



Syntactic and Demographic Analysis of Suicide Notes in Greater Mumbai

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Abstract— *The present article deals with the syntactic and demographic analysis of forty genuine suicide notes collected from the greater Mumbai region. The research aims to measure grammatical and lexical choices and carry out demographic analysis of suicide notes. The primary data of forty suicide notes is collected from different session courts in the Greater Mumbai region. The notes have been anonymized to ensure privacy. An analytical model based on linguistic theories was prepared for syntactic analysis. The suicide victims exhibit certain syntactical choices under emotional load. The demographic outcomes will help to understand the problems faced by the urban population and will help the Government to recommend policies. The noted observations can be used for systematic analysis of suicide notes.*



Keywords— *Suicide notes, syntactic analysis, demographic features, analytical model*

I. INTRODUCTION

The present article deals with the linguistic and demographic study of suicide notes. A suicide note or death note is a message left behind by a person who has committed suicide or who wants to commit suicide. Suicide puts emotional and financial burdens, including healthcare costs, on people and society. Every year, eight lakh people commit suicide worldwide. Nearly 25-30% of suicides are accompanied by a note.

The Government of India classifies death as suicide if the death is unnatural, the person decides to end his or her life and there is a reason for him or her to end life. There might be reasons mentioned in the note. In India, the common methods to commit suicide are poisoning (33%), hanging (26%), and self-immolation (9%). It was illegal in India and the survivor would face a jail term of up to one year and a fine under section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. The Mental Health Care Act 2017 negated laws of Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code and stated that attempting suicide is not a crime and the Government of India decided to repeal the law in 2014. Most of the suicide cases are registered under section 306, abetment to suicide, of the Indian Penal Code.

The person attempting suicide is believed to be under a lot of stress and does not warrant punishment.

The rate of suicide per one lakh population has increased to 12.4 in 2022, which is the highest rate of deaths from suicides since 1967, which is the earliest recorded year for this data. Suicides during 2022 increased by 27% in comparison to 2018, with India reporting the highest number of suicides in the world. Suicide is a significant public health concern. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics showed a consistent, concerning rise in suicide rates from 9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh population in 2022.

Significance of the Research

The present research includes quantitative and qualitative analysis of forty suicide notes. The

results obtained through the study can be useful in the investigation of the content of the suicide note. The research theories in applied linguistics formed the basis of the analysis. The noted features can be considered parameters for the analysis of genuine suicide notes.

Aims and Objectives of Research

To study theoretical aspects pertaining to applied linguistics in detail.

To assess grammatical intricacy and syntactic complexity in suicide notes.

To represent the data through demographic analysis.

To measure grammatical and lexical choices in selected suicide notes.

Data Collection

The data for the present research has been collected from various sources under the following two headings.

A. Primary Data: The primary data of forty suicide notes is collected from different session courts in the Greater Mumbai region.

B. Secondary Data: The secondary data is collected from various sources like research books, national and international journals, research articles, encyclopedias, research dissertations, and internet resources.

II. METHODS

The suicide notes are collected from the Greater Mumbai region. The judgment copies of section 306 of the Indian penal code are uploaded by each session court. It gives clues about the presence of suicide notes in a particular case. Such cases were noted down, and an application was filed with an affidavit for each case separately in these respective courts. The court issued photocopies of suicide notes.

The notes are anonymized to assure privacy. The affidavit has been submitted to the court to hide the victim's identity in the research work. The research is purely to study the linguistic analysis of the content in the suicide notes. The collected suicide notes are classified into different classes considering the aspects like age, gender, education, marital status and socio-economic status of the suicide victim. The linguistic theory and parameters like grammatical and lexical choices, syntax, spelling, hyphenation, word breaks, and punctuation have been considered for analysis.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

