

Psychological Profiling of Risk Factors of Psychological Distress Causing Suicide

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ABSTRACT

Suicide is generally recognized as a major public health issue. Suicidal activity is significantly more common than what is officially documented, according to a number of studies. Suicide tactics included poisoning, hanging, and self-immolation (especially among women). The main causes of suicide were physical and mental sickness, troubled interpersonal connections, and financial issues. Women, students, farmers, and other groups were discovered to be among the most vulnerable. To stop suicide conduct in India, social and public health interventions are just as important as mental health interventions. The death of the rising actress Jiah Khan, who starred in films such as Nishabd, Ghajini, and Houseful, shocked the world on 3rd June 2013. The news outlets indicated that the unfortunate incident was believed to be a suicide, later confirmed by the post-mortem reports of the actress' body. It has been suggested that the young actress was struggling with existing trauma from her past experiences and suffering from various mental disturbances, which can be a major contributing factor leading to her tragic death. In this case study, I will bring focus on the incident that occurred with a special focus on the actor's psychological state at the time of her death as well as the main risk factors and events leading to Jiah Khan's suicide.

Keywords: Young, Suicide, Suicidal death, Psychological distress, Depression, Counselling, Therapy, Trauma, Psychological state

INTRODUCTION

The term "suicide" has been defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "an act of taking one's life; one who dies by his own hands, self-murder." It is also defined as "the act of deliberately taking one's own life or causing one's own death." Suicide is a significant global public health concern that belongs to the non-communicable disease group of causes of death, where hanging is one of the most prevalent unnatural deaths. A guaranteed, speedy, painless death with easy and quick access to the necessary supplies is the most likely explanation. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 53.6% of all suicide cases in India involve hanging as the first method [1]. However, the use of firearms, hanging, and pesticide ingestion account for 77% of suicide deaths worldwide, with low- and middle-income nations having the highest rates [2]. There is a tonne of literature about trends in hanging suicide available internationally, and research showed that more than 90% of cases chose common household objects for the purpose. Sometimes, the choice to commit suicide is thoroughly thought through rather than being made on the spur of the moment. This is known as "complex suicide." In these

conditions, a person ensures a very slim chance of surviving by submitting themselves to various suicide methods to actually put an end to life [3]. Thus, in order to ensure complete death, people use other techniques like ingesting toxic substances, abusing drugs, and drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, likely to lessen pain. If any lethal poisons are discovered in households, they may also be used for this purpose because of their accessibility, carelessness with storage, and potential for harm to others' property. Despite the fact that pesticides are one of these poisons, both inadvertent and intentional pesticide poisoning instances are common in India. Numerous factors, such as mental illnesses like depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, borderline personality

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disorder, alcoholism, and drug misuse, have been researched as potential suicide causes. The most popular suicide techniques include hanging, pesticide poisoning, and using a weapon. People use such sophisticated techniques to ensure a completely painless death because of courage, fear of a failed suicide attempt and its consequences, and other factors. Forensic analysts, along with other investigators at the scene of the crime (SOC), medical officers, and others, find it difficult to conduct investigations in these complex situations because each of their contributions to finding the cause of death cannot be undervalued. In order to demonstrate that the victim had successfully secured his death in his suicidal attempt, this study of complex suicide focuses on the identification of pesticides in visceral tissues, thorough Scene of Crime examination, and medicolegal features of hanging as discovered by doctors. One of the largest societal issues of our time is suicide, which has a negative impact on each and everyone's life. In contemporary society, it is a regular occurrence and source of news. Additionally, there are still no public discussions on this subject, and little to no efforts are made to curtail or stop this act. Suicide is a behavior that occurs as a final act and is likely the result of the interactions of many diverse causes. With biological, genetic, and environmental risk factors, it is a complicated entity. Sociopolitical aspects are important to comprehending suicide [4]. Thus, the categories anomy, egoistic, and altruistic were created by Durkheim in his historical book on suicide. These concepts are still implied today. A history of prior suicide attempts, certain demographic markers, clinical symptoms, and problems with medical and social assistance are risk factors and predictors of suicidal behavior.

Most people who attempt suicide typically have severe depression. Eventually, less than 4% of individuals suffering from depression commit suicide [5]. What led to Jiah Khan's suicide since only a very small percentage of people who suffer from depression really succeed in committing suicide? Was her suicide caused solely by depression, or was it also caused by a number of other issues? This paper will focus on the sad incident involving the young actor and the events leading up to it.

