

A Review of Suicide Note Analysis Studies in India

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Abstract

Suicide note also known as death note is message left by someone who commits suicide or who intends to commit suicide. It is the closest and the final word we get to the suicidal mind before death. Due importance should be given at the site of crime for recovery of suicide note as it is an important piece of evidence showing psyche of the patient and plays an important role in understanding reasons of suicide. Due to scarcity of data on the study of suicide note the present article is an effort to evaluate the psychology of victim in suicide notes with respect to mode of writing, to whom it is addressed and victim's last wish. The present article is just a small effort, studies involving larger number of suicide notes are required to have psychological insight of the person committing suicide, and eventually such data may lead to prevention of suicides.

Keywords: Suicide note • Psychological autopsy • Suicide

Introduction

Suicide note is the last and final word of the person who is bidding good bye to life though it is estimated that only 25–30% of suicidal deaths are accompanied by a note [1]. One in six suicide attempters leave a suicide note [2]. Suicide note found on the body of victim of suicide are ordinarily taken as evidence by police and included in inquest paper. They are used as an important piece of evidence for abetment under section 306 and 107 of the Indian Penal Code [3,4]. The Government of India classifies a death as suicide if there is a reason for the person to end his or her life and the reason may have been specified in a suicide note [5]. Suicide note forms an important part of psychological autopsy that is the information obtained from the relatives or proxy respondents of the deceased regarding the circumstances of suicide to understand the reasons of act of suicide and possible events that would have led to death. Additionally, it may reveal the possible loneliness, alienation, isolation, rejection, fear of the victim leading to this fatal step. A suicide note can be a written note, typed, an audio message, or a video. The content of suicide note can be a plea for absolution or blaming family and friends for life's failings. Thus person by writing a note may try to express his/her feelings which otherwise is not expressed in life. Unfortunately, very few studies have been conducted in this regard in the Indian subcontinent. This paper is an attempt to analyse and evaluate suicide notes recovered from the body or from the vicinity. This article will be of quite help to forensic medicine practitioners in learning about suicide notes, possible information contained in them and about handling, preservation and needful action after recovery of suicide note.

The introduction of liberalization of economy of Saudi Arabia starts with the accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2005. The association with the WTO paved the way to get benefitted from the liberalized access to various foreign markets and led various reforms in its economic governance.

There is no iota of doubt that the boundaries of nations are melting away in this era and whole credit goes to the globalization. We can elaborate in other words, globalization stands for internationalization that is the phenomenon to create interdependence among countries. The world had entered the era of synergy and cooperation among the members of the world. In the present business imperatives, companies are bound to explore market outside of their national boundaries that leads the world towards globalization. In this direction has contributed economics by identify the root cause that leads firms to internationalize. Different countries have different imperatives to opt the path of globalization. On the one side, the developed countries have so much production capacity that cannot be consumed by their own domestic market and on the other side under developed and developing countries do not have world class technology that cater the domestic market to fulfill the aspiration of their citizens and countries as well [1].

Methods

A total of twenty one suicide notes were collected that were left by the suicide victim in the clothing worn, at the scene of death / incidence. The content of the note examined, studied and corroborated with other circumstantial evidences. Detailed information regarding the deceased and the circumstances of death

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was obtained using the psychological autopsy and history obtained from police and inquest papers. Photographs of scene of suicide were also evaluated. The suicide note thus recovered were photographed using digital camera under proper day lighting. The suicide notes were read to obtain an understanding of the general content and they are analysed for the following: written or electronically typed; Short or long (words <100/ >100), to whom it was addressed; expressed affect, last wish of the deceased; motive for the suicide and any specific instructions given.

Discussion

Suicide notes are the windows to the mind of the deceased and an invaluable starting point for assessing and predicting suicide and para suicidal behavior [6]. Menniger suggested that three concepts the wish to die, the wish to kill and the wish to be killed must be present in suicide for suicide to occur [7]. In the present study the wish to die was present in majority (83%) of suicide notes as one of the three concepts as described by Menninger [7]. Similarly in other studies to determine whether Menniger's three concepts were present in suicide note, it was reported that more evidence for the wish to be killed in suicide notes of those who die was present [8].

All suicide notes were handwritten except one that was electronically typed in the present study. Similarly, in another study, twenty one suicide notes were handwritten and one suicide note was typed and sent through mail and in another two studies all the suicide notes were handwritten [9-11]. In our study, the paper used for writing the suicide note in majority (92%) of the notes was plain sheet of paper though victims used other material such as newspaper, diary, cardboard box of medicines, chart paper. In another study suicide note was written on body parts such as forehead, forearms and legs. Length of notes varied from just one page about 100 words to maximum six pages in the present study whereas in another article length of notes varied from just few words to few pages.

