



Mediating role of Depression between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Suicidal Ideation among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine how depression played a mediating effect in university students' fears of being negatively evaluated and suicide ideation. This study also analyzed gender disparities in depressive suicidal thoughts, and fears of being negatively evaluated. To determine the association between the variables in the current study, a cross-sectional correlational design was adopted. G power was used to compute the sample size, and 200 individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 were chosen using the practical sampling technique. The data was gathered from various universities in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The data was collected on demographic sheet, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale—21 Items (DASS-21), Brief FNE Scale, and Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS). SPSS version 21 was used to analyze the data, and the results were tested using independent t tests and the mediation correlation. The current study's findings indicate that there is no significant direct effect of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) on suicidal thoughts ($r=.17$, $P>0.5$). However, the table demonstrates a substantial indirect influence ($r=.13$, $p.0.5$). This shows that depression acts as a go-between for Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and suicidal ideation. Second, no significant differences in FNE, suicidal thoughts, or sadness were detected between male and female students. The study's findings highlight the position and significance of psychological elements that are related to one another. The study also suggests that health psychologists and counselors assist patients improve their resilience and empower them to tackle psychological disorders like depression and suicide ideation. The current study came to the conclusion that suicidal ideation and fear of being judged negatively are both significantly influenced by depression.

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1. Introduction

Depression is a serious medical disease that has an ongoing impact on people's interests, studies. Depression is defined by sadness and/or a loss of interest in previous interests. It can impair your capacity to achieve at work and at home and has a variety of internal and physical consequences. Depression symptoms include persistent sorrow and loss of interest. Clinical depression has an impact on your feelings and thoughts, resulting in a variety of physical and psychological symptoms. It makes regular chores difficult and leads to feelings of purposelessness. Depression affects an estimated 3.8 percent of the global population, including 5% of adults and 5.7 percent of people over 60. Depression affects around 280 million people worldwide. Depression is not the same as having brief mood swings or feeling down in everyday life. Suicide is more likely in people who suffer from depression (APA, 2023).

Suicide is one of the most important public health issues; however it is preventable with time and money (World Health Organization, 2017). Some interpersonal, environmental, and

behavioral aspects have been linked to suicidal thought; these factors have been demonstrated in suicidal ideation research that covers the multifactorial or multidimensional event (Miller, Esposito-Smythers, Weismore, & Renshaw, 2013). The risk variables that start the suicide ideation process include depression, stress, violence, hopelessness, fear of negative evaluation, impulsivity, and a lack of socialization (Braga & Dell'Aglio, 2013; Gvion, Horesh, Levi-Belz, & Apter, 2015). Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is a trait that is often associated with social anxiety, isolation, and low self-esteem. In fact, it is one of the main features of social anxiety (Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2004). Social evaluations take place in various social situations on a daily basis. They are a way of organizing social circles Gilbert (2014), suggesting that carefully examining these evaluations and adjusting behaviors accordingly might have been an evolutionary advantage. However, very little research has been conducted to investigate the links between fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and suicidality. It has been demonstrated that there is a substantial relationship between fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and suicidal thoughts. As a result, fear of negative evaluation (FNE) may be a risk factor for suicide among college students, and this association is likely to be influenced by depression levels (Y.-y. Wang, Jiang, Cheung, Sun, & Chan, 2015).

According to W.-T. Wang, Hsu, Chiu, and Liang (2012), FNE has been linked to depression because it makes people feel inadequate when they receive unfavorable feedback from others. Adams, Myers, Barbera, and Brantley (2011) discovered a connection between FNE and depression symptoms in obese bariatric surgery patients. This emphasizes the importance of studying FNE's effect on depression. According to the findings of the study, FNE had a role in moderating the link between academic stress and psychological symptoms such as anxiety and melancholy (Nonterah et al., 2015). It is challenging to predict which individuals with acknowledged temperamental weaknesses may develop social anxiety problems. Adolescents (N = 185) were followed from the ages of 13 to 18 to evaluate psychosocial, prospective predictors of social anxiety symptoms, and fears of negative evaluation (FNE). This was done after taking into account pre-existing social withdrawal symptoms. According to the findings of structural equation modeling, lack of perceived social acceptability predicts future explicit social anxiety and FNE, whereas the emotional intensity of close peer connections predicts future implicit FNE. The importance of evaluating both implicit and explicit FNE is considered in the results, along with the role that peer contact plays in the emergence of social anxiety (Teachman & Allen, 2007).