N. Shneidman and Norman Farberow (1957) published a book entitled 'Clues to Suicide' where 66 suicide notes were analyzed, of which 33 were genuine and 33 were simulated. Most suicide notes have been dealt with from psychological, psychiatric and sociological perspectives. The simulated notes were obtained from non-suicidal individuals. They used the method called –Discomfort Relief Quotient (DRQ). This study was a discourse-based

analysis of selected suicide notes. The study proved that genuine suicide notes contain more thoughts and ideas than simulated ones. Osgood and Walker (1959) compared suicide notes with ordinary letters using 16 measures derived from four hypotheses. They also applied the CLOZE TECHNIQUE method to the 20 suicide notes by blanking out every fifth word in 20 suicide notes as well as the same number of ordinary letters to check whether subjects could guess correctly what the missing words were. Gottschalk and Gleser (1960) were psychiatrists. They performed word-type frequency analysis on Shneidman's 33-33 notes. Each word was categorized using traditional grammatical and psychological categories. They used two types of tests. The first test was assigning (+, -) signs to individual results and counting all signs. The second was a median test. In this test, results were put in numerical order and the middle result was selected. This result proved that simulated suicide notes contain fewer words than genuine suicide notes. Ogiliv, Stone and Shneidman (1966) applied computer analysis to Shneidman's 66 notes using General Inquirer Software with a psychosociological dictionary. The approach was content-based analysis, which is now called semantic tagging. Their use of computer software for semantic tagging was a major step forward for the research in linguistics. The research proved that genuine notes are more specific and concrete. Shneidman (1979) considered logical style and language characteristics, including computer counts of key 'tag words'. Edelman and Renshaw (1982) reviewed Osgood and Walker, Gottschalk and Gleser Ogiliv, Stone and Shneidman. They tried to pull together all their categories as they wanted to use a united theory of discourse analysis of the suicide notes. They employed a computer for the analysis of Shneidman's 66 paired notes. The software was "syntactic language computer analysis version III (SLCA-III). Antoon Leenaars (1988), the Canadian psychologist, derived 10 protocol sentences that are potential content of suicide notes and matched with Shneidman's 33 pairs of genuine and simulated notes. He made categories based on situation, relationship, emotional state, cognitive state and ego. Adam Gregory (1999), the author of suicide notes, wanted to create a statistical model that would combine all the variables. He took Shneidman's 66 notes and 18 genuine notes for his research. He considered average sentence length and the percentage of nouns, verbs, and cognitive process verbs for his research.

Chaski (2001) used three groups- of techniques: syntactically classified punctuations, syntactic analysis of phrase structure, sentential complexity, vocabulary richness, readability and content analysis and forensic stylistic techniques for analysis. Corney (2003) employed stylometric techniques such as style markers for analyzing

suicide notes. He stated that each author has his own stylistic habits in choosing and using words, phrases and structure. Zheng (2006) developed a framework based on four types of writing style features- lexical, syntactic, structural, and content-specific. P. Matykiewics. W. Duch. J. Pestian (2009) calculated variables extracted using software like linguistic inquiry and word count version. John Pestian, Henry Nasrallah, Pawel Matykiewics (2010) used Shneidman's 66 notes. The groups of suicide notes were matched by gender, race, religion, nationality, and age. They used spelling, structure, tagging, and readability, parsing algorithms to extract and quantify the relevant content features. Robers Kirk, Harabagiu and Sanda M. (2012) identified lexical indicators to classify notes. At the same time, John Pestian, Mawel Matykiewics and Michelle Linn (2012) involved the assignment of emotions to suicide notes. They used the micro and macro averaging method and linguistic inquiry and word count 2007 software for the research. Carpenter (2016) explored the characteristics of suicide notes. According to research, females are less likely to leave a suicide note and those with a diagnosed mental illness are less likely to leave notes. Abaalkhail, Atekah (2020) did an Investigation of Suicide Notes: An ESP Genre Analysis. The findings suggest that suicide notes share common communicative purposes and rhetorical structure, and, therefore, constitute a genre from the ESP perspective. By examining the rhetorical structure of suicide notes, this study proposes a model of suicide note structure, the moves writers use and suggests that suicide notes do constitute a genre without a visible discourse community. Massimo Stella (2022) dealt with 'Cognitive networks detecting structural patterns and emotional complexity in suicide notes' and demonstrated that results demonstrate that suicide notes possess highly structured and contrastive narratives of emotions, more complex than expected by null models and healthy populations.

