



**RELATIONSHIP OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SUICIDAL IDEATIONS
BEHAVIOUR IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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Abstract

Suicide is a serious, complex, and multidimensional phenomena rising at an alarming rate with India accounting for nearly 40% of global deaths by suicide and suicide being the leading cause of death in the 15-29 demographic. With an increase in suicidal ideations, attempts and deaths, it becomes imperative that we try to understand protective factors and ways to prevent it which in most cases can be accrued to timely intervention and social support. The current study focused on a sample of 68 high school students (34 males and 34 females) aged 15 to 18, employing standardized scales to measure the relationship between perceived social support and suicidal ideations. The results indicated that while there is a significantly negative correlation between perceived social support and suicidal ideations, female high school students experienced higher suicidal ideations as compared to male high school students, yet no significant gender differences

were found in levels of perceived social support. In conclusion, with most suicides being preventable, the gender differences in suicidal ideations without differences in perceived social support call for a deeper exploration to reinforce social support mechanisms particularly in high-risk population of adolescents.

Keywords: *Suicidal Ideations, Perceived social support, High school students*

Introduction

Suicide is a tragic and serious public concern with lasting impacts on the individual, their families, and communities. Rising at an alarming rate and being close to that of an epidemic in India, National Crime Record Bureau (2023) stated that a total of 7,62,648 suicides were reported in our country between 2018 and 2022. Despite accounting for 18% of the world's population in 2016, India unfortunately also accounted for 24-37% of global deaths by suicide with a significant proportion of this being students, making suicide the leading cause for those aged 15-29 (Singh, 2022; Armstrong & Vijayakumar, 2018).

Although suicide has been decriminalized (The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017), the number of suicide cases continue to go underreported while the number of attempts and deaths by suicide continue increasing at an alarming rate. Shockingly, 7.76% of the reported suicide deaths between 2018 and 2022 accounted for student suicide. The Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI) Report by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2023) revealed that over 13000 students died in India in 2021 at a rate of more than 35 students dying of suicide every day. With youth suicides at an all-time high, the need to develop and implement effective prevention policies is stronger than ever.

While, suicide is influenced by an interplay of various factors, some of the major risk factors identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) include distress arising from financial troubles, break-up of a relationship or chronic illness. Rates of suicide are also particularly higher amongst specific vulnerable groups facing discrimination in terms of their socio-economic status or gender.

However, contrary to the accepted opinion, most suicides are preventable with timely intervention and support. Some of the measures recommended included limiting access to the means of suicide, reporting of suicide by media responsibly and early identification as well as care for anyone affected (World Health Organisation, 2023) Perceived social support from friends in adolescence has been found to be positively associated with various indicators of mental health (Jakobsen, Hanse, & Andersen, 2022). Additionally, adolescents draw support from people who are mature, familiar, and worthy of trust with the most important type of support being emotional. (Camara, 2013)

Suicidal Behavior and Ideations

Suicidal ideations can be described as a range of contemplations of preoccupations with death and dying. Ideations are heterogeneous in nature and can vary in intensity and duration. (Harmer et al., 2024) There continues to be a discrepancy amongst the accepted definition of suicidal ideations making it increasingly difficult for clinicians. The American Psychological Association (2018) defines suicidal ideation “as the thoughts about or a preoccupation with killing oneself, often as a symptom of a major depressive disorder.”

As reported by Pfeffer (1997), thoughts about death and suicide become increasingly common as children move through early adolescence. Since having suicidal ideations can be predecessor to attempting suicide, early identification can pave way to prevention. Warnings signs may be indicative of high distress or an individual being at risk of suicide.

Some warning signs could include an individual talking about their thoughts of dying or the meaninglessness of life while others could be behavioural in nature like past suicide attempt, giving away personal belongings, sudden loss of interest in things they used to care about etc. (Outlive, 2023)

A cross-sectional study by Kukoyi et al. (2017) of 342 adolescents aged 10-19 years reported that a history of self-harm, violent thoughts towards others, mental health diagnoses and a history of sexual abuse were all positively correlated with suicidal ideations or even attempts of suicide.

Perceived Social Support

While social support can be defined as the provision of assistance or comfort to others, typically to help them cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors (American Psychological Association, 2018). Ioannou et al. (2019) define Perceived social support as “how individuals perceive friends, family members and others as sources available to provide material, psychological and overall support during times of need.”

Adolescence can be a confusing couple of years with individuals finding it increasingly difficult to cope with their life's challenges like academic pressure, the need for independence, starting intimate relationships or even dealing with their bodily changes. As pointed out by Camara

et al. (2013), interpersonal relationships can act as a dynamic source of strength to help adolescents cope with their stressors.

