articles related to suicide and adolescents in Nepal, the articles were filtered further to meet inclusion and exclusion criteria in exact. However, due to very limited studies available from Nepal, the sample size, or methodology were overlooked during selection. Therefore final studies included in this review was 14 Nepalese studies. Data from included articles were extracted and entered in a data charting format in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Data analysis started from organizing the spreadsheet, as: author, year of publication, variables, major findings, conclusion, and limitations. All the authors worked together and needed modifications were done in the spreadsheet for its comprehensibility in common consensus. Then, collated data in Excel format was summarized into the given headings as the results of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is a scarcity of research regarding adolescent suicide in Nepal. Some studies conducted have focused on adults, while others have looked at both young individuals and adults together. Similarly, in our search, there are no any studies that applied IPTS among Nepalese adolescents, given this, the result is based on 14 studies among Nepalese adolescents which examined some of the concepts or variables related to IPTS.

Risk factors of suicidal behavior in adolescents those are related to perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness

A study among 466 Asian international students studying in the United States, examined the moderating effects of 3 risk factors (perfectionistic personal discrepancy, perfectionistic family discrepancy, and discrimination) on the associations between interpersonal risk factors (perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness) and suicide ideation has indicated the importance of interpersonal psychological factors while addressing suicidal risks for the

people from collectivist culture because the study determined that the family discrepancy and perceived discrimination intensifies the associations between interpersonal risk factors (perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness) and suicide ideation (Wang et al., 2013).

To be focused on our objective, studies in Nepal (Banstola et al., 2020a, 2020b) identified the prevalence of suicidal behavior among adolescents in Nepal as 11.3%, the suicidal behavior higher for those who perceived less support, low self-esteem, low social capital, and the later also added that among those whose parents were authoritarian had higher risk for suicide. Though those studies did not apply the IPTS, but the risk factors identified can be linked to the concepts of IPTS. Similarly, a qualitative study among adolescents from Kathmandu explored that depression and loneliness were the factors associated with suicidal behavior (Bhattarai et al., 2020). This indicated that the perceived burdensomeness as feeling of loneliness is represented by this study as a risk factor of suicide.

Further, a narrative review focusing suicide prevention in children and adolescents in four countries (Bangladesh, China, India and Nepal) have clearly indicated the protective role of social connectedness, support and relationship, and determined that when protective factors are lacking, the risk of suicide increases (Wasserman et al., 2021). In addition, studies among adolescents in Nepal, for example, Upadhyaya and Poudel (2019) reported high levels of stress, family conflict, and academic pressure among adolescents and that were associated with increased suicidal behavior. Therefore, the study indicated that stress and family conflict may contribute to perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness in adolescents which can put them at risk for suicide. Another study (pandey et al., 2019) revealed that anxiety, loneliness, and gender were risk factors of suicidal ideation and suicidal attempt. In positive point, having three or more close friends showed protective effect against suicidal attempt. Past studies has established that Positive friendship enhances the sense of belongingness and psychological wellbeing (Schoeps et al., 2020; van Hoorn et al., 2016). Hence, it can be linked to feelings of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness. In support of this, Ellis et al. (2015) from their study among Bhutanese refugees resettled in America indicated the applicability of the two constructs i.e. perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness. Hence, the study supported the suitability of application of IPTS among adolescents in Nepalese context.

Moreover, a review study on suicide among Nepalese adolescents identified the association of poverty, discrimination, and family conflict with suicide risk. It is worth noting that the Nepalese adolescents' suicidal behavior is linked to several factors and among those

the theoretical constructs of IPTS seems better applicable in understanding this issue (Shrestha & Gurung, 2018).

Not only quantitative studies but also the qualitative findings generated the common theme among suicide attempters in young Nepalese that were linked, such as poverty, discrimination, and social isolation were common themes among the participants (Gurung, 2015). Similarly, another qualitative finding (Shrestha & Jordans, 2018) showed the relation between social connectedness and suicide among Nepalese adolescents. Social connectedness was an important protective factor against suicide, it was explored that supportive relationships with family and friends were helpful to cope with stress and emotional distress. However, it is also important exploration that the societal and cultural factors (pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations for marriage) could make it difficult to develop strong social connections and causing increased risk of suicide.

