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Breaking the Silence: Understanding Youth Suicide in Rural Pakistan through the Lens of Bhakkar District

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Abstract
Pakistan experiences a serious public health emergency concerning youth suicide, mainly in its rural areas because access to healthcare and mental health advice is limited and the subject is still stigmatized. The article studies the reasons leading to youth suicide in the Bhakkar area by talking with survivors, family members and professionals who care for their mental health. The study shows, using interviews and analysis of themes, that youth suicide has psychological, social, economic and cultural factors that should be considered. Based on the study, it is evident that culture-sensitive programs, better mental health services and community-driven prevention in rural areas are required for Pakistani people.

Keywords: Youth suicide, rural Pakistan, mental health, Bhakkar District, qualitative research, prevention strategies

Introduction
Suicide is becoming one of the biggest public health issues today, as the World Health Organization declares it is the second leading cause of death for those aged 15 to 29 globally (Al Jazeera, 2022). It gets even more serious when the data are viewed in countries where finding help for mental health is tough and there are not many resources. Because Pakistan has a population of over 220 million that includes many young people, there is a severe youth suicide crisis that requires urgent attention and more information.

This crisis in Pakistan is incredibly big and serious. Data provided by WHO through Al Jazeera (2022) estimate that 20,000 people in Pakistan took their own lives in 2019, but that number is thought to be much lower in reality due to lack of proper reporting and social shame. Each suicide is linked to about ten to twenty attempts and around a hundred others may have suicidal ideas without taking action. A major problem is that as of 2008, only 0.4 percent of the limited health budget was assigned to mental health and no more recent figures are available.

This article discusses the special situation of Bhakkar District, situated on the border of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhah, a rural part of Punjab Province in Pakistan and the contributing factors for youth suicide in that area. By closely examining what young survivors, their families and professionals go through; this study seeks to explain the various reasons why some rural Pakistani youth try suicide.

The Rural Pakistani Context: Understanding Bhakkar District
Bhakkar District mirrors some of the biggest issues in rural Pakistan. The area of Punjab Province touching with Khyber Pakhtunkhah which is mainly an agricultural area, has limited work opportunities for its residents, keeps to old family traditions and does not have much access to mental healthcare and awareness about it. Since Bhakkar differs so much from big city life, young people there face stressors that are not the same as in urban areas, so focusing on suicide in Bhakkar is necessary.

Much of the district's economy is based on farming and this makes many families particularly exposed to any changes in the economy. Because of economic instability, youth often find themselves unsure what their future will look like. Not many people can find chances for education, so youth are often expected to take on work instead of going to school. Because of these economics, young people encounter many challenges, since traditional culture adds even more duties for them.

Culture has a big impact on people's mental health in the Bhakkar District. Family honor, community reputation and following social norms are given strong importance by traditional Pakistani society. Many people hold that mental health problems reflect personal weaknesses or failures in the family which makes many hesitant to get the help they need. This cultural state causes a lot of silence about mental health, meaning young people are often cut off from help they may need.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Youth Suicide Through Multiple Lenses
Several theoretical approaches are used in this research to give a complete view of youth suicide in Bhakkar District. Durkheim's theory explains that lack of social belonging and guidance can result in suicide and Joiner's theory looks at how people's thoughts and feelings about others can lead them to consider or attempt suicide. El Zaatari and Maalouf explain that the Ecological Systems Theory can be used to see how conditions at home and in larger society affect a youth's mental health (2022). From this point of view, factors in Bhakkar District that work together can either guard against or increase the risk of suicidal behavior in young people.

The Stress-Coping Theory theory allows us to study how rural youth in Pakistan deal with different stressful situations and the results of their methods of stress management (Mu et al., 2022). It is very important to know these coping methods to develop ways to help people adapt and become stronger during challenges in life.

Methodology: Giving Voice to the Voiceless
In this study, a qualitative, interpretive method was used to describe the personal experiences of young people who survived suicide and those who were close to them (Zahle, 2021). This approach was specifically picked to focus on how rural people's real life experiences involve suicides in Pakistan.

Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) note that semi-structured interviews were central, giving participants the chance to tell their experiences as they wanted, but also helping researchers explore important subjects orderly. So that participants

could speak easily, interviews were held in Urdu and English. Interviews would last about 15 to 25 minutes and when possible, the location was one that respondents were most comfortable at.

The data was studied using the qualitative research method put forward by Creswell, using NVIVO-10 software for thematic analysis (Kettles et al., 2011). With this approach, researchers noticed similar themes in what participants shared and gained understand why youth suicide is common in their region

Because the topic was sensitive, ethics were a major focus during the research stages. Everyone participating gave informed consent, after being told that stepping out was always allowed. Anonymity and confidentiality were kept throughout; both names and any identifying details were removed from all statements. Participants could use psychological support if they felt their emotions were affected by talking about suicide.

Key Findings: The Multifaceted Nature of Youth Suicide
Academic and Educational Pressures
In the research, it was clear that many young people in Bhakkar District are put under a lot of academic pressure, as they lack industrial and other modern earning opportunities, the only tool to earn is to get educated and find a job. People taking part described being unable to fulfill educational demands that just did not fit their lives. In the city, students usually find more educational opportunities by using different modern tools and opportunities, but those in rural areas struggle to get quality teachers, learning materials and support.

Family members often expect education to be the way for their children to climb out of poverty. Many families spend a lot of money on their children's education which can add stress when the children fail to meet the family's goals. Many described that they wanted to do well, but the chances and resources to succeed were not there.

One participant explained: "I was overwhelmed of the expectations placed on me by the close relations and people around me." I was supposed to help change our family's finances through studying, but I couldn't follow what was said in school most of the time.

Economic Instability and Financial Stress
Almost all participants experienced difficulties because of challenges in managing their finances. In Bhakkar District, an agricultural economy leaves many families unsure about their fortunes because often they rely on rain and many uncertain things such as weather, what crops sell for and market changes. Many young people find it hard to support their families and reach their goals which cause them to feel conflicted.

It was found through the research that financial stress can have many levels. Family members often deal with concerns about food, security and a roof each day. More seriously, when the economy is unstable, it weakens young people's belief in their own power and hope for the future. Various participants talked about being pessimistic about ever becoming financially stable or independent.

There is a strong link between economic pressures and students' hopes for education which brings about significant distress. A lot of young people wishing to attend higher education find it impossible to choose between their studies and

helping out economically. The situation can cause people to feel guilty, frustrated and desperate which can lead to thinking about suicide.

Social Isolation and Relationship Challenges
Loneliness and isolation turned out to be main factors in youth suicide, as youth described feeling disconnected from others. The experience of being isolated is more severe in rural communities, because people depend on their networks more. Young people dealing with mental health issues often have difficulties making connections with others who have not gone through the same.

What the research found is that isolation works through a number of different mechanisms. A few participants said they became more isolated because they were embarrassed by their family's financial troubles or felt they had not done enough to succeed. Some people described feeling that their peers were able to deal with situations in life with less difficulty. The negative feeling about mental health issues adds to isolation, since young people worry about being judged if they share their problems.

When communication in a family is missing or loved ones do not understand mental health, family members may sometimes feel alone. A number of people talked about not being able to open up to their family members without feeling it would add more stress to the family.

