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Depression and suicidal ideation among university students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to verify the relationship between suicidal ideation and depression among college students. This study utilized a survey using simple random sampling methodology involving 65 respondents chosen at random from the residential colleges in University Technology Malaysia, Johor Bahru. The findings indicate that the students' level of suicidal ideation is at the normal stage ($m = 10.7$). The study also indicates that the level of suicidal ideation among male students is higher ($m = 13$) compared to female students ($m = 7.3$). Whereas the level of depression is the same for both sexes. The study also indicates that there is no difference in the level of suicidal ideation and depression among the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other races. The study analysis also verifies that there is significant correlation ($r = 0.68$) between suicidal ideation and depression. The implication of this study can be seen from the point of view of human development in that; the most important priority is on the students' well-being psychology and mental health in the efforts of building their personalities and improving their achievements in the university.

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Key words: Suicide, depression, students

1. Introduction

Teenage era is a temporary, transitional period from childhood to adulthood. This transitional phase can be defined as the period from puberty up to early adulthood. During this period, teenagers are being troubled by all sorts of conflicts and elements that become agents of change affecting them in and out which eventually shape their actions and manners (Mohamed Hatta Shahrom, 2007; Mahmood Nazar Mohamed, 2005). Whereas Stanley (1904) states that turbulence in the hormones during the age of puberty will cause storm and stress in teenagers. This, in turn cause teenagers to experience individual identity conflicts within themselves and with the society around them which eventually contribute to social problems. According to Hamzah (2003) social problems can be defined as actions which are abnormal and unacceptable according to the general norms of religious, social and cultural aspects of the society (Mohamed Abu Bakar, 2010). Research findings of Mohammad Abu Bakar (2010) verify that the main causes of social problems among university students are the influences of the Internet, family status, peers, and the level of religious education.

Suicidal ideation is the early symptom of suicidal actions. Children and teenagers are the most vulnerable and easily influenced by cases of suicide and suicidal ideation (Juhnke et al., 2011). The reality is that committing suicide is not a new issue. Emphasis is now being given to this issue in order to identify the high risks actions that contribute to suicidal actions. This is due to the rise of incidents of committing suicide among teenagers. Committing suicide among adults are caused by five main factors namely the past attempts of committing suicide, the history of substance abuse, physical health problems, mental problems and incidents that happened in life which were connected to depression of both genders i.e. males and females (Foster et al., 1999). The suicidal actions are the results of psychological disturbances which are connected with the individual physical and mental health. Suicidal actions can

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be categorized in a few aspects such as a final solution to a problem, the attempt to commit suicide, indicating the intention of committing suicide openly, and the thought of committing suicide (Mazza & Reynolds, 2001). The terminology 'parasuicide' is used to describe the unsuccessful attempt in committing suicide by individuals who are experiencing multiple stresses. Apart from that, it is also used for individuals who openly threaten to commit suicide.

Depression is difficult to be detected during teenage era probably because it is seen as a normal teenagers' transitional problem and not a mental problem. Teenage depression is usually connected with multiple stresses in life, loose family ties, unsupportive family in dealing with life stresses, conflicts in the family and economic problems. Apart from that, negative relationship with peers such as having no friends, not communicating with friends and not being accepted by friends can also trigger teenage depression. Many teenagers who had low and moderate levels of depression exhibited weakness and disturbances in everyday activities. Depression involves emotional changes, anxiety, quick-tempered and fatigue (Sharif Mustaffa & Syed Othman, 2010). In some cases, depression can cause incidents of committing suicide and dangerous actions among teenagers.

In Malaysia, 7% of teenagers are found to have thought of committing suicide and half of them have translated the thought into actions (Goh dan Kok, 2011). Whereas committing suicide has become a worrisome polemic because of the increasing number of suicides every year. Incidents and attempts of suicide have become a main health problem of the society. Majority of suicide cases in Malaysia are classified as *undetermined deaths* and the rate of suicide attempts is ten times more than the rate of the action of committing suicide (Maniam Thambu, 2010). According to statistics released by the National Suicide Registry Malaysia (NRSRM), the number of suicides has increased in the last three years with a total of 1,156 victims (NRSRM Report, 2010). Whereas the national statistics show that the rate of suicides among females are more than males by the ratio of 3:1 and Chinese have the highest rate of suicides at 48 percent followed by the Indians, 21 percent, Malays, 18 percent and other races, 13 percent (The Star Online, 2012).