Suicidal ideation research frequently concentrates on clinical populations with serious mental health disorders. In order to stop suicidal ideation from developing into suicidal behavior, it must first be investigated at the source. Previous studies have revealed associations between impulsivity and FNE and suicidal thoughts, as well as the mediating role of depression in these relationships, but the body of data is insufficient to draw general conclusions. With this study, we hope to pinpoint FNE as potential contributors to suicidal thoughts in college students. There is insufficient research on the connection between impulsivity and FNE and suicidal ideation. There aren't many studies that look at FNE and suicide outside of the context of social anxiety disorder. Students at universities experience anxiety in part because to FNE. Both FNE can enhance a person's susceptibility to depression, which sharply raises the chance of suicide. The current literature on suicidal ideation in Pakistan primarily focuses on mental health conditions, environmental variables, and situational circumstances. This study will therefore provide us a more detailed understanding of these additional characteristics that influence suicide thoughts among university students. This will create the possibility of timely intervention by identifying at-risk individuals.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The current study proposes that fear of criticism indirectly affects suicidal thoughts, and depression plays the role of mediator. This study supports the idea that individuals with high experience of depression and consequently have an increased chance of developing suicidal thoughts when they also have a fleeing of being judged negatively traits. Fear of negative evaluation needs to be closely monitored throughout the various stages of depression in clinical and healthcare settings while examining depression to prevent suicidal ideation. Fear of negative evaluation can possibly increase the indirect effect of depression by directly causing suicidal ideation. Moreover, it was discovered that depression was important as a mediating and intervening variable because fear of negative evaluation did not directly or independently affect

suicide thoughts. It can be described as the full mediating impact in a single sentence. This suggests that fear of negative evaluation likely predicts depression and that suicidal thoughts predict depression. It helps to explain how fear of negative evaluation partially affects suicidal ideation.

1.2. Objectives

1. To ascertain if depression in college students mediates the link between FNE and suicidal thoughts.
2. Do university students differ in their levels of FNE, despair, and suicidal thoughts according to their gender?

2. Materials And Methods

2.1. Design of the Study

This study used a cross-sectional co-relational design to examine the relationship between FNE and suicidal ideation as it is mediated by depression in college students.

2.2. Research Study Area

The data was gathered for the sake of convenience. Participants were drawn from several universities in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

2.3. Sampling Technique

The participants were chosen using convenient sampling strategy.

2.4. Sample Size

The 200 participants were chosen for this study. The G-Power program was used to determine the sample size. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25. Both men and women who are currently enrolled in various universities made up the sample. Questionnaires were used to gather the data.

2.5. Study Instrument

The demographic sheet was used to collect data on the participant's name, age, gender, birth order, educational institution, parental occupation, and family structure. The Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) baseline/screening version in order to screen people for suicidal ideas and behavior, Kelly Posner and her colleagues created this version of the scale in 2009 for suicide ideation, ideation intensity, suicide behavior, or actual attempts, are its four subscales. For the entire sample, the suicidal-risk group, and the control group, the C-SSRS ideation subscale has a Guttman split-half reliability of .91 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, 0.89, and 0.93, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha values for the suicide intensity, severity, and behavior subscales were 0.73, 0.89, and 0.91, respectively. The mean inter-item correlation for the C-SSRS was 0.64 (range, 0.47–0.72). The results of the item-total C-SSRS adjusted correlation score ranged from 0.47 for item 6 to 0.74 for item 5 ($p < 0.001$). Watson and Friend were the ones who first created the FNE Scale (FNE). Leary (1983) later produced the condensed version. The 12-item BFNE has a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 denoting traits that are not at all distinctive of me and 5 denoting traits that are very characteristic of me. The non-clinical group's Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90, while the clinical group of socially anxious pupils had a value of 0.82. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale—21 Items (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) is a set of three self-report scales used to measure depression, anxiety, and stress. The three DASS-21 scales each have seven items, and each subscale has material to go with it. The depression subscale's Cronbach's alpha value is 0.66. The only information used in this investigation was the results of the depression subscale.

3. Data Analysis Tools

The data were examined using SPSS version 21 statistical program for social sciences. To determine the strength of the link, the research variables were subjected to independent t tests and the mediation correlation.

