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ROLE OF PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS AS PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST SUICIDE AMONG EARLY ADULTS

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Abstract

The current study is an exploration of whether parental attachment and family connectedness play an important role as protective factors against suicide among the early adults. In other words, it tries to understand whether parental attachment and family connectedness have influence on suicidal ideation taking the form of suicidal act. 12 samples of both male and female from the age group of 17 to 28 years were interviewed and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The framework of this study included the individuals' perspectives about the reasons why they stop themselves from the act of suicide and their perception about the dynamics existing in relationships shared with significant others. This was to gain an understanding whether parental attachment and family connectedness act as protective factors against suicide. The key findings suggested that parents tend to play an important role in stopping one from pursuing the act of suicide. Various themes have emerged in terms of global, organizing and basic. Protective factors emerged from the data in terms of internal support system and external support system.

Key words: Parental Attachment, Family connectedness, Suicidal Ideation, Internal Support System, External Support System.

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, India has one of the highest suicide rates worldwide. The country's health ministry estimates that up to 120,000 people kill themselves every year and almost 40 per cent of them are under the age of 30. The national incidence of suicide among youth age 15 - 24 years old has tripled in the last 40 years. More teenagers and young adults die of suicide than from cancer, heart disease, birth defects, and other illnesses combined (U.S. Public Health Service, 1999). Important focal points in any youth suicide prevention strategy are the protective factors and experiences that appear to reduce risks for suicide. Protective factors are quite varied and include an individual's attitudinal and behavioral characteristics, as well as attributes of the environment and culture (Plutchik& Van Praag, 1994)

It is widely accepted that suicide and suicidal behaviour have a multi-factorial aetiology and therefore an inter-disciplinary theoretical framework is required to help understand the phenomenon (Beautrais *et al*, 2005).One of the first to offer a sociological explanation of suicide was Emile Durkheim ([1897] 1951). Durkheim concludes that suicide rates vary inversely with the degree of social integration (i.e., the extent of attachment to social groups) and moral regulation (i.e., society's ability to exert normative regulation upon its members) experienced by individuals within religious, domestic, and political collectivities.

According to Thomas Joiner's theory of suicidal behaviour, there are three specific variables that need to be developed in order to die by suicide: a sense of thwarted belongingness, a perception of functioning as a burden on others, and the acquired capability for suicide. The first two variables, thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness, comprise the desire for suicide.

Social control theories emphasize the role of parental and family control and supervision in preventing adolescents' engagement in deviant behaviours (Hirschi 1969; Sampson and Laub 1993). According to Hagan (1989), parents induce their children to conform through both direct and indirect controls. Direct control is the explicit effort exerted by parents to monitor their children's behaviours. Parental indirect control, on the other hand, operates through children's attachment to their parents and provides a source of constraint on the inclination to deviate even when parents are absent (Hagan 1989). Indirect control, defined by Hirschi (1969) as the psychological presence of the parents when the temptation to commit a deviant act appears, may

be a vital and consistently regulatory process in preventing youth from engaging in problem behaviours.

Previous studies indicate that the more a young person has a sense of connectedness to their family, peers and school, the less likely it is that they will engage in high-risk behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse, or to develop depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts (Resnick et al., 1997). Study done by Theresa et al (2007) found that parents and other family members caring, teachers being fair and feeling safe at school were each associated with lower rates of suicide attempts among students even when depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, alcohol abuse, family violence, sexual orientation and exposure to suicide attempts by others were taken into account. Similar other studies have been done across the globe and across different cultures that reflect the importance of family connectedness and attachment as important factor reducing the risk of suicide. A study done by Michael, Nancy and Nadine (2005) revealed that social environment factors, including low levels of family functioning and social support, are associated strongly with suicide attempts among low-income African American men and women seeking treatment in a large urban hospital. Thus, better family functioning and social supports can be considered protective factors in this population. A study was conducted on the Midwestern Metropolitan area that included whites, Asian American, African American and mix racial backgrounds. The study found that compared to non-isolated adolescents, those who expressed social isolation had higher risk of suicide and high depression and also low self esteem. The strongest protective influence was found to be connectedness with family and this was evident even among the socially isolated adolescents. Although socially isolated adolescents may have higher risks for depression and low self esteem, these negative feelings may not escalate into suicidal behaviour if there is a connection with the family (Eisenberg et al, 2007). Another study was done by Cheng et al on the protective factors leading to decreased risk of adolescent suicidal behaviour on a Chinese population. The result of this study suggests a need to involve parents in programmes designed to prevent suicide. Well-controlled intervention studies have demonstrated that family interventions can have important effects on adolescent outcomes, including substance use (Stanton & Todd 1982; Azrin et al. 1994; Schmidt et al. 1996), juvenile offenses (Klein et al. 1997) and conduct disorder (Dishion et al. 1996). Parental bonding and a sense of family connection are also associated with lower levels of depression, suicidal ideation, alcohol use, risky sexual behaviours and violence (Patterson &Stouthamer-Loeber 1984). Conversely, young

