

## **Relationship Between Social Support, Religiosity, and Academic Expectation on Suicidal Ideation Among University Student**

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**Abstract:** According to the report by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) found that a total of 638 suicides were reported in Malaysia between January and July 2021, an increase of 143% compared to the same period last year. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in an adolescent aged 15-19 years and for every single suicide case, there are more cases involving suicide attempted. The purpose of this study is to identify the level of suicidal ideation and the relationship between social support, religiosity, academic expectation and suicidal ideation among university student. Quantitative approach is used for this study and survey questionnaire as the research tool. This study focused on university students as the respondents by using random sampling technique. The questionnaire distributed for 350 set, and only 301 respondents answered the questionnaire. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Program was used for descriptive analysis. The finding of the study is that most of the students have moderate level of suicidal ideation. The suicidal ideation is also has a significant and positive relations with social support, religiosity and academic expectation. In a nutshell, the suicidal ideation among university students is moderate. It also can be conclude that suicidal ideation has significant and positive relationship towards social support, religiosity and academic expectation. The finding of this study provides a deeper understanding of suicidal ideation in the future.

**Keywords:** Suicidal ideation, Social Support, Religiosity, Academic Expectation

### **1. Introduction**

In Malaysia, to prevent the occurrence of suicide, the government had a law on Section 305 and Section 306 about the abetment of suicide of child or insane person and abetment of suicide respectively (Penal Code Act of 574, 2018). On Section 305, punishment would be death or imprisonment that could be extended to ten years if found guilty. This law was only applicable for those that support or encourage the suicide actions of other people, in hope that when there was a possibility of suicide from someone it could be prevented earlier. Despite of this effort, the number of adolescents who committed suicide was still increasing [1]. Furthermore, the cause of someone who committed suicide was themselves instead of other people. It was also influenced by other factors that cause them to commit suicide.

Now, emphasis is given to this issue of suicide to identify high risk behaviours to suicidal behaviour and actions. This is due to the increase in the incidence of suicide among adolescents. In a report released by the World Health Organization in 2019, there were more than 700 000 individuals who died of suicide each year worldwide [2]. The death rate due to suicide is one in every 100 deaths. Each year, the number of individuals who die from suicide is more than HIV, malaria, breast cancer or war and murder. For every single suicide case, there are more cases involving attempted suicide. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in an adolescent aged 15-19 years. Meanwhile, 77 percent of global suicides occur in low- and middle -income countries. Pesticide consumption, hanging and firearms are among the most common methods of suicide worldwide.

The phenomenon of suicide in Malaysia has worsened with the outbreak of the increasingly COVID-19 pandemic. According to the report by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) found that a total of 638 suicides were reported in Malaysia between January and July 2021, an increase of 143 percent compared to the same period last year [3]. The number increased 1.4 times, compared to only 262 cases in 2020. In addition, the increase in deaths due to suicide cases reported in Malaysia in 2020 was 631 cases compared to 609 cases in 2019. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on various aspects of life including in human mental health issues [4]. The sudden changes that take place in life are basically stressful on the individual. The overly long Movement Control Order (MCO) has had an impact on all walks of life regardless of age, race, religion, and employment status. Thus, when an individual is faced with a crisis and a sudden change in life, the normal reactions that will be shown are such as feelings of worry, fear, sadness, depression, confusion, anger, and can even provoke angry emotions [5]. If all these feelings are not well controlled, it will invite mental health problems which in turn lead to suicide.

Generally, it is important to know that adolescent is one of the vulnerable populations when facing problem and the intention to suicide is always come in their mind. A study conducted before, showed from 684 adolescent, 60.1 percent of them had the risk of suicide and the number indicated a high percentage of suicidal ideation [6]. It indicated that the probability of suicidal thought to change to real suicide was high considered the percentage was more than a half percent of the whole adolescent that participated in the study. It was support [1], where suicidal ideation was the early signed of suicidal behaviour and it could be used to identify the high-risk behaviour that could led to further suicidal actions especially towards adolescent stage. Individual who is in hold of suicidal ideation will often feel that their live is not important and they will think that it is not worth living and prefer to be dead than alive [7].

In this current situation, it showed that suicide was not a new issue in this world. With the rise of many suicides' issues especially among the future generation, it was not a foreign subject to be address by many researchers. Many of the researcher had emphasized on studying the risk factors that contributed towards suicide [8] but, there was still lacked of study focusing on how the protective factor could actually contributed towards the decreased of suicide especially study in Malaysia. Protective factor is a condition that help an individual to decrease problematic or stressful environment in their life. These factors can provide resilience towards the stressful environment that would help individual to cope with stressful event [9]. Social support is an example of protective factor which important in

one's life. It was proven by a study that if there was social support in one's life, it seems that the social support would affect the level of adolescent suicidal ideation [10]. That is why it is important for researcher to study on the protective factor as well as risk factor so suicide case can be reduce drastically.

