



# Content Analysis of Writings by Psychologists who have Committed Suicide

**Nimrah Ishfaq\***

*Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Pakistan*

**\*Corresponding author:** Nimrah Ishfaq, Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Pakistan

**Received:** 📅 February 17, 2020

**Published:** 📅 February 24, 2020

## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to identify emotion problems of psychologists who committed suicide through the material they have written. Convenient purposive sampling was used to identify and select the sample. Books that were freely available was preferred. Books written by Silberer [1] and Gardner [2] were chosen as sample, both of them belonged to different time frame and school of thoughts. Key word analysis along with interpretive content analysis was used to identify emotional problems expressed by these authors in the written content. Subjective knowledge was coded as neutral, only opinion-based line were coded. Key word analysis showed more prevalence of positive words and mild feeling words in the content. Interpretive content analysis showed the presence of psychological issues like depression, anxiety, anger, frustration, guilt, grief, uncertainty, high self-esteem, and stress. Common patterns emerged were extreme point of view in generic conduct of society or in overall opinion, distrust on peer's opinion, self-contradiction and internal conflicts. Content analysis also linked their own way of committing suicide to the content written in their writings. Implication of the study is to highlight the importance of addressing mental health issues among psychologists.

## Introduction

### Background

Suicide is legally defined as an intentional act of self-destruction committed by someone who is aware of what he is doing and what consequences of his/her act will occur [3]. Other than socio-economic status, major reasons of suicide include medical conditions, hopelessness, intelligent, less religious affiliation, lack of social support and belongingness, etc. Psychologists are among those professionals who provide professional guidelines and services about ways to handle such adverse mental issues. Psychologists are not immune to some mental problems, including suicidality, for which they provide services.

Psychologists are professionally bound to heal, develop and maintain a healthy and fully functional society. Personal and professional lives of psychologists require great strength, patience, sacrifices, and stability as compared to other professions. The pressures of routine life do effect psychologists as well but committing actions like suicide is both ironic and warning sign for this profession. Impact of a psychologist's suicide can affect a wide range of different people including family, colleagues, students and patients or clients [4].

### Objectives

- To measure frequency of positive, negative and feelings related words used in the content written by psychologists who have committed suicide.
- To identify emotional problems through their piece of writings.
- To explore problematic patterns through their piece of writings.

### Hypotheses

- Content of the writings will show high use of intense feelings and negative words.
- Content of the writings will show disruptive pattern of writing.

### Methods

#### Sample

Purposive sampling was used to select two books written by two renowned psychologists. Books chosen as sample were

named as “Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult [1] and “Psychotherapy of Antisocial Behavior and Depression in Adolescence” [1]. Inclusion criteria for the current study sample was psychologist who have committed suicide and have written book on any topic which involve opinion expression and subjective interpretation. Criteria matched in these two books also included the reflection of their suicide method in their writings. Difference between these books was based on approach used, geographical difference of the writer’s origin and format/pattern of writing the content of the book.

**Instruments**

**Positive Words List:** This list of ‘Bob Hitching’s positive words’ is from Competitors Journal (a magazine which ceased publication some years ago) - received a copy from Cypry, via the uk.rec.competitions newsgroup. This list contains total 423 words which includes 59 phrases (more than 1 word).

**Negative Words List:** This is a list of negative human traits that was taken from The Dark Side of the Light Chasers written by Debbie Ford (New York: 1998), pp 69-70. This list contains total 216 words which includes 21 phrases (more than 1 word).

**Feelings Word List:** This list gives full range of words of feeling on a continuum from intense positive to intense negative feelings. In this list total words representing the Positive feelings are 87 words which includes: Intense: 14; Strong: 25; Moderate: 25; Mild: 23. In this list total words representing the Negative feelings are 114 words which includes: Intense: 29; Strong: 31; Moderate: 30; Mild: 24.

**Procedure**

Psychologists who have committed suicide were identified through internet research and their books were search according to the objectives. Books of two psychologists were selected due to purpose and convenience of the study based on availability of books in short time. Study was divided into three phases: key word analysis, objective and subjective content analysis. Books were initially converted into word form by using online converters. Keyword analysis was carried out by using word count in Microsoft word. Content analysis was done by using coding methods, before assigning codes emotional problems manifested in the writings of psychologists, each concept was operationally defined. Emotional symptoms included in the present study was based on the

**Table 1.1:** Key word Analysis of Feeling Words in the Writings. Note. Book I = Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult; Book II= Psychotherapy of Antisocial Behavior and Depression in Adolescence.