people from families with low levels of family support (Yuen et al. 1996), significant parental criticisms, overprotection, limited family bonding (Allison et al. 1995), poor family relationships, conflict, limited interfamily communication and low family cohesion are greater risk of a range of pathologies including suicide (Garber et al. 1998).

The current study attempted to delve into the understanding as to how parental attachment and family connectedness can act as protective factors in suicidal behaviour among the youth. It can be used by the general public or even counsellors and family therapists as an important aspect in dealing with people with suicidal ideation. Moreover, not much research seems to have been done on the adults in their 20s although researches are done in the context of adolescents, taking into consideration the age group of 18-24 years. Mostly research is done either on the adolescents or the older adults and when it comes to parental attachment most of the researches are based on adolescents (Essau 2004; Haynie, South, and Bose 2006). However, young adults in their 20s have different issues and problems that can lead to a lot of stress. According to Levinson, during this stage, they step up, explore, start family, pursue a dream, see flaws and re-evaluate. It is a time for exploring and expanding the identity one has established in earlier stages of development.

Method

The data presented in this article was obtained using semi structured interview. The sample for this study was drawn from youth belonging to the age group of 17 to 28 years. The sample size is 12, both males and females. There were two males and ten females hailing from urban middle socio economic status, belonging to nuclear family wherein two are working and ten are pursuing college education. Purposive random sampling was used. The characteristics of individuals are used as the basis of selection. In this study, the important criterion is that the sample should have some degree of suicidal ideation or thought in the past. This sample was obtained using a screening tool called the Positive and Negative Suicidal Ideation Scale and individuals with 2.5 or higher score were taken for the current study. Another important inclusion criterion was that the participants had suicidal ideation in the past five years. The individuals excluded from the study were those with onset of suicidal ideation in the past six month before the interview, clinical population, individuals who have attempted suicide in the past and orphans. The sample was gathered from Bangalore, Assam and Delhi.

Procedure

Individuals within the age range of 17-28 years were approached and informed consent was obtained following which the participants were screened for suicidal thoughts/ideation using a scale called Positive and Negative Suicidal Ideation Inventory.

After the screening process was done, permission was taken from the participants to record the interview. A semi structured interview, developed by the researcher, was carried out to gather information about the various family dynamics and what helped them stop from pursuing the act of suicide. Depending on the availability of the participants, the interview was conducted. The purpose was to gain an understanding about what really helped them stop from pursuing the act of suicide and if family acts as a protective factor, what are the various aspects within the family that may have helped them. Semi structured interview was used in order to make the focus clear and at the same time explore the various aspects of the participant's life based on the purpose of the study. However, since it's more of an explorative study, questions were framed as and when different responses were given. The interview was mostly informal and conversational and all the interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the participants. Field notes were also taken whenever necessary in terms of non-verbal communication or otherwise. Memos were written from the taped interviews and transcripts were obtained from the tapes.

In order to establish validity of the gathered data and results, reflexivity-self analysis, peer debriefing and expert review were used. For the screening tool, the reliability and validity were treated separately.

The analysis of the data was done using thematic analysis and they were subjected to analyst triangulation and expert review.

Results and discussion

Data was collected from the participants keeping in mind the main objective of exploring if parental attachment and family connectedness help in stopping one from committing the act of suicide, although there is presence of suicidal ideation. Apart from this, various family dynamics were explored in order to gain a better understanding about the level of attachment and

connectedness that exists within the family. Various themes and subthemes have emerged along the same lines where family dynamics are shown and at the same time the various factors that stopped the young adults from pursuing the act of suicide were obtained. These themes and subthemes have been elaborately explained while connecting the various dynamics within the family with their responses given in terms of what helped them stop from pursuing the act of suicide.

