

# Psychological factors associated with suicidal ideation in high school adolescents

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## Highlights

- The study identified that depression and stress play a key role as predictors of suicidal ideation.
- The results show that both depression and stress were associated with a higher risk of suicidal thoughts, while anxiety and age did not show a statistically significant relationship in the model used.
- This pattern suggests that an increase in depression and stress levels translates into a higher likelihood of suicidal ideation.
- The lack of significance of anxiety and age may be linked to the interrelationship between emotional variables.

## Graphical abstract

The regression model presented a coefficient of determination  $R^2$  of 0.432, which means that approximately 43.2% of the variation in mental health outcomes can be explained by depression and stress factors.

Depression was identified as a crucial factor in mental health, showing a highly significant predictor with a beta coefficient of 0.462 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating a strong and statistically significant relationship with the mental health outcomes assessed.

Stress was also a statistically significant predictor with a beta coefficient of 0.188 and a p-value of less than 0.05, indicating its relevant relationship with suicidal thoughts.

Main factors analyzed

Psychological factors associated with suicidal ideation in secondary school adolescents.

## Abstract

Suicide is a major public health issue that is often overlooked, surrounded by stigma, myths, and taboos. The aim of this article was to identify psychological factors, such as depression, stress, and anxiety, that predict suicidal ideation in high school adolescents. The study was conducted with 292 students with a mean age of  $15.52 \pm 1.64$  years from the *Institución Educativa Secundaria Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, located in the city of Ilave, Puno region, during the months of May to August 2024. This study employed a descriptive-explanatory cross-sectional design. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis show a significant relationship between depression, stress, and suicidal ideation, suggesting that these factors play an important role in increasing the risk of suicidal thoughts ( $R^2 = 0.432$ ). In particular, depression emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.462$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) compared to stress ( $\beta = 0.188$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), highlighting the urgency of targeted interventions that prioritize depressive symptoms in suicide prevention strategies. These findings emphasize the need for healthcare professionals to implement comprehensive mental health assessments and interventions that not only focus on alleviating symptoms of depression and stress but also promote resilience and coping mechanisms among at-risk populations.

**Keywords:** Anxiety. Suicidal Ideation. Depression. Stress. Suicide.

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## INTRODUCTION

Suicidal ideation is a mental health issue with profound implications for individuals, families, and societies worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, nearly 800,000 people die by suicide each year, an alarming figure that translates to the loss of one life every 40 seconds<sup>1</sup>. This reflects not only the tragic outcome of suicide itself but also the immense burden caused by repeated attempts and the complex psychological and social factors that contribute to such extreme suffering.

Moreover, research indicates that approximately 60% of individuals who experience suicidal thoughts are at high risk of planning or attempting suicide within the following 12 months. This alarming statistic underscores the urgent need for effective mental health prevention, intervention, and support services that address the underlying causes of suicidal ideation and offer help to individuals in crisis before the situation escalates into a tragic outcome<sup>2</sup>.

Suicidal ideation among adolescents is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has received growing attention in the field of mental health. It has become one of the leading causes of death among young people in various regions of the world<sup>3</sup>.

In Peru, the National Death Reporting System (SINADEF) reported a concerning increase in suicide-related incidents in recent years. In 2023 alone, 391 suicides and 2,121 suicide attempts were recorded. In the first quarter of 2024, the number of attempts had already reached 184, with 45 cases in January, 39 in February, 63 in March, and 37 in April. These figures stand in stark contrast to the same period in 2023, when 95 suicide attempts were documented: 17 in January, 19 in February, 25 in March, and 34 in April<sup>4</sup>.

These statistics highlight a growing public health problem, with a clear upward trend in suicide attempts during the early months of 2024. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that 16.5% of all suicides in the country are committed by adolescents aged 15 to 19. This demographic group is especially vulnerable, as mental health issues and sociocultural pressures often converge during this life stage.

Similarly, research has consistently shown that men are more likely to die by suicide than women, although women tend to report higher rates of suicidal ideation<sup>5</sup>. Psychological factors such as depression, anxiety, and stress have been identified as critical determinants of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, particularly among vulnerable populations

like adolescents<sup>6,7</sup>.

These mental health issues are often accompanied by social factors, including family dynamics, academic pressure, and societal expectations, which further aggravate the risks associated with suicide. Addressing these psychological and socio-environmental determinants is essential for developing postvention strategies aimed at reducing suicide rates and supporting individuals at risk before they reach a crisis point.

The theoretical foundations of this study focus on the relationship between psychological factors and suicidal ideation. Depression, for instance, has been established as a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among adolescents, with depressive symptoms shown to intensify the risk of suicidal thoughts<sup>8</sup>.