CASE PRESENTATION

This case revolves around the alleged suicide of Bollywood actress Jiah Khan, who was found hanging from her bedroom's ceiling fan on 3rd June 2013, in her Mumbai home. Five days after her death, a six-page suicide note was recovered from her room and it was found by the deceased's sister. Jiah Khan's family shared scanned images of her suicide note on social media platforms and it was also published in many newspapers online and offline. The actress's note incriminates her boyfriend of being the sole reason behind her unhappiness. It states that he was responsible for the abetment of her suicide because he was "returning her love with cheating and lies" [6]. Following this disclosure, the actor was taken into police custody as the primary

suspect/accused and was charged with abetment of suicide under Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. The charge was filed under the investigative expertise of the Central Bureau of Investigation. The accused was released on bail within a month but the trial was ongoing. After a decade of struggle, the Judge acquitted the accused of his charges due to paucity of evidence. The online disclosure of Jiah Khan's note not only provided grounds for her boyfriend's arrest, but also revealed crucial information to the public (reporters, analysts, readers, audiences, Twitters, and Facebookers) which in turn, invited the uninhibited public opinions about the progress and verdict of the case. Jiah Khan was suffering from relationship problems with an abusive partner, and depression, and was struggling to heal from past traumatic events that had occurred in her life. Prior to her suicide, the actress had various unsuccessful attempts at taking her own life and was displaying signs of self-harm. She was also subjected to abuse at the hands of her partner and also underwent an abortion. All of these factors contributed as major aspects that led to her suicide.

BACKGROUND

This article describes a case study of a young rising actress who took her life at the age of 25 by hanging at her residence. The bio-physiological changes like immature abortion affecting the psychological and social variables that may have contributed to her untimely death were examined through various methods to establish the predisposing, precipitating, and perpetuating factors of her mental state before and at the time of her death.

METHODS

A review and in-depth analysis of life records, police reports, personal notes of the deceased, post-mortem reports as well as semi-structured interviews of the individuals closely related to the deceased were conducted for the purpose of articulating this case study.

BRIEF FACTS OF THE CASE

- **3rd June 2013:** "Houseful" actress Jiah Khan (then 25 years old), was found hanging from her bedroom's ceiling fan at her apartment in Juhu, Mumbai.
- **4th June, 2013:** Jiah Khan's mother, Rabia Khan claims that the incident was a case of murder, and not suicide.
- **9th June 2013:** Jiah Khan's sister recovered a six-page suicide note from her apartment in Juhu. The contents of this letter held the Boyfriend of the deceased responsible for the abetment of Jiah Khan's suicide.
- **10th June 2013:** based on the claims made by the suicide letter, the accused was arrested on the charges of abetment of suicide.

- **2nd July 2013:** after 22 days of being in jail, the accused was granted bail by the Bombay High Court.
- **October 2013:** Jiah Khan's mother claims that her daughter was in an abusive relationship and her boyfriend used to subject her to physical and verbal abuse.
- **3rd July 2014:** Bombay High Court then transferred the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation, Mumbai.
- **May 2015:** CBI probed into the investigation of the issue with available evidence and reached the accused's house in relation to the case.
- **December 2015:** On the basis of Jiah Khan's six-page letter, her boyfriend was accused. According to the central agency, Jiah Khan's suicide letter detailed their "intimate relationship, physical abuse, and mental and physical torture" at the hands of the accused.
- **2016:** The central agency, based on their investigation proceedings, decided to rule out any foul play in Jiah Khan's murder.
- **February 2017:** In connection with the Jiah Khan Murder Case, Mrs. Rabia Khan, the mother of the victim, filed a criminal writ petition in February 2017 against the Union of India, the Central Bureau of Investigation, the State of Maharashtra, and the accused. The High Court rejected the petition.
- **2018:** A special court under CBI rejected the plea for further investigations of the accused in relation to the Jiah Khan murder case.
- **2021:** After the CBI investigation, the sessions court argued that it lacked jurisdiction. A special CBI court was given new jurisdiction over the Jiah Khan suicide case.
- **2022:** Rabia's second plea to the Bombay High Court asking for a further investigation into the case was denied.
- **April 2023:** The Judge of the Special CBI court heard the closing arguments for both sides in April but withheld judgment. Asserting that the investigation and charge sheet was fraudulent, the accused further stated that the prosecution witnesses testified against him at the direction of complainant Rabiya Khan, the police, and the CBI in his final statement submitted to the court.
- **28th April 2023:** As the learned ASG correctly pointed out, allowing this investigation to continue on without any real purpose and moving it from the hands of one agency to others and then to a third is needlessly extending the trial and adding to the trauma of both the accused and the complainant. He also added that even though the accused and the victim have a fundamental right to prompt justice, there was absolutely no basis for the complainant's requested relief to create a Special Investigation Team to conduct more investigation into the case.
- The court did not think it necessary to grant an intervention application to the complainant because they believed that the Petition itself had no merit. As a result, the aforementioned application lost its fruitfulness and was rejected. The observations made in the case and its investigations were purely preliminary in nature and were intended solely to help the court take a decision regarding the petition. Thus, in conclusion, the petition was denied.
- According to investigations, the victim's death was caused by asphyxia from hanging, not homicide. Due to the lack of any incriminating evidence, the accused was cleared of all allegations of aiding and abetting Jiah Khan's suicide by a special CBI court.