Majority (38%) of individuals who wrote suicide notes were in the age bracket 21-25 years. Agewise distribution of those who wrote suicide note is given. The majority (72%) of victims used English language in the present study though other languages such as Hindi and Punjabi were used to express themselves while writing suicide note whereas in another study, the language of the note was Kannada in 70%, three were in Kannada and English, two in English, and one in Tamil. The majority (42.8%) of suicide note were not addressed to any of the person whereas 9.5% notes were addressed to everyone. There are suicide notes that are addressed to parents (14.3%), sibling (9.5%), relatives (14.2%) and friends (9.5%). One have addressed to municipal corporation whereas another one have addressed the note to police officer, hotel manager and judiciary. In study by another author, the majority of suicide note was not addressed to any person in particular (55%), others were addressed to relatives (36%), spouse (18%), and mother (13%) and two have addressed the letter to press and media. Suicide note was most commonly addressed to a sibling in another study in Delhi.

In a study in 2013, in eight cases, the notes were addressed to someone: five were addressed to the parents, two to a named friend, and only one one to 'dear all'. In our study, reasons for committing suicide was not mentioned in 42.8% of suicide notes. One of the person wrote about some lie (4.7%). Financial reason was in 19% of

suicide notes and failure in examination and unemployment in 14.2%. Other reasons mentioned in suicide notes were marital discord (4.7%), proving innocence (4.7%), illness (9.5%), physical appearance (4.7%), problems at workplace (4.7%) and life too much to bear (9.5%). In other studies, reasons for committing suicide were distressing situations (one third), loss of dear ones (4%), proving innocence and problems at workplace (14%) and illness (4%) (10). It was that noted disturbed love affair and financial problems were the common reasons mentioned in suicide notes and 23 % committed suicide to prove their innocence.

In the present study in majority (69%) of suicide note victims have blamed none but held themselves solely responsible for the act. In 31% others were blamed that is municipal corporation in one, friend or some other person in another. The present study is similar to another study where most have blamed none for the act (50%), four blamed self, two blamed husband, and seven of them have blamed some others. Expressed affect in this study on suicide note were categorised and subjective sentences were divided into emotions with a positive polarity and the ones with a negative polarity. Sentences with a negative polarity were sorrow, hopelessness, abuse, guilt, blame, fear and anger. Sentences with a positive polarity were also further classified as pride, hopefulness, love, happiness, peacefulness, thankfulness and forgiveness.

In the present study contents of suicide notes was a combination of expressed affect with positive as well as negative polarity. Affects with negative polarity that is anger, fear, guilt, shame, hopelessness was seen in majority (74%) of suicide note. Love and concern for parents, relatives, friends, hopefulness, thankfulness, happiness were found in 46%. In study by another author, suicide notes in majority showed declaration of love and affection towards their parents, family and friends communicating their responsibility for the act, seeking forgiveness and dissipating guilt, helplessness and anger. This reassertion, declaring of love and giving of explanations, seem to be of major importance, even though they are aware of the pain the suicide will inflict on the beloved ones. On classification of emotions, love, thankfulness, hopelessness, and guilt were much better classified than blame, fear and anger. In a study on suicide notes, genuine notes included feelings of love, hate and helplessness.

Similarly contents of suicide notes included apology/shame/guilt (19%), love for those left behind (14.2%), advice for those left behind (9.5%), life too much to bear (4.7%), hopelessness (4.7%). In another study, hopelessness and depression was the most common diagnosis in 52.5% cases. The commonest themes in another study were apology/shame (74%), love for those left behind (60%), life too much to bear (48%), instructions regarding practical affairs post-mortem (36%), hopelessness/nothing to live for (21%) and advice for those left behind (21%).

It was concluded by another author that suicide notes written by young people were longer, rich in emotions, and often begging for forgiveness. Suicide notes written by the elderly were shorter, contained specific instructions, and were less emotional. In our study specific instructions were given in only 28%, and a last wish was mentioned in 9.5%. 14% have expressed concern about their parents, staff of hotel, friends being troubled by police after their death. Similarly in another study, a last wish was mentioned in 32%, 18% have expressed concern about their relatives being troubled by

police after their death. In another study on 40 suicide notes from Delhi region a last wish was mentioned in 30%. In another study by author dr Shalini conducted at AIIMS New Delhi mortuary from 2001-04 on 68 suicide notes and 70 control cases .following results were obtained. Taking the strive to liberalize the economy, a permission has been granted to access to the country's equity market i.e. the Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) that facilitated the foreign financial institutions to play a pivotal role in harnessing the dynamics of the economy. Before 2008, apart from GCC investors, other investors were prohibited to purchase equities in Saudi Stock Exchange. Taking a bold step, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has introduced equity swap arrangement that paved the way for foreign investors to purchase the economic benefits. All these appropriate steps helped Saudi Arabia stand with the global financial governance hoping to take the economy of Saudi Arabia at par with one of the best economies of the world [5,6].

Conclusion

Suicide note is an important message forwarded during the last few moments of the deceased. The present study analyses the content of suicide note and inherent message in it. Understanding psyche of the deceased of suicide and knowledge of the messages contained within suicide notes would be useful for suicide prevention programmes. It is the duty of the forensic medicine expert to check the pockets, secret pockets in the clothes for presence of suicide note. Mouth should be clearly examined for any piece of paper. Clenched fists should be thoroughly examined. The suicide notes thus recovered should be handed over to police for handwriting analysis by experts.

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