Proportional Contribution of Factors to Youth Suicide
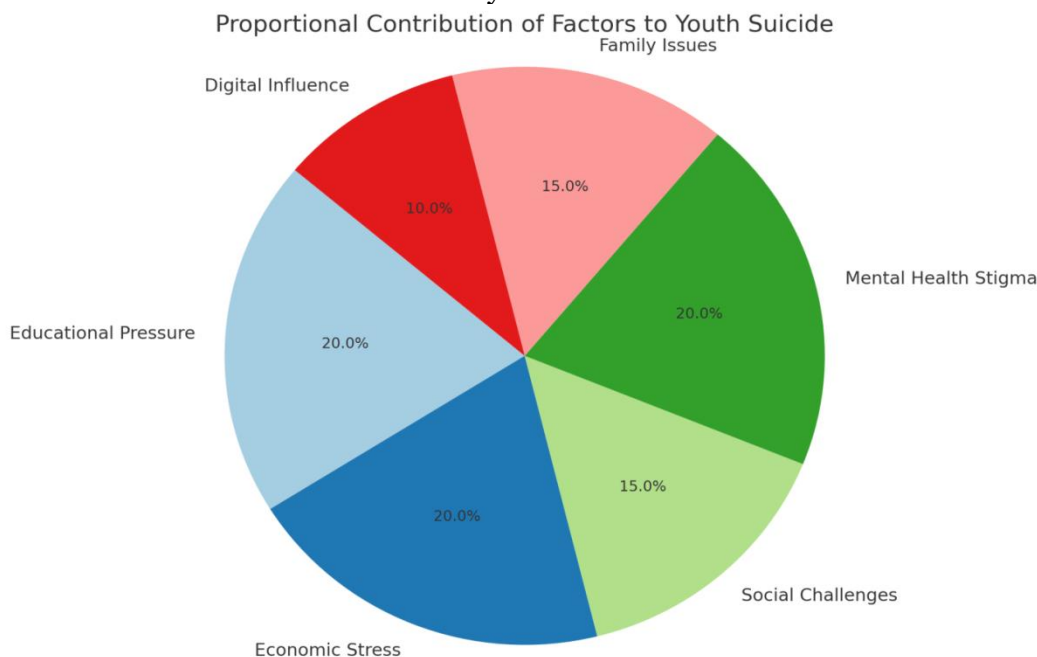
Cultural Stigma and Mental Health Taboos
Stigma about mental health made it much harder for many to get help and recover. Many in Bhakkar District and all over rural Pakistan, see mental health issues being a matter of personal weakness, faults within a family or a lack of spirituality. Since society talks little about mental health, many young people go without support or knowledge.

Many people said they worried that if their mental health issues became known, it could bring shame on their family and make them seem disturbed. Many women avoided getting help because they felt afraid. Young women suffer the most from the stigma because of extra cultural expectations surrounding their family's honor

and their chance to marry.

It was found that stigma works in different ways such as causing individuals to feel ashamed and also resulting in discrimination from communities. Individuals who have attempted suicide as youths are often dealt stigma which may slow their progress and ability to return to their communities. As a result, people who suffer a suicide attempt might end up being even more isolated.

Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Conflicts

Family connections both helped protect and created additional stress for the participants. Whilst families often help each other emotionally, they can also cause pressure, arguments and trouble in understanding one another. It was found that sometimes expressions of family care and support make the situation more stressful for young people.

Intergenerational problems were most noticeable, since younger people had to decide between keeping traditional values and achieving what they really wanted. Having their own economic and social problems, parents may not be able to give their children the help they want emotionally. When different generations have trouble understanding one another, it can cause young people to feel unreached and isolated in their family.

It was clear from research that young people are affected by their family's mental health. If someone in the family has mental health problems, young people may end up doing more than is their responsibility or feel more strain related to family life.

Expert Perspectives: Professional Insights on Youth Suicide

Experts in mental health working in the region shared useful information about what leads to suicide among youth. Dr. Sarah Ahmed, a specialist in adolescent mental health, pointed out that the main factors usually involve mental health disorders along with social isolation and the demands of school. A lot of young people become so overwhelmed that they do not know how to cope with what is happening.

Dr. A.K. Khan, a psychiatrist involved in suicide prevention, mentioned how social factors can be very important. What causes these problems is mainly peer pressure, bullying and the way families operate. Many young people feel that they cannot get out of their situations which causes them to feel hopeless.

She mentioned that the way cultures address mental health is a big challenge, saying: Many young people feel too afraid to speak out and ask for help which leads them to feel more isolated.

These experts highlight that youth suicide involves many aspects and demands approaches that cover both mental, social and cultural elements at once.

The Role of Technology and Social Media

Though technology and social media were not initially seen as main aspects, they became very important for the participants. Where traditional ways of socializing are restricted, people in rural areas might find that using social media can offer a chance to connect or place extra pressure on them.

