

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF SUICIDAL IDEATION IN YOUNG ADULTS: PERSPECTIVES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS BASED ON THEIR FAMILY FUNCTIONING

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Abstract

Suicide has been described as the third leading cause of death among the young adults. Young adults experience suicide ideation; however, not many of them commit suicide since only a third actually commits suicide. This study was conducted to find out about suicide ideations among youth adults based on their family functioning. Data was collected by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews involving mental health professionals, while data analysis was done using NVivo software. Based on thematic analysis five major themes were analyzed on the basis of Satir's Growth Model i.e., role of the symptom in the system, family dynamics, family roles, family life chronology and survival triad. Findings of the study indicated that family conflicts and family pathology play a crucial role in developing suicidal thoughts in young adults. Major negative life events are constantly linked to suicidal ideations. Hostile family environment, negative messages from parents, and criticism all play a major role in developing suicide behaviors among young adults. The parents exert their power on young adults, making them adhere to their orders. They also show no concern for the individual's perspective or wishes. The suicidal tendency has been found to be related to such parenting styles. The poor quality of bonding between the parents and children is one of the major elements that cause different kinds of negative emotions. The present research would contribute in developing intervention programs for dysfunctional families to deal with suicidal ideations.

Keywords:

Young Adults, Suicidal ideation, Family Functioning, Satir's Growth Model, Thematic analysis.

Introduction

Worldwide, suicide remains the third cause of death for individuals aged between 15 and 29 years. However, suicide is not just a concern that affects high-income nations; rather, suicide happens globally across all continents. Notably, nearly three-quarters (73%) of all suicide deaths in the world happened in low- and middle-income nations in 2021 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). It is common for young people to have suicidal thoughts, but very few i.e., only one-third) of those individuals go ahead to attempt suicide (Nock et al., 2013). Suicidal ideation is more prevalent than suicide mortality, with the ability to forecast future suicide and suicidal attempts (Ribeiro et al., 2016). Therefore, it is vital to gain an enhanced understanding of the factors that increase and reduce the likelihood that young individuals who experience thoughts of hurting themselves or committing suicide will inflict harm on themselves (Etherson et al., 2025). Suicidal thoughts refer to the consideration of ending one's own life. The idea of suicide may or may not include plans for committing the act. In some instances, the use of the phrase "suicidal thoughts" refers to suicidal ideations. Not all individuals who think about suicide commit the act (Perveen, Malik, & Atta, 2026).

Islam is the second most popular religion in the world, having more than 20 percent followers of the total world's population residing in 56 countries where they are in majority in Asia and Africa (Rezaeian, 2009). Suicide is considered a sin in Islam (Naveed et al., 2017). Similarly, there are a number of hadiths that have been recorded regarding this matter, most of them are related to afterlife but from a cultural, legal and religious point of view there is no punishment for the survivors of a suicide in Islam (Nazeer et al., 2025). Moreover, Pakistani laws were made only by considering Islamic concepts and therefore, suicide attempts are considered criminal acts and can result in imprisonment or even heavy fines. Consequently, they do not constitute any legal crime in the society (Naveed et al., 2017). That is why suicidal behavior remains a subject that is given little priority by researchers, even in Pakistan and other countries (Perveen et al., 2026). Given the controversial nature of suicidal behavior and the stigma attached to it, this form of behavior is usually underreported in Pakistan. It may be hard to accept, but suicide and suicidal behavior have never been studied extensively (Naveed et al., 2017).

Pakistan is the fifth most populous developing country in South Asia. Just like any other developing country, one of the issues Pakistan struggles with is an increasing rate of teenage suicides that pose a serious burden for the society, socially, emotionally, and economically. Considering the fact that mental illness remains highly stigmatized in Pakistani society and that suicide attempts are considered criminal, it becomes increasingly hard to ascertain the effect of teen suicides in the economic development of the country. Suicide is usually seen as a matter of culture that is multifaceted and arises due to family disputes and poor psychosocial adaptation in Pakistan. Even though cultural and religious impact plays an essential role in analyzing suicide among young adults, failure to have an adequate national suicidal ideation screening, registration, and security system

among adults is the most challenging impediment to comprehending the causes of suicide among young adults (Nazeer et al., 2025). The majority of studies related to suicidal ideations conducted in Pakistan have been simple, retrospective case series studies. Suicide is a catastrophe that has emotional as well as economic impacts on the families and society. Therefore, addressing suicidal ideations and suicidal behavior among young adults has become a serious matter now (Balaji et al., 2023).