Stress has been systematically linked to increased vulnerability to suicidal ideation, as it has the potential to trigger or worsen underlying symptoms of depression and anxiety<sup>9</sup>. Chronic stress - whether stemming from academic pressure, family conflict, or social isolation - can significantly impact an individual's mental health, leading to a range of emotional and psychological difficulties. These stress-induced difficulties often act as catalysts for more severe mental health disorders, with suicidal thoughts being a devastating consequence when coping mechanisms fail or when individuals feel overwhelmed by their circumstances.

In addition to stress, anxiety, although less studied in relation to suicide compared to depression, has also been identified as a significant risk factor for suicidal ideation. Emerging research suggests that adolescents experiencing high levels of anxiety may be particularly susceptible to developing suicidal thoughts. Anxiety disorders typically involve persistent worry, fear, and a heightened state of arousal, which can impair an individual's ability to cope with stress and to effectively engage in problem-solving<sup>10</sup>. As anxiety intensifies emotional distress, it may lead to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, which are key contributors to suicidal ideation.

Recent studies have shed critical light on the complex relationship between psychological factors and suicidal ideation in adolescents. One study revealed that a striking 50.2% of the adolescents in its sample reported experiencing suicidal thoughts. Moreover, a significant correlation was found between depression and increased suicide risk, reinforcing the central role that mood disorders play in the development of suicidal ideation<sup>11</sup>. This finding

aligns with other studies<sup>1,2,3</sup>, underscoring the urgent need for effective mental health interventions targeting depression as a key factor in suicide prevention.

Similarly, another study emphasized the importance of early intervention in adolescents showing depressive symptoms. The research demonstrated that depression is a core factor driving suicidal thoughts in youth, thereby reinforcing the notion that addressing depressive symptoms early on can help mitigate suicide risk<sup>12</sup>. These findings collectively suggest that depressive symptoms should be recognized as critical warning signs in adolescents and actively addressed, particularly in environments where youth are most vulnerable, such as schools.

Beyond depression, other factors have also been linked to increased risk of suicidal ideation in adolescents. For example, one study highlighted the important role that adverse family circumstances play in exacerbating vulnerability to suicidal thoughts<sup>13</sup>. Family dysfunction, abuse, neglect, and conflict can create an emotionally unstable environment that makes adolescents more prone to depression and, consequently, suicidal ideation.

These stressors, when combined with the already challenging developmental stage of adolescence, can significantly increase the risk of self-harm and suicide.

Despite advances in research on suicidal ideation and its associated factors, significant gaps remain in the current literature. First, many studies have focused predominantly on depression, often neglecting the interaction between stress and anxiety in predicting suicidal ideation<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, most investigations adopt a cross-sectional design, which limits understanding of the dynamic nature of these factors over time<sup>15</sup>. Finally, there is a notable scarcity of studies integrating these factors into a predictive model that considers the school context, a perspective that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue<sup>16</sup>.

This study seeks to address these gaps by identifying and analyzing the psychological factors that predict suicidal ideation in school-aged adolescents. Therefore, the aim of this article was to identify and analyze psychological factors, such as depression, stress, and anxiety, that predict suicidal ideation in high school students at I.E. *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, in the department of Puno.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional and descriptive-explanatory design, conducted at the Nuestra Señora del Carmen Secondary Educational Institution in Ilave, during the months of May to August 2024, within a school term in which classes were held fully in person. The sample consisted of 292 students, of whom 57.0% were female (166 individuals) and 43.0% male (126 individuals), with a mean age of  $15.52 \pm 1.64$  years.

The criterion for data collection regarding Internet usage was based on the recommendation of the Peruvian Ministry of Health, which suggests limiting daily screen exposure to under four hours, especially for minors<sup>17</sup>. In this study, it was found that nearly half of the sample (47.3%) used the Internet for less than three hours per day, in accordance with the recommendation; 28.8% used it between three and four hours daily, while 24.0% exceeded four hours of daily use.

Regarding family environment, the majority (50.9%) lived with both parents; 23.1% lived alone; 15.4% lived with their mother; and 7.2% with other relatives. A small percentage (2.6%) lived with their father, while only 0.9% lived with friends.

The data also reveal relevant information about the personal challenges faced by this group. Economic problems were the most frequently reported concern, affecting 40.4% of the participants, followed by emotional issues (33.4%). Sentimental conflicts affected 14.2%, and social difficulties were the least mentioned, at 12.0%. Regarding age, the largest group was composed of those under 16 years old (51.2%), followed by those aged 16 to 17 (17.5%), and finally, those over 17 years old (31.3%).

These demographic and situational data highlight the diversity of experiences and challenges faced by this group, with economic and emotional difficulties standing out (Table 1).

**Table 1** - Sociodemographic characteristics of students from the Secondary Educational Institution Nuestra Señora del Carmen, Ilave, 2024.

