

Deadline: A Novella Exploring the Causes, Inhibitors, and Recovery of Suicidal Ideation

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ABSTRACT

The topic of suicide has been prominent through human history and the numbers of people committing suicide have gone up over the years. Suicide is driven by what is called suicidal ideation which can be caused by diverse and complex reasons. With this in mind, we want to bring up suicidal ideation as a topic for our creative work in the form of a novella. To ground this topic more for this creative thesis, we are using the Three Step Theory of Suicide (2015) by E. David Klonsky and Alexis M. May to explain the cause and inhibitor of suicidal ideation, along with Re-Vitalizing Worthiness in Overcoming Suicidality Theory (2011) by Evelyn Gordon, John R. Cutcliff, and Chris Stevenson to explain the recovery of suicidal ideation. This creative work in the genre of psychological thriller will explore the main character's cause of suicidal ideation which is from her pain as a childhood breadwinner and her guilt as an assassin. She inhibited her attempt out of the connection that she had with her family. In the end, she chose to overcome that ideation by surviving a crisis, getting to the point of no return, and accepting help to earn her life.

Keywords: novella, psychological thriller, suicidal ideation, suicide

INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines the creative process behind a novella that focuses on suicidal ideation—specifically its causes, inhibitors, and ultimate recovery. Suicide is an act of taking one's own life. Suicide has been a prevailing event amongst the world and has increased its cases over the years in some places. World Health Organization (2021) said that suicide is the third leading cause of death especially among 15–29-year-olds globally in 2021. Suicide is an important topic to touch on in hope of bringing awareness to the topic since it is incredibly prominent today. Since this creative work will be set in Indonesia, it is also important to consider data from said country about suicide. According to data from Pusiknas Bareskim Polri (2025), there are 1,270 suicide cases recorded in Indonesia from 7 November 2025 with an approximate of 100 cases per month, which touches the importance of discussing this topic.

People in many cases who have taken their life have experienced suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation is a thought that someone might have to commit suicide, and as stated by Liu et al (2020) “ranges in severity from passive ideation (i.e., a desire to be dead) to active ideation (i.e., a desire to kill oneself)” (p.367). Ideation would require an great deal of help to prevent suicide from happening. Besides this, there are many factors that come to play in terms of suicidal ideation. Turecki et al. (2019) mentioned that some of the risk factors that play a part in someone considering suicide are: biological which includes genetic, psychological which includes personality traits, clinical which includes psychiatric illness, and social as well as environmental factors. Some environmental factors include cultural effects and surroundings. For example, in Indonesia, Hartini et al (2018) mentioned that there is a lot of stigmas in the community surrounding mental health. This stigmatization could negatively impact the people who are suffering from mental illness, and this could include people who have suicidal ideation, either a moderate amount or a strong amount. With condemnation, this may lead to one of the factors in someone committing suicide. The complexity of the factors made suicidal ideation an important topic to talk about for both suicide recovery and prevention.

In terms of bringing up a serious topic about suicide and making sure Carmen's, who is the main character, journey is paced well, this creative work will be written in the form of a novella. Novella

has a word count of 17,500-40,000 words which is a moderate amount of word count to convey a critical topic. It can also make the characters not appear flat since there are many characters in the story. On the contrary, it can make the main character's goal not too drawn out so that the tension of it will not disappear.

Aside from the medium, it is important to make sure that the genre fits the story and its intentions, which is why we chose to use the genre of psychological thriller for our creative work. Psychological thriller, as mentioned by Mecholsky (2014), is also "defined by their ability to maintain suspense" (p.9). It is a genre of literature that delves into the depth of the character's complex mental and emotional state, often emphasizing in their perceptions, thoughts, and even blurred lines of reality. With the psychological elements of the genre, we want to show the character's thoughts and feelings, and to show how the character spirals from suicidal ideation to attempting. With the thriller aspect, we want to show the importance of the theme by showing how the main character who has suicidal ideation thinks or acts while facing external situation and what drives them to do things the way they do.

