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Psychological Predictors of Suicidal Ideation Among Adolescent Students in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract: Suicidal ideation among adolescents represents a significant public health concern worldwide and is influenced by a complex interaction of psychological and psychosocial factors. The present study aimed to examine the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescent students in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design was employed. The study sample consisted of 70 adolescent students aged between 13 and 18 years selected from secondary and higher secondary educational institutions. Standardized instruments were used to assess depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, social isolation, and suicidal ideation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between depression and suicidal ideation ($r = .631$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, anxiety and stress significantly predicted suicidal ideation ($F = 16.132$, $p < .001$). Family conflict and social isolation were also found to be positively associated with suicidal thoughts among adolescents. The results suggest that suicidal ideation is influenced by a combination of emotional distress, family-related difficulties, and social disconnectedness. The study highlights the importance of early identification of psychological risk factors and the implementation of school-based mental health interventions, counseling services, and family support programs. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on adolescent mental health and provide valuable insights for psychologists, educators, and policymakers involved in suicide prevention initiatives.

Keywords: *Adolescent Mental Health, Suicidal Ideation, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Family Conflict, Social Isolation.*

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. While this period offers opportunities for growth and identity formation, it also presents challenges that may increase vulnerability to mental health problems. Among these concerns, suicidal ideation has become one of the most serious threats to adolescent well-being. According to the World Health Organization, suicide remains one of the leading causes of death among adolescents and young adults globally. Suicidal ideation, defined as thoughts, considerations, or plans related to ending one's life, is recognized as an important precursor to suicide attempts and completed suicide. In India, adolescent suicide represents a growing public health concern. Academic pressures, family expectations, interpersonal difficulties, emotional distress, and inadequate mental health support contribute significantly to suicidal behavior among young people. Several psychological factors have been linked to suicidal ideation.

Depression is widely regarded as one of the strongest predictors of suicidal thoughts. Anxiety disorders may intensify emotional suffering and impair coping mechanisms. Chronic stress can reduce resilience and increase psychological vulnerability. Family conflict and social isolation further exacerbate emotional distress by limiting access to support systems. Despite increasing awareness of adolescent mental health issues, limited research has examined the combined influence of these psychological variables among adolescents in Pathanamthitta District. The present study was therefore undertaken to identify significant psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

Review of Literature

Suicidal ideation among adolescents has emerged as a significant global public health concern. Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by rapid biological, psychological, and social changes, making individuals particularly vulnerable to emotional distress and mental health disorders. Research conducted over the past two decades has consistently demonstrated that suicidal ideation is influenced by a complex interaction of psychological, familial, and social factors. Depression has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescents. Beck et al. (1996) suggested that depressive symptoms such as hopelessness, helplessness, and negative self-evaluation significantly increase vulnerability to suicidal thoughts. Similarly, Nock et al. (2013) reported that adolescents experiencing depressive symptoms were at substantially greater risk of developing suicidal ideation and engaging in self-harming behaviors. A longitudinal study conducted by Lewinsohn et al. (2001) further established that depression during adolescence significantly predicts suicidal thoughts and attempts during early adulthood. In addition to depression, anxiety has been recognized as an important determinant of suicidal behavior. According to Boden et al. (2007), adolescents with anxiety disorders are more likely to report suicidal thoughts than their non-anxious counterparts. Excessive worry, fear of failure, and emotional dysregulation associated with anxiety may impair adaptive coping mechanisms and increase psychological vulnerability. Several researchers have also highlighted the combined effect of depression and anxiety in elevating suicide risk among adolescents.

Stress has similarly been linked to suicidal ideation. Exposure to chronic stressors such as academic pressure, peer conflicts, financial difficulties, and family-related problems may adversely affect adolescents' psychological well-being. Liu and Miller (2014) found that perceived stress significantly predicted suicidal ideation among secondary school students. Their findings suggest that prolonged exposure to stress reduces resilience and increases susceptibility to negative cognitive patterns associated with suicidal thoughts. Family environment represents another crucial factor influencing adolescent mental health. Numerous studies have documented the association between family conflict and suicidal behavior. King and Merchant (2008) reported that adolescents experiencing frequent family disputes, poor parental support, and dysfunctional communication patterns were more likely to exhibit suicidal ideation. Similarly, Brent et al. (2015) emphasized that family cohesion and parental involvement function as protective factors against adolescent suicide risk. Conversely, family instability and interpersonal conflicts increase emotional distress and feelings of isolation.

