

# SUICIDE AMONG YOUTHS – IDENTIFYING RISKS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS: A REVIEW ANALYSIS

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## *Abstract*

Suicide is an act of deliberate self-harming or injuring self, intending to end one's own life. Suicide is not a disease, and it does not always result in death. However, suicide or a suicidal attempt has some associated behaviour and thoughts that are significant public health issues. According to World Health Organisation (2019), suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among youths worldwide, aged 15-29. According to NCRB (2019), it has been revealed that Tripura ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among all the states of India and 2<sup>nd</sup> among the North-Eastern states after Sikkim in terms of suicide cases. Globally as well as nationally, India's suicide rate is increasing alarmingly and its grievous contribution to world statistics. The generation of youth of this country is more vulnerable to suicide, and it has become a serious matter of concern globally. There are certain psychological, social, and environmental risk factors like stress, depression, trauma, etc. that make a youth more vulnerable and prone to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Similarly, certain protective factors help the youths against suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviours, eventually protecting them from committing suicide.

The current review article aims to ascertain the risk factors of suicide among the youths. It also aims at finding the protective factors of suicide among the youths and how these can be executed to curb the issues.

**Keywords:** Suicide, youth, risk-factors, protective factors.

## Introduction

Suicide is an act of deliberate self-harming or injuring self, intending to end one's own life (Work Group on Suicidal Behaviours, 2003). According to World Health Organisation (2019), suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among youths worldwide, aged 15-29. It is also the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death among female and male youths respectively. The report by Global Burden of Disease (GBD, 2016) showed that India's contribution to global statistics of suicide had been 36.6% among women and 24.3% among men and most of them were aged between 15 to 39 years.

According to NCRB (2019), it has been revealed that Tripura ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among all the states of India and 2<sup>nd</sup> among the North-Eastern states after Sikkim in terms of suicide cases. The average suicide rate of India is 10.4, whereas, in Tripura, it is 18.2. The NCRB report further revealed that there had been a hike of 60% in the suicide rate over the last decade, and it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among the youths of 15-29 years. In India, 35.1% of suicide victims are youths aged between 18 to 29 years of age. The above data highlights how India's suicide rate is increasing alarmingly and its grievous contribution to world statistics. The generation of youth of this country is more vulnerable to suicide, and it has become a serious matter of concern. The study by Goldney, et al. (1989) revealed that since suicidal ideation ranges from fleeting thoughts to sincere thoughts and planning for a long time, it results in the diversity of prevalence rate of suicidal ideation among different communities.

Suicide is not a disease, and it does not always result in death. However, suicide or a suicidal attempt has some associated behaviours and thoughts that are significant public health issues (Turecki, et al., 2019). According to various studies, some commonly used suicide-related terms which imply certain suicidal ideas and thoughts have been mentioned below:

- **Suicide:** Act of intentional self-injury to end one's own life.
- **Self-harm:** Behaviour of injuring self, which may or may not have the intention to die.
- **Suicidal Behaviour:** Self-injuring behaviours to end one's life with an intention to die.
- **Suicide Attempt:** Self-injurious behaviours with inferred or actual intent to die.
- **Suicidal Ideation:** Thoughts about attempting suicide and ways to attempt suicide.

Suicidal ideation may be active or passive (Dandona, et al., 2018; Masango, Rataemane & Motojesi, 2008; Turecki, et al., 2019).

The study of Ruch, et al., (2019) showed that the suicide rate is increasing day by day among the young generation across different countries and cultures. Youths are the future and pillar of nations. They are the most significant assets of any country. During this time, they leave school, start their higher education, join their professional spaces or get into wedlock and settle in life. This age is indeed a very stressful transitional period, and the youths at this age are prone to various psychological distress and mental health disorder, which might push them towards self-harm and suicide eventually (Izadinia, Amiri, Ghorban Jahromi, & Hamidi, 2010; Sweeting, West & Der, 2010).

The most common ways of committing suicide among the youths are overdosing of drugs, hanging, or using a sharp object for self-harm (Cloutier, Martin, Kennedy, Nixon, & Muehlenkamp, 2010; Parellada et al., 2008). However, other studies concluded that hanging and food/drink poisoning are also leading causes of suicide in India followed by self-immolation and drowning (Wu, Chen, & Yip, 2012). Studies also exhibited that 20-40% of adolescents commit suicide without any prior plan and act on impulsiveness (Witte et al., 2008).