2. Method

This study aims to find out and evaluate college students' thinking in connection with the idea of suicide and not to diagnose the problem in depth. The actual aim, in particular, is to find out the difference of suicidal ideation and depression according to demographic factors such as gender (males and females) and then verify the levels that represent both genders i.e. low, medium or high. This study also aims to find out the difference of suicidal ideation and depression according to the races of respondents. Apart from that, it also aims to look into the relationship between the suicidal ideation and depression. Sixty-five (65) respondents were randomly chosen from a university college. The instrument used in this study is *Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire* (ASIQ; 1988) and *Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale* (RADS 2;1981) by William Reynolds. ASIQ is managed to calibrate suicidal actions in depth and the ideas that emerge before committing suicide whereas RADS2 is used as an instrument to detect depression among college students.

3. Findings and discussions

Overall Suicidal Ideation among College Students

Overall group score for suicidal ideation of college students is 10.7 (Normal distribution mean is 11; Reynolds, 1990). Whereas group score for depression is 50 which is at low level (T-score under 61 is considered low; Reynolds, 1990). This shows potential that majority of the community of college students are not thinking about suicidal ideation at a high level. However, the interpretation of suicidal ideation should also be done individually by looking at the critical value of every individual item that portrays their ideas and thought to commit suicide. For individual with high scores therefore, the assumption is that; he/she is having a high level of suicidal ideation and often thinks about it and should get intervention, for instance getting counselling or psychiatric treatment.

The differences of suicidal ideation and depression according to demographic factors

Table 1: The differences of suicidal ideation and depression level between genders

Gender	P	Results
Suicidal Ideation	0.43	Has Difference
Depression	0.95	No Difference

* Significant at a level of significant 0.05

The table 1 shows the results of analysis on different levels of suicidal ideation and depression between genders among college students. The overall findings of the analysis showed that there are no significant differences in the levels of depression based on respondent gender (t = 0.95; p>0.05). However, there are significant difference based on suicidal ideation among gender (t = 0.43;

$p < 0.05$). Besides, male students ($m = 13$) showed higher mean score than female ($m = 7.3$). The results showed moderate to low (normal) level score of depression and the existence of suicidal ideation among both gender.

Table 2: The differences of suicidal ideation and depression level between races

Race	P	Results
Suicidal Ideation	0.72	No Difference
Depression	0.81	No Difference

* Significant at a level of significant 0.05

The table 2 shows the results of analysis on different levels of suicidal ideation and depression between Malay, Chinese, Indian and others among college students. The overall findings of the analysis showed that there are no significant differences in the levels of suicidal ideation ($F = 0.72$, $p > 0.05$) and depression ($F = 0.81$; $p > 0.05$) based on respondent race.

The Correlation between suicidal ideation and depression among college students

Table 3. Pearson correlation between suicidal ideation and depression

Suicidal Ideation	r	P
Depression	0.68	0.000

* Significant at a level of significant 0.05

The table 3 above showed that the relationship between suicidal ideation and depression is medium-strong significant and positive ($r = .68$, $p < .05$). These findings show that the increasing in depression leads to the enhancement of suicidal ideation among college students.

Research findings show that suicidal ideation and depression among college students are at a low level. However, there is a difference in suicidal ideation between male and female college students. Findings show that the suicidal ideation is higher in males as compared to females among college students. Kok and Goh (2011) state that males are more prone to commit suicide because of male-female love relationship and it is the same for all races. Whereas for depression, both genders show the same results. Results of the study also show that there is no difference in suicidal ideation and depression in college students of all races (Malays, Chinese, Indians and others). Apart from that, research findings show that there is relationship between suicidal ideation and depression. The moderate and positive relationship between both variables studied is in line with the findings by Reeves (2010) which state that the factor contributing to the risk of suicide is a psychopathological problem which is also connected to depression, confusion, sexual abuse, work, trauma etc. In addition, Schwartz and Cohen (2001) found that depression is the most significant factor in predicting suicidal actions.

4. Conclusions

Suicide is a serious issue which has to be dealt with immediately. According to estimates released by the World Health Organization (2010), suicidal attempts happen every three seconds, whereas deaths due to suicide happen every forty seconds which makes up to almost a million deaths connected to suicide every year (WHO, 2010). Committing suicide and depression are issues closely related with individual's mental health. Research done among college students shows that suicidal ideation is not at a critical level. However, there is still tendency to think towards it based on the scores of respondents' answers. Moreover, it can be deduced that depression has a significant relationship with suicidal ideation. Therefore, in trying to carry out any form of intervention, depression should be given appropriate attention and should be prevented before it gets worse and eventually translated into suicidal actions. Counselling approach focussing on discussion and crises management is an alternative in inducing change, stability and in reducing risks of individuals who are having ideas of hurting themselves or committing suicide (Pelling, Bowers and Armstrong, 2007). In dealing with suicide issues, all parties including parents, teachers, the government, media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must put in a concerted efforts in order to solve this problem.

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