With this creative work, there will be three questions that the story will focus on; why Carmen considers suicide a viable option, why Carmen continues to inhibit her attempt, and how Carmen ultimately overcomes her suicidal ideation. The main theory used for this creative work for supporting the first and second statement is three step theory of suicide, or usually called the 3ST, by E. David Klonsky and Alexis M. May in 2015. The three steps are based on three factors; development of suicidal ideation, strong versus moderate ideation, and progression from ideation to attempts. The first step includes pain and hopelessness as factors. Klonsky & May (2015) had stated that pain without hopelessness would not result in suicidal ideation, but the opposite will result in suicidal ideation. The second step includes connectedness to decide whether a person will have strong or moderate ideation. Connectedness in this case, as explained by Klonsky and May (2015), is "one's attachment to a job, project, role, interest, or any sense of perceived purpose or meaning that keeps one invested in living" (p. 117). If pain and hopelessness is paired with the loss of connectedness, it will result in strong ideation instead of moderate ideation. The last step includes the capability of suicide which Klonsky & May divided into dispositional, acquired, and practical capability. This element will decide whether the ideation will transform into an attempt or not. The theory applies to the main character as her guilt from being an assassin and pain from being the main provider can be represented as both pain and hopelessness, her connectedness to her family became her inhibition to attempt suicide, and her job of being an assassin increases her capability of suicide.

Other than that, we also included a supporting theory to answer the third statement which relates to recovery. We chose to use Re-Vitalizing Worthiness in Overcoming Suicidality by Evelyn Gordon, John R. Cutcliff, and Chris Stevenson. Suicide recovery. The theory as mentioned by Gordon et al (2011) is "rather than concealing their suicidal selves, they begin to accept this as part of who they are and to do so in a way that allows them to occupy themselves with living rather than dying" (p. 26). It shows that recovery is not instant, but it takes process. To get to the point of acceptance, a person would go through a transitional period from confronting a crisis of destiny to the stage of earning a life. Gordon et al also mentioned that the stage of confronting a crisis of destiny could be divided into two; living the crisis and reaching a point of no return. Living the crisis meant that the person isolates themselves from everyone due to their guilt, shame, and unworthiness. Reaching to the point of no return happens when they realize they cannot live with the in-between period of life and death so they must choose between the two. Once they get to the point of no return, that person may get to the stage of earning their life. This process involves the process of realizing their worthiness and enacting a new worthy identity. In the novella, Carmen went through the process of isolating herself from her siblings and her guardian for eight months, realizing that she could not just neglect herself and the situation around her forever while her siblings moved on, and she earned her life by pouring her feelings into the journal and letting her family back in to help.

The story of our creative work includes a 21-year-old assassin, who was the breadwinner of her family, planned to take her own life but ended up delaying it because of her dysfunctional family that could not take care of themselves without her. She planned to resolve all the remaining ties that had

been holding her down from death so she could die without worrying about them, yet she found herself in deeper trenches from the danger of her job as well as her family life.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The theme of our creative work is that suicidal ideation does not come from one single problem and does not have an instant fix. This theme is applied in how Carmen was struggling with a lot of things in her life such as providing for her family from a very young age, taking care of her four siblings and her mother, the guilt of being an assassin, and the spy following her later during the story. It shows that suicidal ideation does not happen from one single event which causes someone extreme distress. It happens when many different factors get piled up together such as pain, hopelessness, and lack of connectedness. Even after she decided to live after attempting suicide, the recovery process was slow as she went through process of living through the crisis by neglecting herself and others, getting to the point where she could not live distancing herself from her family, and starting to earn her life by being more open with her emotions.

Plot

Following the theme, our plot will focus on Carmen, who is the main character, dealing with her psychological stress consuming her everyday life. It started with Carmen doing her job as an assassin, eliminating her target. She then headed home to her family, followed by the reveal of her messy home life. Her siblings fought a lot, and her mother was neglectful as well as abusive. When she went in her room, the story revealed Carmen's suicide deadline and her checklist of things to do before she took her own life, which were saving up for her brothers' future, finding a better guardian for her brothers, and doing a final hit.

It continued with the appearance of a spy who followed her after she failed a hit. Carmen worked on her checklist while the spy haunted her, making her doubt if they were real or just in her head. She often had a talk with Jazz, who is the boss for the cafe Carmen worked at, to help her out because she needed a place to store the money for her brothers and to take care of her brothers if anything happened to her. Meanwhile, it all escalated after the spy finished her work in a hit she couldn't complete, making them a genuine problem. Since that day, Carmen had tried to investigate who the spy could be, suspecting her brothers, her co-worker, and her handler. Carmen's suspicion started with her brother Joseph who had ties with the organization Carmen worked in, her brother Matthew who had installed a hidden camera in her room, and her co-worker Andi who kept watching her while never taking off her earphones. Even when Carmen kept crossing off more items in her list, new ones would pop up such as making sure Joseph is free from the organization and helping her alcoholic mother to get into rehab after she admitted she was pregnant again.

