

Peer Relationship Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy, and Adolescents' Suicidal Ideation in Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

The occurrence of suicide has become a serious phenomenon throughout the world. This study investigated the relationships between peer relationship satisfaction, self-efficacy and adolescents' suicidal ideation in Malaysia. The mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents' suicidal ideation was also examined. A total of 684 school-going adolescents participated in the current study. Pearson correlation and a series of multiple regression analysis were carried out to examine the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents' suicidal ideation. The study revealed that peer relationship satisfaction and self-efficacy were negatively correlated with suicidal ideation. This means that adolescents who are more satisfied with their peer relationship and have higher self-efficacy tend to have lower suicidal ideation. Self-efficacy also partially mediates the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and suicidal ideation. These findings implied that adolescents' satisfaction with peer relationship is a predictor that impact suicidal ideation, while

self-efficacy plays an significant role in the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and suicidal ideation. Intervention in planning suicide prevention programs should emphasize on both improving peer relationships and increasing self-efficacy among adolescents.

Keywords: Peer relationship satisfaction, Self-efficacy, Suicidal ideation

1. Introduction

Suicide has become a crucial problem throughout the world where more than 800,000 people died from suicide every year (WHO, 2014). More seriously, there were many more suicide attempters for each death from suicide while those with suicidal thoughts were countless. Many people who attempt suicide were from the vulnerable group such as young people (WHO, 2013). Also, Asian countries have higher risk of suicides where they accounted approximately 60% of the world suicide cases (Chen, Wu, Yousof, & Yip, 2012). While in Malaysia, the suicide rate is quite high where the National Suicide Registry Malaysia (NSRM) found that an average of 60 suicide cases happen every month (Ng, 2012). Moreover, a recent local study found out that a total of 294 adolescents out of 1441 adolescents in Malaysia were at-risk in involving in suicidal behaviour (Choon, Mansor, Siti, Hamidin, et al., 2014). This indicated that around 20% of the adolescents in Malaysia involved in suicide behaviour which makes suicide a serious phenomenon in our nation.

Suicide has become the major cause of death worldwide (Kapur & Gask, 2009). For adolescents aged 10 to 19, suicide has become their third major cause of death (WHO, 2014). Suicidal ideation is the thoughts or desires of one to take own life. It is a major predictor of suicidal planning and attempts (O'Carroll et al., 1996). Thus, identifying factors that predict suicidal ideation may help in the prevention of suicidal attempts which eventually decreases suicidality among adolescents.

Suicidal ideation amongst adolescents is often linked to various factors including self and peers. Peers play a very important role in adolescents' life. Adolescents who are more satisfied with their peer relationships tend to be happier (Demir, Ozdemir, & Weitekamp, 2007). In contrast, adolescents who are dissatisfied with their peer group have higher probability of engaging in suicidality (Tze-Chun et al., 2009). Local study revealed that having close friend protect adolescents from suicidality (NoorAni, Cheong, Nurashikin, & Azriman, 2014) as well as friends' advises were most sought for when youths discuss on the topic of death (Kok, Gan, & Goh, 2011). In addition, adolescents perceiving peers as unkind and unhelpful, being bullied, and engage in frequent physical fighting have higher risks in having suicidal thoughts and attempts (Cui, Cheng, Xu, Chen, & Wang, 2010). In overall, poor peer relationship lead to dissatisfaction which in turn lead to higher risks in having suicidal ideation.

Self-efficacy is an important personal factor that impact adolescents' suicidal ideation. Self-efficacy is how people judge their capabilities which influence how people behave, think, and react (Bandura, 1986). People with high self-efficacy belief in own abilities are more able to achieve desirable outcomes and success in life (Bandura, 1977). They are more motivated in achieving their goals which in turn lower their risk in engaging in suicidal behaviour (Choon, Mansor, Siti, Tan, et al., 2014). Adolescents with high self-efficacy also seem to be protected from suicidality as they are positively connected socially and have better adaptation (McNamara, 2012). Another study found that suicidal ideation, suicidal planning and suicidal attempts occur due to low level of emotional self-efficacy in adolescents (Valois, Zullig, & Hunter, 2013). Thus, increasing self-efficacy in adolescents is vital to decrease the probability

of adolescents engaging in suicidality.

According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), people learn from their environment by observing and imitating as well as processing the behavior using personal or cognitive abilities. Bandura also specifies that self-efficacy plays a major role in human functioning (Bandura, 1977). Personal factors such as self-efficacy and environment factors such as peer relationship are interrelated with our behavior. Moreover, social cognitive theory described that behavior is shaped by the environment factors and mediated through personal factors. Based on the social cognitive theory, peer relationship plays an important role in adolescents' development where problems with peers lead to maladjustment, including having suicidal ideation while having high self-efficacy lower the risk of having suicidal ideation.