Many people said that seeing happy or successful images on social media could bring up feelings of not being good enough. Frequent comparisons with people

from better off situations might make the situation seem worse to those already in need.

Technology could also help people, as many shared how certain websites or chat groups gave them assistance and community. Being aware of society's impact, we should include digital literacy and responsible use of social media in mental health education.

Implications for Mental Health Policy and Practice

Outcomes of this research are expected to guide mental health services and government policies in provincial districts. Since youth suicide is involved with many different issues, it needs solutions that work on personal, family, community and systemic concerns all at once.

Healthcare System Strengthening

The studies emphasize that rural areas urgently need more mental health services. Today, Bhakkar District, just like numerous rural areas in Pakistan, does not have adequate mental healthcare, qualified health staff or crisis-response plans. There needs to be community mental health services that are accessible, cheap and culturally appropriate.

If primary healthcare workers can spot and handle mental health emergencies, early intervention would be much improved. With a lack of mental health professionals, it might be useful to teach basic mental health skills to healthcare workers, teachers and members of the community.

Educational System Reforms

The stress reported by participants highlights that schools should focus more on students' health and welfare as well as their academic achievements. Examples are flexible learning spaces, help with studies and teachers provided with skills to respond when students need support emotionally.

Mental health education belongs in schools, helping students build skills to handle emotions, learn to cope and know about available help. Support programs involving students in the same school or community can lessen social isolation and bring students closer.

Community-Based Interventions

Experts point out that community action that address stigma, spread awareness of mental health and help people form social connections are very important. Working with religious leaders, elders and important community members in education programs could encourage people in the community to view mental health differently.

Offering support groups in the community might allow young people and their families to feel less alone and obtain valuable peer help. The programs should be tailored so they fit with and consider the culture and ethical practices of the community.

Economic Support and Opportunity Creation

With economic stress playing a big part in youth suicide, it is essential to help young people with poverty and provide more job opportunities for them. Other

options could be vocational classes, small loans or locally based support for small businesses that may give people different ways to get out of poverty.

Scholarships in education might help students and support programs cut down on the pressure families experience concerning costs. Young adults might benefit from the guidance of career counseling and job placement services as they face the job market after education.

Recommendations for Prevention and Intervention
Research results show several suggestions that can help to prevent youth suicide and help those at risk:

Priority Areas for Future Research and Intervention
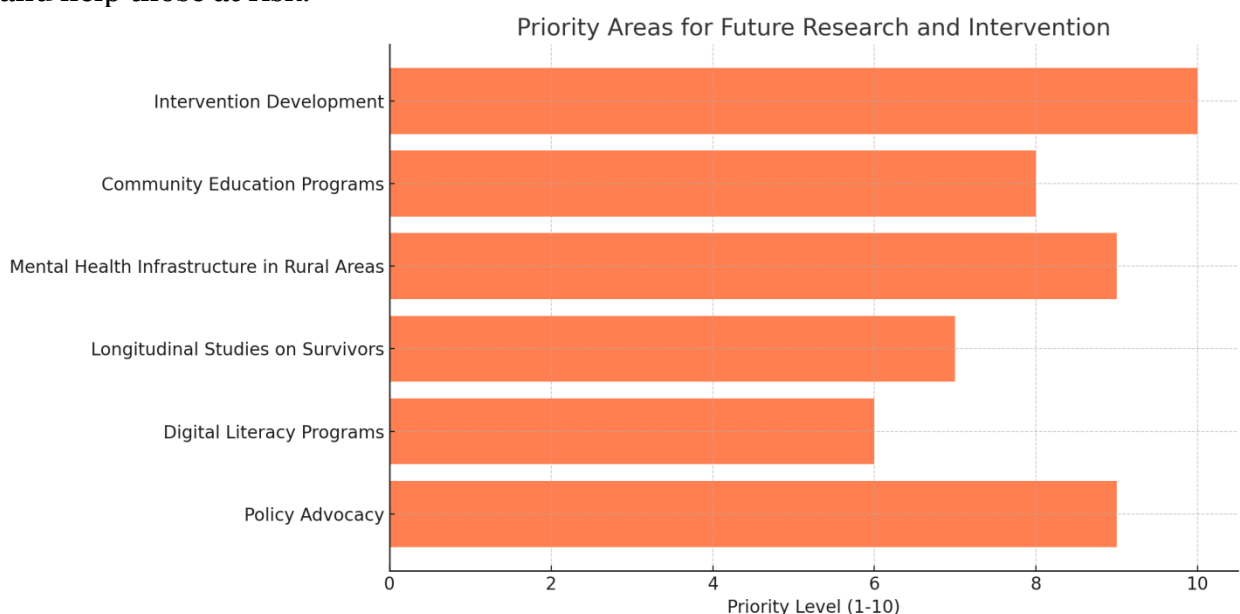
Immediate Interventions
- Crisis Hotlines: Ensure there are always trained counselors available to offer quick assistance through hotlines in the local languages.
- Crisis Management: Create clear steps for health institutions, schools and community associations to respond when someone attempts suicide or is in mental health trouble.
- Family Support Services: Help families impacted by suicide attempts through immediate support and counseling, educating them on mental health and encouraging support.