Social isolation and lack of interpersonal support have also received considerable attention in suicide research. Joiner's (2005) Interpersonal Theory of Suicide proposes that a diminished sense of belongingness and perceived social disconnection contribute significantly to suicidal ideation. Empirical evidence supports this proposition. Miller et al. (2017) found that adolescents reporting loneliness and reduced peer support demonstrated significantly higher levels of suicidal thoughts. Social isolation may intensify feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, thereby increasing vulnerability to suicide-related behaviors. Within the Indian context, adolescent suicide continues to be a growing public health challenge. National studies have reported that academic stress, family expectations, emotional problems, and inadequate mental health services contribute substantially to suicidal behavior among young people. Senapati et al. (2024), in a comprehensive review of adolescent suicide in India, identified depression, anxiety, family dysfunction, and social stressors as major risk factors associated with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Despite increasing awareness regarding adolescent mental health, empirical evidence from specific districts and communities remains limited.

Although previous studies have independently examined depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, and social isolation as risk factors for suicidal ideation, relatively few investigations have explored the combined predictive influence of these variables among adolescents in Kerala. Furthermore, research focusing specifically on Pathanamthitta District remains scarce despite concerns regarding increasing mental health challenges among

adolescents. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to examine the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescent students in Pathanamthitta District and to identify the relative contribution of selected psychological and social variables to suicide risk.

Conceptual Framework

The present study is based on the premise that suicidal ideation among adolescents is influenced by multiple psychological and psychosocial factors. Drawing upon cognitive and interpersonal theories of suicide, depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, and social isolation were considered independent variables, while suicidal ideation served as the dependent variable. Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, hopelessness, and diminished interest in daily activities, all of which have been linked to increased suicide risk. Anxiety contributes to emotional instability and maladaptive coping strategies, whereas chronic stress may overwhelm an individual's psychological resources and resilience. Family conflict can negatively affect adolescents' emotional security and psychological adjustment, while social isolation may reduce feelings of belongingness and increase vulnerability to suicidal thoughts. Based on the existing literature, it is assumed that higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, and social isolation will be associated with greater suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

Hypotheses

H1: Depression is significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

H2: Anxiety is significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

H3: Stress is significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

H4: Family conflict is significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

H5: Social isolation is significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

H6: Depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, and social isolation significantly predict suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design to investigate the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescent students. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine the relationships between selected psychological variables and suicidal ideation without manipulating any study variables.

Study Setting

The study was conducted in selected secondary and higher secondary educational institutions located in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala, India. The district was selected due to increasing concerns regarding adolescent mental health and suicide-related behaviors reported in the region.

Participants and Sampling

The target population consisted of adolescent students aged between 13 and 18 years studying in secondary and higher secondary schools. A total of 70 participants were included in the study.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of adolescents from different age groups and educational levels. Participants were selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

The study included:

- Adolescents aged 13–18 years.
- Students enrolled in secondary and higher secondary educational institutions.
- Students willing to participate in the study.
- Students who provided informed consent and assent.

Exclusion Criteria

- The following participants were excluded:
- Students diagnosed with severe psychiatric disorders requiring immediate clinical intervention.
- Students who were absent during data collection.
- Students unwilling to participate in the study.

Research Instruments

i. Demographic Information Form

A self-developed demographic questionnaire was used to collect information regarding age, gender, educational status, family type, parental occupation, and socioeconomic characteristics.

ii. Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II)

The Beck Depression Inventory-II was utilized to assess depressive symptoms among adolescents. The instrument consists of 21 items measuring cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of depression.

iii. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)

The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory was employed to evaluate anxiety levels among participants. The instrument measures both state anxiety and trait anxiety through standardized items.

iv. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

The Perceived Stress Scale was used to assess the extent to which individuals perceived situations in their lives as stressful.

v. Family Conflict Scale

The Family Conflict Scale measured perceived conflict, communication difficulties, and emotional disturbances within the family environment.

vi. Social Isolation Scale

This instrument assessed loneliness, social disconnectedness, peer relationships, and perceived social support.

vii. Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation (BSS)

The Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation was administered to evaluate the presence and severity of suicidal thoughts among participants.

