

Research Article

Suicidal Risks in Transgenders in South Asia

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Suicidal ideation is comparatively higher in the transgender population than in the general population. In addition to the risk factors for suicidality in the general population, transgender people experience unique stressors that enhance their risk for suicidal attempts. It is a very prominent concern showing a high prevalence of not only suicidal ideation but also suicidal attempts, and many end their lives in these attempts. We aimed to accentuate research on this topic, recognize significant mental health disparities, and offer new prospects for future research.

Objective: To determine various risk factors for suicidal ideation among Transgenders in South Asia.

Methodology: We performed a systematic review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) on PUBMED and GOOGLE SCHOLAR, specifically using peer-reviewed articles examining risk factors for suicidal thoughts and attempts in transgender people. Articles that were imported in Zotero were 1090. After excluding three duplicates, the remaining articles were screened based on titles and abstracts, and then full-text availability criteria were applied. Applying inclusion and exclusion criteria provides the final articles selected for our research analysis. Seven papers were selected to study risk factors for suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts.

Results: Seven papers were selected out of 1900 articles from search criteria. Out of these, four are based in Pakistan, two studies were conducted in Nepal, and 1 in south India. The age range of participants was 16-62 years of age. The total number of participants in the included six studies is 1559, and one used a non-probability sampling technique. All the factors that contributed to a high prevalence of suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts in transgender are highlighted.

Conclusions: The quantitative findings showed a high prevalence of biological risk factors such as body dissatisfaction and environmental and social risk factors, including Social discrimination, lack of family support, and low income. Psychological elements also emerged as noteworthy suicidal risk factors encompassing depression, anxiety, and behavioral risk factors like drug abuse. Our analysis can direct policymakers and healthcare professionals about the pressing need to evaluate different risk factors and to think up constructive interventions to lessen suicidal ideation in transgender people.

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Key Words: Suicidal Ideation, Suicidal Risk Factors, Suicidal Thoughts, Transgenders, Transsexuals, Gender Non-Conforming, South Asia.

INTRODUCTION:

Transgender people are those whose gender identity differs from the gender assigned at birth¹. As their sexual identity diverts from their identity at birth, they get victimized and face social discrimination². A positive relationship exists between social support from relatives and psychological well-being³. The discriminative behavior of society impacts their mental health negatively. It evokes depression and suicidal thoughts in transgender people.⁴ Transgender identity, sexual minority phobia, lower education status, lower income, disability, psychological distress, workplace discrimination, lack of family support, lack of health-care facilities, and childhood abuse are the prominent risk factors for suicidal ideation in the transgender community.⁵ The risk factors are the traits, qualities, or conditions that increasingly predispose individuals to the likelihood of suicidal ideation.⁶

Suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts are significantly higher in transgender as compared to the general population.⁷ In Asian countries like Pakistan, mental stress approaches are different. There is an intense need to fill this gap through proper education and training of people so that they can address their mental issues better.⁸ Suicidal ideation is a prominent concern, showing the prevalence of 55% of transgender people living in developed societies of Canada and the US, of which 29% attempted suicide in their lifetime.⁹ The developing societies also have similar trends, as 31% of transgender people in India end their lives in suicidal attempts.¹⁰ In Nepal, 39.8% of the transgender population experienced suicidal ideation due to gender discrimination.¹¹ Suicidal ideation prevalence was 42.

9% in the transgender community of twin cities of Pakistan.¹² A study conducted at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Science, Islamabad, also showed that 29.1% of transgender people had one or more suicidal attempts.¹³

This study aims to determine risk factors for suicidal ideation among transgender people in South Asia. Although some studies report the suicidal risk factors among transgender individuals in South Asia, the available evidence is limited and fragmented. Therefore, a systematic review is necessary to collect all the available evidence and identify gaps. The findings of this systematic review can guide policymakers and healthcare professionals about the pressing need to evaluate the social, cultural, and economic factors that increase the risk of suicidal behavior among transgender individuals and to devise effective interventions to reduce the risk of suicidal attempts among transgender individuals in South Asia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The study design of the article is a systematic review. Systematic reviews usually involve a detailed and inclusive plan and search strategy that uses various methods to identify, select, appraise, and synthesize all relevant studies on a particular topic and produce reliable outcomes. It is a great source to stay updated and to identify research gaps in our understanding of a field. The review was based on Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines.