Suicidal Intensity

Thapaliya et al. (2018) have revealed in variability of suicidal intent from moderate to severe and their link with various psychological problems in hospitalized patients with suicidal attempt. Most of the attempts occurred among younger population i.e., more than two third among the population less than 35 years of age. The role of psychological factors was indicated such as, marital problems, domestic violence, family disputes, failure in romantic relationships. These are the factors related to thwarted belongingness because the adolescence is the period when they like to establish romantic relationships and has peak attraction to opposite sex, as well as the important developmental crisis of young adult is the intimacy versus isolation. Therefore, these factors are genuinely important ones to be understood for young people. Similarly, economic status, chronic physical illness and treatment related issues might be viewed linking with perceived burdensomeness.

Inadequate Mental Health Services, Lack of Access and Social Stigma as Barrier in Preventing Adolescent's Suicides in Nepal

A review study by Shrestha and De Leo (2020) showed that lack of access to mental health services is an important risk factor along with poverty, family conflict, discrimination, and socio-cultural factors contributing to increased suicide among Nepalese adolescents. The limited mental health services are also not culturally appropriate and are stigmatizing. This is affecting the help seeking behavior of adolescents. Similarly, Shrestha and Khatiwada (2019) identified multiple barriers that Nepalese adolescents face in accessing mental health services,

that included poor knowledge (about mental health and mental health services), stigma towards mental health problems, and lack of appropriate services. Need of appropriate and culture sensitive mental health services for adolescents and the need of efforts in reducing stigma were pointed out by the authors. Gurung and Karki (2019) pointed the traditional cultural beliefs, societal expectations and shame increasing the risk of suicide in Nepalese adolescents. Traditional cultural belief views suicide as a 'sin' or 'cowardly act' therefore, this prevailing belief in society inhibiting the adolescents to seek help or talk about their suicidal feelings. Again, Karki and Gurung (2020) reported about cultural factors including stigma, shame and negative attitude towards mental illness that are playing a critical role in suicide risk among Nepalese adolescents.

These studies show that in addition to the risk factors for suicide identified by IPTS, lack of access to mental health services is also a significant contributing factor to suicide among Nepalese adolescents. Therefore, addressing this issue by increasing access to culturally appropriate and sensitive mental health services for Nepalese adolescents is an important aspect to prevent suicide in this population. These studies show that suicide is a complex problem, and there are multiple factors that might contribute to suicidal risk among adolescents in Nepal. Unfortunately, the factors specific to the cultural and societal context of Nepal also contributing in escalation of suicidal risks among adolescents. Therefore, more researches are needed to fully understand the unique risk factors for suicide among Nepalese adolescents which can help to prevent suicide in this population. Through this review it is clear that the application of IPTS among Nepalese adolescents will be very effective in understanding adolescents' suicidal behavior and consequently helps in development of preventive interventions.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, several risk factors were identified from Nepalese studies, which support the concept of IPTS and its possible application in better understanding suicidal behavior among adolescents of Nepal. The factors can be linked to the theoretical concept of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness among adolescents, such as lack of support, social connection i.e., connectedness to family and friends, loneliness and feeling of isolation. Study also highlighted the importance of culturally appropriate and sensitive mental health services, and addressing the negative perception of suicide in Nepalese culture in order to prevent suicide among Nepalese adolescents. It was also prevalent that poverty, discrimination, family conflict, societal and cultural expectations, stigma and lack of access to mental health

services as well as the services are to be appropriate and sensitive to adolescents' need. To be specific, various risk factors identified by previous studies showed the applicability of the two constructs i.e., perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness. However, to better ensure and support this, future studies are needed to apply all the three constructs of the theoretical framework of IPTS to explain Nepalese adolescents' suicidal behavior as well as which construct would be best applicable and no doubt that the findings be helpful in preventing suicides among adolescents.

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