Young adulthood is a time of great developmental transition, such as the development of identity, emotion regulation, and transition of social roles, making them more susceptible to mental illness and suicide (WHO, 2014). However, there are many aspects that can affect the decision of the young adults to take their own lives. Young adults had discussed the issue of difficult family dynamics, inter-personal conflicts, as well as other challenges in their lives, the pressure of which gradually accumulates and finally reaches a level whereby they are unable to cope with the associated emotional pain any longer (Guest et al., 2021). The risk of suicide in this particular age group is linked to family dysfunction, poor educational qualifications, and economic status (Eslava et al., 2023). There is sufficient evidence to show that family functioning has a close relationship with psychological disorders. The function of families may be crucial for mental health susceptibilities (Chu et al., 2023). Hence, it is crucial to study suicidal thoughts in young adults from the perspective of family functions.

The other critical aspects that result in the occurrence of self-harm in young people include drug use, low self-esteem, lack of communication between parents and their young adults, and hopelessness. The major causes for these problems include stress from schoolwork, which arises because of society and parents' expectations, as well as family situations such as strictness in parenting, absence of emotional support, and too much use of social media. Family discord and dysfunctional family may affect the psychological state of children and are considered to be a particular factor in the occurrence of suicide among Pakistani young adults. Family disputes and relationship problems are considered the most common causes (Imran et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The primary goal of the Satir growth model is to help clients reach their full potential through effective communication and high self-esteem. There are five basic elements used in the Satir growth model to evaluate family functioning, which include the role of the symptom in the system, family dynamics, family roles, family life chronology and survival triad (Satir, 1972; Satir, 1983; Satir et al., 1991). Satir theory operates under the premise that change is always possible, if not externally, then internally; and its primary emphasis is on changing individuals' experiences in terms of their coping skills, perceptions, feelings, expectations, and fulfillment of their desires and life energy (Banmen, 2002).

Objectives

This study was conducted to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To explore suicidal ideations in young adults based on their family functioning.
2. To identify the major contributors of family functioning from mental health professionals' narratives based on Satir's Growth Model.

Significance of the Study

Suicide has been cited as one of the main reasons why young people between the ages of 15 to 29 die. This has made suicide a serious problem that requires the attention of policymakers, practitioners, and the community at large (WHO, 2021). With suicide accounting for a large percentage of the deaths of young people, suicide attempted by young adults should be taken seriously because of the wider social impact and loss of life years due to death (Grimmond et al., 2019). Due to the significance of the prevention of such behaviors, studies have focused on researching risk factors related to suicide, with the emergence of protective factors being studied more recently; nevertheless, the need for strong studies in this field continues to persist (Pirani et al., 2021). The reason behind the lack of an in-depth discussion on suicidal distress could be due to the existence of suicide stigma, as it may label individuals facing suicidal distress as 'sinful', 'dangerous', 'attention-seekers', 'selfish' and 'contagious' (Oexle et al., 2019), making it a challenging topic to discuss. Suicide behaviors and ideations among college students remain highly prevalent and continue to emerge.

Considering the effects and irreversible consequences that can arise from suicide, it is crucial to know the underlying factors motivating young-adults to regard life as meaningful (Pirani et al., 2021). There is a need to comprehend and forecast the factors contributing to suicidal thoughts among young adults, particularly within the field of psychiatry, which exhibits a considerably high prevalence rate (Liu et al., 2025). Suicidal behavior among Pakistanis is escalating every day. Numerous studies have been conducted in this domain worldwide, whereas in Pakistan, the research is relatively underdeveloped. Most of the studies have been conducted on individuals who committed suicide; however, little information is available on suicide attempts survivors (Gul et al., 2025).

Research Methodology

Qualitative method was used to access the role of family functioning on young adults with suicidal ideations by exploring their family functioning aspects through professionals' narratives. A deductive thematic analysis approach was used, guided by existing theoretical frameworks, particularly Satir's Growth Model. This approach allowed the researchers to analyze data within predefined conceptual domains while remaining open to context-specific insights emerging from participants' narratives.