Zaško-Zielińska, M. (2022) did the linguistic analysis of suicide notes to test the authenticity of the text focusing on genre theory and its relevance for the examination of the suicide note and its generic features, as well as on the concept of idiolect.

Lester, David & Fekete (2023) compared the content of 113 suicide notes. The content analysis examined formal, syntactic and grammatical characteristics, as well as speech patterns and verbal expressions. The suicide notes, therefore, had more indications of irrational thinking, characterized by high scores for emotional categories, frequent negation, absolutistic words, high self-preoccupation and a tendency toward polarized thinking.

Campos RC and et.al (2024) did An Exploratory Study in the Portuguese Population on Writing a Suicide Note:

Correlates in the Suicide Spectrum and Qualitative Analysis. The findings of the qualitative study suggest that individuals who have written suicide notes exhibit a significant self-oriented focus, yet they also demonstrate a strong sense of concern for the survivors.

Syntax

Syntax examines words in longer sequences such as phrases, clauses and sentences. The syntax focuses on the inner grammatical organization of sentences. In a sentence, each word can be separated and symbolized. Every listener or reader interprets it, or a linguist defines it as phrases like noun phrases and verb phrases which are universal. The speakers and writers quickly cultivate the ability to build grammatical and suitable syntactic structures, and they build utterances that clarify sentences. Linguists develop means to perceive and understand the language acquisition, analysis and clarify the usage in speakers and writers.

The grammatical structures can be assessed at the sentence level and their unified structures. It is challenging to choose the order and organization of all elements in the sentence to match its speakers' and writers' intended meaning. The basic phrase structure of the English sentence comprises a noun phrase, auxiliary verb and verb phrase. The sentences are made up of words and phrases that can be categorized into grammatical sets that relate to time, situation and place.

1. Person- first (I/we), second (you), third (he/she/ it/they)
2. Number- singular and plural of nouns and pronouns.
3. Gender- he or she
4. Case- subject (I, he, she, we, they) or object (me, him, her, us them)
5. Tense- past, present and future that relate, the time of action to the time of the utterance
6. Mood- the marking modal verbs (may, might, can, could, could, could, will, would, shall, should, must)

The speaker's wishes, intentions, necessities, obligations, certainty and possibilities.

7. Aspect- English verbs related to perfect action (completed), progressive action (not completed) and static verbs (know, understand, hate, love)

The familiar grammatical types are the lexical parts of speech, they are – nouns, verbs, adjectives

and adverbs. The other grammatical words bind the content words together, they are- prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns and interjections. The third kind of grammatical category has grammatical features that display their functions in the sentence, predicates, complements, adverbial of time, place, manner, transitive, intransitive and reflexive verbs, the verb to be (existential, possessive,

locative), auxiliary verbs and active and passive voice of sentences.

Syntactic Analysis

The syntactic analysis includes the identification of phrases and clauses in the content. The sentences are classified as simple, compound and complex. The sentence types like declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory are considered. The words are categorized as open class including nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The closed class covers determiners, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, operator verbs, interjections and enumerators. The word frequency is manually counted. The words are further classified as content words and grammatical words. Other concepts like capitalization, abbreviations, contractive forms and punctuation marks are shown. There is a focus on spelling, hyphenation and word breaks. The tense is divided into past and non-past. Below is the analytical model to extract features from a suicide note. Every note is manually analyzed using this model and features are noted.