1.1 Sharing of problems:

Data analysis revealed that sharing of problems has been one of the predominant factors that seemed to have helped the subjects to not pursue the act of suicide. Sharing of problems as understood from the transcripts meant having an opportunity for them where they can discuss about the various issues and a perception in mind that there is availability of context and circumstances within which he/she can share his/her problems. This may not mean problem solving, but a thought about the availability of someone with whom to discuss the problems. Most of the participants who talked about parents and family as the main factor in stopping themselves from pursuing the act of suicide have also talked about sharing their problems with their parents and siblings. Poor problem solving within the family can be a risk factor of suicide. Similar finding has also been reported by other studies. Separation from and/or rejection by parents, poor family communication and problem-solving, are major issues implicated in youth suicidal behaviours (Brent et al., 1988; Spirito, Brown, Overholser, & Fritz, 1989).

Table 1

Comprehensive View of the Global, Organizing and Basic themes

Global themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes
1. External support system	1.1 Sharing problems	
	1.2 A sense of closeness	1.2.1 Emotional
		1.2.2 Psychological
	1.3 Involvement of the family members in each others' lives	1.3.1 Problem solving
		1.3.2 Daily activities
		1.3.3 Recreational activities
	1.4 Rigidity/Flexibility of rules within the family	1.4.1 Acknowledgement and coping with rules
		1.4.2 Freedom of choices

			1.4.3	Rules regarding behaviour	
	1.5	Communication in terms of approachability			
2. Internal support system	2.1 Internal self		2.1.1	Self confidence	
			2.1.2	Thought control	
			2.1.3	Fear of death	
	2.2 External self		2.2.1	Self Distracting	
			2.2.2	Recreational activities	

Many participants gave emphasis on the role of the mother in sharing and solving problems. Most of the participants expressed their comfort of sharing problems with their mothers. One of the such examples from the transcript: *"Ok fine... most of the time it's like that... I'm very close to my mom... like 100 percent I share everything with her which is really shareable... and with my dad I'm not too close... I'm close to my dad but it doesn't mean I'll share everything with my dad also... I share 80 percent with him, but 100 percent I share with my mom...and I really feel so good that my mom helps me a lot in all this...and not only this like you know...those things related to my friends and all... everything related... even if I have a fight with my boyfriend, then also I will share it with my mom... say everything to her..."*

Such kind of response was seen among many participants where they talked about sharing their personal problems with their mothers. This in some way gives them comfort and relief and a sense of availability of context wherein to share their problems. This gives some amount of psychological relief of stress stemming from the problems.

There were quite a few participants who talked about their discomfort of sharing problems with their fathers. One such example from the transcript is given below:

*"Yea, I'm too close, as I told you before... I'm not that close to my dad, but with my mom I'm quite close...because I usually share everything... everything I can discuss with her..."*Such kind of response was not found to be gender specific. This shows that most participants in general were more comfortable sharing their problems with their mother, rather than their father.

However, there were a few who also discussed their discomfort in sharing problems with their mothers or even parents because of various reasons like, over-protectiveness, over-possessiveness and over-reactivity. One of the participants said,*"Yea... I can share anything I want with my mother...the only problem is that she never understands... like she...after like my brother has gone... she has become more conscious about me...even if the slightest things will make her shout... like she reacts too much..."*Many participants who expressed their discomfort of sharing problems with their parents have talked about other important people with whom they are comfortable sharing their problems. There were many participants who focused on sharing problems more with their siblings rather than their parents. They expressed discomfort of sharing their personal problems with their parents and not bringing parents into certain matters. One of the participants said, *"...I usually approach my elder brother. We used to discuss things among ourselves because we don't want to bring things to them. So everything discussion will be between me and my brother. Even for my younger brother if something is there, some issue, we will take up that. We don't want to bring it in front of my parents."*The participant from whom the above transcript was obtained didn't think parents helped him in stopping from committing the act of suicide. This shows that a lot of the closeness with family depends on the extent to which they are able to share their problems with the family. Family mostly acts as a protective factor when there is certain amount of comfort in communication of personal and other problems.

Apart from family members, there were also participants who talked about sharing their problems with their friends and romantic partners. This is mainly seen among participants where approachability to parents and family is low. This is also seen exclusively among the participants who didn't express parents as the reason why they stop themselves from pursuing the act of suicide. A probable reason could be the fact that communication gap hinders the level of attachment and connectedness or vice versa. The level of closeness expressed by these participants was also low. Friends tend to play a bigger role among such individuals, especially in case of personal problems. One such example of a transcript is: *"It's like it depends on the matter...if it's too personal then I... like sometimes it happens that it's too personal, so that time I don't disclose it to my parents...and I disclose it to my friend if she's very close to me..."*Sharing of problems is closely associated with communication and the sense of closeness. These two are themes that emerged in the study.

