



## **The Prevalence and Correlates of Suicidal Ideation among University Students: A Survey**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine the frequency and correlates of suicidal thoughts among students who are studying at a public university in Malaysia. A convenience sample strategy was used to recruit 371 undergraduate students for this survey research project. The respondents' information was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. According to the findings, a significant number of respondents scored positive for the emergence of suicidal ideation. The study also suggests that there is a strong link between suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety in this study. However, there is no notable link between suicidal ideation and substance use.

**Keywords:** suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, substance use

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Suicidal thoughts are believed to be a regular occurrence for individuals experiencing severe stress or depression. In most cases, the views are temporary and treatable; however, these thoughts can sometimes drive the individual to act and attempt or complete suicide. Based on Anderson and Smith (2014), Suicide is considered a major cause of death among individuals between 15 and 24 and is the subsequent driving reason for death among students in the United States (Schwartz, 2006).

The number of research on suicidal ideation has increased in recent years. The World Health Organization (WHO) statistics show that the number of people who committed Suicide in 2012 was estimated to be over 800,000 people. Most of the numbers are contributed by young people between 15 to 29 years of age. The suicide rate has shown a significant increase at 8.5% worldwide (World Health Organization, 2014).

Among these cases, suicide attempts or completed Suicide is the driving reason for death among university students. At the same time, the first cause is self-induced injury (Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller & Dodd, 2009). This research indicates a significant rate of suicidal ideation among university students, which eventually leads them to their death if left untreated. Suicide in Malaysia has become the second most elevated reason for death among individuals between the ages of 15 to 29, based on a report by Pillay (2017) in the *New Straits Times*. Based on a senior psychiatrist consultant at the hospital of the National University of Malaysia, the current figure for Suicide is 3 per 100 000 inhabitants. However, this might not be accurate as suicide cases in Malaysia are underly reported because of issues such as culture, religion, and other legal prohibitions (Khan, Sulaiman & Hassali, 2012). Based on a National Survey, as much as 11.4% of university students develop suicidal ideation, which is the thoughts of committing suicide. Of these numbers, 7.9% wanted to commit suicide, and 1.7% of students tried suicide (Barrios, Everett, Simon & Brenner, 2002).

This factor is concerning, as reported by The World Health Organisation (WHO). The suicidal magnitude has shifted over the past decades from western Europe to Asia and compared to the data from 2012. Past years show that Asian countries have a significantly higher average of suicide cases. These numbers report that 26% of the world's population living in 11 South-East Asian countries accounts for more than 39% of the global suicide numbers (World Health Organization, 2014). Many research and information on Suicide and self-harm have been carried out in the US and European countries. Still, this study's rates do not reflect suicide spread internationally, with Asia responsible for up to 60% of suicide cases (World Health Organization, 2014). Malaysia is located in South-East Asia and is known for various ethnicities, cultures, and religious backgrounds. There is a state located in East Malaysia called Sarawak, where it is most abundant with different people of different ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds. There is a lack of research on these populations' mental health and even less on specific groups of individuals such as university students. Therefore, a study on the prevalence and correlates of suicidal ideation in students from a selected public university would be timely.

Numerous studies have researched possible factors that correlate with suicidal ideation. The results have shown that depression is one of the critical factors that contribute to the development of