Phrases
Clauses
Sentence- Simple, Compound, Complex.
Sentence Types- Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative, Exclamatory.
Word Classes- Open Classes-Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb. Closed Classes- Determiner, Pronoun, Preposition, Conjunction, Operator Verb, Interjection, Enumerator.
Words- Frequency
Content words, Grammatical words.
Abbreviations
Capitalization.
Punctuation Marks.
Contractive Forms
Spelling, hyphenation and word breaks.
Tense: Past, Non-past

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After manually examining each note and extracting features using the analytical model. The following results have been observed.

i. 100% of suicide victims utilized phrases and clauses in their communication to convey maximum information as they may not get another chance to communicate.

ii. 87.5% of suicide victims opted for simple sentences due to a higher level of emotional arousal.

iii. 90% of suicide victims chose to write complex sentences to show the emotional load of the individual in his/her final moments. People cannot decide the length of a statement and opt to write lengthy and complex structures. Gregory (1999) noted that suicide notes are often greater in length as the suicidal individual wants to convey as much information as possible.

iv. 100% of suicide victims chose to write declarative sentences to declare many things before committing suicide. The range of these sentences is from declaring their love for someone to asking for severe punishment for the accused person.

v. 17.5% of suicide victims used interrogative sentences as they had few questions for family, friends and society. They wanted answers to those questions.

vi. 35% of suicide victims wrote imperative sentences. They had arrangements to make, instructions for the loved ones, and requests for the police or authority.

vii. Only one suicide victim used exclamation to show the irony of the situation, making its percentage 2.5%. There are more words in a suicide note. There is a higher frequency of instructions and less explanation for action.

viii. 100% of suicide victims used nouns and verbs. The genuine suicide notes have a greater percentage of nouns and verbs as suicide victims are under high drive and therefore likely to refer to more nouns and verbs (Jones and Benell 2007)

ix. 92.5% of suicide victims chose to use adjectives to strengthen their content.

x. 92.5% of suicide victims used adverbs to increase the strength of verbs.

xi. 95% of suicide victims wrote determiners to clarify references made in the note.

xii. All suicide victims chose to write pronouns making their percentage 100% to represent responsibility, possession and relationship. According to Sapir (1912), pronouns represent responsibility, possession and relationship.

xiii. In all notes, we find the presence of prepositions, they have been used to bring clarity to narration.

xiv. 97.5% of suicide victims employed conjunctions to join utterances. The discourse connectors show impulsiveness, a difficulty in sticking with their decision. If someone uses many, it shows less confidence and less power. Weintraub (1989) observed that a higher frequency of conjunctions shows apologetic or rationalizing personality traits.

xv. All suicide notes make use of operator verbs to build grammatical constructions. They are also used to modify utterances.

xvi. 7.5% of suicide victims used interjection in their writing to highlight the irony of the situation.

xvii. 27.5% of suicide victims used enumerators to list the torture they faced and the reasons that forced them to commit suicide.

xviii. The frequently used term in these suicide notes is 'I' making its percentage 67.5%. The other terms are 'my, me'. The use of first-person singular is associated with negative affective states (depression). The other frequently used terms highlight the significant factors for suicide. Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) found that the use of first-person singular is associated with negative affective states (depression). Charles Osgood and Evelyn Walker (1959) observed that under a high emotional drive, people repeat certain terms.

xix. There are more grammatical words in the collected suicide notes. 92.5% of suicide victims used grammatical words in the suicide notes to express their reactions to socially shared stressors and depression. Cindy Chung and James Pennebaker (2011) argued that grammatical terms are reactions to socially shared stressors and depression.

xx. 55% of suicide victims used abbreviations and 72.5% of suicide victims used contractive forms while writing. It is the habitual way of writing using abbreviations and contractive forms.

xxi. 47.5% of suicide victims used capitalization in the content to highlight those things and people who played major roles in the suicide. It immediately draws the attention of the reader.

xxii. 40% of suicide victims used more than two basic punctuation marks. It shows the proper education and training of the people. The mental stress does not affect much for the appropriate use of punctuation marks in writing.