1.2 Sense of closeness:

Sense of closeness, as expressed by the participants, involves various aspects, be it emotional or psychological. This sense of closeness as expressed by the participants is an important factor that helps in stopping one from committing the act of suicide. Participants who have expressed sense of closeness with their parents have felt that they tend to be one of the major factors that helped them from stopping the act of suicide. Both emotional and psychological aspects of closeness emerged in the transcripts. These two were the subthemes that emerged within the broader theme of sense of closeness.

1.2.1 Emotional closeness:

Emotional sense of closeness was expressed in terms of general perception as well as showing affection and feelings towards family members.

1.2.1.1 Openly show affection:

Openly showing affection, as obtained from the transcripts, involves being able to show various affections like love towards family members without holding any constraints within oneself. Many participants talked about openly sharing their affections with their parents and siblings. It was noticed that participants could more easily and comfortably share affections to their mother. The following transcript is an example of this instance: *"Openly expressing feeling? Not very much but up to some extent... my mom really knows how much I love her and of course my father too... but father is really strict..."*

It was also obtained from the transcripts that participants who expressed closeness with their parents, expressed being able to openly show affection towards their parents. This could be a protective factor against suicide. Although individuals may have suicidal ideation, a sense of emotional closeness with their parents can help them overcome such thoughts and stop the act of suicide.

However, there were participants who also expressed their inability to share their feelings openly with their parents. *"I have not expressed like this... openly showing is not there... I don't openly show my affection towards them..."*

As seen in the above transcript, not all participants could express their feeling openly towards their parents. There could be various reasons for this. One of the main reasons could be a personality factor. Not all individuals can openly show affection towards other people. An

introverted person, for example may not be able to easily show such affections towards others. One such example was seen in one of the interviews where the participant showed hesitation and shyness while talking about showing affection towards parents. His response was: *"I have not expressed like this... openly showing is not there... I don't openly show my affection towards them..."*

Apart from parents there were some participants who talked about being more comfortable with their siblings. Along with sharing their problems, they also openly show affectionate feelings towards their siblings. Most participants, who showed discomfort in sharing affection towards parents, expressed their comfort with their siblings. One such instance is: *"Openly show my affection, not to my parents basically... but yea with my brothers and sisters I can show... I have one brother and one sister... with sister I can share my feelings openly..."*

This could be associated with the fact that most often people tend to be less comfortable with their parents than their siblings because of the generation gap existing among the parents and their children. For some, parents tend to be more of an authority figure, rather than a friend to them. Despite the generation gap and the difference in their positions, a major subtheme that emerged is a sense of cohesiveness expressed as a general perception of the participants. This subtheme is discussed below.

1.2.1.2 Perception of cohesiveness:

Perception of cohesiveness as implicated from the data is a general feeling that the participants have shared about their family and the closeness that they share with their family. A general perception of cohesiveness was expressed among various participants towards the end of the interview. As a phenomenological study, such a perspective was important and needed to be taken into consideration. Out of the 12 participants, 10 participants expressed their sense of cohesiveness with their parents. Interestingly, all these participants expressed that parents are the first important factor that helps them stop pursuing the act of suicide. Similar findings have shown that family closeness is a strong predictor of both ideation and attempts (Lydia, Carl, Dana, & Ann, 2004). One instance where a participant expressed a sense of cohesiveness towards their parents is:*"Sometimes when we have problems with friends and at that time you feel more close to your family...you feel like your family is the only world... sometimes... our world is about friends and family na... sometimes when we have disappointments with your friends, then family... oh god (giggles), it's very emotional na... (Giggles)..."*

There were many participants who expressed their feeling of closeness with their mothers. This stems from the comfort they share with their mothers with respect to sharing problems or sharing affection as discussed in the previous themes. This perception of closeness that an individual experiences towards their family can stop him/her from converting the suicidal ideation into the act of committing suicide.

1.2.2 Psychological closeness

A sense of closeness was also expressed in psychological terms where participants talked about how they felt that their parents are always available for them whenever they need them. This is the kind of psychological comfort that they get from the availability of their parents in times of need. This is one important factor that has been found to serve as a protective factor. Almost all the participants expressed their views in this regard. This is also found in previous studies where it has been said that whatever the family constellation, feeling that your family is there when you need them is an important factor for adolescents and this should be emphasized to parents of teenagers who often feel that either they are not getting through to their children or that their children do not need them as much now that they are older (Lydia, Carl, Dana, & Ann, 2004). This mostly applies for youth as reflected in this study as parents tend to easily think that because they are old enough, they need not be always there for their children. A transcript obtained from the interview:*"Yes, in my case, they are always available... and I think we should take advice from them because they are much experienced..."*

It is not just about the time of need, but a kind of satisfaction that they are available although they might not be able to share all their problems. One participant said, *"They are available every time... means I used to talk with them anytime... but problems that I have I can't share..."*

Availability of parents is a psychological perception of an individual which is an important component in stopping one from committing the act of suicide. Such kind of comfort is essential especially during times of stress and breakdown.

