

# **Suicidal–Related Thoughts of University Students**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Suicide is an act of taking one's life. This paper determined the suicidal related thoughts among the first year college students of the University of Bohol. Suicidal related thought is a cognitive process that involves a contemplation of ending one's own life. It utilized a quantitative research

design with the aid of a standardized instrument - The Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R) that assesses suicidal ideation and its frequency, suicide attempt and the likelihood of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. There were 523 students from 11 colleges who participated in this study. It comprised of 50.94% females and 41.63% males. Results revealed that having a suicide plan is evident among the respondents in college I, while suicide-risk ideation is apparent in colleges A, J, K, C, H, and E. Suicidal ideation is experienced rarely or at one time by some respondents. Nonetheless, they have manifested the risk to likely, somewhat likely and very likely commit suicide in the future. Findings also revealed that females have higher suicidal ideation than males. But both sexes are at risk as regards to committing suicide in the future. Hence, it takes into consideration that suicidal related thoughts may influence suicidal behavior in the future.

**Keywords:** Health, suicide, suicidal ideation, quantitative design, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Suicide is considered a sensitive topic that most people avoid talking about in usual conversations. It is an act of taking one's life. It is a behavior that may cause a person to die. However, its hazard components may differ with age, sex, sexual orientation, and the person himself/herself. It is brought about by various factors that may include unhappiness, depression, stressful events, or having a mental or psychological problem.

The World Health Organization reported that suicide is the fourteenth leading cause for death worldwide and is responsible for 1.4% of all mortality. Some psychological factors directly cause this behavior. Although some suicidal people do not necessarily dread to finish their own life, it is important to address this concern in order to provide necessary means of managing suicidal related thoughts effectively and preventing people from doing this act.

In this context, this study intends to determine the suicidal related thoughts among the first year college students of the University of Bohol. It further hopes to provide recommendations to effectively deal with suicidal ideation, prevent suicidal behavior, and ultimately promote mental health and a better life. Specifically, it seeks to determine the following aspects:

1. The profile of the respondents in terms of sex and the college they belong to.
2. The respondents' responses based on suicidal ideation, frequency of suicidal ideation, the threat to a suicide attempt, and the likelihood of suicidal behavior in the future.
3. The degree of variance on the chance of committing suicide among the respondents from different colleges.
4. The degree of difference between male and female respondents on the possibility of committing suicide.

One in every 10 Filipinos ages 15-27 years old had experienced suicide ideation, and one of every 20 Filipino youth progresses to suicide attempt (Quintos, 2017). Ideation may incur suicidal behaviors (i.e., attempts, execution). Joiner's (2009) Interpersonal-Psychological Theory on Suicide Behavior states that a person will die by suicide only when one has the desire to do so that comes along with having thoughts about it or contemplation of ending one's own life. Suicidal ideation greatly varies from fleeting thoughts to preoccupation to detailed planning. The decision to do the act may be a result of one's suicidal ideation. On the other hand, Baechler's Escape Theory of Suicide pointed out that it emerges as a product of a person's wish to escape from current life problems. Wilcox, Arria, Caldeira, Vincent, Pinchevsky, and O'Grady (2010) studied the prevalence and predictors of persistent suicide ideation, plans, and attempts during college. They have found out that 12% of the 1,253 college students' respondents had suicide ideation for the past 12 months. Out of these students, 25% had persistent suicide ideation (2.6% from the overall sample). Ten students (0.9% from the entire sample) had a suicide plan or attempted suicide during four years in college, and three students had both a plan and attempted suicide. It indicates that college students who have thoughts or plans of committing suicide may lead to suicidal attempts or behaviors, hence putting them at risk.

There are also several factors that cause the risk of suicide, particularly among college students. O'Connor's (2011) Integrated Volitional Model of Suicidal Behavior proposes that suicidal behavior is a result of the complex interplay of factors as proximal predictors of an individual's intention to engage in suicidal behavior. Pratt (2018) in his study of depression and anxiety pointed out that college years are the time of increased risk of stressful events (i.e., academic work, bereavement, relationship issues, financial

matters, career, and personal health problems) that increases the range of mental health obstacle and in turn adds to the risk of suicide.

In a study on the prevalence and predictor of suicidality among medical students in a public university in Selangor, Malaysia, respondents whose age group was between 16-24 years old were identified as being high-risk in suicidal behavior due to experiencing pressures of being a medical student. Moreover, Respondents' lifetime suicide attempts were the strongest pre-dictor of suicidality, while depression lands second. Medical students who had broken off a steady love relationship were at higher risk of suicidality compare to those who did not have a broken love relationship.