Participants

Ten professionals including psychologists, psychiatrists, and/or marital and family therapists with minimum three years of full-time experience in the field who have treated and helped Pakistani families from diverse circumstances were included in the study. Participants' written consent was taken, and their confidentiality was ensured. The right to withdraw from the study was discussed with all participants. They were acknowledged for their contribution and cooperation.

Ethical Approval

This study is approved by Institutional Research and Ethics Forum of Rawalpindi Medical University (RMU), Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Procedure

The interview guide was formulated based on the literature review, theoretical background, and the purpose of the research. The verbatim of the respondents was transcribed accurately. The analysis of data was done through the use of NVIVO software. Findings from the literature review were therefore combined and applied to confirm the domains of family functioning obtained during the interview session. The analysis of data was done in six phases of thematic analysis formulated by Braun and Clark (2024). The six-phase thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke is founded on familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and defining and naming themes.

Data Analysis

A brief explanation about this process is given below:

1. Familiarizing with Data: As per Braun and Clarke (2024), this stage plays an essential role in building up an intimate connection between the researcher and data since otherwise it is impossible to come up with any significant findings. At this stage, researchers began with transcribing data that have been gathered through interviews, which involved ensuring complete verbatim transcription of the verbal statements as well as non-verbal expressions like pauses or tone changes. To do so, initially, the verbal data were transcribed by the researchers, and then read several times for better comprehension of the content of data. Therefore, initially, all interviews conducted by individuals were transcribed word for word.
2. Generating Initial Codes: The second stage of the thematic analysis involves a shift from becoming familiar with the data set to identifying and generating themes within the data set. During the second stage, the researchers analyzed the data set to generate codes that described important aspects about the data set, taking into consideration the study's objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

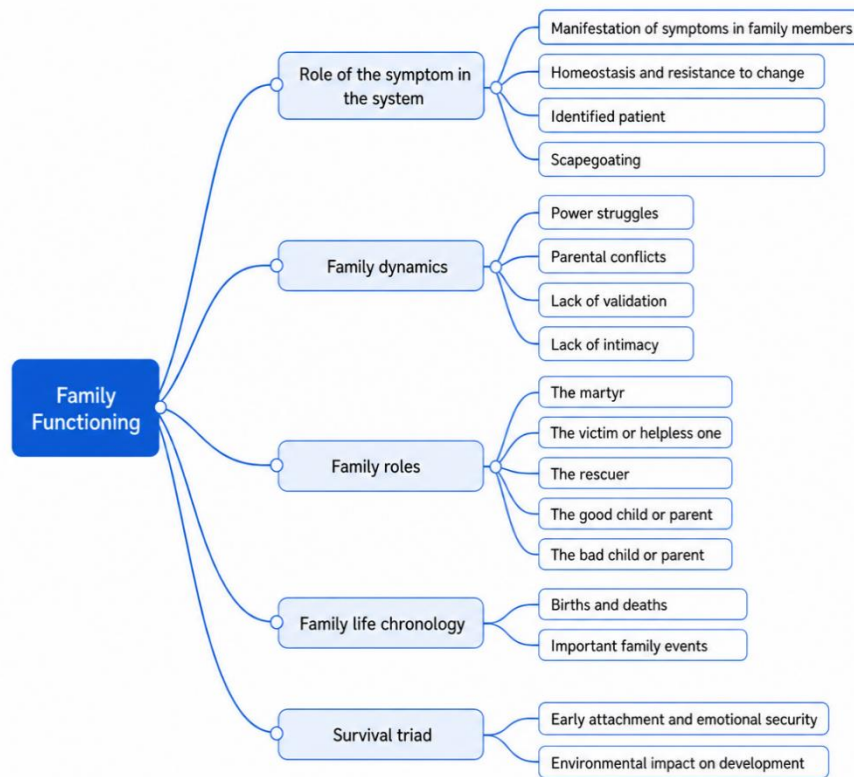
3. **Searching for Themes:** Thematic analysis phase three is an important milestone in the process of coding because it moves from the generation of codes to the identification of patterns or themes within the data set. The themes are considered important recurring patterns of meaning that emerge from the codes, and they are closely related to the objectives of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the third phase of the thematic analysis, the researchers began categorizing the codes and analyzing how they relate to each other, interact, contrast, and overlap. The initially generated data codes were studied several times before forming themes and categorizing them further into subthemes. The major themes were appropriately named depending on the nature of the problems discussed by the participants in the coded data.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** The fourth step of thematic analysis involves the critical and iterative assessment of themes that emerged from the previous steps. It is worth noting that the fourth step is not concerned with altering or developing themes but with ensuring that the selected themes are truly representative of the data and that they tell an informative story of research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this particular step, the coded excerpts from data for each theme were critically analyzed for their coherence, consistency, and uniqueness. Themes were also examined, and some of them were even renamed. The literature suggests that there exist different kinds of major themes of suicidal ideation. Eventually, it was determined that there were five major themes associated with the topic under investigation.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** The fifth stage of thematic analysis involves ensuring the accuracy of the themes generated from the fourth stage to represent the data set as well as addressing the research question through the themes. In this stage, more attention is placed on developing clear, concise, and strong definitions for each of the generated themes coupled with relevant names (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers at this stage performed an in-depth investigation of the theme in order to determine not only its relevance but also its interactions with other themes and the role played in addressing the research question. In this process, the themes under consideration were reconfirmed and divided into different groups. First, the themes were analyzed individually and then grouped, and finally, they were revisited.
6. **Writing up:** Lastly, in Phase 6, analysis and extract findings were placed within context with respect to previous literature via article reporting.