1.3 Involvement of family members in each other's lives

There is certain level of involvement within the family among the members as obtained from the data derived from the interview. An important aspect of family connectedness is found to be the involvement of the members in each other's' lives; and not just consider themselves as separate entities outside the family unit. This could be in terms of problem solving, daily activities and recreational activities. Many participants have expressed their involvement as a family unit where every member gets involved in each other's' lives. The same participants also expressed the importance of their parents in helping them stop from pursuing the act of suicide. This involvement was obtained from the transcripts in terms of subthemes that are discussed below.

1.3.1 Problem Solving

Problem solving is an important aspect that helps individual overcome stressors. Research studies have found that there is a link between beliefs that one's problems cannot be resolved, the sense of loss of control, and suicidal behaviour (Jacobs, 1971). Family can play an important role in resolution of problem. The data obtained from the interview suggests that problem solving within the family is not only one way, but it also works two ways. Not only do the participants talk about their problems and discuss with parents, the parents and siblings in the family also discuss their problems with them. This is an important component of attachment towards family members. Closeness is expressed in the involvement of the members in each others' lives. One participant said, *"...in our family... I told you being the single daughter of my mom and dad I will be... I'm the single child actually...if I face any problem, my mom and dad helps me a lot...and if my mom and dad face any problem, I try my level best to help them out..."*
This is not only seen for single child, but also for others who shared same viewpoints about problem solving within the family. This involvement in each others' lives in terms of dealing with each others' problems is indicative of the connectedness shared within the family among the members. This connectedness in turn poses as a protective factor against suicide. Participants who have talked about such connectedness expressed how parents tend to help them in stopping themselves from committing the act of suicide. Although not directly, but the thought of the consequences it would cause to their parents, tend to help them stop from pursuing the act of suicide.

1.3.2 Daily activities

An involvement in each other's' daily activities becomes an important component of attachment and connectedness with family as derived from the transcripts. Daily activities are associated with the roles that they play within the family and also in their personal lives. Although not many participants expressed their views on this subtheme, there were participants who expressed their involvement in each other's' daily activities. The following is an example from the transcript: *"Yea I think each and every one of us has some particular role that we have to play... I will see them as my father or mother how they play their roles and manage their roles...as well as professionalised...so I also have to see that...only studies won't do... I have to manage... I have to help my sister...do her homework... at least I help her in some way or the other...and my mother"* As the sense of closeness is more, an individual feels more attached with their parents. This sense of attachment stops them before they could think of committing suicide as they would think of the consequences that it would cause to their parents.

1.3.3 Recreational activities

Involvement of the family members in recreational activities is also found to be an important component of attachment and connectedness from the study. Doing fun activities together, like going for outings, give a sense of cohesiveness and a bonding within the family. Most of the participants talked about going for picnic, birthdays, dinners, family visits etc. One of the examples from the transcript is: *"...yea we do spend time... especially in some occasions...or birthday parties and all...or in the end of the year we go out for a picnic and all..."* The same participant also expressed feelings of cohesiveness towards parents and her sister. All these aspects tend to bond them together and allow a platform to share a degree of closeness. The participant also expressed how this closeness with her parents and sister does not let her pursue the act of suicide because she does not want to hurt them. Thus, indirectly such involvement in recreational activities with family acts as a protective factor against suicide.

1.4 Rigidity/Flexibility of rules

There are rules that exist in almost every family, implicit or explicit. These rules determine the behaviour of the members within the family. Apart from this, rules within the family tend to determine the risk of suicide. Thus, this theme can not only be influential as a protective factor, but it can also be associated with risk of suicide. Research indicated that individuals who have experienced low parental affection and high parental control, or "affectionless control," are at

particularly elevated risk for depressive disorders and other adverse mental health outcomes (e.g., Buist et al., 2004; Muris et al., 2003).

