



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: THE CONTRIBUTING  
FACTORS AND COPING STRATEGIES ON SUICIDAL  
IDEATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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**Bachelor of Psychology (Honours)**

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**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS  
AND COPING STRATEGIES ON SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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This project is submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK  
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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Suicidal ideation is a negative thinking about wanting to die with no planning of attempting suicide. In Malaysia, there are a lot of research related with suicidal ideation yet the information on suicidal ideation among university student is limited. Other than that, the contributing factors on suicidal ideation and coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university student also is not discussed.

**Objectives:** To understand the phenomenon of suicidal ideation among university students, to identify the contributing factors of suicidal ideation among university students and to explore the coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university students.

**Method:** The sampling method that were used is the purposive sampling where five university students from the University of Malaysia, Sarawak were interviewed using semi-structured interview.

**Results:** Based on the finding, the theme for the phenomenon on suicidal ideation among university student are time and the subthemes are periods, frequency, and duration. The theme for the contributing factors on suicidal ideation is family factors with parent-child relationship and family conflict as the subthemes, then the theme emotional distress with hopelessness and loneliness as the subthemes, and the theme life events with negative life events as the subthemes.

The theme for coping strategies on suicidal ideation are healthy coping strategies with distraction, talking and self-love as the subthemes and unhealthy coping strategies with drinking and smoking as the subthemes.

**Keywords:** Suicidal ideation, contributing factors, coping strategies, university students

## ABSTRAK

**Latar belakang:** Fikiran bunuh diri adalah pemikiran negatif tentang ingin mati tanpa perancangan untuk cuba membunuh diri. Di Malaysia, terdapat banyak penyelidikan yang berkaitan dengan idea bunuh diri namun maklumat mengenai idea bunuh diri dalam kalangan pelajar universiti adalah terhad. Selain daripada itu, faktor penyumbang idea bunuh diri dan strategi mengatasi idea bunuh diri dalam kalangan pelajar universiti juga tidak dibincangkan. **Objektif:** Untuk memahami fenomena idea bunuh diri dalam kalangan pelajar universiti, untuk mengenal pasti faktor penyumbang idea bunuh diri dalam kalangan pelajar universiti dan untuk meneroka strategi mengatasi idea bunuh diri dalam kalangan pelajar universiti. **Kaedah:** Kaedah persampelan yang digunakan ialah persampelan bertujuan di mana lima orang pelajar universiti dari Universiti Malaysia, Sarawak telah ditemu bual menggunakan temu bual separa berstruktur. **Keputusan:** Berdasarkan dapatan kajian, tema bagi fenomena idea bunuh diri dalam kalangan pelajar universiti ialah masa dan subtema ialah tempoh, kekerapan dan tempoh. Tema bagi faktor penyumbang idea bunuh diri ialah faktor keluarga dengan hubungan ibu bapa-anak dan konflik keluarga sebagai subtema, kemudian tema tekanan emosi dengan keputusan dan kesunyian sebagai subtema, dan tema peristiwa kehidupan dengan peristiwa kehidupan negatif sebagai subtema. Tema untuk strategi menangani idea bunuh diri ialah strategi menangani secara sihat dengan gangguan, bercakap dan cinta diri sebagai subtema dan strategi menangani tidak sihat dengan minum dan merokok sebagai subtema.

**Kata Kunci:** Idea bunuh diri, faktor penyumbang, strategi mengatasi, pelajar universiti

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the background of the study, the statement problems, research objective, research questions, the definition of terms in this study, research frameworks, and the significance of the study.

### **1.1 Background of Study**

When an individual ends their life by committing suicide, we call it “died by suicide” (Alberta Mental Health Board, 2005). Died by suicide is a term mostly used by reporters to report suicide cases that had happened, and it is used to reduce the stigmas. Suicide is the intention to die by injuring oneself that resulted in death (Crosby A, Ortega L, Melanson C., 2011). Suicide is extremely a very heart-breaking incident that will cause pain to the people that left. Suicide is a tragedy that robs happiness and can give awful effects on family, friends, and communities (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, 2017) that were left. It is a tragedy that people want to avoid, and people choose not to talk about it as other people will look cynical towards the family.

