



Psychological strain and suicidal ideation: A comparison between Chinese and US college students



Jie Zhang^{a,b,*}, Yanzheng Liu^a, Long Sun^a

^a Shandong University School of Public Health and Center for Suicide Prevention Research, Beijing, China

^b State University of New York Buffalo State Department of Sociology, New York, USA

A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study was to explore the relation between psychological strains and suicidal ideation among Chinese and American college students. Another secondary purpose of the study was to examine the reliability of the psychological strains scales (PPS: Ref) one more time in China and the United States in college populations.

Method: Samples of college students were randomly recruited from China and United States. All of 529 college students (aged 17–27, 68.9% female) completed self-report assessments of psychological strains (Psychological Strain Scale), suicidal ideation (Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation), and indicators of psychological well-being (e.g., depression, anxiety, and stress).

Results: Empirical results show that Psychological Strain Scales (PSS) has a good reliability. Chinese college students reported higher suicide ideation scores than American students whereas there was no statistical difference in psychological strains. Psychological strains and, depression, anxiety, and stress, were positively related to suicidal ideation in both countries. Stepwise multiple regression analysis indicated that psychological strain can significantly predict suicidal ideation.

Conclusions: These findings provide support for the Strain Theory of Suicide for both Chinese and American college students and some measures can be taken to reduce psychological strains in students. However, future work could extend these findings by utilizing a longitudinal design to determine whether psychological strains are in fact antecedents, and not simply correlates, of suicide ideation.

1. Introduction

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15–29-year-olds on a global basis (WHO, 2014). A web-based survey by the National Research Consortium of Counseling Centers in Higher Education reported that 18% of undergraduates have ever seriously considered attempting suicide (Drum et al., 2009). Similarly, a review on the prevalence of suicidal ideation among Chinese college students ranged from 1.24% to 26.00% and the overall pooled prevalence of suicidal ideation was 10.72% (Li et al., 2014). Suicidal ideation (SI), also named as suicidal thoughts, is represented by the presence of wishes to commit suicide in individuals who have not made any recent overt suicide attempts (Beck et al., 1988). The range of suicidal ideation varies greatly from fleeting thoughts to detailed planning, from role playing to unsuccessful attempts (Osama et al., 2014). Suicidal ideation has been identified as an important risk factor for suicide actions in college students (Menezes et al., 2012; Whitlock and Knox, 2007).

Studies examining SI in college students have suggested that a large number of factors were closely associated with suicidal ideation. Those

factors included but were not limited to demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age) (Mackenzie et al., 2011; Schwenk et al., 2010), psychiatric diagnoses (e.g., depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug use) (Lamis et al., 2010; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004; Mackenzie et al., 2011), psychological symptoms (e.g., depression and hopelessness) (Kisch et al., 2005; Lamis et al., 2010). Other factors included social support or problematic relationships (e.g., family, school, friends) (Pittman and Richmond, 2007; Ploskonka and Servaty-Seib, 2015; Wong et al., 2011b), problem solving methods (e.g., active and passive problem solving) (Linda et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012), negative life event (e.g., life stress, delinquency, physical health, academic performance) (Hurst et al., 2013; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004; Linda et al., 2012; Roh et al., 2007), personality traits (e.g., cognitive impulsivity, self-esteem) (Sun et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2014), family history (e.g. physical and sexual abuse, family violence) (Gibb et al., 2001; Mackenzie et al., 2011), poor family environment (e.g., family structures, parenting styles) (Zhai et al., 2015). Suicidal ideation is a complicated psychological phenomenon, but this current study focused on the effect of psychological strains among college students with a

* Corresponding author at: Center for Suicide Prevention Research, School of Public Health, Shandong University, China.
E-mail address: zhangj@buffalostate.edu (J. Zhang).

comparison between Chinese and American student samples.

Male and female college students' suicidal ideation rates were 6.9–13.5% and 9.7–20.35% (Tang and Qin, 2015; Wang et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2012; Zhai et al., 2015), respectively, in China. A meta-analysis results showed that prevalence of suicidal ideation in females was higher than in males (Li et al., 2014). However, some studies found no difference between the sexes (Zhang et al., 2013b) or suicidal ideation among male medical college students were in higher level than females (Shang et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2017). While in US, 8.7–22.5% of male respondents and 9.9–15.4% of female respondent were classified as being suicide ideators (Ellis and Lamis, 2007; Kisch et al., 2005; Mackenzie et al., 2011). Being female was significantly associated with a higher probability of suicidal ideation among American students (Ellis and Lamis, 2007; Wong et al., 2011a). A study revealed that there was negative correlation between age and suicidal ideation university students of both sexes in China (Zhang et al., 2013b). Senior students have higher suicidal ideation than junior students (Schwenk et al., 2010) whilst the freshmen were more likely to think about suicide in Chinese students sampled (Zhang et al., 2016), and lower GPA was related to underclassmen's behavioral health severity (De Luca et al., 2016).