Different viewpoints have been expressed by the participants regarding the rules within the family and the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the rules. This satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the rules may also determine the level of comfort within the family and the extent to which they get along within the family. When a participant is able to get along well with the family there is more of expressed closeness and cohesiveness towards the family. This acts as an indirect factor in stopping one from committing the act of suicide. The various subthemes are discussed below with regard to this major theme:

1.4.1   Acknowledgement and coping with rules

There were many participants who talked about rules within the family which have been set by their parents. Some participants showed their irritation or dislike towards the rules, but at the same time talked about acknowledging and coping with them. This helps them adjust within the family and get along well with other members in the family.

In terms of acknowledgement of rules, the participants tend to express some level of understanding and thus, following the rules. One of the examples derived from the transcript is as follows:*"Yea...we used to follow some strict rules...my dad was from a military background...whatever he says we have to obey...we didn't use to understand, but now we do...anytime he says something, we have to stick to that...whatever he says we have to obey...sometimes we used to get disturbed, but we understand...when we become parents, probably we will also be like that..."*

Such kind of understanding on the part of the members in the family may be essential, not only to get along with the family, but also to function as a cohesive family. Thus, attitude towards such rules could either serve as a protective factor or become a risk for suicide.

1.4.2   Freedom to make choices

There are various individual choices that one has to make during their life time. In a collective society like India, most of these choices are not solely taken by the individual. These choices are discussed in the family among the members. Even when families are liberal, individuals discuss about their plans and goals with their family. However, certain families tend to take the major

decisions for their children even after 18 years of age while others tend to give the freedom of choice.

There were few participants who talked about freedom experienced in making their career choices. One example is: *"...yea...I'm fully satisfied with my family... they don't force me to do anything... they don't forbid me to do anything...they don't stop me from doing a course of my interest...if I have interest, they don't forbid me..."*

Some participants have talked about the importance of taking the advice of their parents in making any decisions in life. However, such a perspective not only stems from the family, but also from the personality and the nature of the participant. An instance from the transcript is as follows:*"Actually...ah... yea... (Pause)... your personal interest?? Yea... my parents are very supportive...before doing something, I always ask them should I do this or that...because all these issues, they are very experienced and all... so I think they will...they will definitely provide with some solution...at least they can say this will be much better for you and... It's not just one sided... I also give my... like I want to do this or that...overall we come to the conclusion that yea this will be the best...if you can go on with it..."*

However, there were a few who were unsure about freedom of choice. Most of them didn't ponder over this, which could be because they never thought beyond the constraints set by the family. One such example from the transcript is:*"I'm not 100 percent sure about all those things...50 percent, yea dad will be like ok... if you are ok for that you go for that... but if dad says it's really not ok...then I can't opt for those courses... it doesn't only depend upon me... I have to go acc to their will also..."*

This could also be associated with the degree of closeness and obedience that is followed within the family. The rules within the family can be a determining factor for such freedom of choices as well as the constraints. This aspect is discussed in the following subtheme:

1.4.3 Rules regarding behaviour

When it comes to behaviour, every family sets rules regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Most of the participants commented on the acceptance and non-acceptance of individuality in terms of the behaviour exhibited by them.One of the instances where the participant has commented on the acceptance of individuality is:*"...yea to some extent, I am accepted... but sometimes they do have a problem... they say that we should behave in this*

manner... you should do this or that...sometimes they complain against, but then that's not a major problem..."

The above example is an instance of adjustment with the rules regarding behaviour. However, there were some who expressed dislike towards such rules regarding behaviour. One such instance from the transcript is:_"I'm, being from Assam, my mom and dad stays in Arunachal Pradesh, they over there...so there are certain rules in my family also...like, you knows girls should enter their house before seven and like if we go outside then we should take either mom or dad and like more than that they don't like... if I say 'papa I want to stay at my friend's house', my papa and mama don't like all these things... they just say you call your friends during day time and don't stay at night...you have to get home itself and those are the rules... and my mom and dad don't really like if I get busy over phone for hours and hours..."_

There were various other rules put forth within the family that the participants talked about. There were also participants who talked about limitations in terms of choosing their future career and the courses. One such transcript is as follows:_"...actually I wanted to go for anthropology...but I couldn't because...anthropology...ah...I didn't want to do in Guwahati...I wanted to do it outside...but because of personal reasons my father didn't allow...I had to take up English...initially I didn't like it at all...actually I hate my college...but our dept and teachers are so good...now I like English...and English was really...ah...my father wanted to go for English...now I think English is good...even after that even after doing my MA in English I would like to go for anthropology...like for my personal interest..."_

There were varied rules that the participants talked about, in terms of choosing their romantic partner, apart from career and other general rules regarding behaviour. Some participants expressed comfort with the rules, while the others talked about the difficulties faced as a consequence of the rules. This comfort or discomfort with the rules within the family plays an important role in determining the perception of closeness towards the family as discussed earlier in this chapter. Those participants, who expressed comfort with the rules, have also expressed sense of closeness towards their parents. As a consequence, those participants perceive their parents as one of the major factors that stop them from acting on their suicidal ideation.