The keywords used were "suicidal ideation" OR "suicidal risk factors" OR "suicidal thoughts" AND "transge-

nders" OR "transsexuals" OR "gender non-conforming" AND "south Asia." Two search engines, Google Scholar and PubMed, were used for study collections. This only includes articles that were published in English between the years of 2013 to 2023.

An English language prerequisite was secured for the articles to be included. The study includes articles addressing suicidal risk factors in transgender individuals. Our research's primary focus revolves around studies conducted in South Asia. Articles incorporated in our analysis utilizing a cross-sectional study design.

Exclusion criteria include articles presenting divergent outcomes related to our topic and studies discussing suicidal ideation due to medical diseases like HIV. The exclusion criteria of our article encompass studies that discuss therapies or remedies to prevent suicidal behavior in transgender.

Articles that were initially imported in Zotero were 1090. After removing the duplicates, three researchers conducted screening. Articles were screened first based on their titles and abstract, and then full-text availability was the focal point for selection. Inclusion criteria were then employed to select the articles. After the inclusion-exclusion criteria, we remained with the seven final selected articles. Then, the final selected articles were reviewed for data extraction. After screening, the final selected articles were scrupulously reviewed for data analysis following PRISMA guidelines.

RESULTS:

One thousand nine hundred articles resulted from search criteria across databases (PubMed and Google Scholar). Seven review papers met the inclusion criteria after removing duplicates and screening based on

titles, abstracts, and full-text availability. All the included studies were cross-sectional studies. Out of these, four are based in Pakistan, two studies were conducted in Nepal, and 1 in South India. The age range of participants was 16-62 years of age. The total number of participants in the included six studies is 1559, and one study used a non-probability sampling technique to include all transgender individuals available there. The range of biological, environmental/ social, psychological, and behavioral risk factors contributing to the high prevalence of suicidal ideation and behavior among Transgender individuals in South Asia are highlighted. These studies suggest that transgender individuals in South Asia face significant challenges that put them at risk for suicidal behavior, including depression, social discrimination, lack of family support, body dissatisfaction, drug abuse, low income, and sex work.