Reliability of the Instruments

Internal consistency of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Table 1: Reliability of the measurement scale

Scale	No. of. Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Depression Scale	10	0.786	Acceptable
Anxiety Scale	7	0.842	Good
Stress Scale	5	0.627	Acceptable
Suicidal Ideation Scale	6	0.745	Acceptable

The obtained reliability coefficients indicated acceptable internal consistency of the instruments used in the study.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the concerned school authorities. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, confidentiality of responses, and voluntary nature of participation. After obtaining informed consent and assent, questionnaires were administered in classroom

settings under the supervision of the researcher. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and independently. Data collection was completed within the scheduled period.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the concerned institutional authorities before commencement of data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from participants and parents where necessary. Confidentiality and anonymity of participant information were maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics software for analysis.
The following statistical procedures were employed:

- Frequency and percentage distributions
- Mean and standard deviation
- Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
- Multiple Regression Analysis
- Reliability Analysis using Cronbach's Alpha

Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of 70 adolescent students participated in the study. Participants were between 13 and 18 years of age and represented different educational levels within secondary and higher secondary schools in Pathanamthitta District. Demographic information was collected to understand the background characteristics of the study sample.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 70)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	13 – 15 Years	28	40
	16 – 18 Years	42	60
Gender	Male	48	68.6
	Female	20	28.6
	Prefer not to say	2	2.8
Education Type	8^{th} Class to 10^{th} Class	28	40
	11^{th} Class to 12^{th} Class	42	60

Interpretation

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. Among the 70 adolescent students included in the study, 42 (60.0%) were aged between 16 and 18 years, while 28 (40.0%) were between 13 and 15 years of age. Regarding gender, 48 participants (68.6%) were male, 20 (28.6%) were female, and 2 participants (2.8%) preferred not to disclose their gender.

In terms of educational status, 42 participants (60.0%) were studying in higher secondary classes (11th–12th standard), whereas 28 participants (40.0%) were enrolled in secondary classes (8th–10th standard). The findings indicate that the sample predominantly consisted of older adolescents and students pursuing higher secondary education.

Relationship Between Depression and Suicidal Ideation

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between depression and suicidal ideation among adolescent students.

Table 3: Correlation Between Depression and Suicidal Ideation

Variables	**r**	**p-value**
Depression and Suicidal Ideation	.631	< .001

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between depression and suicidal ideation ($r = .631$, $p < .001$). The findings indicate that adolescents with higher levels of depression were more likely to report suicidal thoughts.

Predictive Role of Anxiety and Stress on Suicidal Ideation

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether anxiety and stress significantly predicted suicidal ideation.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Anxiety and Stress Predicting Suicidal Ideation

Model	**F**	**p-value**
Anxiety and Stress → Suicidal Ideation	16.132	< .001

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 16.132$, $p < .001$), indicating that anxiety and stress significantly contributed to the prediction of suicidal ideation among adolescents.

Family Conflict and Suicidal Ideation

The analysis demonstrated a positive relationship between family conflict and suicidal ideation. Adolescents reporting higher levels of family conflict exhibited greater suicidal thoughts compared to those experiencing lower levels of family dysfunction.

The findings suggest that family-related stressors play an important role in adolescent psychological well-being and may increase vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

Social Isolation and Suicidal Ideation

Social isolation was found to be positively associated with suicidal ideation. Participants reporting loneliness, social withdrawal, and reduced peer support showed higher levels of suicidal thoughts.

The findings support previous evidence suggesting that lack of social connectedness contributes significantly to adolescent suicide risk.

Summary of Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized below:

- Depression showed a significant positive correlation with suicidal ideation ($r = .631$, $p < .001$).
- Anxiety and stress significantly predicted suicidal ideation ($F = 16.132$, $p < .001$).
- Family conflict was positively associated with suicidal ideation among adolescents.
- Social isolation emerged as a significant psychosocial predictor of suicidal thoughts.
- Psychological and social factors collectively contributed to suicidal ideation among adolescent students in Pathanamthitta District.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to examine the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescent students in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. The findings revealed that depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, and social isolation were significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescents. These findings highlight the multifactorial nature of suicidal thoughts and emphasize the importance of addressing both psychological and social determinants of adolescent mental health. The study sample predominantly consisted of older adolescents (16–18 years) and students pursuing higher secondary education. This demographic composition may reflect the increased academic, social, and developmental challenges experienced during late adolescence, which have been associated with greater psychological distress and vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

The first objective of the study was to examine the relationship between depression and suicidal ideation. The findings demonstrated a significant positive correlation between depression and suicidal ideation ($r = .631$, $p < .001$). This result indicates that adolescents experiencing higher levels of depressive symptoms are more likely to report suicidal thoughts. Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, hopelessness, low self-worth, and feelings of helplessness, all of which contribute to suicidal thinking. The findings are consistent with the cognitive theory of depression proposed by Beck (1967), which suggests that negative views about oneself, the world, and the future increase vulnerability to suicidal ideation. Similar findings have been reported by Lewinsohn et al. (2001), who found that depressive symptoms significantly predicted suicidal thoughts among adolescents. Likewise, Nock et al. (2013) identified depression as one of the strongest predictors of adolescent suicidal behavior across different populations.