xxiii. 52.5% of suicide victims chose to cancel the content and overwrite it to display the psychological load. In his/her last communication, the person can be under tremendous psychological load which is why he cannot decide the use of appropriate terms. The spontaneous correction indicates the writer's psychological burden. They cross out, change

words, insert words or delete words. Lee (2013) noted that spontaneous correction indicates the writer's psychological load. They cross out, change words, insert words or delete words.

xxiv. 15% of suicide victims made spelling errors. The spelling or punctuation errors are a direct result of the drive that suicidal people experience. Osgood and Walker argue (1959) that spelling or punctuation errors can be a direct result of the drive that suicidal people experience.

xxv. 37.5% of suicide victims kept gaps or spaces in letters and words to show the breaks in the thought process in the final moments of life. The person's thinking ability is affected due to mental stress. There are structural disturbances like spelling, punctuation errors, and awkward constructions in suicide notes. Leenaars (1988) found a higher degree of confusion in emotions in suicide notes.

xxvi. 85% of suicide victims used the past tense in the content to refer to past incidents in life. More references are found to their condition and the torture they were facing before committing suicide.

xxvii. 12.5% of suicide victims used abusive terms to direct their displeasure and anger toward accused persons.

Demographic Analysis of Suicide Notes

To analyze suicide notes demographically, certain categories like gender, age, marital status, education, occupation and addressee of the suicide note are taken into consideration. Each note is

analyzed through the parameters set for demographic analysis. It is classified considering the above categories of suicide notes. The noted observations are as follows.

Gender

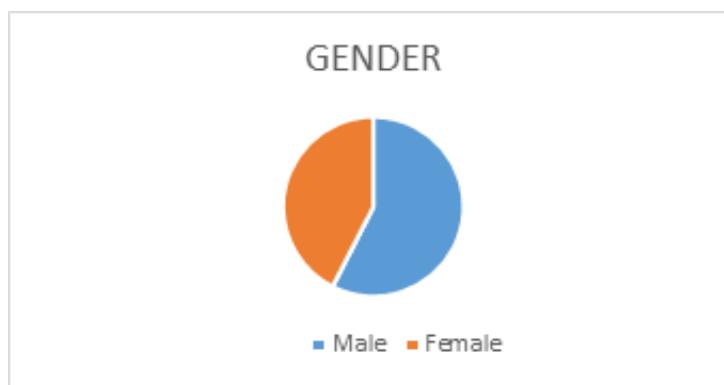
In the Greater Mumbai area, more male members committed suicide compared to female

members. In 40 suicide notes, there are a total 23 male members, making the total percentage of

57.50%. There are 17 female members, making their percentage, 42.50%.

Male	Female
23	17
57.50%	42.50%

(Table 1)



(Chart-1)

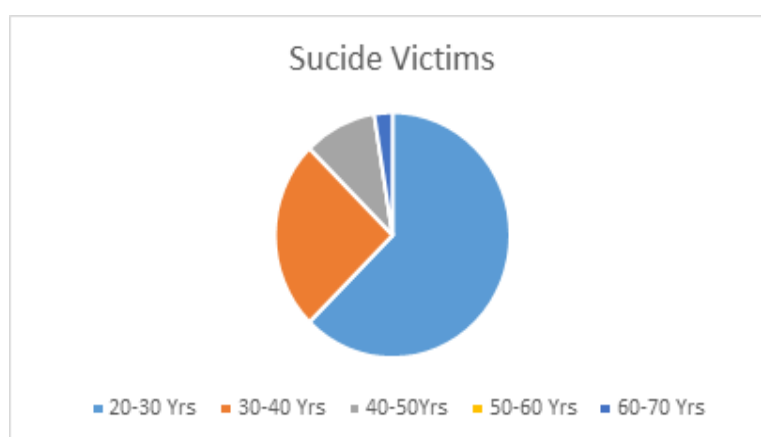
Age

To categorize the suicide victims by the age, five categories for ages like 20-30 years, 30-40 years, 40-50 years, 50-60 years, and 60-70 years were made. The maximum number is observed in the age group 20-30 years. 25 people committed suicide in this group, making the highest percentage of 62.50%. In the second category of the age group 30-40 years, 10 people committed suicide, making its

percentage 25%. The third category is of age group 40-50 years, 4 people committed suicide, making its percentage 10%. There were no people in the age group of 50-60 years. The fifth category is of age group 60-70 years, one member was making the percentage 2.5%. The age group is further classified as male members and female members. The percentage of male members compared to female members is higher.