Lastly, respondents who had something valued lost or stolen had 4.4 times higher risk of suicidality in comparison to those medical students who did not lose anything valued (Tin, Sidik, Rampal & Ibrahim, 2015). Findings of this study are consistent with Sta. Maria, Lee, Estanislao, & Rodriguez's (2015) study on the prevalence and associated factors of suicide ideation among university students in Metro Manila revealing that the incidence of suicide ideation among participants was 24% even though the suicidal severity is low.

Multivariate analysis also shows that students who were dissatisfied with a romantic relationship, and those who reported having a low level of closeness to their parents and peers were more likely to think of suicide. The study of Wilcox, et., al. (2010) identified factors such as low social support, exposure, and victimization to domestic violence, maternal depression and high reported depressive symptoms in the first year of college as associated in the risk for both one-time and persistent suicidal ideation. Studies pointed out the importance of having strengthened mental health services available in the university. It also emphasized the need for an intervention program to reduce the suicidality among undergraduate students.

Mazurel (2014), in his study on Students at risk of suicide: Identification, Referral, and Prevention supported other related studies and identified mul-tiple risk factors. Results showed that 27.5% (n=2398) have thought about death, and 8.6% (n=681) of students were at risk for suicide. Women had higher odds for suicide risk compared to men. Variables such as depres-sion, anxiety, psychological problems, and lifestyle significantly correlate with suiciding risk for both sexes. Smoking, general health, and living situ-ation were variables also significant to women. Alsalman's study (2016) on Gender Differences in Suicide Ideation among College Students in Kuwait stated that female college

students have a higher level of suicidal ideation (mean = 7) as compared to 5.2 from males.

Vijayakumar (2015) further stated that women are apt to suicidal ideation due to the gender-related vulnerability to psychopathology and psychosocial stressor. Nevertheless, other than the sex, sexual orientation, and race are also factors that have caused suicide risk.

In the Philippines, Filipinos who commit or attempt suicide are getting younger over the years. Several college students are at risk in this condition. The World Health Organization (2011) revealed that suicide is the leading cause of death among young adults in many other countries. Hence, the need to raise campaign on mental health awareness is a must. The Mental Health Act of 2017 requires educational institutions to develop programs both for students and educators and other employees to raise awareness on mental health issues (i.e., suicide), provide support for people at risk and facilitate access for treatment and psychosocial support.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a quantitative research design to provide numerical analysis of the suicidal related thoughts of the college students of the University of Bohol. It used a standardized instrument developed by Osman, et., al. (2001) called Suicidal Behavior Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R) as the data gathering tool. It contains four groups of items that intend to assess suicidal ideation, frequency of suicidal ideation for the past 12 months, threats of suicide attempt, and the likelihood of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The instrument uses numerical value for scoring where possible score ranges from 3 – 18 points. Using the given cutoff score of  $\geq 7$  for the general adult population, the at-risk individual will be identified from the general sample.

The conduct of the study was within the vicinity of the University of Bohol after approval from the Vice President for Academics and the Department Deans. The participants were the First Year college students of University of Bohol. They were randomly selected based on the thirty percent (30%) of the total number of First Year students from each department. Table below shows the distribution of the respondents.

**Table 1. Distribution of Respondents**

N = 523

| <b>Department</b> | <b>Total First Year Enrollees</b> | <b>Required Sample</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| College A         | 39                                | 12                     |
| College B         | 66                                | 20                     |
| College C         | 210                               | 63                     |
| College D         | 321                               | 96                     |
| College E         | 284                               | 85                     |
| College F         | 268                               | 80                     |
| College G         | 62                                | 19                     |
| College H         | 136                               | 41                     |
| College I         | 50                                | 15                     |
| College J         | 17                                | 5                      |
| College K         | 290                               | 87                     |

Researchers asked each respondent for his/her consent to participate in the study and clearly articulated the purpose and instructions as well as established rapport to assure the quality of the data gathered. They also conducted a debriefing after the respondents answered the tool. They subjected the quantitative data to a statistical analysis using Simple Mean, Simple Percentage, and Analysis of Variance after collecting, collating, and recording of sufficient data.

In accordance with the ethical considerations of research, researchers abided by the moral responsibility to protect the respondents from risks or harm as a result of their participation. Respecting their dignity was a priority. Hence, they were ensured of confidentiality and protection of their privacy. Deception or exaggeration of the aim of the research and biases was avoided and any information was communicated with honesty and transparency. Approval from the Research Ethics Committee was also sought.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data gathered from the research conducted are herein presented, analyzed, and interpreted. Table 2 shows percentage of respondents who have suicidal ideation in terms of sex.