Past studies aforementioned have highlighted that peer relationship satisfaction and self-efficacy are related to adolescents' suicidal ideation. Moreover, studies have shown that problems in peer relationship will affect adolescents' self-efficacy, and low self-efficacy will predict suicidal ideation. However, few studies have examined the self-efficacy as the mediator on the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents' suicidal ideation. Thus, this study extended past research by investigating the relationships between peer relationship satisfaction, self-efficacy and adolescents' suicidal ideation in Malaysia. In addition, this study examines the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and suicidal ideation.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample and procedures

The respondents consisted of 684 school-going adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia. They were recruited using multistage cluster sampling. Self-administered questionnaires were used in collecting the data. Permission from the Ministry of Education Malaysia, Selangor Education Department and school principals were obtained prior to data collection. Ethic approval was also granted from the Ethics Committee for Research involving Human Subjects Universiti Putra Malaysia (JKEUPM). The respondents were briefed regarding the purpose and confidentiality of the current study, as well as informed consent was obtained from the respondents. Respondents were 14 to 17 years old secondary school students which comprised of 379 females (55.4%) and 305 males (44.6%). The respondents were of Malay (58.9%), Chinese (33.2%), and Indian (7.9%) ethnicity.

2.2 Measures

Peer relationship satisfaction was measured using the Network of Relationships – Relationship Quality Version (NRI – RQV; Buhrmester & Furman, 2008). The NRI – RQV was designed to measure relationships quality among children, adolescents, and adults across different types of personal relationships. The subscale of relationship satisfaction was used in the current study to examine the adolescents' satisfaction towards peer relationship. It consists of 3 items with 5-point Likert type scale ranged from 1 = Never or hardly at all to 5 = Always or extremely much. Higher score indicated that adolescents are more satisfied with their peer relationship. Example of items are “How happy are you with your relationship with

this person?” and “How much do you like the way things are between you and this person?”. The reliability for peer relationship satisfaction is quite high (Cronbach’s alpha = .754).

Self-efficacy was assessed using The General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE: Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The GSE measures an individual perceived self-efficacy in a general sense. Self-efficacy is one’s belief in achieving in life and able to handle obstacles in life. The GSE has 10 items with 4-point Likert type scale ranged from 1 = Not at all true to 4 = Exactly true. Higher score indicated higher self-efficacy among adolescents. Example of items are “It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals,” and “I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.”. The reliability for the General Self-efficacy Scale is high (Cronbach’s alpha = .803).

The Positive and Negative Suicide Ideation Inventory (PANSI) [Osman, Gutierrez, Kopper, Barrios, & Chiros, 1998] was used to measure adolescents’ suicidal ideation. The inventory consists of two parts, positive ideation (PANSI-PI) and negative ideation (PANSI-NI). In this study, the PANSI-NI was used to assess the suicidal thoughts among adolescents. PANSI-NI has 8 items with 5-point Likert type scale ranged from 0 = None of the time to 4 = Most of the time. However, due to sensitivity issue relating to Malaysia context, only 6 items from the negative ideation were used in this study. Example of items in the study are “Seriously considered killing yourself because you could not live up to the expectations of other people?” and “Felt hopeless about the future and you wondered if you should kill yourself?”. The reliability for the suicidal ideation is high (Cronbach’s alpha = .832).

3. Results

The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (SD), and zero-order correlations for variables (N = 684)

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3
1. Peer relationship satisfaction	11.69 (2.467)	-	-	-
2. Self-efficacy	27.54 (4.672)	.206***	-	-
3. Suicidal ideation	3.06 (4.037)	-.112**	-.117**	-

Note: **p < .01; ***p < .001

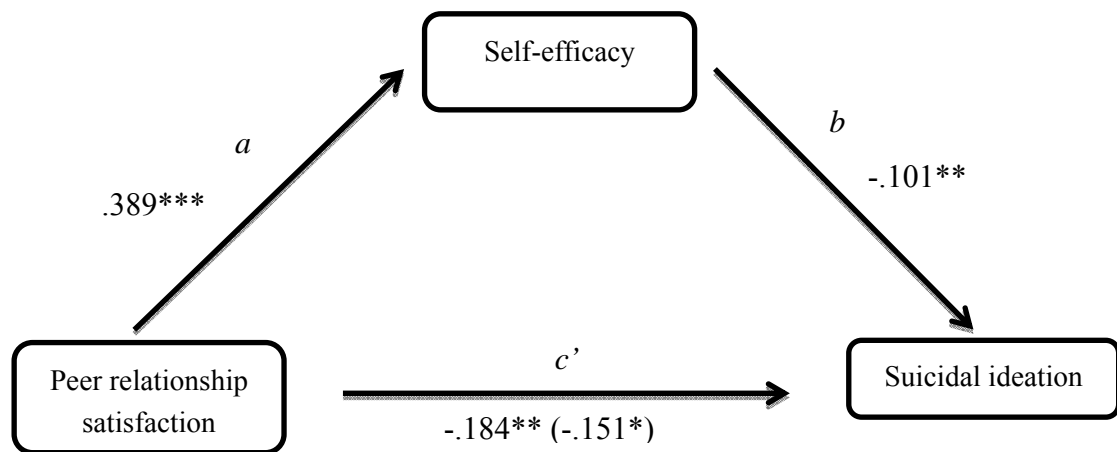
Pearson Correlation was carried out to measure the relationships between peer relationship satisfaction, self-efficacy, and adolescents’ suicidal ideation. Table 1 displayed the means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations for all the variables. All the variables were significantly related to adolescents’ suicidal ideation. By referring to Table 1, both peer relationship satisfaction ($r = -.112$, $p < .01$) and self-efficacy ($r = -.117$, $p < .01$) were negatively correlated with adolescents’ suicidal ideation. The findings indicated that adolescents who are more satisfied with their peer relationship and have higher self-efficacy tend to have lower suicidal ideation.