Studies have revealed that certain psychological, social, and environmental risk factors make youths more vulnerable and prone to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Kraemer, 1997). Similarly, certain protective factors help the youths against suicidal ideation and suicidal

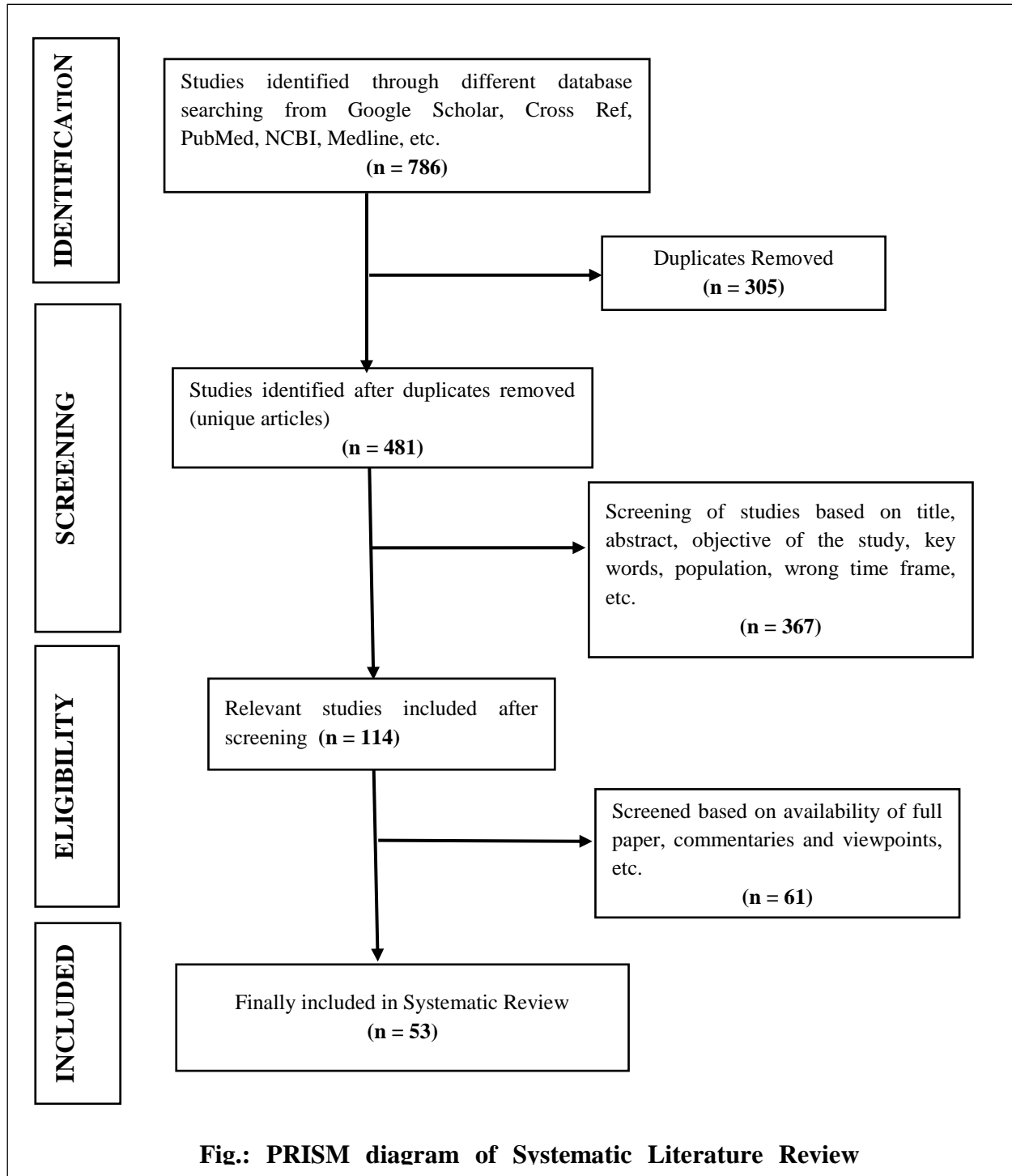
behaviours, and eventually protect them from committing suicide (Burke, et al., 2016). Some of the risk factors for suicide among the youth are stress, depression, bipolar disorder, traumatic incidents, bullying, substance abuse, etc. In contrast, protective factors against suicide among youths are high self-esteem, emotional regulation, strong attachment to family and friends, etc. So, it is the call of the hour to study suicide and suicidal ideation among youths and its associated risks and protective factors, and how these preventive methods can be implemented to curb the issues (Jordans, et al., 2014).