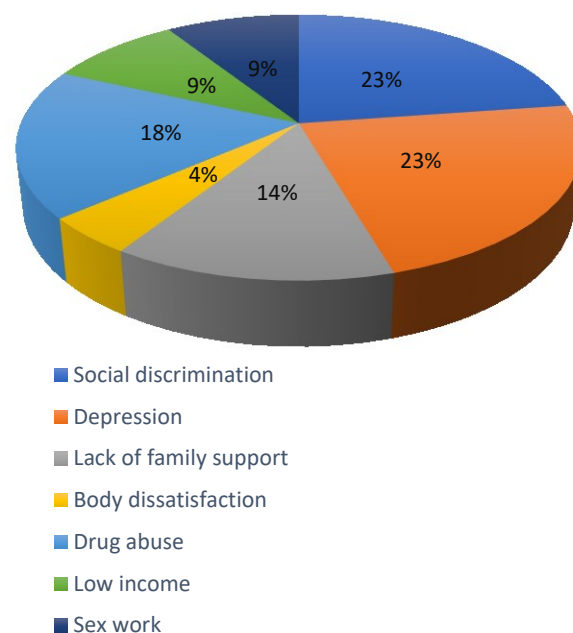


Figure1: Suicidal risk factors in Transgender representation by a pie diagram

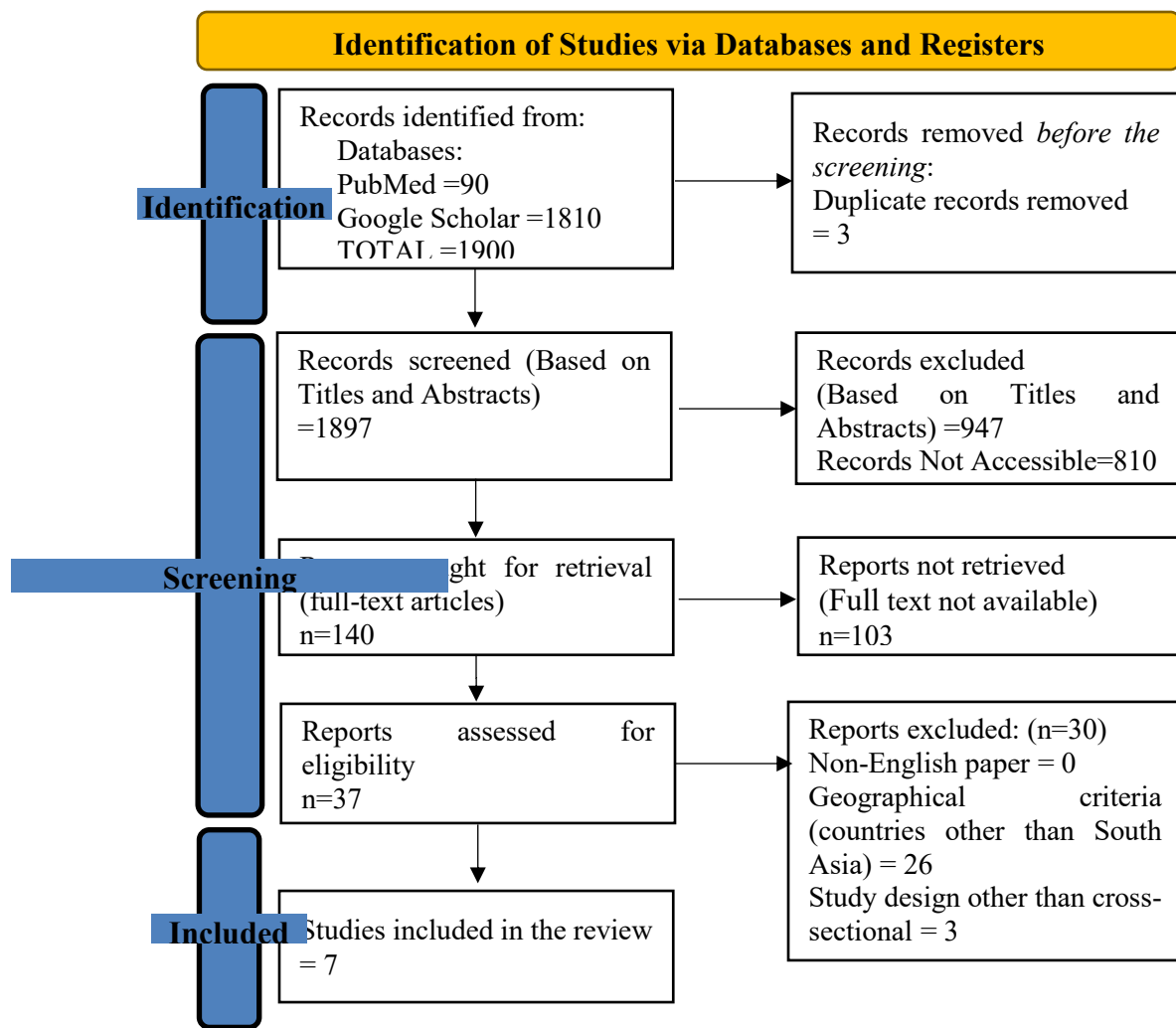


Figure 2: PRISMA Flow Chart

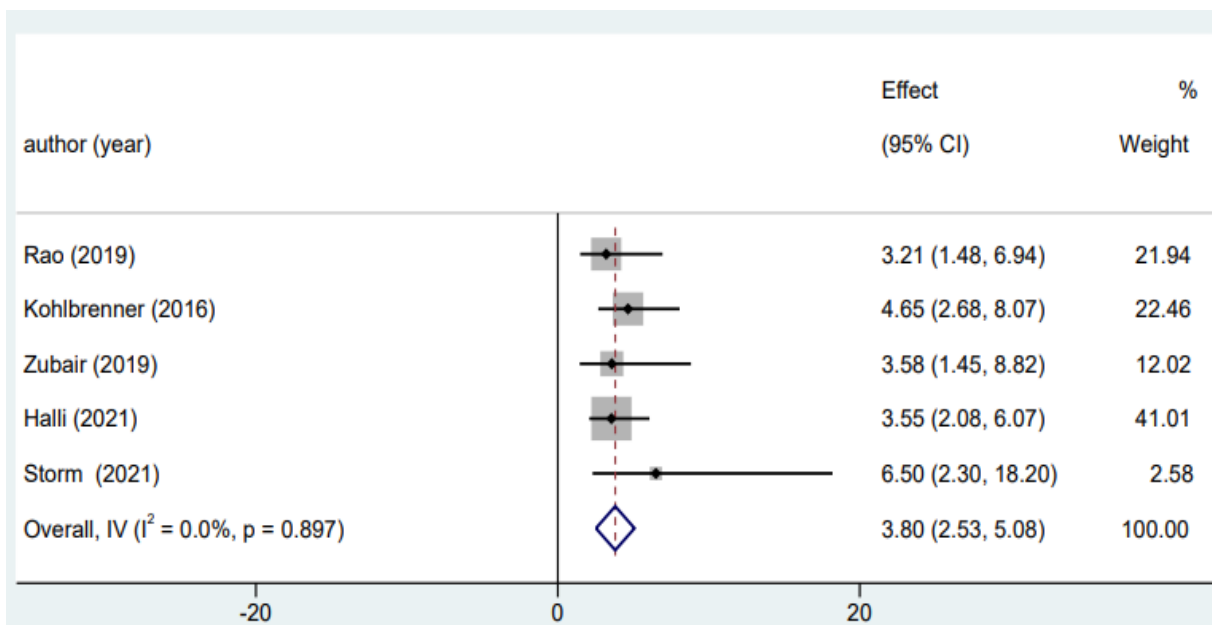


Figure 3: Forest Plot (Association between Depression and Suicidal Ideation in Transgenders, reported by five studies)

Table 1: Data Extraction Table

Serial No.	Author Year of publication	Study Design	Sample Size (n)	Age	Educational Status	Region	Biological Factors	Suicidal Risk Factors Environmental and Social Factors	Psychological Factors	Behavioral Factors
1.	Azeem R. 2019. ¹²	Cross-Sectional	n= 156	Mean Age=39.26 ±4.28		Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Pakistan.		Low Family Income	Depression	Substance Use
2.	Shah HBU. 2018. ¹⁴	Cross-Sectional	n= 186	Mean Age= 29 ± 7.88 years	139 out of 189 transgender individuals had no formal education or less than a 5th-grade education.	Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Pakistan.		Discriminatory victimization, Non-Discriminatory victimization, Institutional discrimination, Sex work Lack of family support		Drug abuse