	Positive Feelings Words (f)		Negative Feelings Words (f)		Total (f)	
	Book I	Book II	Book I	Book II	Book I	Book II
Mild	240	25	16	47	256	72
Moderate	259	125	52	140	311	265
Strong	142	269	73	15	215	284
Intense	179	86	45	19	224	105

content. Both books reflect emotional symptoms as anger, anxiety, depression, frustration, grief, guilt, lack of confidence/uncertainty, and self-esteem. Emotional symptoms can be positive or negative and can come from within you or be a reaction to your environment. Emotional changes can be normal, temporary responses to events; however, disproportionate, extreme, persistent or unstable emotional reactions may indicate an underlying disorder.

The emotional problems or symptoms were coded as:

- a. Anger – represented as opposition or harshness
- b. Anxiety – represented as fear of future or restlessness
- c. Depression – hopelessness or down
- d. Frustration – hurdle or helplessness
- e. Grief – loss or sadness
- f. Guilt – sense of right or wrong
- g. Lack of confidence – unsurety or uncertainty
- h. Self-esteem – evaluation of self-capacities
- i. Stress – pressure or emphasis (in a do or die manner)

Critical analysis was done to consider the pattern of writing and trait of psychologist depicted in the content in form of emotional or fluctuating statements.

**Results**

Results of Table-1 showed that number of positive words is greater as compared to negative words. Thus, our first hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 1:** Key word Analysis of Positive and Negative Words in the Writings. Note. Book I = Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult; Book II= Psychotherapy of Antisocial Behavior and Depression in Adolescence.

Words	Frequencies (f)	
	Book I	Book II
Positive words	34662	14280
Negative words	2737	2765

Results of Table 1.1 showed that frequency of intense feeling words is less than other categories. Hence our hypothesis is rejected.



Results of Table 2 showed that there is presence of emotional problems in writing of psychologist who have committed suicide.

**Table 2:** Frequency of Emotional Problems Observed in the Writings. Note. Book I = Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult; Book II= Psychotherapy of Antisocial Behavior and Depression in Adolescence.

Emotional Problems	Coded Frequency (f)	
	Book I	Book II
Anger	30	44
Anxiety	60	16
Depression	1	28
Frustration	70	72
Grief	9	16
Guilt	3	3
Lack of confidence	1	8
High Self esteem	141	40
Stress	42	45
Total	357	272
Neutral	653	135

Results of Table 3 showed disruptive pattern of writing. Thus, our second hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 3:** Patterns observed in the Writings. Note. Book I = Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult; Book II= Psychotherapy of Antisocial Behavior and Depression in Adolescence.

Patterns Emerged	
Book I	Book II
Emphasis on self-knowledge and morality	Importance of family
Integration of various subjects	Unsystematic approach
Concern about the betterment of society	Criticism on society
Use of vague language	Relevancy with the suicide method used
Over exaggeration	Judgmental and one-sidedness
High self-ranking	Biasness
Contradiction and conflict	Hopelessness
Extremism	Contradiction
Relevancy with the suicide method used	Frustration and mistrust
Transformation	Ironic tone used

## Conclusion

This qualitative research was planned to identify the emotional problems of psychologists who committed suicide. Key word analysis showed that there was less use of negative words as compared to positive words and mild/moderate feeling words were used more as compared to intense feeling words. Results showed that emotional problems like anger, anxiety, depression, frustration, grief, self-esteem, and stress were found in the content of those psychologists. Common patterns emerged in both writings were extremism, distrust on peer’s opinion, contradiction and conflicts. Content analysis also indicated material linked to their way of committing suicide. Implication of the study was to highlight the need to address and develop some plans to stabilize mental health of psychologists.

## Limitations and Suggestions

- Sample size is small for generalization. More data is needed to confirm the findings.
- To see the impact of subject specifically, a comparative study should be done.
- One book is a translated version so, it was one of the major limitations.
- Availability and cost of material was the main constraint along with time.

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DOI: [10.32474/JCCM.2020.01.000121](https://doi.org/10.32474/JCCM.2020.01.000121)



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