The main objective of this review article is to ascertain the risk factors of suicide among the youths. It also aims at finding the protective factors of suicide among the youths and how these can be executed to curb the issues.

## **Methodology**

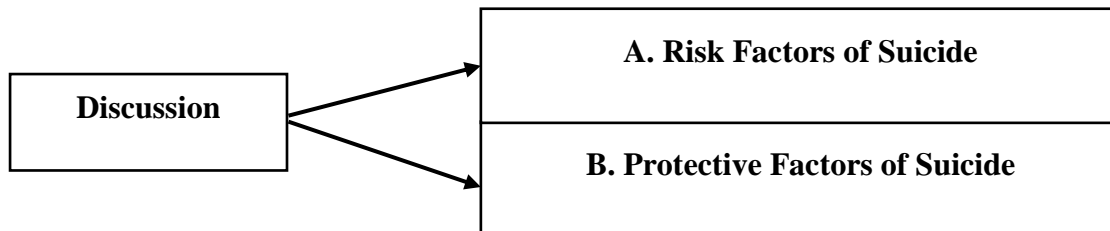
This paper has been reviewed from the secondary data available, through conceptual models, various past journals, research papers, and other useful websites related to Suicide, Suicidal Ideation, its associated risks and protective factors. Finally, the paper extensively reviews different articles pertaining to psycho-social coping mechanisms to reduce stress levels among individuals. For conducting this review research, related articles were focused on and keywords like "suicide", "suicide and mental health", "suicidality", "suicidal ideation", "youths", "risk factors of suicidality", and "protective factors" were used. For identifying articles that focussed on the theme of suicide, specific terms like "suicide", "suicidal ideation", "suicidality", "youths", "risk and protective factors," and other related words were used. The databases used for identifying related articles were from Google Scholar, Medline, Pub Med, Government data, and various other journals. 53 articles relevant to the topic, including government reports, reviews, mini-reviews, working papers, original research papers, case reports, etc. were studied. Both the authors reviewed all the articles, and the most relevant ones were chosen and cited in

this review article. Finally, conclusions have been made based on the findings as discussed from different reviewed articles. A PRISM flow chart has been given to show the selection process of articles suitable for the current paper:



## Findings and discussion

The authors intended to discuss the reviewed articles related to the themes under two broad headings as mentioned:



### A. Risk Factors of Suicide:

Certain risk factors can push youths to the verge of committing a suicide attempt and an eventual death. The following are some of the risk factors:

- ***Suicidal Ideation:*** Suicidal Ideation refers to the thoughts and ideas about suicide. Park et al. (2017) found that suicidal ideation and the ideation's severity are a significant predictor of suicidal attempts later in life, and suicidal ideation should not be overlooked. It is a considerable risk factor for suicide. Further studies revealed that among the most commonly known risk factors of suicide, suicidal ideation is a very significant one, and suicidal ideation should not be disregarded if found in anyone (Klonsky, May & Saffer, 2016). Miranda, Ortin, Scott, and Shaffer (2014) attempted to study how frequency and length of suicidal ideation affect adolescents and also found that pondering about suicide quite often, over a long period, can be linked with suicide in the future. Further, it also reveals that suicidal ideation for an hour or so resulted in a suicide attempt in the future. Louzon, Bossarte, McCarthy and Katz (2016) demonstrated that high suicidal ideation indicated an increased risk of suicide.