    1.5   Communication in terms of approachability

Communication is an important factor that is associated with attachment and connectedness in the family. It is the ease and comfort in communication that determines the level of sharing problems,

affections etc. Most of the participants talked about approachability and the comfort of communicating with their mothers.

"When we were 24 or 25, by that time only he started to listen... before that he doesn't used to listen and also... he was abroad until we were 23...after that only he came back... till that he will say something to my mom and she will convey that... otherwise he won't listen... that is his character... because he was from military background ok... yea, that's the thing."

In the above instance, although there was a circumstance, the communication continued to be through his mother even after his father returned from his post. Similarly there were other participants who talked about the ease of communicating with their mother rather than their fathers. This is also associated with the ease of sharing problems with parents.

Communication is an important component of every relationship and it has been reflected in the transcripts in different forms like sharing problems, affections, involvement in each other's' lives etc. The transcripts discussed above are with regard to the direct comment on the approachability as perceived by the participants. This perception also plays an important role as protective factor against suicide by allowing a channel of communication of stress and sharing of problems.

2.1 Internal self

There are various factors that lie internal to an individual that help them in dealing with thoughts of suicide. These factors help them stop themselves from pursuing the act of suicide. Not all individuals tend to possess such factors within themselves. It was found that participants, who didn't talk about parents, siblings, friends or other significant others as a source of stopping themselves from the act of suicide, tend to talk more about such internal factors. This could be associated with the family dynamics that are typical for every family. The various aspects of internal self factors as reflected in the data are self-confidence, thought control and fear of death. These subthemes are discussed below.

2.1.1 Self confidence

There was one participant who talked about gaining back confidence which helped her stop from the act of suicide. It is more like a self-force that makes her stop and think and retrospect before committing the act of suicide. The example from the transcript is:

"...not as such... (Pause)...the present thing I'm continuing, it can't go any further...like that...sometime I feel hopeless about some particular topic...feel again I gain new strength I again gain my confidence..."

Self-confidence is an important component which lies latent in all the factors that help in stopping one from committing the act of suicide. A degree of confidence is essential to reflect and think before the act of suicide. A confidence that one can handle the stress and the problems that appear is essential to stop oneself from the acting on the suicidal ideation.

2.1.2 Thought control

Sometimes individuals express a self-force that helps them to control the thoughts of committing the act of suicide. This was reflected from the data obtained from the interview.

"*I don't give up forever...for some minutes...but after sometime I resume myself...*"

This force may be based on moral values set by the society or those existing within an individual. "*It mostly happens during the results time...when the results are declared and I don't do good and there is parents call... that time I feel like I better go for this kind of thing... but that time it comes out like, no I'm doing something wrong... I should not think of all these matter because whatever, I'm doing, they have accepted me this way so it' s better I be this way itself... it's like that...*"

Such morals that are incorporated within an individual can help one reflect and stop oneself from the act of suicide. The idea of what is right and what is wrong can over shadow the desire to commit suicide, for some. The above is an example of such a perspective. Overall, thought controls tend to help an individual from acting on the suicidal ideation.

2.1.3 Fear of death

Fear is aa basic instinct that protects the ego from destruction. This also applies when it comes to threat of self destruction. It is a response that helps suppress thoughts of suicidal ideation. There was one participant who expressed fear of committing the act of suicide that helps her hold back.

"*Any other reasons, apart from my parents, I think I will be scared to do such kind of things...*"

Although not many participants have talked about the element of fear, it is one of the predominant factors that stop an individual from committing the act of suicide. However, the influence of fear on decision to commit suicide depends on the degree of the problem situation. Although fear of death is evident in every human being, its power to protect one from self destructive behaviour can vary from person to person. Out of 12 participants, only one talked about fear of death as one of the major factors that stop her from pursuing the act of suicide. Relatively less importance is given to the fear of death especially when serious problems arise in one's life.

2.2 External self

Apart from the internal self, there are factors that lie outside an individual that may help stop one from committing the act of suicide. These factors exist in the environment that surrounds an individual and act as stress relievers. These environmental aspects help them stop themselves from committing suicide. There are two subthemes discussed under this. They are self distracting and recreational activities.