Purpose

The purpose is to study relationship between suicidal ideations and perceived social support among high school students.

Hypothesis

- There will be a negative relation between suicidal ideations and perceived social support.
- Male students will report lower perceived social support as compared to the female students.
- Female students will have higher levels of suicidal ideations as compared to the male students.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total sample of 70 high school students was collected within the age range 15-18 from New Delhi and surrounding areas. The sample consisted of 34 males and 34 females.

Measures

An Adolescent Suicidal Behavior Assessment Scale (SENTIA): SENTIA is a brief 16-item psychometric tool developed to assess suicidal behavior and ideations in adolescents accepting response in True/False format. The scale has 3 subscales: Suicidal Act/Planning, Suicidal Communication and Suicidal Ideation.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): The MSPSS (Zimet et al., 2016) is a 12-item scale designed to assess perceived social support from three sources; Family, Friends and a Significant other. The scale asks respondents to indicate their feelings to each statement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Very strongly disagree) to 7 (Very strongly agree).

Procedure

Standardized tests were administered, and data was collected using google form. Owing to the sensitive nature of the research topic, participants were alerted to the potentially triggering set of questions right at the beginning followed by obtaining an informed consent and freedom to leave the study if any discomfort was encountered. At the end, participants were provided with adequate resources like suicide helplines and were thanked for their participation.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1					
<i>N, Mean and Standard Deviation</i>					
	Group	Suicidal Ideations		Perceived Social Support	
N	Male	34		34	
	Female	34		34	
Mean	Male	2.06		61.8	
	Female	3.68		59.3	
Standard deviation	Male	2.06		18.0	
	Female	1.51		14.8	

Table 2				
<i>Correlation between Suicidal Ideation and Perceived Social Support</i>				
	Suicidal Ideations		Perceived Social Support	
Suicidal Ideations	—			
Perceived Social Support	-0.388	**	—	
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$				

Table 3 <i>Independent Samples T-Test</i>							
			Statistic		df		p
Suicidal Ideations		Student's t	-3.693		66.0		< .001
Perceived Social Support		Student's t	0.619		66.0		0.538

Table 4 <i>Group Descriptive</i>							
	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE	
Suicidal Ideations	Male	34	2.06	1.00	2.06	0.353	
	Female	34	3.68	4.00	1.51	0.259	
Perceived Social Support	Male	34	61.76	65.50	17.96	3.081	
	Female	34	59.29	59.00	14.79	2.536	

Discussion of Results

The results found out that Perceived Social Support is significantly negatively correlated to Suicidal Ideations ($r=-0.388$, $p<0.1$). This result is in line with the study conducted by Hussein and Yousef (2024) to understand impact of perceived social support on suicidal ideation among students at Ain Shams University where it was found that low and moderate degrees of perceived social support was significant predictor of severity of suicidal ideations. Another study conducted by Kleiman and Liu (2013) which aimed to study social support as a protective factor in suicide also indicated a negative relationship between social support and suicidal ideation and stated that social support is associated with decreased likelihood of suicide attempt.

Further, it was found that females are higher on suicidal ideations ($p < 0.001$, Mean = 3.68) as compared to males. A similar result was found from a study conducted by Zhang et al., (2019) on high school students in Beijing, China to understand gender differences in suicidal ideation and health-risk behaviors. The study indicated that the prevalence of suicidal ideation was significantly higher for girls (13.3%) as compared to boys (10.7%).

Additionally, our results also indicated that there is no significant difference between males and females when it comes to perceiving of social support. However, this finding contradicts the findings of Matud et al. (2003) which stated that there are gender differences in the structure of perceived social support, and they can be explained by differences in experiences of socialization. Another study by Soman et al. (2016) also reported similar findings and concluded that perceived social support was significantly higher in males as compared to females.

Conclusion

The research aimed to understand the impact of perceived social support on suicidal ideations in high school students (N=68) between the age demographic of 15-18 using standardized scales of measurement. Results indicated that while there is a significantly negative correlation between perceived social support and suicidal ideation, females have higher suicidal ideations, yet no gender differences were found in levels of perceived social support.

Because suicide is a complex multidimensional phenomenon, these results point to the complexity of factors underlying and influencing suicidal thoughts and the need for gender-sensitive interventions for young people. Most suicides are preventable with timely intervention. Enhancing social support systems and tailoring interventions for adolescents within schools can contribute to decreasing rates of suicidal ideations as well as attempts. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence towards a hopeful path forward by crafting a more understanding environment for the young people where they feel valued and supported.

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