According to Baumeister (1990), suicide can be seen as the final solution in the attempt to escape from the world and themselves. People who tried to attempt suicide do not want to die, but they wanted to get out from the pain they are feeling. Sometimes, people who are suicidal think that killing themselves is the only way to end the pain that they are feeling or suffering. People who are suicidal think that there is nothing else they could do, so the final act is to commit suicide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide is a significant public health issue worldwide because it is among the leading causes of death than malaria, homicide, and Parkinson’s disease.

More than 700 000 people die due to suicide which is roughly one death every 40 seconds every year (WHO, 2016). Suicide can happen throughout the lifetime, and it was the fourth leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds globally in 2019 (WHO, 2021). Suicide is complex and tragic. Suicide is a wide-ranging phenomenon, and it happens every single day even though this incident is preventable.

Suicide can happen to anyone. It is a tragedy that is preventable because there are warning signs (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2021). People who want to commit suicide normally will show symptoms that are possible in the way they talk or in their mood and sometimes in their behavior. People who are suicidal usually talk about wanting to die, talk about feeling empty or hopeless, talk about how trapped they feel and feel like there are no solutions or ways to their problems, feeling unbearable emotional or physical pain, isolating from family and friends, talking about death regularly and many other warning signs. Commonly, people who want to commit suicide will have suicidal ideation.

According to World Health Organization (2020), suicidal ideation refers to the thoughts, ideas, or ruminations about the possibility of ending one's life. Suicidal ideation means thinking about suicide but with no planning to attempt suicide (Crow, Eisenberg, Story, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2008). People who have suicidal ideation do not necessarily mean that they want to die but having those thoughts make them a risk factor (Gliatto, MF; Rai, AK, 1999). According to Psychiatric Association Practice Guidelines for Psychiatric Evaluation of Adults (2016), suicidal ideation is one of the signs of another primary clinical diagnosis, and they suggest that 90% of people who choose to end their lives by suicide meet the diagnostic criteria for one or more clinical diagnoses. Suicidal ideation is usually related to other mental health issues and life events.



## **1.2 Problem Statement**

According to Glover (2000), during the university year, students encounter different levels of difficulty in academic pressure and achievement, working choices, and life goal decisions. Students usually have difficulty coping with a new environment and responsibilities especially when entering university life. University life can be demanding and hard. When entering challenging university life, students may feel hopeless, stressed, and overwhelm. When students feel like, they cannot cope, then the students may perceive suicide as the solution to the problems (Tam et al., 2011).

Several studies have been conducted before and findings revealed that suicidal ideation among university students has an increased rate (Abdollahi et al, 2014). This study suggests that university students have a high risk of this issue. Even though there are several studies have been conducted on this issue, but most of them were conducted in quantitative research. Conducting qualitative research related to this issue can help us to listen to the voices of the people that have had their encounter with suicidal ideation. Other than that, this type of research will help to clarify the experiences and track events.

According to Min (2005), youngsters experience a lot of changes as they enter independent life, working life, armed services, and personal relationships. The young adult is the time of life where a lot of transition and adjustment happened. Young adults would feel pressure, overwhelmed, and sometimes frustrated, especially when they see their friends have moved on from their lives and have a better life. As for students, pressure and frustration come from the competition for higher marks and failure to find suitable work. In consequence, students can become upset, stressed, and, at last, suicidal (Wu, Su, & Chen, 2009). Therefore, researchers need to explore more about the other factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among university students.

There are various reasons why suicide is happening. Typically, before suicide happens, there is always the ideation or thoughts to suicide. Suicidal ideation is an early sign of suicidal attempts. There are several past research that identified the factors of suicidal ideation among university students all around the world. According to Brent and Man (2005), family history of suicide can be one of the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation. According to previous research done by Brent and Melhem (2008), they suggest that parents' history of suicidal behavior may grant the vulnerability for suicide to children, even though the vulnerability may be partially heritable. Children of parents with psychiatric illness have a high risk of suicide and suicidal ideation.