Variáveis	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	n	%
<b>Age</b>	15.52 $\pm$ 1.64		
Under 16 years old		150	51.2
Between 16 and 17		51	17.5
Over 17 years old		91	31.3
<b>Gender</b>			
Female		166	57.0
Male		126	43.0
<b>Daily internet use</b>			
Less than 3 hours/day		138	47.3
Between 3 and 4 hours/day		84	28.8
More than 4 hours/day		70	24.0
<b>Living arrangement</b>			
With mother		45	15.4
With father		8	2.6
With both parents		148	50.8
With friends		3	1.0
With other relatives		21	7.2
Alone		67	23.0
<b>Main concerns</b>			
Economic		118	40.4
Emotional		98	33.6
Romantic		41	14.0
Social		35	12.0

A trained researcher conducted the administration of the instruments, clearly communicating the purpose of the study to the participants. The informed consent process was explained in detail, ensuring that participants understood their rights and the voluntary nature of their involvement. The importance of completing all questionnaire items was emphasized to ensure data integrity and accuracy. The possible benefits of the study were also shared, highlighting its contribution to the educational community by providing valuable information to improve mental health support and intervention programs. This approach aimed to promote transparency and trust, ensuring that participants felt informed and respected throughout the data collection process.

The researchers developed questions to assess sociodemographic variables along with their respective levels of measurement, such as: gender (female/male), daily internet use (less than 3 hours/day; between 3 and 4 hours/day; more than 4 hours/day), living arrangement (with mother; with father; with both parents; with friends; with other relatives; alone), main concerns (economic; emotional; romantic; social), and age (under 16 years; between 16 and 17 years; over 17 years).

To assess depression, anxiety, and stress, the

DASS-21 scale was applied, a widely used psychological instrument developed to measure levels of these three emotional states. It is a shortened version of the original DASS scale, which comprised 42 items; however, the DASS-21 is considered more practical in clinical and research contexts due to its brevity, while still maintaining high levels of reliability and validity.

The scale consists of 21 items divided into three subscales: depression, anxiety, and stress, with 7 items per subscale. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, where respondents indicate the extent to which they experienced specific symptoms or feelings during the past week. Responses range from 0 points (did not apply at all) to 3 points (applied very much or most of the time). The scores for each subscale are summed to obtain a total score for depression, anxiety, and stress, with higher scores indicating more severe levels of the respective emotional state.

The DASS-21 is commonly used in both clinical and non-clinical populations to detect mental health problems, monitor changes in symptoms over time, and evaluate the outcomes of therapeutic interventions. It is particularly useful for identifying individuals who may benefit from further

psychological assessment or intervention. The instrument has demonstrated a high level of reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.94$ , indicating excellent internal consistency.

Suicidal ideation was assessed using the Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation, a widely recognized tool developed to measure the severity of suicidal thoughts in individuals. This scale consists of 20 items that explore various aspects of suicidal ideation, including: (i) attitudes toward life, assessed through five items (each scored on a scale from 0 to 2); (ii) suicidal thoughts, assessed through six items (also scored from 0 to 2 each); (iii) characteristics of a suicide attempt, assessed through four items (with scores from 0 to 2); and (iv) suicidal

behavior, assessed through five items (each scored from 0 to 2).

The internal consistency of the Beck Scale was evaluated, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.923, indicating excellent reliability of the instrument.

To examine the relationships between depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal ideation, the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was applied. Additionally, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive power of suicidal ideation, considering depression, anxiety, and stress as independent variables. All statistical procedures were conducted using IBM SPSS software, version 25. Tests were performed with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ .

RESULTS

Table 2 - Correlation of suicidal ideation with depression, anxiety, and stress among students from Nuestra Señora del Carmen Secondary Educational Institution, Ilave, 2024.

		Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Suicidal Ideation
Spearman's Rho	Depression	-	0.855**	0.861**	0.503**
	Anxiety		-	0.871**	0.472**
	Stress			-	0.509**
	Suicidal Ideation				-

\*\*Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Based on Table 2, it is possible to state the following: there is a moderate correlation between suicidal ideation and stress ( $\rho = 0.509$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), depression ( $\rho = 0.503$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and anxiety ( $\rho = 0.472$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). These results indicate that the presence of depression, anxiety, and stress increas-

es the risk of experiencing suicidal thoughts.

These findings reinforce the importance of addressing depression, stress, and anxiety as a suicide prevention measure among students, highlighting the need to implement intervention programs that promote mental health in this population group.

