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PREVIEW

**Depression, hopelessness and aggression as predictors of suicidal ideation in
delinquent and non-delinquent hospitalized adolescents**

Chaim Nissel

**A Doctoral Project Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Pace
University**

New York

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Abstract

This study analyzed psychological, self report, test data accumulated from 1024 adolescents at a private psychiatric facility. The Youth Self Report (YSR)-Delinquent Behavior scale was utilized to divide subjects into delinquent and non-delinquent groups. The Beck Depression Inventory, Beck Hopelessness Scale, Reynold's Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire and YSR-Aggressive Behavior scale were used as measures of depression, hopelessness, suicidal ideation and aggression, respectively.

This study found that for both delinquent and nondelinquent groups, all three variables examined, aggression, depression and hopelessness, were highly significant in predicting suicidal ideation in hospitalized adolescents. It was predicted that aggression would be a more prominent factor than depression and hopelessness, in predicting suicidal ideation for delinquent adolescents more so than for nondelinquent adolescents. This was not indicated by the results of this study. In fact, aggression had equal predictive value for both groups. The predictive value of the three variables, aggression, depression and hopelessness, together accounted for close to 50% of the variance in suicidal ideation.

Interaction effects were examined between each variable and delinquency and between combinations of the variables and delinquency and these were not

significant. There appear to be no significant differences in the predictive value of aggression, depression and hopelessness in predicting ideation, between delinquent and nondelinquent hospitalized adolescents. These results show that aggression alone, is a significant factor in predicting ideation. It has greater predictive value when combined with depression and hopelessness. Limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

PREVIEW

Chapter One

Introduction

Suicidal ideation refers to thoughts and cognitions about taking one's life and is considered to be a predictor of suicide risk and a primary focus for many intervention programs. Suicidal ideation can range from relatively minor thoughts about death to serious contemplation about specific plans of killing oneself. Suicidal ideation also refers to thoughts dealing with the reactions of others, whether others will recognize one's worth after an attempt or thoughts of suicide as a means of retribution towards others. Reynolds and others (Beck, Kovacs & Weissman, 1979) believe ideation is presumed to precede and possibly lead to contemplation, which can then lead to suicide threats and attempts and eventually completions. The construct of suicidal ideation falls along a continuum of suicidal behaviors, which include suicidal thoughts, contemplations, threats, gestures, attempts, and completions. Hence, suicidal behavior generally refers to the entire continuum of suicidal thoughts and actions, while suicidal ideation refers specifically to thoughts about death, dying, seriously hurting or killing oneself, and planning and thinking about the outcome of a suicide attempt (Reynolds, 1987; Bonner & Rich, 1987). Reynolds (1987) presents the following list of behaviors, which indicate the range of "suicidal cognitions and behaviors" in increasingly dangerous order.

Ideation: Morbid ideation, thought of death, wishes never born, better if not alive, life not worth living, wishes were dead, others would realize worth if dead, suicide as retribution/punishment of others, thoughts of

killing self (general), thoughts of killing self (specific), thoughts of methods, thoughts of time and place.

Intent: Writing notes and/or will, giving away possessions, subtle and/or overt threats, minor self destructive acts.

Attempt: Pseudo-suicide attempt (cry for help), minor attempt (distinct possibility of failure), major attempt (very small probability of failure).

Completion. (p. 2)

Numerous theorists and researchers have reported that suicidal ideation is related to, and a strong predictor of, future suicidal behavior (Kandel, Raveis & Davies, 1991; Brent et al., 1993; Shafii, Carrigan, Whittinghill & Derrick, 1985; Reynolds, 1987; Reynolds, 1991; Pearce & Martin, 1994). For this reason alone, it is extremely important to detect and intervene with adolescents experiencing suicidal ideation (Siemen, Warrington, & Mangano, 1994; Reynolds, 1987; Shafii et al., 1985). Reynolds (1991) further states that experiencing thoughts about suicide and self destructive behaviors can, in its own right, be considered a maladaptive disturbance and suggest the need for psychological intervention. Carlson and Cantwell (1982) see ideation as "perhaps a barometer of the severity of depression in many young people regardless of age" (p. 367). Providing therapeutic intervention for adolescents experiencing ideation may provide better outcomes and quicker alleviation of symptoms than waiting for the suicidal thoughts and perhaps plans to become