The second objective was to determine whether anxiety and stress predict suicidal ideation. The regression analysis revealed that anxiety and stress significantly predicted suicidal ideation ($F = 16.132$, $p < .001$). Adolescents experiencing elevated anxiety and stress levels may face difficulties in emotional regulation and coping with daily challenges. Anxiety often generates excessive worry, fear of failure, and uncertainty regarding future outcomes, while chronic stress may overwhelm an individual's coping resources. These findings support previous studies conducted by Boden et al. (2007) and Liu and Miller (2014), which reported significant associations between anxiety, stress, and suicidal thoughts among adolescents. The results suggest that psychological distress extends beyond depression and that multiple emotional difficulties contribute to suicide risk.

Another important finding of the study was the positive association between family conflict and suicidal ideation. Adolescents reporting frequent family disagreements, poor communication, lack of emotional support, and strained family relationships exhibited higher levels of suicidal thoughts. Family serves as the primary source of emotional security during adolescence; therefore, dysfunctional family environments may significantly impair psychological well-being. The findings are consistent with those of King and Merchant (2008), who reported that family conflict and inadequate parental support increase vulnerability to suicidal behavior. Similarly, Brent et al. (2015) emphasized that strong family cohesion functions as a protective factor against adolescent suicide risk.

The study also found that social isolation was significantly associated with suicidal ideation. Adolescents who experienced loneliness, social withdrawal, and reduced peer support reported higher levels of suicidal thoughts. Social connectedness plays a crucial role in emotional development during adolescence. Individuals who feel disconnected from family, friends, or peers may develop feelings of rejection and hopelessness, increasing their susceptibility to suicidal ideation. This finding supports Joiner's (2005) Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, which proposes that thwarted belongingness and perceived social disconnection are major contributors to suicidal thoughts. Similar findings have been reported by Miller et al. (2017) and Calati et al. (2019), who identified loneliness and social isolation as significant risk factors for suicidal behavior.

Collectively, the findings suggest that suicidal ideation among adolescents is influenced by an interaction of psychological, familial, and social factors. Depression, anxiety, and stress contribute to internal emotional distress, while family conflict and social isolation represent external environmental stressors that may exacerbate vulnerability to suicidal thoughts. The results reinforce contemporary biopsychosocial perspectives, which view suicidal ideation as a multidimensional phenomenon requiring comprehensive assessment and intervention.

The findings of the present study have important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers. School-based mental health programs should incorporate routine screening for depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal ideation. Family counselling interventions may help strengthen communication and emotional support within families. Furthermore, peer-support initiatives and social connectedness programs may reduce feelings of isolation and promote psychological resilience among adolescents.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on adolescent mental health in India and provides empirical evidence regarding the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among students in Pathanamthitta District. The findings underscore the need for early identification and intervention strategies aimed at reducing suicide risk and promoting adolescent well-being.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescent students in Pathanamthitta District, Kerala. The findings revealed that depression, anxiety, stress, family conflict, and social isolation were significantly associated with suicidal ideation among adolescents. Among these factors, depression emerged as a strong correlate of suicidal thoughts, while anxiety and stress significantly contributed to the prediction of suicidal ideation. Family conflict and social isolation were also identified as important psychosocial risk factors influencing adolescent mental health.

The results emphasize that suicidal ideation is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by both internal psychological distress and external social-environmental conditions. Adolescents experiencing emotional difficulties in conjunction with inadequate family support and social connectedness may be particularly vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. These findings highlight the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention that addresses psychological, familial, and social determinants simultaneously.

The study underscores the need for early identification of at-risk adolescents through school-based mental health screening programs, counseling services, family interventions, and peer-support initiatives. Strengthening mental health awareness among parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals may facilitate timely intervention and reduce suicide risk among adolescents. Future research should explore additional protective factors such as resilience, coping skills, self-esteem, and social support using larger and more diverse samples.

Overall, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on adolescent mental health and provides valuable insights into the psychological predictors of suicidal ideation among students in Kerala. The findings may assist mental health professionals, educators, policymakers, and researchers in developing evidence-based strategies to promote adolescent well-being and prevent suicidal behavior.

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