2.2.1 Self distracting

Distracting self, as derived from the transcripts, is a way of dealing with thoughts of suicidal act in which although the motivation stems from self, objects from the surrounding environment are used to distract the self. These objects could be books, movies, music, sports etc. One of the examples from the transcripts is given below:

"*...then we can also take the help of our books or if you feel sometimes low, then we can listen to music or just watch a movie*"

This factor will greatly vary from individual to individual. Only one participant talked about such distracting objects that help her overcome thoughts of suicide. For others, these might not be a strong enough factor to help them stop from committing suicide. For them emotional connection and attachment with people could be more important. Although the participant from whom the above transcript was obtained also talked about parents being a major factor in helping her stop from committing suicide, these environmental factors tend to supplement the reasons to stop.

2.2.2 Recreational activities

People indulge in recreational activities for leisure and also to relieve themselves from daily stressors. There are participants who talked aboutrecreational activities as a way of dealing with the stress and thus reducing the thoughts of committing the act of suicide.

"*...basically I have like four dogs...they really cheer me up...when I'm sad I talk to them...they are so caring...they will come and meet me...they will act like they know everything...they understand me so well...if I'm sad for 4-3 hours I get normal after that...*"

In the above transcript the participant talked about pets as being one of the factors that help her relieve stress. Findings from other research also suggest that pets help in stress relief and is found to have therapeutic value. For the participant, this was kind of a recreational activity which helps her deal with the problems and the stress that stems from it. Thus, this helps in stopping one from pursuing the act of suicide.

Discussion and Implications

Based on the results of this study, the overall support system available for an individual can be divided into internal support system and external support system. The internal support system comprises of thoughts, emotions and behaviour that lie within an individual without any direct support from significant others or the surrounding, that help them overcome thoughts of suicide and stop them from pursuing the act of suicide. These could be in terms of self confidence, distracting behaviour, thought control, recreational activities etc. On the other hand, based on this study, the external support system compromises of aspects that lie outside an individual which tend to influence an individual and stop them from pursuing the act of suicide. This could be in terms of significant others and the relationship shared by the individual with them and the various dynamics involved in the relationship. Both internal and external support systems tend to provide a way to stop them from committing the act of suicide.

In sum, the study in exploring the various family dynamics and the aspects that help one from stopping the act of suicide, valuable information was derived in terms of various protective factors against suicide. A major finding was that parents tend to play a major role in stopping one from the act of suicide which works mostly in terms of indirect control. The anticipation of consequences that the act has on the parents tends to play an important role in stopping them from pursuing the act of suicide. Apart from parents, other important people also tend to help them stop from the act of suicide. Internal support system in terms of distraction, self confidence, thought control etc, also play an important role for the same.

This study also had limitations which need to be looked at while considering the findings of this research. The interview conducted contained aspects that are sensitive which could make the participants hold back while answering the questions. In India, family has great importance and is considered to be something that is sacred, thus participants may not want to reveal the family dynamics with an outsider. They might try to confirm to what is socially accepted so as to preserve the integrity of the family. However, attempts were made by the researcher to establish rapport and take time to gain the comfort of the participants.

Apart from this, the study had a sample of only 12. Thus the small sample size can pose a question on the generalizability of the findings of the study. Moreover, the current study was more exploratory and the results may have to be confirmed using quantitative method on a larger sample. The aspect of gender was not fully taken into consideration in the study, although

attempts were made to highlight any difference existing in terms of the responses. The ages of the participants were not equally spread out in the sample. Thus, care needs to be taken while looking at the findings of the study.

The current study indicated that both internal and external support systems can help one from stopping the act of suicide. Important people in one's life seemed to have played an important role directly or indirectly in stopping one from committing suicide. The predominant factor that seemed to have stopped one from acting out on their suicidal ideation is the parents. The attachment and connectedness experienced by individuals seemed to have helped them in reflecting the consequences of their act on their parents which in turn helped them stop from pursuing the act of suicide. Such kind of information can be used by various therapists and counsellors while dealing with suicide cases. The enhancement of family connectedness can act as a preventive measure for suicidal act not only for adolescents, but also for young adults. Attachment of young adults towards their parents and family is usually not stressed on. However, it is an important aspect that needs to be looked upon while dealing with suicide cases of young adults as it is found to have great implications. Apart from attachment and connectedness towards family, various other protective factors have been revealed in this study. These can also be looked upon while dealing with cases of suicide.

However, further studies can be carried out to look into cultural and regional factors that can influence the attachment style and connectedness with parents and family.

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34

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