The study is reported in line with the 32 item COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) framework developed specifically for the rigorous and transparent reporting of qualitative research (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007).

Results and Discussion

The findings were analyzed using thematic analysis via NVIVO-14 software. The following themes were discovered during the process.

Fig.1 Mind Map of Family Functioning of Yong Adults with Suicidal Ideations



Theme 1: Role of Symptoms in the System

Family dysfunction may be connected to how the illness is perceived causally by the family. This self-blame or blaming of the patient was reported to correlate with dysfunctional families in a research study (Walton et al., 2005).

The symptoms of mental and psychological illness including suicidal ideations have a profound impact on the entire family system. These effects often include emotional strain, anxiety, and heightened tension (Psychiatrist).

Families may experience misunderstandings, blame-shifting, and conflict. Financial burdens particularly those related to treatment costs can also arise, along with feelings of helplessness or failure among parents (Psychologist).

Theme 2: Family Dynamics

The perceived aspects of family, including hostile family climate, criticism and invalidation by parents, and emotional disconnection within the family members, contribute to the development of suicidal behavior among young adults and adolescents (Hagan & Joiner, 2017; Macalli et al., 2018). The lack of effective communication and interaction among family members results in isolation among themselves, causing the build-up of negative feelings that would affect their social adaptation process and finally result in psychological problems (Fried et al., 2016).

Most individuals who exhibit suicidal tendencies often come from family environments marked by emotional distance, harsh or critical attitudes, frequent conflict, physical or verbal abuse, and serious parental disputes. These families typically lack effective communication systems to address and resolve underlying issues, which further contributes to the individual's emotional distress and sense of isolation (Psychologist).

It is essential to appreciate the relationship between the family-level and individual level, particularly in terms of what the individual sees, interprets, and responds to regarding the attempt to take his life (Mathew et al., 2021). The idea that emotional invalidation at the family level results in emotion regulation problems that could ultimately result in suicide is proposed by research conducted in 1993 (Linehan, 1993).

Factors that exacerbate the patient's condition include repeated criticism, emotional unavailability, dismissing the illness as an exaggeration or "drama," and ignoring the patient's concerns or complaints (Psychiatrist).

Theme 3: Family Roles

Parents compel their offspring to obey their demands without giving any regard to the individual views and wishes of their young adults. According to the parents, the only acceptable parental behavior in relation to young adults is that of fulfilling their needs regarding clothes, food, shelter, and transport. Any deviation from the parental instructions would attract punishment, reprimanding, and even whipping. Parents always set unrealistic standards for their children in terms of academic achievements. This is mostly evident in the form of disciplinary actions meted out by parents on their offspring while studying. The young adults are put under immense pressure to study. Research shows that suicidal thoughts are linked to such kinds of parenting practices (Hashimoto et al., 2014).