3.	Batool I. 2022. ¹⁵	Cross-Sectional	n=200	18 to 45 years of age	61.5% were Unable to read or write, 8% had completed primary education, 21.5% had secondary and 9%graduate individuals	Pakistan	Body Dissatisfaction	Social interaction anxiety, Low Quality of life		
4.	Kohlbrener V. 2016. ¹¹	Cross-Sectional	n=400 MSM (Men having sex with Men) Transgender Individuals	16 years of age or above		Kathmandu Valley of Nepal.	Age(can be influenced by social and cultural factors)	Perceived discrimination	Depression	
5.	Zubair UB. 2019. ¹³	Cross-Sectional	n= 148	Above 18 with mean age 38.2 ± 3.18	All the participants were able to read Urdu.	Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Pakistan		Social discrimination, Low income	Depression	
6.	Storm S. 2021. ⁶	Cross-Sectional	n= 340 MSM and TGW	17 to 62 years with mean age of 29	93% of the participants were literate having a formal education.	Eight small Cities of Nepal.		Social discrimination Lack of family support, Physical abuse of sexual orientation, Cheating & Threats Sex work	Depression, Psychological Issues	Alcoholism Drug abuse
7.	Halli SS. 2021. ¹⁶	Cross-Sectional	n=282 Individuals	18 years and above	18% of participants had little or no formal education.	Bangalore, Karnataka, India	Physical appearance	No formal education Lack of marriage and spouse Social Discrimination & Stigma	Depression Anxiety Personal identity	Alcoholism