The suicidal ideation of college students in both countries has the similar risk factors, as mentioned above, but female students were more affected by history of unwanted sexual encounters (Mackenzie et al., 2011; Stephenson et al., 2006), abuse (Thakkar et al., 2000; Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016), drug use (Stephenson et al., 2006; Zullig and Divin, 2012), history of suicidality (Monson et al., 1998), and love and relationships with parents (Darling et al., 2007) compared with male counterparts in US, while college men were more affected by delinquent behavior (Morgan et al., 2004). In China, females were more likely to be affected by the risk effect of a belief system on suicidality than males (Zhao et al., 2012).

The Strain Theory of Suicide proposes that a suicide or suicidal behavior is usually preceded by a psychological tension or frustration called strain. It emerged as an additional theoretical conceptualization to explain the unique patterns of Chinese rural suicide victims (Zhang, 2005). It postulates that strain usually precedes a suicidal behavior in one's daily life (Zhang, 2005; Zhang and Song, 2006). Different from simple single pressure or stress, a strain contains at least two conflicting or competing pressures or variables, similar to the formation of cognitive dissonance. In fact, strain is more serious, frustrating and threatening than cognitive dissonance. An extreme consequence can be mental disorder and the extreme solution may be suicide. In the path from psychological strains to suicidal behaviors, the strain may be moderated by social factors such as social integration and psychological factors such as personality traits. It can also be intervened or strengthened by psychopathology like mental disorder.

There could be four types of strain derived from specific sources precede a suicide. (1) Conflicting values: when two conflicting social values or beliefs are competing in an individual's daily life, the person experiences value strain. (2) Aspiration vs. reality: If there is a discrepancy between an individual's aspiration or high goal and the reality, he/she has to live with, the person experiences aspiration strain. The larger the discrepancy, the greater will be the strain. (3) Relative deprivation: In the situation where an extremely poor individual realizes that other people of the same or similar background are leading a much better life, the person experiences deprivation strain. The more the perceived deprivation causes relatively greater strain. (4) Deficient coping: Someone who is not able to cope with the situation when facing life crisis might experience coping strain. It is noted that when one person may experience two or two more strain types at a given time and it was named strain clusters or clustering of strain (Agnew, 1992; Stack and Wasserman, 2007).

The Strain Theory of Suicide has been tested in various populations in the past few years. Chinese subjects who immigrated to USA at 18 or younger were at higher risk for suicidal ideation than their China-born counterparts who arrived in the America at or after 18. The high

prevalence of mental disorders for Chinese Americans may be due to psychological strains resulted from culture value conflicts (Zhang et al., 2013a). A survey of college students in Shandong Province of China found that the prevalence of suicidal ideation was 17.3% and four kinds of psychological strains were all identified as risk factors for suicidal ideation (Dong et al., 2015). Another survey of college students in USA found that psychological strains successfully predicted mental illness and suicidal behaviors (Zhang and Lyu, 2014). Studies of suicide in China and the United States showed that psychological strains were significantly associated with suicide to different extent even after accounting for the role of mental disorder (Zhang et al., 2009, 2011; Zhang and Lester, 2008). For example, one study among undergraduate students reported that psychological strains can predict suicidal ideation even after controlling for several covariates (Zhang et al., 2014). However, there were so little studies on relationship between strain and suicidal ideation in American population.

Psychological strains from the four different sources were found in many of the past studies, but studies were mainly in the suicide deaths or attempts (Sun et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2009). Studies taking college students as the research objects were relatively in scarcity. Comparison of the relationship between strain and suicidal ideation among different population was even fewer. Although empirical studies have shown a relationship between psychological strain and suicidal behavior including suicidal ideation, further studies are still needed because the theory needs to be validated in the normal population. In present study, we study psychological strain and suicidal ideation in college student populations from different cultural environments, in order to test again the Strain Theory of Suicide in various cultural contexts.

Based on literature review, three hypotheses are set up to test. (1) Psychological strains and suicidal ideation may vary in country-specific college students because of cultural differences. (2) Psychological Strain Scales have good reliability in both Chinese and American undergraduates. (3) There is significant and positive relationship between psychological strain and suicidal ideation in both college undergraduates. (4) Psychological strains can be important variables predicting suicidal ideation in both China and US samples.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedures

Data for study were collected among college students from United States and China. One convenience university was selected from United States and two from China. All the three universities were medium size and accredited four-year colleges with undergraduate programs. None of them was among the top-notch universities in their countries. Therefore, students sampled from the two countries were comparable. Student ID was obtained and then simple random sampling was used to get participants among the undergraduate students from each of the three universities. A total of 539 students (298 Chinese, 241 American) eventually participated in the questionnaire survey. The sample for this study consisted of 164 males (31.1%) and 364 females (68.9%), and 11 values were missing.

Questionnaire survey was administered in groups with research assistants' supervision in classrooms. The questionnaire was approved by the IRB or research office in each of the universities. Informed consent was obtained from each subject before starting to respond to the questionnaire survey. Anonymity of the respondents and confidentiality of the collected information were secured and promised to both the organizations the researcher affiliated with and the subjects who voluntarily participated.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Socio-demographic information

Besides the demographic information such as age (in years), gender

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4933202>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4933202>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)