Many studies on suicidal ideation among adolescent had been conducted in other countries where the study sample came from different range of population. To reduce this suicidal ideation, the role of support system is an important thing that needed to be address. The support system such as the existence of social support can act as one of the protective factors towards adolescent. Family social support plays an important role on mental health especially depression which in turn leads to suicidal ideation and acts as a buffer in dealing with stressful life events [11]. This is also evidenced in a study by López-Cepero who showed that after 16 weeks of individuals with depression undergoing family social support therapy, there is an improvement and progress in their ability to deal with their mental problems [12]. In addition, a study conducted before also found that the social support especially family and friends act as a protective factor of suicidal ideation [13]. This is because adolescents with strong family support think they are liked and respected, and that family provides a social network they can turn to in times of need [14]. This is consistent with attachment theory, which states that parents should be sensitive to their children's needs and provide emotional support [15]. As a result of these encounters, people may feel more socially connected and supported, which may reduce the likelihood of suicide ideation.

In clinical and community samples of adolescent suicide, a few studies have found that the perceived quality of family relationships is an important risk or protective factor [16]. The health benefits of social support cannot be isolated from relational processes between parents and adolescents in times of crisis, such as while coping with personal problems, including suicide ideation, as suggested by the theory of social support. These findings are in line with those of Chu et. al, who discovered that the family component, particularly a perceived poor connection with the parents, is linked to suicide behavior [17]. Adolescents at this age require positive relationships, particularly with family, in order to boost their self-esteem and allow them to express and discuss their thoughts and difficulties. Such assistance is not only protective, but it may also improve their overall well-being. Durkheim also used the idea of social integration, as well as varied family situations and the function of religious integration, to stress the significance of family support in understanding suicide [18]. Insufficient social integration, promotes individualism, which encourages egoistic suicide, whereas a society unable to manage people' inherently boundless desires would strive to anomic suicide [18]. To explain suicide, Durkheim utilised control theory, arguing that delinquent behaviours occur when an individual's tie to society, particularly the family, is weak or broken. The protective factor was also linked to future treatments that may be designed.

Rather than social support, there were also study stated that religiosity can prevented an individual from committing suicide even though they had a high level of suicidal ideation [19]. The reason is just because it against the religion teaching. It showed here that religiosity might play a big role for an individual to decrease their suicidal ideation. There are some of the studies that touch on the role of religiosity in preventing suicide such as study conducted by Hoffman and Marsiglia which stated that there was a protective aspect in religiosity towards suicide which usually divided into internal and external aspect [20]. Religiosity also was said as the individual personal believe that can influence their behaviour where to the extent religiosity can prevent from suicide to happen because the teaching of religion had been an undeniable factor in a religion believer life [21]. The relationship between religion and suicide is explained by three primary theoretical perspectives. Religion has a protective role, according to the social integration theory [18] and the network theory [22], since it fosters community bonds and social integration. Recent research, on the other hand, has shown a more complex relationship between social integration and suicide, suggesting that both too little and too much social integration may be linked to a higher risk of suicide [23]. On the other hand, the commitment hypothesis [24]

claims that religious fundamental beliefs against self-killing prevent people from considering it during tough circumstances. According to these ideas, persons and organisations with religious convictions have reduced rates of suicide behaviour [25][26] and improved mental health [27].

Suicide was also seen as undesirable by those with a religious affiliation [28]. Spiritual difficulties, such as doubting God's existence or God's love, were found to be predictive of suicide attempts in a recent longitudinal research [29]. Other studies, on the other hand, found that good religious coping was a protective factor against suicide thinking and attempt [30][28]. Besides that, according to the study done by [28], religion plays a protective function against suicidal behaviour through influencing attitudes about suicide. Self-annihilation is forbidden in all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) since it is considered an act against divine will. Identifying the impacts of religion while controlling for the effects of attitudes about suicide is a big difficulty from a scientific standpoint. Furthermore, in Malaysia most of Malaysian have their own religion practices where they do believe that their religion can prevent them from committing suicide. Despite religiosity being important factor as stated above but there is still a high prevalence on suicide among adolescents. The reason might be placed on a complex relationship between religiosity and suicide related factor because the country with a high level of religiosity were said to have a lower suicide ideation rate rather than a country with a low level of religiosity [20].

