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Cultural aspects of suicidal behaviour among female migrant adolescents

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Statement of the Problem: Suicidal behaviour of female ethnic minority adolescents in several western countries appear to be disproportionately higher compared to native peers. The Western medical-psychiatric and psychological explanatory models (individual focused, linear cause-effect relationships between psychopathology and suicidal behaviour, and medicalization oriented) flaw the understanding of suicidal behaviour from social and cultural perspective. Despite the growing strand of studies aimed to identify cultural factors of suicidal behaviour, the actors' perspective remains under researched. Alternatively, Bourdieu's concept of habitus is proposed and subsequently expanded and specified it into ethnic habitus to capture the specific ethnic factors of in female migrant adolescents' suicidal behaviour.

Methodological & Theoretical Orientation: The ethnic habitus of Dutch Hindustanis is explored to detect cultural elements which pertain to suicidal behaviour. This group is ideally suited to demonstrate the usefulness of the concept of ethnic habitus in suicidology. This group hails from Suriname (former Dutch colony), originating in India. They differ from western culture in terms of historical background, family relationships, cultural norms and values, religion, views on death and life, and most importantly, in the prevalence of suicidal behaviour. Both scientific literature and non-scientific reports and documents are explored, as well as several cultural expressions, such as oral history, proverbs and sayings, and popular songs and films.

Findings: Four major fields are found where Hindustani ethnic habitus is conveyed: gender specific and religious socialization, cultural images, and communication.

Conclusion & Significance: Ethnic habitus renders to examine the primary and secondary socialization that consciously and unconsciously contribute to suicidal behaviour. The existing Hindustani habitus contains different embodied cultural, historical and religious attitudes and belief about suicidal behaviour, which are internalized and transferred over time as an acceptable outlet. The concept seems suitable to apply on other cultural groups as well.

Biography

Indra Boedjarath has her expertise in mental health care of migrants in Netherland. As a Psychotherapist, she runs her own psychotherapy practice and works at an institution for children's and adolescents' mental health care. She always combined her clinical work with management, among others as the former Managing Director of Mikado, the Dutch center of expertise on transcultural health care. In addition to her work as a Psychotherapist, she is as an external PhD candidate working on a research: cultural aspects of suicidal behaviour. On regularly basis, she gives lectures, provides supervision, and speaks at international conferences on various cultural and social themes within the mental health care.

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