**Table 2. Respondents with or without suicide ideation based on sex**

| Sex    | Frequency | No Suicidal Ideation | Percentage | With Suicidal Ideation | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|----------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|
| Male   | 221       | 129                  | 58.37      | 92                     | 41.63%     |
| Female | 302       | 148                  | 49.06      | 154                    | 50.94%     |

Suicidal ideation was evident among 154 female respondents and 92 male respondents. It shows that first-year female students manifest higher suicidal ideation (50.94%) as compared to the first year male students (41.63%). This finding supports the study of Alsalman (2016) on Gender Differences in Suicide Ideation among College Students in Kuwait. It stated that female college students have higher level of suicidal ideation (mean = 7) as compared to males. In a similar study, Vijayakumar (2015) further stated that women are apt to suicidal ideation due to the gender-related vulnerability to psychopathology and psychosocial stressor.

### **On the Respondents' Responses on Suicidal Ideation Groups of Items**

**Suicide Ideation Subgroups.** Respondents from the seven colleges were at risk of suicidal ideation, which means that they have thoughts of committing or attempting to kill themselves. It identified College I as the Suicide Plan Subgroup indicating students engagement in planning to commit suicide, while colleges A, J, K, C, H, and E belonged to the SuicideRisk Ideation Subgroup implying that students from these colleges have thoughts of doing the said act. Students from Colleges F, G, D, and B had no preoccupations or thoughts about committing suicide, thus they belonged to the Non-Risk or Non-Suicidal Subgroup.

Findings are supported by Pratt (2018) in his study on depression and anxiety pointing out that college years is the time of increased risk of stressful events (i.e., academic work, bereavement, relationship issues, financial matters, career, and personal health problems) that increase the range of mental health obstacle and in turn adds to suicidal risk. One's suicidal ideation may be a form of escape from the stressful events they have experienced as college students. For Baechler, suicide emerges as a product of the person's wish to escape from current life problems.

**Frequency of Suicidal Ideation.** Results showed that respondents from Colleges I, A, J, H, and B have experienced suicidal ideation rarely or

one time for the past year. While those from Colleges K, C, F, E, D, and G did not have suicidal related thoughts for the past year. Findings indicate that although for some students suicidal ideation rarely comes or at one time, it still manifests a risk of suicide, hence, needs attention.

**The Threat of Suicide Attempts.** Results reveal that respondents coming from the Colleges I and A had told someone about his or her suicidal ideation. It is a good indicator that when challenged with this kind of dilemma, seeking help is a necessity, and not only an option. It is where they can connect and get support that can help prevent suicidal behavior. Schreiber (2018) emphasized that social support and family connectedness is a protective factor in deterring suicide attempts, while family discord increases the risk. When children communicate what they are going through, it is a protective gear from the risk of suicide. Hence, active involvement of parents in the lives of their children is essential. Sta Maria, et. al. (2015) reported that students who have a low level of closeness to parents and peers more likely think of suicide. However, evidently, in this study many respondents do not communicate suicidal ideation.

**Likelihood of Suicidal Behavior in the Future.** Results show that students from colleges C, K, D, E, F, I, J and H likely, rarely likely and very likely to commit suicide in the future. It indicates how crucial it is when suicidal ideation is left unattended.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study revealed that the college that the respondents belong to and sex had nothing to do with their suicidal ideation. The risk of suicide is not far from reality especially when one has related thoughts about it. Nevertheless, readiness and capacity to tell others about their unpleasant thoughts and feelings is a good indicator of seeking help. Teaching and encouraging students to be more open of what they are going through is an advantage to thwart the dangerous impact of suicidal ideation. It can help one get social and family support which prevents one from the likelihood of committing suicide in the future. The finding is crucial to developing programs for prevention from doing the act..

Ultimately, providing recommendations to address concerns on suicidal related thoughts of college students is a must. A university-based intervention should be done that includes restricting access to the lethal methods; promotes both physical and mental health; promotes



responsible representation of suicide in platform around the university; reduce its stigma, and cultivate a help-seeking behavior to the students by promoting awareness and education campaigns. Introducing a “gatekeeper” program may help address the individuals’ suicide risks by providing training, workshops, and therapeutic activities in order to effectively manage suicidal thoughts and preoccupations as well as recognize warning signs for suicide risk.

Finally, since the study uses only the quantitative research method, it suggests for further research using mixed method (both quantitative and qualitative).

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