Carmen's D-day was up and when she performed her final hit, the spy showed up before she could end her own life. They chased Carmen to the beach where she found Matthew and Lucia who tried to get her home only to find Martin who offered her a choice to kill Joseph, Matthew, and Lucia in return for leaving Leo and Jack alone. Carmen decided to kill Martin after wrestling with her own mind. The spy was then revealed to be Carmen herself.

In the last chapter, there was a time skip to eight months after the incident and Carmen had isolated herself. She then realized that even without sacrificing herself, her brothers, with Jazz being their new guardians, had managed to take care of themselves. They helped her out to focus on her well-being and Carmen ended up writing her thoughts and journey in the journal Matthew gave her. Carmen and her brothers visited their mother's grave with their new baby sister, Sofia, who survived the shooting. The story ended with Carmen deflecting a bullet from hitting her brother Jack, as she had found her reason for continuing living.

Characters

Main character:

- Carmen

Age: 21 years old

Carmen is the oldest child of her 4 siblings. She worked as an assassin to provide for her family. She was the main breadwinner of her family and always had to take care of her 4 younger siblings as well as her alcoholic single mother. She had carried this responsibility ever since she was 6. Carmen is hard-working, caring, and responsible as a person. She held responsibility as her core virtue, and she played the role of a provider and a protector for her family. Her virtue of being caring and responsible can often be a double-edged sword as she also has low self-esteem and self-worth, is stubborn, and has high skepticism. This can be seen from how she put her family's needs first even when she was struggling with her own problems. Her being stubborn and sceptic made it harder for her to open with her family about her problems and kept it to herself, as it can be seen from how she investigated her own family due to her paranoia. Her core emotion is mostly paranoia and tiredness even though she had her moments of happiness. Even with her occupation as an assassin, she has a boundary that she will never cross, such as taking jobs that require her to kill children, which she ended up having to do but refused to do. Her worldview revolves around her family as she will put them first above all and will do almost everything for them. Her main goal in the story was to make sure her family can survive without her, mainly her siblings, before she ultimately killed herself in a month. She struggled with PTSD, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Side characters:

- Lucia

Age: 37

Lucia is Carmen's mother and a mother of 5 kids. She was adventurous and had a fiery spirit for new things, until she started having kids. She never intended to have Carmen but kept her because Carmen's father stayed. But after he left her, Lucia started to spiral out and lost herself in alcohol addiction. She dated many men and got pregnant with their kids, but none stayed with her, which led to her taking out her frustration on her kids. She did not work anymore and let Carmen take care of her debts and her children while stealing her money for alcohol. Her day is mostly filled with drowning herself in alcohol, watching soap operas, and going to bars because she wanted to fill that hole in her heart. She eventually got pregnant with her final child which led to her opening to Carmen and showing regret for how she had been a terrible mother..

- Matthew

Age: 17

Matthew is Carmen's younger brother and is the second oldest amongst the siblings. He idolizes Carmen and wants to become independent one day. He is attentive and responsible, but he is also hot-headed, especially when it comes to Lucia. Matthew often helps Carmen take care of the other siblings, but he picks fights with his mother whenever she insults or blames either him, Carmen, or his other siblings. Matthew also has suspicions of what Carmen does for work although Carmen always deflects it whenever he tries to talk to her about it.

- Joseph

Age: 15

Joseph is Carmen's younger brother and is the third oldest amongst the siblings. He is very distant and was barely home. He skipped school and did not have the best grade. He would always be out as an errand boy, dealing with drugs for the people who had ties with Carmen's

organization she worked at. He suspected Carmen but mostly he stayed away from her, afraid she would catch up to his secret. He used to be Lucia's punching bag (often verbally, sometimes physically) before he stopped staying in the house.

Leo

Age: 8

Leo is Carmen's younger brother and is the fourth oldest amongst the siblings. He is the troublemaker and often fights with Jack. He is often picky with food and would not eat if it is not something he likes. Leo admired Carmen but he usually does not express it a lot unless it is something meaningful to him. Leo is oblivious to Carmen's work and is distant from Lucia.