Table 3 - Multiple linear regression analysis predicting suicidal ideation among students from Nuestra Señora del Carmen Secondary Educational Institution, Ilave, 2024.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Erro padrão	$\beta$	t	Sig.	Lower limit	Upper limit
Depression	0.727	0.113	0.462	6.427	0.000	0.505	0.949
Anxiety	-0.066	0.128	-0.041	-0.518	0.605	-0.317	0.185
Stress	0.319	0.138	0.188	2.308	0.021	0.048	0.591
Age	0.254	0.302	0.029	0.840	0.402	-0.340	0.848

a. Dependent variable: Suicidal ideation.



The multiple linear regression analysis reveals that depression and stress emerged as significant predictors of suicidal ideation, with the overall model explaining 43.2% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $R^2 = 0.432$ ). Specifically, the predictive model indicated that both depression ( $\beta = 0.462$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and stress ( $\beta = 0.188$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were statistically significant factors associated with higher levels of suicidal ideation.

These findings suggest that as levels of depression and stress increase, so does the likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts. In contrast, neither anxiety nor age showed a statistically significant effect on suicidal ideation in the analyzed model, as both variables presented p-values greater than 0.05.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis revealed a critical relationship between depression, stress, and suicidal ideation, indicating that these factors significantly contribute to the risk of suicidal thoughts. With the model explaining 43.2% of the variance in suicidal ideation ( $R^2 = 0.432$ ), the findings highlight the substantial impact that mental health conditions have on individuals' well-being.

Specifically, depression emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.462$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) compared to stress ( $\beta = 0.188$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that individuals with high levels of depressive symptoms are at a notably greater risk of experiencing suicidal ideation. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of addressing mental health issues in suicide prevention efforts—particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and young adults, who may be facing both academic and social pressures<sup>7,8,18</sup>.

Depression and stress not only significantly contribute to suicidal ideation, but their consequences go beyond individual suffering, also affecting the health of society as a whole. Individuals suffering from depression often experience intense feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and despair, which can distort their perception of reality and diminish their ability to cope with everyday challenges<sup>19</sup>.

In the case of suicide, it is useful to understand it as the outcome of a complex and interrelated combination of factors that merge into an emotional amalgam. This internal confusion and the resulting conflict can lead an individual to progressive isola-

This lack of significance may be explained by the potential multicollinearity among anxiety, depression, and stress, which makes it difficult to isolate the individual impact of each factor. Additionally, it is likely that other elements not covered in this study, such as psychosocial or contextual variables, influence the relationship between these variables and suicidal ideation.

Therefore, future research should include a more in-depth analysis of possible mediators or moderators to better understand these complex links. In summary, while depression and stress contribute decisively, anxiety and age may not play a significant role in suicidal ideation in this specific dataset (Table 3).

tion, distancing them from social circles and support systems that could offer help. Such distancing not only intensifies feelings of loneliness but can also significantly worsen mental health issues, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

Similarly, chronic stress can heighten anxiety levels and impair decision-making capacity, intensifying the sense of helplessness<sup>11,16,20</sup>. The interaction between these factors creates a dangerous cycle in which the individual becomes increasingly vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Understanding these consequences is critical for developing effective prevention strategies that address the psychological dimensions of mental health. Future research must delve deeper into the complex interaction between depression, stress, and other psychosocial factors, such as social support and resilience, in predicting suicidal ideation. This investigation should consider not only individual dimensions (such as emotional skills and coping capacity) but also the social and economic contexts in which individuals are embedded.

Social factors such as the quality of interpersonal relationships, family functionality, the level of community support, and the presence of protective networks play a crucial role in mental health and can influence the onset or mitigation of suicidal thoughts. Likewise, economic conditions, including poverty, unemployment, and financial insecurity, act as significant stressors that may aggravate depressive symptoms and stress, thereby increasing the risk of suicidal ideation<sup>8,21</sup>.

Understanding how these elements interact

can offer deeper insight into the mechanisms that underlie suicidal thoughts and behaviors<sup>22,23</sup>. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could help identify critical periods in which individuals are more vulnerable, allowing for more timely interventions.

Expanding the scope of research to include dif-

ferent populations and contexts will enable the adaptation of prevention efforts more effectively, aiming to address the specific challenges of distinct groups and ultimately reduce the incidence of suicidal ideation across various demographic segments.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis reveal a significant relationship between depression, stress, and suicidal ideation, indicating that these factors are strongly associated with the risk of suicidal thoughts. With a model explaining 43.2% of the variance in suicidal ideation ( $R^2 = 0.432$ ), the substantial impact of mental health conditions on individual well-being becomes evident.

In particular, depression emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.462$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), compared to stress ( $\beta = 0.188$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), underscoring the urgency of

targeted interventions that prioritize addressing depressive symptoms in suicide prevention strategies. Such strategies should include the early detection of depression in primary care through systematic screenings that help identify individuals at risk before symptoms worsen. Moreover, it is essential to ensure timely access to effective treatments such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), both of which have demonstrated a significant reduction in suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

## CRedit author statement

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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