20-30 Yrs.	30-40 Yrs.	40-50Yrs.	50-60 Yrs.	60-70 Yrs.
25	10	4	0	1
62.50%	25%	10%	0	2.50%
Male/Female	Male/Female	Male/Female	Male/Female	Male/Female
13/12	7/3	3/1	0	1/0
32.5%/30%	17%/ 7%	7.5%/ 2.5%	0%	2.50%

(Table-2)



(Chart-2)

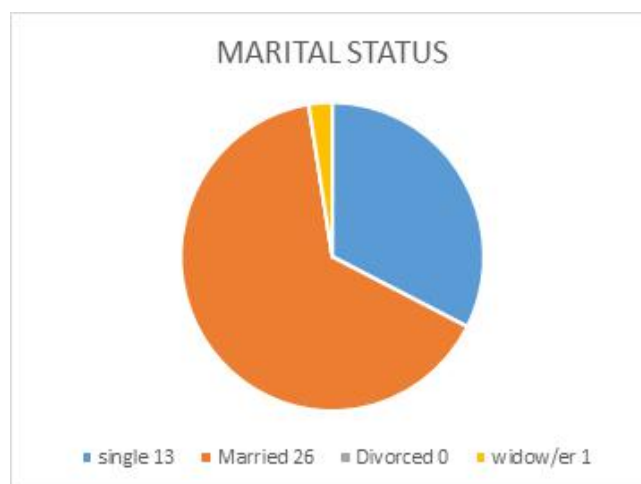
Marital Status

The marital status of the suicide victim is categorized as single, married, divorced, and widow/er. There were 13 single members who committed suicide, making the percentage 32.50%. In this category, 8 female members committed suicide with the percentage of 20%, whereas 5 single male members committed suicide with the

percentage of 12.5%. In the married category, a total of 26 people committed suicide with the percentage of 65%. Of these 26 members, male members were 17, making their percentage 42% while there were 9 female members with the percentage of 22%. There was no divorcee member in this category. One widower committed suicide making the percentage of 2.5% for the category.

Marital Status	Single	Married	Divorced	widow/er
	13	26	0	1
	32.50%	65%	0%	2.50%
	Male/Female	Male/Female	Male/Female	Male/Female
	5M/8F	17M/9F	0	1M
	12.5%/20%	42%/22%	0	2.50%

(Table-3)



(Chart-3)

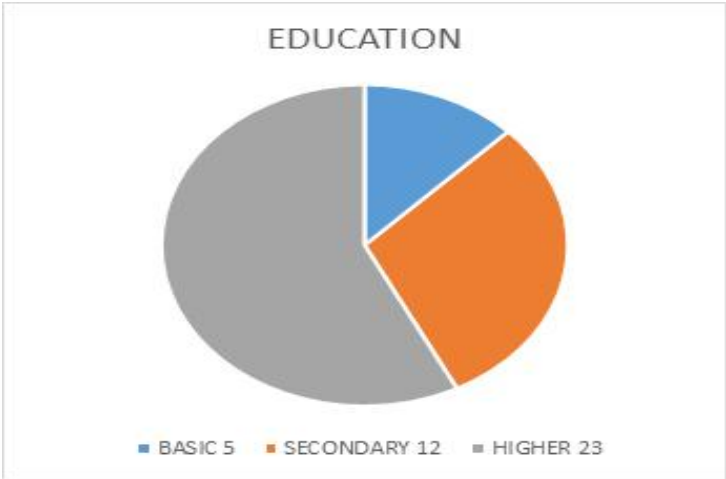
Education

The suicide victims are classified into three categories- people with basic education, with secondary education and people with higher education including graduation and post-graduation. There were 5 people with basic education making its percentage 12.50%; among them were 4 male members marking their percentage 10% and one female