Parents often, even unconsciously, convey the message: "I sacrificed everything for you." While this may stem from love or frustration, it can place a significant emotional burden on the child. The child may begin to internalize this as a sense of failure feeling as though they have not lived up to expectations or have been a disappointment. In some cases, this perception can lead to the

dangerous belief that their absence or even death might bring relief or peace to the family. This thought pattern can reinforce suicidal ideation (Psychologist).

Many young adults take on the emotional burden of managing their parents' or siblings' issues, often at the cost of their own needs and well-being. They experience ongoing emotional pressure but suppress their own distress in an effort to appear strong. When such individuals eventually express suicidal thoughts, it can be difficult for family members to accept or acknowledge it because they have always been perceived as the strong ones (Psychiatrist).

Theme 4: Family Life Chronology

Familial aspects like familial conflict, familial support, and familial pathology have been found to be linked to suicidal ideation among young adults (Randell et al., 2006). Life events involving adverse situations to major life transitions have been consistently linked to suicidal ideation (Liu et al., 2014). Events such as difficulties within family relationships or losses like deaths, addiction, loneliness, childhood trauma, environmental issues, or even genetic factors have been found to contribute to the emergence of suicide ideation and eventually suicidal attempts among young adults (Anwar et al., 2022).

There are numerous incidents or experiences within the family system that can contribute to issues such as suicidal ideation. These may include parental divorce or separation, the death of a close family member, experiences of sexual or physical abuse, financial crises or extreme poverty, the presence of mental illness in a family member, and intense familial pressure related to reputation or social standing (Psychologist).

Theme 5: Survival Triad

According to research evidence, factors such as dysfunctional families, problems related to the parent-child attachment issues, and parental adjustment issues act as significant predictors of suicidal thoughts (Wilkinson et al., 2011). In a meta-analysis study, a significant negative correlation between parental attachment and suicide ideation among young adults was established, meaning that individuals with low parental attachment levels were found to have high levels of suicide ideation. The experience of parental attachment problems could contribute to the frustration of interpersonal needs and thus facilitate burdensomeness and belongingness failure (Yang et al., 2023). Poor attachment between parent and child is one of the key factors responsible for generating a number of negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression. Research indicates that these negative emotions are negatively related to thoughts of suicide (Cerutti et al., 2018). Moreover, problematic family relations, such as negative lack of perceived parental support and parent-child interactions, have also been linked to suicidal behavior among adolescents (Fortune et al., 2016). On the other hand, higher levels of positive affect, parental support, and adaptive representations of attachment are significant

variables associated with lower rates of suicidal behavior among young adults (Brent et al., 2013). Other studies have shown that good parent-child relationship results in high social adaptation and develops positive psychological characteristics, which ultimately minimize negative feelings and inappropriate behaviors such as suicide (Leben et al., 2023).

Parental conflict and strained relationships can lead to deep feelings of deprivation, loneliness, and emotional insecurity in children. When parents engage in mistreatment or demean each other in front of the child, it creates an emotionally unsafe environment. In such settings, the child may begin to feel invisible or unimportant within the family system (Psychologist).

Conclusion and Future Implications

The qualitative research was conducted with the aim of examining how the family influences the development of suicidal thoughts among young adults from the view of mental health practitioners. This was done through the use of the deductive thematic analysis approach based on theoretical approach of Satir's Growth Model. The interviews were carried out on ten professionals who include psychologists and psychiatrists who have been working for at least three years in their professions. The findings showed that family factors such as family conflicts and family pathology contribute to the emergence of suicidal ideations among teenagers. Significant life events and changes, especially negative ones, are closely related to suicide ideations. The family environment that is unfriendly, parental verbal abuse, and negativism towards the individual's opinions and beliefs contribute to the risk of suicidal tendencies. The parents pressurize their offspring to comply with their wishes, without respecting their views and desires. Several studies have found that suicidal thoughts occur due to these parenting approaches. Poor attachment between the parents and their offspring is an essential factor that contributes to the development of several emotional problems. Such findings will assist in designing family-based interventions for the parents and their offspring to address dysfunctional family aspects and associated issues regarding suicidal ideations.

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Conflicts of Interest

There are no competing interests in this manuscript.

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