Other than that, drug use disorder, early childhood abuse (Bridge, Goldstein, & Brent, 2006), and mental disorders (Fergusson, Beautrais, & Horwood, 2003). Everything that is happening or had happened may contribute to the risk of suicidal ideation and conducting qualitative research can help researchers understand more about suicidal ideation because it comes from experience that people always choose to ignore.

The style of coping a person used usually differs from one another. Coping can be an internal source of emotional strengths that then becomes prevention from committing suicide. Coping strategies are a way of distracting one from committing suicide or suicidal ideation. In 1984, Lazarus and Folkman describe that coping as an effort to control individual and environmental demands. Coping helps to alter the causes of stress. Coping has its style and according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) every style of coping has two strategies, that is behavioral and cognitive strategies.

Usually, an individual would use both strategies but, it also depends on the situation. Consequently, researchers can try identifying what coping strategies that students use to overcome suicidal ideation. This study will then help other people to overcome their problems in the future.

For these reasons, it was very necessary to improve understanding of the contributing factors on suicidal ideation among students. The main purpose of this study was to address the gap from previous studies by identifying what was the contributing factors on suicidal ideation and how students overcame their experiences with suicidal ideation that can then help future researchers to find new prevention and intervention.

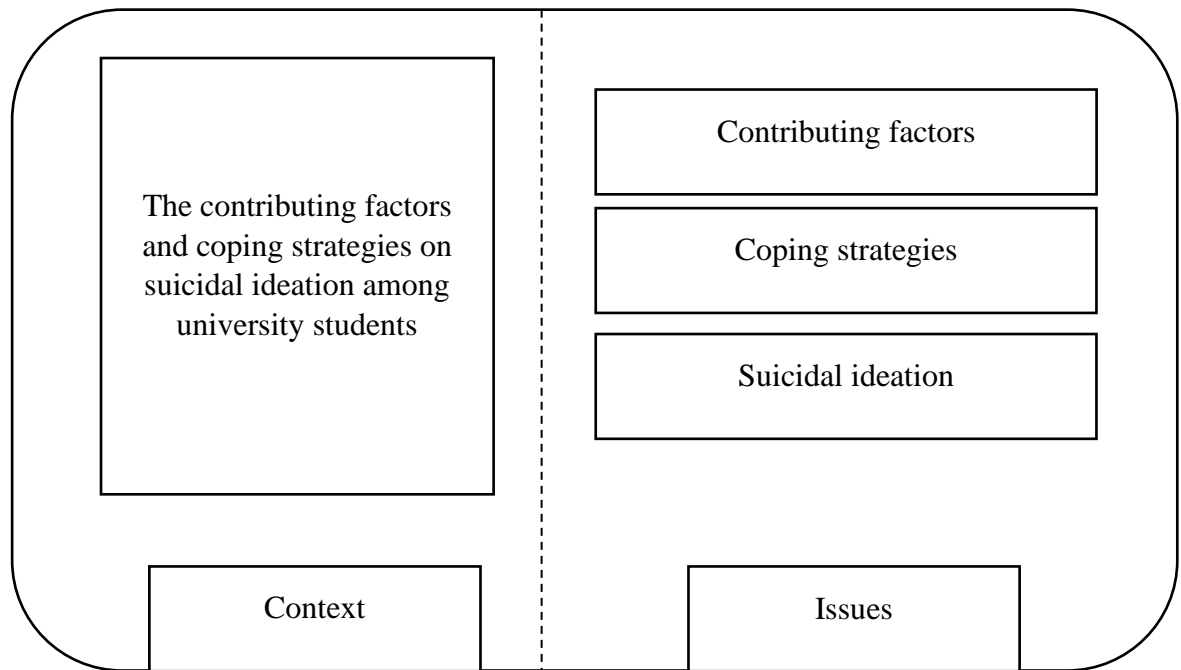
### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To understand the phenomenon of suicidal ideation among university students.
2. To identify the contributing factors of suicidal ideation among university students.
3. To explore the coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university students.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What was the phenomenon of suicidal ideation among university students?
2. What were the contributing factors of suicidal ideation among university students?
3. What were the coping strategies for suicidal ideation among university students?