member making the percentage 2.5%. There were 12 people with secondary education making their percentage 30%; among them were 7 male members with a percentage of 17.5% and 5 female members with a percentage of 12.5%. There were 23 members with higher education making its percentage 57.50%; among them were 12 male members making their percentage 30% and 11 female members making their percentage 27.5%.

Education	Basic	Secondary	Higher
	5	12	23
	12.50%	30%	57.50%
	Male/Female	Male/Female	Male/Female
	4M/1F	7M/5F	12M/11F
	10%/2.5%	17.5%/12.5%	30%/27.5%

(Table-4)



(Chart-4)

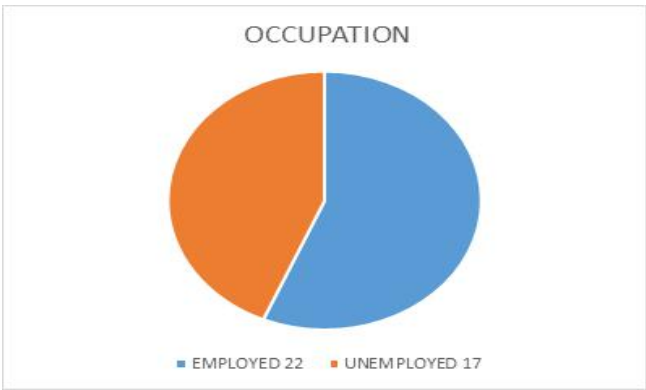
Occupation

To classify suicide victims as per their occupation, six categories were made- employed, unemployed, professional, student, homemaker, and retired people. There were 10 working (employed) members making their percentage 25%. There were 5 unemployed people, making

their percentage 12.50%. There were 12 professional members, making their percentage 30%. There were 4 students, making their percentage 10%. There were 8 homemakers, making their percentage 20%. There was one retired person, making the percentage 2.5% for the category.

Occupation	Employed	Unemployed				
	22	17				
	55%	42.50%				
	Male/Female	Male/Female				
	17M/5F	6M/12F				
	Employed	Unemployed	Professional	Student	Home maker	Retired
	10	5	12	4	8	1
	25%	12.50%	30%	10%	20%	2.50%

(Table-5)



(Chart-5)

Addressee

The collected suicide notes are addressed to specific individuals. Based on this information, four categories - family members, spouse, friends and acquaintances and

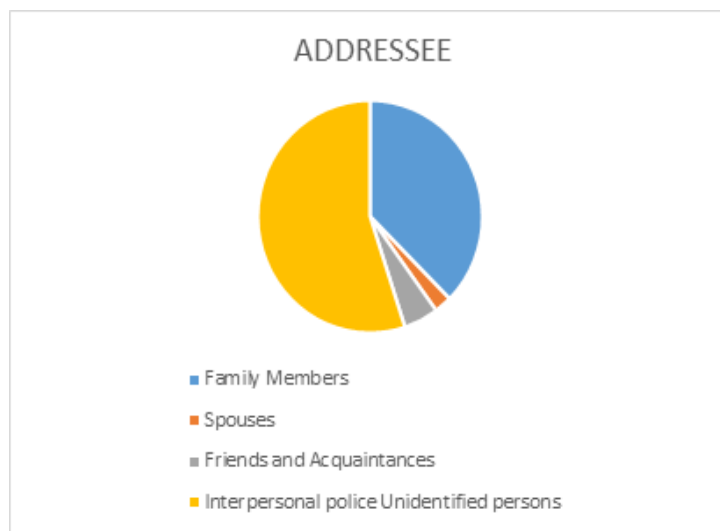
interpersonal, including police and unidentified people for the addressee are made. There were 15 notes addressed to family members, making their percentage 37.5%. There was one note addressed to the spouse, making its

percentage 2.5%. There were 2 notes addressed to friends and acquaintances making their

percentage 5%. There were 22 notes either addressed to police or unidentified members, making its percentage 55%.