EVENTS LEADING TO SUICIDE

The young actress, Jiah Khan, is believed to have come from a broken home. Her father had divorced her mother when Jiah was about three months old, and she has since then held animosity towards him throughout her developing years. In one of her interviews, she talked about her father and says that "A man who left his daughter when she was two, should be hanged in public." In the year 1989, Jiah moved to London from the United States with her mother who then remarried. Jiah's stepfather had left them when she turned 7. The actress claims that her stepfather had taken away a substantial amount of their family's savings and gained ownership of their home in London, subjecting the family to live in poor conditions and undernourished meals. Jiah had always been a musically gifted child and was keenly interested in opera singing as well as dance in her early childhood. She had begun dancing even before she turned 6 and had mastered various dance forms like Reggae, Belly Dancing, Lambada, Salsa, Kathak, Jazz, and Samba. This shows that she always wanted to be a part of the performing arts and hence chose the acting career. By the age of 16, Jiah Khan had become a proficient opera singer and recorded six pop tracks, revealing that she was very fond of creating music for others to listen to. According to the information given by a close source of the deceased, Jiah Khan seemed to have been sexually assaulted and raped by an older man when she was just 14 years old. It has also come to light that the deceased's previous partners were abusive to her and she was suffering in her relationships with them. It is possible that the victim had harbored many years of repressed trauma that she was unable to heal from, without any support or help from the people she loved and trusted. Jiah Khan was suffering from relationship problems with an abusive partner, and depression, and was struggling to heal from past traumatic events that had occurred in her life. Prior to her suicide, the actress had

various unsuccessful attempts at taking her own life and was displaying signs of self-harm. She was also subjected to abuse at the hands of her partner and also underwent an abortion. All of these factors contributed as major aspects that led to her suicide.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILING

A brief and approximate psychological profile of the victim can be made by assessing and interpreting various observations and statements that had been made by the deceased as well as those of the people related to the victim. In the Jiah Khan murder case, many pieces of evidence and facts were presented to the court with respect to the matter at hand, in order to help the court, form an unbiased judgment for the delivery of justice. A statement analysis of the suicide note found at Jiah Khan’s apartment was conducted by forensic psychologists in order to determine any risk factors and causes behind her actions. A thorough assessment revealed that many of the victim’s statements were found to have a negative meaning that depicted feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness, indicating that the victim was possibly suffering from depression. Her past experiences

had been very traumatic for her and she may not have completely healed from them. An estranged family environment can cause feelings of fear and anxiety and low self-esteem of oneself. It is possible that the victim was suffering from a fear of abandonment as she has witnessed two of her father figures abandon her in her childhood, leaving her family broken and deprived. She may have carried that fear into her romantic relationships which makes her more dependent on her romantic partners for attention, love, and support. Her impulsive actions and attention-seeking behavior can be indicative of a constant need to be validated as an individual. She also shows some symptoms that could indicate that she was suffering from borderline personality disorder like unstable emotional relationships, very intense and abrupt mood shifts, reckless and impulsive behavior, and acts of self-harm [7]. Owing to these pieces of evidence and testimonies submitted to the court, the presiding judge had acquitted the accused because “Jiah Khan was a victim of her own sentiments”. There is a possibility that various factors, internal and external, may have contributed to her impulsive action and may have acted as a trigger that leads to her unfortunate death [8] (Table 1).