Medium-term Strategies
- Comprehensive Trainings: Develop education for teachers, healthcare workers and community leaders so they can notice warning signs and assist properly.
- Peer Support Networks: Introduce organized peer support programs to help young people meet and learn from peer counselors who have experienced mental health issues.
- Add Mental Health Services: Include mental health care in already-established healthcare, education and social programs to make it easier for people and decrease the stigma around it.

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Long-term Systemic Changes
- Advocating for new laws: Encourage making new national and provincial laws that focus on helping youth with mental health and provide the necessary money for treatments and prevention.
- Tracking and Evaluation: Create techniques to watch for changes in youth suicide statistics and review how well different prevention methods are working.
- Starting Cultural Initiatives: Start long-term projects that increase awareness and encourage people to talk freely about mental health issues.

Limitations and Future Research Directions
Despite providing useful information on youth suicide in the district, there are some shortcomings in this research. Despite providing many insights into how people feel, the qualitative design of the study means the findings cannot easily be applied to other areas or people. Participants might have been influenced by the sensitive nature of the subject to not share as much which could affect how complete the data is.

Future studies ought to study young people over time to see how suicidal thinking begins and how it progresses. Studying differences in suicide rates among rural and urban youth might help identify what puts rural youth especially at risk. Intervention research to test the success of prevention programs in rural Pakistan is particularly needed. Focusing on research about ethnic-minority youth and disabled people might shed light on their unique needs. More focus should be placed on how technology and social media impact youth mental health, especially because rural communities are now better connected.

Conclusion
Rural Pakistan is experiencing a serious and complex issue with youth suicide that urgently needs the attention and effort of everyone. Young people living in the Bhakkar District highlight how many different aspects—mental, social, economic and cultural—can work together to lead to suicidal behavior. The study highlights that community-focused, culturally appropriate ways are necessary to help prevent youth suicide by dealing with the main reasons for distress and ensuring strong resilience and support for young people. Examples would be strengthening mental health services, addressing unfairness in economics and reducing the adverse effects of culture and supporting communities that young people live in to help them succeed.

Survivors and their families in rural Pakistan give important insight into what it is like to experience mental health problems. Suicide stories point out the harm it can do to individuals and to communities and how recovery is possible if help is given. Now, dealing with youth suicide in rural Pakistan needs a continued effort from the government, healthcare groups, schools, communities and families. It will include more resources, stronger services and major changes in the understanding and treatment of mental health in Pakistan.

Like youth departments all over the world, young people here must have the chance to shape and plan for a more hopeful future. Silence about mental health, stigma and inadequate social support can cause tragic incidents. Opening up the

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discussion, challenging negative beliefs and providing thorough support may help save young lives and help the whole community thrive. Being sustainable is challenging, though it is not impossible. Making mental health care important, encouraging cultural awareness and persisting in proven practices in Pakistan would enable youth suicide to be tackled and make safeguarding mental health the norm. The stories revealed by Bhakkar District youth remind us to help those who need it and that every statistic is the sign of someone who should be supported and understood.

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