Besides that, academic expectation stress can lead to negative thought such as development of suicidal ideation. Academic stress is a form of mental distress caused by the anticipation of dissatisfaction connected with academic failure, or even the potential of such failure [31]. Students must meet a variety of academic obligations, such as school examinations, answering questions in class, demonstrating progress in school topics, comprehending what the teacher is teaching, competing with their classmates, and meeting the academic expectations of their teachers and parents. These expectations may strain or exceed their limited resources. As a result, people may experience tension and sadness. Academic worries permeate students' life, disrupting parts of their everyday routine. Students are under pressure to perform, to fit in, to commit, and to live up to others' expectations. They even establish lofty objectives for themselves that are often unattainable [32].

College students have a high chance to experience suicidal ideation, plan and attempt to suicide worldwide [33]. This is they are weighed with people's expectation from their surroundings. It is supported by the study conducted by Nandagaon & Raddi where they find that academic stress is closely related to depression and suicide among adolescent students; hence, good academic stress management might avert such effects [31]. Clearly it shows that extreme stress without having strategy to cope may lead to suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour if it left untreated. These issue regarding the academic stress and suicidal ideation have become increasingly becoming serious and have a sense that more attention are required because it would be bad if it left untreated [34]. Furthermore, the findings of Ogba study revealed an alarming prevalence of suicidal ideation among University of Nigeria, Nsukka students as a result of academic stress caused by overwhelming academic demands and the students' inability to bounce back after experiencing academic stress threatening challenges [32]. However, the data revealed that they were able to manage, indicating that copying may function as a buffer between academic stress and suicide thoughts.

Therefore, this paper aimed to:

- i. To identify the level of suicidal ideation among university student.
- ii. To identify the relationship between social support, religiosity, academic expectation and suicidal ideation among university student.

## **2 Finding and Discussion**

## Demographic

**Table 1: Demographic statistics**

		Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	188 (62)
	Female	113 (38)
Age	19 and below	21 (7)
	20 - 22 years	187 (62)
	23- 25 years	30 (10)
	26 and above	63 (21)
Race	Malay	125 (42)
	Chinese	74 (24)
	India	54 (18)
	Others	48 (16)
Religiosity	Islam	141 (47)
	Buddha	61 (20)
	Hindu	38 (13)
	Christianity	49 (16)
	Others	12 (4)
Category	Undergrad student	211 (70)
	Postgrad student	90 (30)

Table 1 above shows the demography of the respondents. From the total of 301 respondents, 188 of them (62%) are male while 113 of them (38%) are female. The respondents are mostly in the age of between 20 to 22 years old with 62%, followed by the age of 26 and above with 21%, 10% of the respondent with the age between 23 to 25 years old, and the least with 7% is the respondents with the age below 19. Almost half of the respondents are Malay with 42%, Chinese (24%), India (18%), and others with 16%. Most of the respondents which is 47% of them are Islam, followed by Buddha with 20%, Christianity (16%), Hindu (13%), and others religion (4%). More than half of the respondents are undergraduate student which comprise of 70% of the respondents.

Objective 1:

**Table 2: Level of Suicidal Ideation**

Central tendency level (Mean Range)	Frequency/Percentage (%)
Low (3.67-5.00)	92 (31)
Moderate (2.33-3.66)	170 (56)
High (1.00-2.32)	39 (13)

Table 2 above shows the level of suicidal ideation among university students. Half of the respondents which comprise of 56% of them have moderate level of suicidal ideation, 31% of them with low level and 13% with high level of suicidal ideation.

Objective 2:

In hypothesis H1 we investigated the relationship between social support and suicidal ideation. The path coefficient of social support to suicidal ideation was noted as 0.675 and was found significant with having t-value = 10.660. Hence, it is determined that there is positive relationship between social support and suicidal ideation. Consequently, H1 is strongly supported by the empirical data. This is in

line with Salsabhilla & Panjaitan (2019) research, which found that social support from family had the greatest impact on suicide thoughts. Because family ties last a long time, the quality of them has a greater impact on suicide thoughts than other types of interactions. Students will feel supported if their families are helpful, and they will be less stressed, which can lead to suicide thinking. It is also supported by the study of Kusumastuti *et al.* (2021) and Johari & Ismail (2021) where they found that there is a positive correlation between family and peer support with suicidal ideation. While the study of Arenson *et al.* (2021) reported that various forms of social support may have varying effects on the risk of suicidal ideation. These effects may vary depending on the circumstances, such as when, from whom, and for whom the assistance is provided. Furthermore, because family is the major support structure for students, it is assumed that they will seek help from them first, rather than friends or significant others. Aside from that, friends are people who are going through similar phases of growth, therefore the pressures they confront are similar. Friends can be asked to exchange experiences and help each other solve challenges. If a person does not receive social support from peers, it might lead to long-term stress and suicide ideation among students (Salsabhilla & Panjaitan, 2019).