- ***Family History of Suicide:*** A study on suicide concerning family history of suicide has revealed that history of suicide has significantly increased the suicide risk among family members irrespective of any psychiatric disorder (Quin, Agerbo & Mortensen, 2002; Runeson & Asberg, 2003). A similar study by Sorensen, et al. (2009) revealed suicide among parents also increased the suicide risk among their children. Rajalin, Hirvikoski, and Jokinen (2013) assessed the male suicide rate and found that males who have a family history of suicide made seriously well-planned suicide attempts.
- ***Stress:*** A study conducted among Chinese youths on stress revealed that excessive life stress could simultaneously lead to suicidal ideation and suicide (Zhang, et al., 2012). Theories of suicide also proved how life stresses could accelerate suicidal thoughts and behaviour (O'Connor & Nock, 2014). Another study by Liu and Miller (2014) also revealed that stressful and traumatic life events like financial loss, divorce, or the death of someone close could increase the risk of suicidal ideation and attempt among youths.
- ***Impulsivity and Aggression:*** Wang, et al. (2014) found that youths who reported to have attempted suicide and suicidal ideation have high cognitive impulsivity and aggression. Further, the study stated that impulsivity and aggression seem to have predicted suicidal ideation among the youths. Again, studies showed that impulsivity and aggression are the personality traits that make a person prone to a high risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours. These traits might pass on through genes to the next generation and result in a risk of suicidality (Gvion & Apter, 2011; Turecki, 2005). Aggression and impulsivity can also result in suicidal behaviour among alcoholics (Koller, 2002).
- ***Depression, Anxiety, and Hopelessness:*** Several studies have proved that feelings of depression and hopelessness are significantly inducing suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Studies further state that the deadly combination between despair and depression seems

to have predicted suicidality (Chioqueta & Stiles, 2005; Rhodes, Bethell & Bondy, 2006). The study by Peter, Roberts, and Buzdugan (2008) showed both depression and anxiety were responsible for suicidality among youths. Similar results were revealed by Taylor, Gooding, Wood and Tarrie (2011). Nguyen, et al. (2013) also found that anxiety and depression strongly associate with suicidal ideation among Vietnamese adolescents.

## **B. Protective Factors of Suicide:**

Certain factors can protect suicide among youths and safeguard against all suicidal tendencies, thoughts, and behaviours. These are as follows:

- **Resilience:** A study by Hiesel and Flett (2008) showed that resilience among youths greatly assists in decreasing suicidal ideation. Similarly, Sher (2019) revealed that resilience is a protective factor against suicidal thoughts and actions, and promoting resiliency should be a part of psychiatric treatment. A longitudinal study on resilience also found that it effectively prevents mental health disorders and substance abuse disorders while preventing suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Bremt, 2016).
- **Attachment to Parents and Peers:** Studies showed that quality attachment with parents and peers plays an essential role as a coping mechanism to reduce stress and deliberate self-harming behaviours (Hallab & Covic, 2010). More studies found that adolescents' attachments to their parents and peers reduce their delinquency and suicidal attitudes (Jiang, You, Zheng & Lin, 2017; Yuksek & Solakoglu, 2016). Secured and good quality attachment to peers and parents seem to reduce suicidality among adolescents (Bostik & Everall, 2007).
- **High Self-esteem:** The study by Sharaf, Thompson and Walsh (2009) found that low self-esteem increases suicidal risk and high self-esteem decreases suicidal risk among adolescents. Further, Cero and Sifers (2013) found that physical abuse among children



reduce their self-esteem, which further causes suicidal ideation. Hence, self-esteem should be developed to reduce suicidal ideation among youths. Globally it is proved that, self-esteem levels help to predict suicidal ideation, problem eating, and other physical and mental health issues. So, high self-esteem should be developed and promoted among youths (McGee & Williams, 2000).

- ***Spirituality:*** Meyer, Teylan, and Schwartz (2015) revealed that spirituality or religious affiliation results in a lesser chance of having suicidal ideation and attempts, and it can be used for improving mental health and wellbeing. Similarly Bullock, Nadeau, and Renaud (2012) also showed that how spirituality acts as a stepping stone to good mental health among youths. Many other studies also proved how spirituality acts as a protective factor against suicidal behaviors and thoughts (Kyle, 2013; Wagani & Colucci, 2018).
- ***Strong Problem-solving Skills:*** Speckens and Hawton (2005) found that adolescents who showed suicidal behaviours had poor social problem-solving skills and vice-versa. Further adolescents with high stress are more prone to suicidal attempts as they lack problem-solving skills compared to those who have good problem-solving skills (Carris, Sheeber & Howe, 1998; Grover, et al., 2009).

## **Conclusion**

There are both risk factors as well as protective factors of suicide among youths. Risk factors make youths more prone to suicide, while protective factors protect and safeguard them against suicide. Therefore, youths should be encouraged to foster and practice skills and techniques like resilience, spirituality, problem-solving ability, etc, to avoid suicidal thoughts and behaviours and to lead a healthy and productive life, hence contributing to the development of society and nation.

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