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The Diagnostic Role of Self-Restraint, Meaning in Life, and Depression in Students' Suicide Risk

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Abstract

Aim: The present study aimed to differentiate students with high and low suicide risks based on the components of self-restraint, meaning in life, and depression. In this causal-comparative study, the statistical population comprised all male and female high-school students in Oskoo (Iran), of whom a sample of 766 was selected by both cluster random and purposive sampling. The data were collected via the Beck Depression Inventory, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, the Suicide Probability Scale, and the Self-Restraint Scale. The data were analyzed in SPSS 22 using discriminatory analysis. The variable of depression and the components of impulse control and responsibility had the highest discriminatory power, followed by the components including aggression control, the presence of meaning, search for meaning, and consideration for others, which were respectively the best discriminatory components of the two groups ($P < 0.01$). Educational authorities are advised to incorporate programs to improve students' self-restraint skills and give meaning to their life.

Keywords: *suicide risk; depression; self-restraint; student; meaning in life*

Introduction

One of the threatening injuries of adolescence is committing suicide (Khanzadeh, et al., 2017). Suicide is the individual's conscious effort to kill oneself and end one's life that may lead to suicide attempt (Becker et al., 2018). Curtin et al (2019) reported that the frequency of suicide deaths has surpassed homicide deaths among teenagers aged 15 to 19 years in recent years. Different studies indicate that depression and hopelessness are among the risk factors of suicide in adolescence (Bilsen, 2018).

In contrast, meaning in life is a strong protective factor against suicide attempts (Leo et al., 2020). Sun et al (2022) estimated that a one-point increase in the meaning of life score is associated with a 0.47-point reduction in the depression score and a 0.13-point decline in the suicide ideation score.

Self-restraint is another variable that can be linked to suicide. Mayer & Salovey (1991) introduced self-restraint as the individual's ability to control one's emotions and affects and to correctly use their emotions; they argued that the ability to regulate emotions increases the capacity to soothe oneself and repel common anxieties, depression, and weariness. Scheithauer et al (2015) found an inverse relationship between self-restraint and self-harming behaviors.

Given the above, learning about the findings of research on this subject can elucidate more aspects of suicide risk among students. The present study thus seeks to answer the following question: *Can the components of self-restraint, meaning in life, and depression differentiate between students with high and low suicide risks?*

Methodology

This causal-comparative study aimed to differentiate students with high and low suicide risks based on the components including depression, self-restraint, and meaning in life. The statistical population comprised all male and female high-school students in Oskoo (Iran) in the academic year 2021-2022. Using cluster sampling and based on Krejcie and Morgan's table, a sample of 766 students was finally selected. Using purposive sampling and based on the suicide risk scores, 215 students were detected as having a low suicide risk (scores below the 34th percentile of suicide risk) and 196 as having a high suicide risk (scores above the 67th percentile of suicide risk), and the analysis was finally performed on these 411 students. The data were analyzed in SPSS 22 software using discriminatory analysis.

Tools

Beck Depression Inventory (1966): This instrument comprises 21 items on depressive symptoms and assesses the respondents' depression level. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 was obtained in the present study.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006): This 10-item questionnaire assesses the presence of and search for meaning in life with two sub-scales: The presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 was obtained for the entire questionnaire in the present research.

Suicide Probability Scale (SPS; Cull & Gill, 2002): This 36-item scale comprises four sub-scales, including hopelessness, suicide ideation, negative self-evaluation, and hostility. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 was obtained in this study for the entire scale.

Self-Restraint Scale (SRS; Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990): This 30-item scale evaluates the degree of emotional inhibition and the ability to suppress aggression. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 was obtained in the current study for the entire scale.

Results

Table 1. Wilks' Lambda test results to investigate the significance of differences between the two groups of students with high and low suicide risks

Predictor variables	Wilks' Lambda	F statistic	DoF 1	DoF 2	Sig. level
Impulse control	0.76	127.14	1	409	0.001
Suppression of aggression	0.83	81.17	1	409	0.001
Consideration of others	0.98	4.85	1	409	0.001
Responsibility	0.77	117.95	1	409	0.028
Presence of meaning in life	0.84	73.74	1	409	0.001
Search for meaning in life	0.98	5.70	1	409	0.017
Depression	0.55	327.58	1	409	0.001

The Wilks' Lambda test revealed a significant difference between the two groups in terms of all the components of self-restraint, meaning in life, and depression ($P < 0.05$; Table 1).

Table 2. The pooled within-group correlations (structure matrix) between the predictor variables and the standardized coefficients

Predictor variables	Cumulative ICC	Standardized coefficients
Impulse control	0.55-	0.18-
Suppression of aggression	0.44-	0.19-
Consideration of others	0.10-	0.07
Responsibility	0.53-	0.20-
Presence of meaning in life	0.42-	0.13-
Search for meaning in life	0.11-	0.21-
Depression	0.88	0.78

Based on the weights obtained from the predictor variables, depression and components of impulse control and responsibility had the highest correlation coefficient and therefore the greatest discriminatory power (Table 2). The next greatest discriminatory components of the two groups were aggression control, presence of meaning, search for meaning, and consideration for others, respectively ($P < 0.01$).

Discussion and conclusion

To explain the first and second research findings suggesting the high discriminatory power of depression and self-restraint components in students' suicide risk, it can be argued that adolescence is a period full of movement, change, and transition from one state to another simultaneously in several areas. Such situations inevitably provoke a certain degree of helplessness, depression, insecurity, stress, and a sense of loss of control (Bilsen, 2018). It has been well documented in the suicide literature that the higher is the severity of depression, hopelessness, and stress, the higher will be the risk of suicidal behaviors in students (Leo et al., 2020).

Furthermore, self-restraint generally refers to the individual's ability to voluntarily control internal processes and behavioral outputs; the ability to manage and control emotions and impulses seems to lead to self-adjustment, which in turn prevents impulsive behaviors such as self-harm and suicide (Sadeghi et al., 2020). Another finding was the discriminatory power of meaning in life. People who lack meaning in their lives may be less interested in maintaining their health (Dyer et al., 2007) and are thus more likely to engage in suicidal behaviors (Liu et al., 2021).

The limitations of this study include the statistical population solely consisting of high-school students, which demands caution when generalizing the results. Researchers are advised to investigate the effectiveness of different programs and plans to promote self-restraint skills in order to mitigate students' suicidal ideation directly and indirectly and help students lead a peaceful life far from the risk of suicide.

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