

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUICIDAL IDEATION, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND COPING SKILLS IN FEMALE PRISONERS OF A JAIL IN PAKISTAN

Sadia Rasheed, Mazhar Mufti, Rizwan Taj, Najma Najam

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To compare the convicted and under trial female prisoners on suicidal ideation, coping skills and social support.

**Design:** Cross-sectional comparative study.

**Place and duration of Study:** Adiyala Jail Rawalpindi. Data is collected in six month duration i.e., May 2004 to Nov 2004.

**Subjects and Methods:** Sample of the study consisted of 40 female prisoners in which 20 were convicted and other 20 were under trial. Majority of the sample was in the range of 25-35years (57.5%), unmarried (50%) and educated till middle (67.5). Instruments used were Beck Suicidal Ideation Scale, Social Support Questionnaire and Brief COPE.

**Result:** The result shows that under trial female prisoners use more avoidance copings as compared to convicted female prisoners. It means that un-convicted female prisoners have more negative thinking, more self blame, behavior disengagement venting and denial as compared to convicted female prisoners. But the difference is non significant ( $t=1.43, p=.16$ ).

**Conclusion:** Present study shows that social support and coping skills have greater impact on prisoner's suicidal ideation. The higher the social support the higher the coping skill and lesser the suicidal ideation.

**Key words:** Suicidal ideation, Social support, Coping skills, Prisoners.

## INTRODUCTION

The female prisoners in Pakistan are mostly poor and illiterate up to the extent as per some of statistics 91% did not know under what law they were convicted<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>. The study shows that women are most frequently detained for spousal murder or offences under the Haddood Ordinance.

The research shows that suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts were common in prison than in general population and these were significantly associated with higher rates of psychosis, anxiety, depression and personality disorders in prison<sup>4, 5</sup>. In the general prison population, self harmers have higher levels of suicidal ideation which is mainly due to sensory deprivation, degradation, emotional effects, socialization, uncertainty, dependency and lack of confidentiality.

### Sadia Rasheed

Psychologist, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi.

### Mazhar Mufti

Consultant Physician, Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad.

### Rizwan Taj

Head and Associate Professor Deptt. of Psychiatry PIMS Islamabad.

### Najma Najam

Vice Chancellor Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi.

### Correspondence:

Dr. Rizwan Taj

When prisoners become frustrated, angry and filled with anger in reaction to conditions to which they are subjected, other kind of reactions are also possible. Prison constitutes a "pernicious assault on the self esteem of the prisoner," and many prisoners find it difficult to control hostile impulses in the face of this assault<sup>6</sup>.

Social support is important factor for prisoners<sup>4</sup>. It affects their coping skills and thinking ability. Social support has been popularized to connote the various forms of aid and assistance supplied by family members, friends, neighbours and others<sup>4, 7, 8</sup>. This study examines the relationship between suicidal ideation, social support and coping skills in female prisoners at a jail in Pakistan.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The sample consisted of 40 female prisoners of Adiyala Jail Rawalpindi in which 20 were convicted and other 20 were under trial. All the female patients were in the age range 25-45 and those who could read the questionnaire in Urdu were included in the study. Following instruments were used.

1. Beck Suicidal Ideation Scale<sup>9</sup>
2. Social Support Questionnaire<sup>9</sup>
3. Brief COPE

Three questionnaires were administered in the same sequence for all the prisoners.

The data analysis was carried out by using SPSS. Pearson product correlation was computed to find out the relationship between suicidal ideation, social support and coping skills. T-Test was applied to assess the differences between convicted and under trial female prisoners on social support, coping skills and suicidal ideation.

## RESULTS

The age distribution showed that 57.5% of the sample female prisoners were in the age range of 25-35 and 42.5% were between the age ranges of 36-45.

Table 1 and 2 indicate results and Demographic data of the sample.

**Table1**  
**Frequency of married, unmarried and widows (n=40)**

Marital status	Frequency	%age
Unmarried	20	50
Married	17	42.5
Widow	03	7.5

It is obvious from table 1 that 50% of the sample female prisoners were unmarried and 42.5% were married and 7.5% were widow.

**Table2**  
**Frequency of education level of female prisoners (n=40)**

Educational Level	Frequency	%age
Middle (5-7)	27	67.5
Matriculation	11	27.5
Intermediate	02	5.0

Table 2 shows the educational status of sample. It is evident that 67.5% of the sample female prisoners were educated up to middle and 27.5% up to matric and 5% had college education.

**Table3**  
**Frequency of crimes committed by female prisoners (n=40)**

Crimes	Frequency	%ge
Drugs related crimes	17	42.5
Murder cases	12	30
Theft	11	27.5

Table 3 shows the crimes for which these prisoners were jailed. It shows that 42.5% prisoners have committed crimes related to drugs, 30% crimes related to murder and 27.5% were related with theft.