DISCUSSION:

In this systematic review, we have examined the multifaceted landscape of the suicidal risk factors among transgender individuals in South Asia. Our review shows a complex interplay of several variables that significantly contribute to the vulnerability of this marginalized community in South Asia. The prominent risk factors identified include psychological distress, with depression as a central concern. Mental stress at a young age is linked with negative school behavior, negligence, social and peer problems, substance misuse, and adverse outcomes in adulthood.¹⁷ Social factors such as social discrimination and lack of family support aggravate the risk.

Moreover, the economic hardships, such as low income and engagement in high-risk occupations such as sex work, amplify the risk of suicidal behavior in the transgender community. Substance abuse, often adopted as a coping mechanism, is also a critical risk factor for suicidal behavior. Most of the drug abusers are in their adult age, which can cause massive damage to the physical, mental, and moral development of youth.¹⁸ Biological risk factors such as body dissatisfaction and physical appearance also put them at a higher suicidal risk. The complex interplay of these multiple factors puts transgender individuals at a higher risk of suicide in South Asia.

Depression was a significant factor leading to suicidal attempts among the transgender population in South Asia. It is consistent with the previous studies showing depression as a common suicidal risk factor shared by the transgender community in the developed world.¹⁹ Another significant risk factor for suicide was social discrimination, which was a prominent factor in most of the studies. The transgender community is something that does not fit into the social and cultural norms in South Asia. South Asia is a region that has a diverse cultural heritage richly influenced by religion and beliefs. The transgender community challenges cultural norms and religious beliefs in a negative way, which puts them under an extreme level of social discrimination and stigma, as evident from other studies.²⁰

Family support is a significant factor against suicidal

attempts among the population.²¹ Lack of family support is a significant suicidal risk factor for the transgender community in South Asia. It is aligned with the previous studies showing that the transgender community who have family support is less prone to suicide, while those whom their families reject are more prone to suicidal behavior.²²

Low income and financial pressure are common risk factors for suicide in the general population.²³ The same was observed in the transgender population in the study. Unlike the middle-income countries in South Asia, high income in other parts of the world is a protective factor against suicide among the transgender community.²⁴ In contrast, low income, similar to South Asia, significantly contributes to suicidal behavior, as proved by previous studies.²⁵

Sex work and prostitution were significantly linked to suicidal attempts in the transgender community. Those involved in sex work either by will or forced to do so have a greater prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempts. This is similar to the general trends of suicide in sex workers reported in the literature.²⁶

Substance abuse and alcoholism are pretty common in the transgender community, which influences their mental health and makes them prone to suicidal ideation. This is consistent with the previous studies showing how the various social and psychological factors push them towards substance abuse and make them prone to suicidal behavior.^{27,28}

A study conducted in Pakistan in 2022 also identified body dissatisfaction as a major risk factor for suicide.¹⁵

A similar cross-sectional study from Bangalore, India, also concluded that physical appearance and body dissatisfaction are major risk factors for suicide.¹⁶ As transgender people do not fit into the normal functioning society, they become dissatisfied with their body and appearance, which puts them in an inferiority complex and depression. This aligns with other studies on transgender individuals, showing that body dissatisfaction significantly contributes to suicidal behavior.²⁹ Contrary to, in the general population, body dissatisfaction only caused depressive symptoms.³⁰

The transgender community faces much social Isola-

tion and discrimination. They do not get respectable livelihoods, are forced to be sex workers, are prone to substance abuse, and suffer from depression, all contributing to the suicidal risk.

CONCLUSION:

Depression and Social discrimination are the significant risk factors that divert the transgender community from being involved in ill-suited conduct. Screening for depression, anxiety, and mental disorders should be conducted for preliminary acknowledgement, better treatment options, and preventive measures. Our study suggests that political action should be taken depending on sexual inclination, measures to decrease suicidal behavior, and increasing essential opportunities for transgender people. There is a need for further research on this topic to provide awareness about different risk factors because of the increasing risk of suicide in transgender people.

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