Table 1. Biopsychosocial Model of Psychology of Personality Profiling.

Biological Factors	1. Predisposing Factors - malnutrition, lack of food, starvation in the early years leading to staggere development of the body
	2. Precipitating Factor - the constant need to look good, diet conscious for professional requirements like modeling and acting
	3. Perpetuating Factor - work pressure, competitive workplace
Psychological Factors	1. Predisposing Factors - fear of abandonment, stressful family situation, estranged parental relationships
	2. Precipitating Factors - sexual assault and rape in young adulthood, trauma, unstable romantic relationships, premature abortion, physical, verbal, and mental abuse
	3. Perpetuating Factor - lack of help, love, and support, overdependence, unfaithful and disloyal romantic partners, premature abortion, physical, mental, and verbal abuse
Social Factors	1. Predisposing Factors - malnutrition and starvation, poor familial relationships, absence of father figure, poor financial and socio-economic background
	2. Precipitating Factors - unfaithful romantic relationships, unstable and intense emotions for partners, inability to trust loved ones, lack of support from peers and family
	3. Perpetuating Factor - low self-esteem due to abuse, work pressure, competitive workplace, and lack of strong and healthy friendships

FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS INPUTS

Post Mortem Reports: A team of three doctors conducted an autopsy on Jiah's body at JJ Hospital, Mumbai. The procedure was recorded on camera. According to the postmortem report that was prepared and received, it was found that Jiah Khan died by hanging herself with a dupatta, and no other exterior wounds that would indicate struggle or self-defense were discovered. The report also suggests normal levels of hormones and body fluids at the time of death. She was identified to have some tattoos. Further study of the reports revealed that there was a mention of the presence of parallel ligature marks around the victim's neck that suggest that her death was indeed caused by lack of oxygen and cessation of breathing due to hanging. There were also faded cut lines on her arm and around the wrist which can be suggestive of previous suicidal attempts made by the victim. The medical profile of the victim mentions that she was taking therapy sessions from a trained mental health professional for a period of time for various psychological stressors. The doctor shared his opinion on her psychological state and mentioned that there was a possibility that the victim was suffering from episodes of depression and anxiety due to previous traumatic experiences in her childhood as well as her previous romantic relationships. Her symptoms like affective instability, intense but unstable relationships with partners as well as impulsive and reckless behavior are also suggestive of the possibility that the victim might have been suffering from borderline personality disorder. Her full medical checkup from previous periods also revealed that she had undergone a procedure for abortion.

RESULTS

The forensic psychological evaluation and review indicated that Jiah Khan was suffering from various psychological distresses from her childhood and past experiences, constituting trauma that she never recovered from. From the review that was conducted for the purpose of this study, it was found that the victim's personality and psychological profile consisted of ten risk factors that could have possibly led to her suicide [9,10]. They include estranged family history, poor nutrition and starvation, abuse (physical, verbal, mental), past experience of trauma, unresolved grief, dependent and borderline personality traits, intense and abrupt mood shifts, poor self-image and self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness, and mixed depression-anxiety post-abortion [11]. All these factors initiated a trigger putting her at a high risk of suicidal behavior, eventually causing her tragic death.

DISCUSSION

This case study asks many questions about the factors that lead young people to commit suicide. Any major risk factors for suicide significantly raise the likelihood of suicide. Jiah Khan, an actress, unfortunately, had nine main risk factors

altogether, which increased her chance of suicide and ultimately resulted in her terrible death. Ten of the factors identified in this article were estranged family history, poor nutrition and starvation, abuse (physical, verbal, mental), past experience of trauma, unresolved grief, dependent and borderline personality traits, intense and abrupt mood shifts, poor self-image and self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness, and mixed depression-anxiety post-abortion.

CONCLUSION

In India, it is essential to address social and public health issues in addition to mental health issues while addressing suicide. In India as much as in other countries, mental illness increases the chance of suicide. advanced nations. However, India has many more risk factors. These frequently have a connection to societal systems and particular stressors. An approach to social and public health recognizes that suicide can be prevented and encourages an integrated framework for interventions at several societal levels, including the individual, the family, the community, and the health care system.

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