Pearson product moment correlations were calculated for various indices. There was highly significant inverse correlation between suicidal ideation and social support ( $r = -0.35$ ). There was also a negative relationship between suicidal ideation and coping skills ( $r = -0.36$ ). Similarly there was highly significant negative correlation between social support and coping skills ( $r = -3.2$ )

**Table4**  
**Comparison between convicted and under trial prisoners (n=40)**

	Under Trial	Convicted	t(p)
Suicidal Ideation			
Number of Women	20	20	0.40(0.69)
Mean (SD)	12.65(9.17)	13.60(5.17)	
Social Support			
Number of Women	20	20	0.78(0.44)
Mean (SD)	64.10(15.25)	67.50(12.17)	
Coping skills			
Number of Women	20	20	1.22(0.23)
Mean (SD)	32.15(7.06)	29.45(6.96)	

Table 4 shows the differences between convicted and under trial prisoners on the measures of suicidal ideation, coping skills and social support. Results indicate that under trial female prisoners had more suicidal ideation as compared to convicted female prisoners. The result also indicate that those female prisoners who were convicted used more coping skills as compared to those who are un-convicted female prisoners. Although there were some differences in these groups, none reached statistical significance.

## DISCUSSION

Many studies have examined social support in relation to suicidal behavior. They found that close and supportive relation to parents was negatively correlated with suicidal ideation<sup>6,7,10</sup>. Students become vulnerable to suicidal ideation when there is insufficient parental support. It was believed that a theory of social support requires attention to three interrelated classes of variables<sup>7</sup>. Personality characteristics, interpersonal relationships and the situation that stimulate supportive efforts. These variables can be reckoned as context of social support because the effect of social support depends on the interaction of the three contexts. Persons without employment or family support were found at risk of suicide in prison<sup>11</sup>. The impact of any particular supportive effort depends on the motivations and expectations of both provider and recipient and hence perceived support is a product of interaction among such variables. It may be noted that perceived social support is more important than actual supporting person's life. It was found that personality factors are indeed related to social support in bringing about suicidal ideation.

The present study indicates that there exist a positive relationship between social support and coping skills. When there is significantly lower emotional support then there are more chances of negative coping behavior. Social support is the concept that has become popular in mental health research in the last two decades. It is accepted that other people can ease our way through times of stress. It is also observed that network membership may also provide the possibility for stressful interpersonal events such as social conflict and losses<sup>12</sup>. According to the Stress Buffering Theory, social support will have positive effects on the mental and physical health of people under high levels of stress. It was asserted that different modes of support may alter exposure to problems, appraisal of problems, and consequences of problems, in quite distinct ways<sup>6</sup>.

We found that there was more suicidal ideation under trial female prisoners as compared to convicted prisoners. In the UK under trial has been found to be a particularly vulnerable time period, and the risk of suicide appears to be quite high<sup>5</sup>. Two causes are posited for suicide in jail- the inmate is facing a crisis situation and jail environments are conducive to suicidal behavior. The hypothesis is proved by the results of present study that there are more coping skills in under trial female prisoners as compared to convicted prisoners. It also showed that social support and coping skills have greater impact on prisoner's suicidal ideation. The higher the social support the higher the coping skill and lesser the suicidal ideation.

## REFERENCES

1. Ameer MA.. Prison rules. Under section 59 of prison act 1894. Lahore 1994; Irfan Law book House.
2. Awan, Z. When the law is abused. Dawn, October 20, 1989.
3. Shah L, Hassan M. Problems of women prisoners in the central Jail for women Multan, Women's Division. Islamabad, 1987.
4. Taylor A. social Isolation and imprisonment. Psychiatry 1961; **373,373**.
5. Lloyd C..Suicide and Self Injury in Prison: A Literature Review. London, Home Office 1990
6. Vaux AA, Riedel S, Stewart D. Modes of Social Support: The Social support Behaviors(SS-B).Am J Community Psychology 1987,15: 209-37.
7. Sarason, I.G, Sarason BR, Pierce GR The meaning and measure of social support: the series in clinical and community psychology. In: Veiel H O F, Baumann U. (eds). **BOOK NAME?** Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, **CITY OF PUBLICATION**, 1992.
8. Beck AT, Kovacs M, Weissmen A. Assessment of Suicidal Intention: The scale for suicidal ideation. J Consulting Clin Psychol 1979;47:343-52.
9. Sarason IG, Levine H.M, Basham RB, Sarason BR. Assessing social support: The social support questionnaire. J Personality Social Psychol 1983; 44:127-39.
10. Cohen S, Wills TA. Stress, social support and buffering hypothesis, Psychological Bulletin 1985; 98:310-57.
11. Hatty S, Walker J. A National Study of Deaths in Australian Prisons. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, 1986.
12. Cutrona, CE. Objective determinants of perceived social support. J Personality Social Psychol 1986;50:349-55.