In the hypothesis (H2) the relationship of religiosity and suicidal ideation was examined. The path coefficient of religiosity to suicidal ideation was noted as 0.725 and was found significant with having  $t\text{-value} = 15.485$ . Hence, it is summarized that religiosity is significantly and positively linked with suicidal ideation. Consequently, this hypothesis H2 is strongly supported by the empirical data. Religions reported to be a protective factor against suicidal ideation, according to the research by Ibrahim *et al.* (2019), Fekih-Romdhane *et al.* (2020) and Dueñas *et al.* (2020). Previous research have shown that suicide rates among Muslims are low when compared to the prevalence rates of other religious faiths (Eskin *et al.*, 2020). Muslims believe that people can seek aid from a religious teacher or leader in addressing their difficulties via their relationship with God and participation in congregational prayers at mosques. However, due to their busy contemporary lifestyles and working parents, some adolescents forgo spiritual assistance, while others blame God for all of their difficulties. Because religion provides believers with a worldview about life and self, highly religious adolescents are more optimistic and think they can overcome problems, and hence are less likely to engage in suicidal ideation and behavior (Ooi *et al.*, 2021).

Hypothesis (H3) evaluated the relationship of academic expectation with suicidal ideation. From the results it is indicated that path coefficient of academic expectation to suicidal ideation is 0.716 with  $t\text{-value} = 13.793$ . Hence, it is summarized that academic expectation is significantly and positively related to suicidal ideation. Subsequently, H3 is strongly verified by the empirical data. These results support the results of previous research conducted by Ayudanto (2018) which states that poor academic achievement can cause an individual to experience stress, so that suicidal ideation is caused by expectations. The relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation in students is significant and both variables are positive, indicating that if students have high academic stress, students' suicidal ideation is also high and vice versa (Lelanoh *et al.*, 2021). Agree with the results of other studies, research conducted by Byun *et al.* (2020) provide evidence that low or average levels of academic performance are associated with an increase in suicide rates in South Korea. The education system in South Korea is getting higher due to competition for entrance exams at top universities. High academic stress does not only occur in South Korea, but also in other Asian countries. This is due to the education system in Asia which emphasizes academic achievement and considers academic achievement to be one way to achieve success (Ayudanto, 2018).

In the last but not the least, all the research hypotheses having direct effect were supported in the present study. The detail of the direct relationship existed between different constructs i.e., path

coefficient along with its significance level (beta value, t-value), standard deviation and P-values as given in Table 4

**Table 3: Hypotheses testing ( $\beta$ -value and t-value)**

	$\beta$ -value	Standard Deviation	t-value	P Value
SS -> SI	0.675	0.063	10.660	0.001
R -> SI	0.725	0.047	15.485	0.000
AE -> SI	0.716	0.052	13.793	0.000

While, in Table 4 the overall summary of the proposed research hypotheses including direct relationship of social support along with its dimensions on suicidal ideation, the direct relationship of religiosity along with its dimensions on suicidal ideation, and relationship between academic expectation on suicidal ideation. All these proposed hypotheses of the study were supported by the empirical data.

**Table 4: Summary of the direct hypotheses**

	$\beta$ -value	t-value	p-value	Results
Hypothesis 1 ( SS -> SI)	0.675	10.660	0.001	Supported
Hypothesis 2 (R -> SI)	0.725	15.485	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis 3 (AE -> SI)	0.716	13.793	0.000	Supported

### 3 Conclusion

The finding of this study provides a deeper understanding of suicidal ideation where it can increase the number of study that studied on suicidal ideation especially in Malaysia context. In addition, increasing the research that solely focusing on the effect of protective factor on suicidal ideation because most suicide-related research actually focus on the risk factor only. Furthermore, this study also shows the way in decreasing the level of suicidal ideation where the protective factor can helps the school, caregivers, government and others to plan any appropriate measure to reduce suicidal ideation. As limitation were existed in this study, there a few recommendations for future researcher who is interested to continue this research. Perhaps, the future researcher can broadened the population so that the result can represent in wider term.

This study can be conducted not only limited to undergraduate but postgraduate students and also cover several universities in private and public which ultimately allows a comparison to be made. A larger sample will increase the probability of making generalizations across the university to give a more detailed picture and the real situation and this will also benefit stakeholders in formulating strategic plans and actions. In addition, it is also suggested that future researchers try to provide research in the demographic aspect that looks at the profile of those who have intentions and tend to act suicidal. At the end of research, a profile of suicidal ideation's character can develop if this research can be continued by the future researcher. Therefore, a mixed method approach when conducting this research is encouraged so that better understanding can be obtain by the researcher. This suggestion can remove the restriction of quantitative method which only focus on the answer given on the paper.

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