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework



*Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework*

## **1.6 Significance of Study**

This study was necessary because it gave readers the information and understanding about the contributing factors and coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university students. This study helped people to understand that student life was not as easy as it seems from the perspective of university students. Society be better informed about the factors and coping strategies on suicidal ideation so that they can understand better the life as a student and be mentally prepared over the future.

Next, this study can be applied in future research. The topic of contributing factors and coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university students need to be studied more so that the future generation can gain something from the research. Other than that, there was not enough study in qualitative research. Most of the studies that had been carried out were in quantitative research. Research in qualitative research will help some of the students to speak more about their suicidal ideation and not just answer questions. This type of research also helps researchers to understand more about suicidal ideation as the researcher heard the experiences themselves.

Apart from that, the topic of coping strategies should be further discussed because there is always a hope of getting a new strategy to cope with suicidal ideation. This research was a guideline for other researchers who also want to carry out the same research in the future. The findings of this study help society to realize the truth about what was going on within the students' perspectives. Finally, yet importantly, this study has the potential to help the government and any other authorities to get rough information about the contributing factors and coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university students, and in consequences, the data allowed the authorities in providing treatment or initiative to help students with mental health issues.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **1.7.1 Suicidal Ideation**

**Conceptual Definition:** According to World Health Organization (2020), suicidal ideation or also known as suicidal thought refers to having thoughts or ideas about the chance of ending one's life.

**Operational Definition:** Suicidal ideation terms used in this study refer to one's thinking about ending their own life, considering it, or planning on doing it.

### **1.7.2 Contributing Factor**

**Conceptual Definition:** Contributing factor refers to a scientifically established factor that directly affects the level of a risk factor.

**Operational Definition:** Contributing factors in this study refer to the reasons why and what lead to suicidal ideation.

### **1.7.3 Coping Strategy**

**Conceptual Definition:** Coping strategy refers to a person's ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to deal with certain outside and/or internal pressures that can be seen to be demanding or beyond the person's capabilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Strategy is a program of action designed to achieve a goal or accomplish a task (World Health Organization, 2020).

**Operational Definition:** The term coping strategy in this study refers to the approach used to solve a problem or distract themselves from doing something they should not do like committing suicide or approaches in dealing with suicidal thoughts and feelings.

## **1.8 Summary**

This chapter reviewed the scope of research by defining the background of the study, statement of problems, research objectives, research questions, and terminology in terms of conceptual and operational definitions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviewed the literature corresponding to this research topic. This chapter discussed the contributing factors and coping strategies on suicidal ideation among university students that were related to the previous studies.

#### **2.1 Suicidal Ideation**

Suicidal ideation is the early symptom of suicidal action. Suicidal ideation has a different meaning for every researcher. According to Gliatto and Rai (1999), suicidal ideation was known as the thoughts in which people ponder or were amused by suicide. According to Brazier (2020), suicidal ideation was emphasized as the goal and intention to commit suicide in the absence of a suicide attempt.

##### **2.1.1 Theories Related to Suicidal Ideation**

###### **2.1.1.1 Suicidal Ideation and College Students**

The suicide trend among adolescents and young adults from the age of 15- to 24-year-olds has nearly increase in the previous twenty years, jumping up to 237% between 1960 and 1980 (Gispert, Wheeler, & Davis, 1985; Maris, 1985). The early symptom of suicidal action is suicidal ideation, and this trend cannot be taken lightly. The number increases year by year and it was getting more and more serious. In 2001, nationwide studies conducted in The United States found that 9.5% of college students had serious thoughts of suicide and 1.5% of them had attempted suicide (American College Health Association, 2001). According to another research, anywhere between eight percent and fifteen percent of university students in the United States act on their suicidal ideas (Bonner & Rich, 1987; Brener, Hassan, & Barrios, 1999).