- Jack

Age: 6

Jack is Carmen's younger brother and is the youngest amongst the siblings (not counting the one Lucia is pregnant with). Jack is a crybaby and a snitch. However, he is quick to forgive and forget whenever Leo picks on him. Jack is clingy to Carmen and would snitch on Leo to her all the time. Jack did not know about Carmen's work and would talk to Lucia from time to time only for Lucia to ignore him.

- Martin (Stingray)

Age: 32

Martin is Carmen's handler in the assassination organisation she worked at. His assassin alias is Stingray, and he has been overseeing Carmen since she was 14. He is cold and distant as a seasoned assassin. Jacques is the one who gives Carmen her mission of who she is supposed to kill. He does care about Carmen but keeps his distance from her as he plays the role of only a mentor, not a friend.

- Lisa "Jazz" Setiawan

Age: 35

Jazz is the owner of the cafe Carmen worked in, Deja Brew. She cared about her employee, especially Carmen, since Carmen had told her vaguely about her situation. She had a dog at home, no known spouse in the story after she divorced her husband 6 years ago. She offered to be Carmen's guardian and her brothers' guardians.

- Andika (Andi)

Age: 21

Andi is a dropout college student and Carmen's co-worker. She had worked at Deja Brew longer than Carmen. She first worked part-timer but became a full-timer after she dropped out of college. She is sarcastic, teases Carmen a lot, and is an observant person. She cared about Carmen even though she did not always show it. She might also harbor romantic feelings towards Carmen.

Conflicts

The type of conflict in this creative work will have the Man vs Self conflict. According to Wijayanti and Laba (2020), this conflict refers to "a battle that occurs in the mind of a character due to different desires or choices" (p. 35). This type of conflict is used for our creative work because we want to show how the main character struggles from her own manifestation of threat that came from the stress, her guilt, and the willingness to escape from her struggle. This threat became an imaginary spy that Carmen hallucinated.

Other than conflict with self, we also incorporate Man vs Man conflict. Folarin (2013) stated that this type of conflict is between two people or a fight between people. It is not always a physical fight as what matters is that there is hostility between both parties. This creative work is using Man vs Man or interpersonal conflict because we want to add another person that disagrees with the main character and fights against her rather than just her own mind. In this case, this villain turned out to be Martin that had been present as Carmen's handler and betraying her at the climax. The two conflicts seemed separate at first, but they converge in the climax as seen from Carmen's spy driving her to do what Martin ordered her to do, which was to assassinate her own family.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the novella *Deadline* that we have written as a part of this creative thesis has answered the statement and the purpose of the creative work by portraying the causes, inhibitors, and recovery of suicidal ideation. This is shown from how the main character went through conflicts that incorporate the causes and inhibitors, as well as resolution which incorporates the recovery.

The cause is exhibited through Carmen's pain from being the breadwinner and caretaker of her family and her guilt of being an assassin. These factors add to her suicidal ideation; however, pain needs to be paired with hopelessness for an ideation to take shape. Her hopelessness comes from her feeling of unworthiness of being with her family due to the blood in her hands which caused her to think that the only way to end her pain was to take herself away with it.

On the contrary, a person may inhibit these ideations due to the connectedness factor. Carmen exhibited connectedness from her relationship with her family which acted as the main inhibitor and caused her to delay her suicide attempt. She saw that her family could not live without her help. This factor kept her anchored with her desire to live, which disappeared at the end after she completed her list since she saw that her family's fate was secured and did not need her anymore.

Finally, at the end of the story, Carmen went through the stage of recovery after attempting suicide. Recovery can be divided into confronting the crisis of destiny and earning a life. At the stage of confronting the crisis, Carmen chose to isolate and neglect herself as an aspect of living with the crisis and reached the point of no return by noticing she could not live like this forever both for herself and her siblings. After this stage, she reached the stage of earning a life where she accepted help from her brothers and Jazz. She chose to write a journal for her thoughts which marked her change of identity.

With this creative work, we hope to spread awareness in terms of suicidal ideation so people suffering with one will hopefully see that they are not alone and with a hopeful ending to the story, they might see that things could get better for them. It would also hopefully reduce stigma about suicidal ideation so it could be helpful for both people with suicidal ideation and ones without.

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