Table 2. Relationship between Peer Relationship Satisfaction and Adolescents’ Suicidal Ideation Mediated by Self-Efficacy (N = 684)

Step	IV	DV	B	SE	Beta	t
1	Peer relationship satisfaction	Suicidal ideation	-.184**	.062	-.112	-2.948
2	Peer relationship satisfaction	Self-efficacy	.389***	.071	.206	5.485
3	Self-efficacy	Suicidal ideation	-.101**	.033	-.117	-3.069
4	Peer relationship satisfaction	Suicidal ideation	-.151*	.063	-.092	-2.378
	Self-efficacy		-.084*	.033	-.098	-2.525

Note: B = Unstandardized coefficient; SE = Standard Error; Beta = Standardized coefficient; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; Sobel test: Z = -2.672, p < .01

Regression analysis was run to examine the mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents’ suicidal ideation. Table 2 showed that there were a direct significant effect of peer relationship satisfaction on adolescents’ suicidal ideation (B = -.184, SE = .062, t = -2.948, p < .01) and self-efficacy (B = .389, SE = .071, t = 5.485, p < .001). Self-efficacy (mediator) and adolescents’ suicidal ideation were also significantly related (B = -.101, SE = .033, t = -3.069, p < .01).



Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Figure 1. Mediation model

The regression analysis results support the partial mediation model as displayed in Table 2 and Figure 1. The results showed that the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents’ suicidal ideation after fixing self-efficacy is significant (B = -.151, SE = .063, t = -2.378, p < .05). The amount of mediation was obtained by subtracting the regression coefficient from the fourth regression (peer relationship satisfaction → suicidal ideation,

when self-efficacy was controlled) to the regression coefficient of first regression (peer relationship satisfaction → suicidal ideation, when self-efficacy was not controlled). The amount of deduction obtained was $0.151 - 0.184 = 0.033$. The mediation model was further tested with Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986), and it was confirmed that self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents' suicidal ideation ($Z = -2.672, p < .01$).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study further contributes to the existing body of literature on the relationships between peer relationship satisfaction, self-efficacy, and adolescents' suicidal ideation in Malaysia. Findings showed that both peer relationship satisfaction and self-efficacy negatively correlated to adolescents' suicidal ideation. Adolescents who are satisfied with their peer relationship and have high self-efficacy have lower probability of having suicidal ideation. This supported past studies where peer relationship play an important role in adolescents (Cui et al., 2010; Kok et al., 2011). Having friends is important for adolescents as they spend most of the time with peers. Peers served as an important source of support and happiness for adolescents (Demir et al., 2007). Thus, adolescents who are satisfied with their peer relationship tend to have lesser suicidal thoughts.

In addition, adolescents with high level of self-efficacy are better in adaptation and doing judgment. Self-efficacy helps adolescents to believe in own abilities to strive better in life as well as motivate them achieve desirable outcomes and to be successful in life (Bandura, 1977). Thus, adolescents with high level of self-efficacy have lower probability of having suicidal ideation (McNamara, 2012). Moreover, findings revealed that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between peer relationship satisfaction and adolescents' suicidal ideation. The findings implied that peer relationship satisfaction not only directly influence adolescents' suicidal ideation, but also indirectly through adolescents' self-efficacy. Given that both adolescents' self-efficacy and peer relationship satisfaction are important in influencing adolescents' suicidal ideation, programs targeting at adolescents should focus on improving their self-efficacy and the ability to establish positive relationship with peers. Consequently, it may reduce the suicidal thoughts among adolescents which in turn decrease the suicidal cases in Malaysia.

Although the current study extended existing studies on adolescents' suicidal ideation in Malaysia context, there are also several limitations. Firstly, this study is cross-sectional in nature, thus we cannot determine the causality between the variables. Mixed method or longitudinal study is suggested in future to better understand the relationship between variables. Secondly, self-administered questionnaire were used in collecting the data where all the data were self-reported. Respondents bias may occur which may lead to under-reporting of social undesirable behaviours mainly suicidal ideation. Thus, data from third party such as parents and teachers can be obtained to minimize bias as the study is not relying on only one source.

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