Addressee	Family Members	Spouses	Friends and Acquaintances	Interpersonal police
				Unidentified persons
	15	1	2	22
	37.50%	2.50%	5%	55%

(Table-6)



(Chart-6)

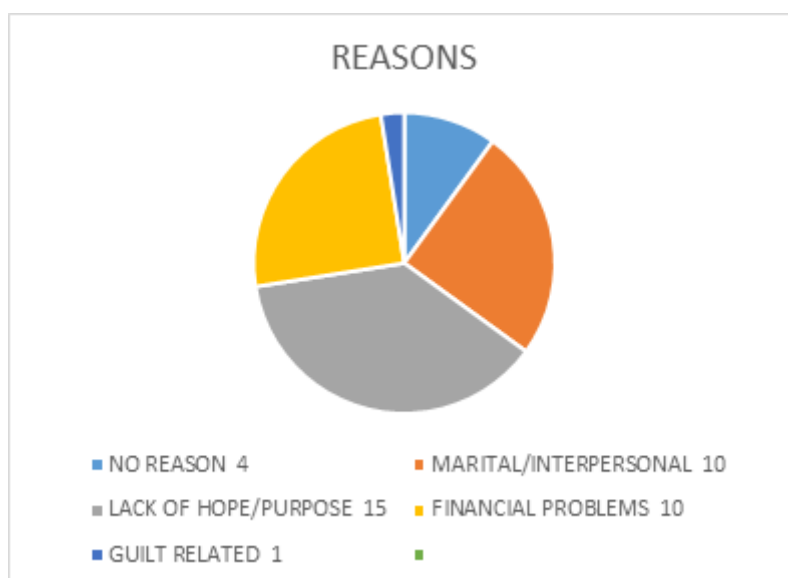
Reasons

To identify the reason for the suicide, five categories were made -no reason, marital or interpersonal, lack of hope, finance, and guilt-related. There were 4 notes where the reason for the suicide was not mentioned, making its percentage 10%. There were 10 people who committed

suicide in the category of marital/interpersonal reasons, making its percentage 25%. 15 people committed suicide due to a lack of hope in life, making its percentage 37.50%. 10 people committed suicide due to financial problems, making its percentage 25%. There was one person who committed suicide due to guilt-related issues, making its percentage 2.5%.

Reasons	No Reason	Marital/Interpersonal	Lack of Hope/Purpose	Financial Problems	Guilt-Related	
	4	10	15	10	1	
	10%	25%	37.50%	25%	2.50%	

(Table-7)



(Chart-7)

The demographic analysis of forty suicide notes collected from Greater Mumbai shows some important observations. The gender category showed that more male members committed suicide compared to female members (57.50%-42.50%). More young people committed suicide in the mentioned decade. The highest number was found in the age group of 20-30 years (62.50%). The marital status of the suicide victims confirmed that more married people committed suicide, among them again the male percentage was higher (65%). The education category observed that more graduate and post-graduate people committed suicide (57.50%). The observation is that more employed people committed suicide (55%). The addressee of the many notes is either police or unidentified people (55%). The major reasons for suicide are lack of hope, marital or interpersonal problems and financial problems.

V. CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analytical model which comprises the linguistics research theories and applied linguistics helped in a great way to analyse suicide notes systematically and arrive at definite conclusions. Each note is manually analyzed using an analytical model and observations are noted in quantitative and qualitative analysis. The noted observations can be used for systematic analysis of suicide notes. After the systematic classification of the notes according to the various categories like gender, age, education, occupation, and socio-economic status, the demographic analysis is carried out. The demographic outcomes will help to understand the problems faced by the urban population and will help the Government to recommend policies.

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