3.1. Procedure

Data was gathered from many universities in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. During university hours, participants were personally solicited. Some subjects consented to participate in the study, while others declined. A demographic form and the scales were given to the study participants once they consented to participate. All participants provided their written consent

as well. The topic, purpose, and objectives of the study, as well as how to complete the questionnaire and its significance, were explained to the participants. They received guarantees that their information would be kept private and used only for research. Each participant received their own instructions. All participants were instructed to thoroughly read each item before selecting a response from the available options. The entire set of data for this study was gathered over the course of three weeks, and it typically took each participant 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participants were appreciated for their cooperation and involvement at the conclusion.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

The head of the institute, ethics committee, psychology department and the ethical review board of Bahria University Lahore, was given the permission. In order to guarantee the participants' privacy and secrecy regarding the matters, informed consent was also obtained from them.

4. Results & Analysis

Table 1 shows bivariate correlations between different measurement variables for university students. The table shows that depression among college students was positively and significantly associated with suicide thoughts ($r=.21^{**}$), but not significantly associated with anxiety over receiving poor grades ($r=.13$). Similar to the previous finding, there was no statistically significant link ($r=.17$) between suicidal ideation and concern over criticism.

Table 1: Measures for patients with substance use disorders and their inter correlations

Variables	1	2	3
Depression	---	.139	.214**
Fear of Negative Evaluations	---	---	.172
Suicidal ideation (SI)	---	---	---

N = 120 **p 0.01 and *p 0.05 are for students.

Table 2: Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and Suicidal Thoughts in Students: Mediation Analysis of Depression

	Coefficient	Se	T	P	95% confidence interval	
					LL	UL
Total Effect	.0311	.0144	2.1535	.0327	.0026	.0596
Direct Effect	.0172	.0150	1.1502	.2518	-.0123	.0467
Indirect effect	.0139	.0068			.0027	.0292

According to the findings, there is no discernible direct relationship between FNE and suicidal thoughts ($r=.17$, $P>.0.5$). Table, however, demonstrates the important indirect effect ($r=.13$, $p.0.5$). This shows that sadness mediates the relationship between suicidal thoughts and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). According to the overall mediation regression analysis, depression among students is a significant mediator of FNE and suicidal thoughts.

Table 3: Gender differences in FNE, depression, suicidal ideation, and independent samples t-test

Variables	Males M	SD	Females M	SD	T	p	Cohen's d
FNE	34.4430	5.77738	33.6322	6.71187	.830	.408	0.13
SI	.6582	1.20773	.4828	1.14995	.959	.339	0.20
Depression	14.9873	8.06304	15.0575	8.60956	-.054	.957	-0.01

Note: Fear of Negative Evolution (FNE), Suicidal Ideation (SI).

The table 2 results showed that there are no significant differences, FNE, depression and suicidal ideation among males and females students.

4.1. Discussion of Findings

According to the results of this study, depression acts as a mediator among fear of negative evaluation and suicidal ideation in university students. This means that FNE and depression predict suicidal ideation in university students. Therefore, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 of the study were verified by the results. The difference in variables reported similar

levels; hence, it can be inferred that FNE, depression, and suicidal ideation are equally experienced by both male and female university students.

The current study stated that the relationship among FNE and suicidal ideation is mediated by depression. The results were in accordance with this statement. University students find themselves in evaluative situations all the time as part of both their degree requirements and their social life at university. FNE has been shown to have a significant positive association with suicidal ideation Y.-y. Wang et al. (2015), but the findings of the current research show that FNE has no significant direct effect on suicidal ideation; rather, the relationship is partially mediated by depression and possibly by some other factors as well. This partial mediation can be explained by the fact that, according to a previous study done with Ghanian students, fear of the negative was a mediator links of the psychological symptoms of anxiety and depression and educational stress (Nock et al., 2013; Nonterah et al., 2015). From this, it can be inferred that FNE is a risk factor for depression; in other words, FNE predicts depression among students, and depression has already been established as a possible trigger to suicide thoughts. This implies a connection between FNE and suicidal thoughts that is mediated by depression, which the current investigation also confirmed. In conclusion, FNE may serve as a subtle risk factor for college students considering suicide.

The study's second hypothesis postulated that FNE, suicidal thoughts, and depression would differ by gender. However, the findings revealed that there are no appreciable differences between male and female university students in FNE, suicidal thoughts, or depression. But some previous studies state that the depression is becoming more common among male university students Gao, Ping, and Liu (2020), and those girls are more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. Moreover, many past studies have implied that men are more impulsive than women in general, and FNE levels have been observed to be higher in females than in males, because they are often judged more severely for their appearances and social conduct. Due to the cultural background and the fact that the population of the current study comprised university students between the ages of 18 and 25, it is not typical of the general population and may explain these discrepancies between the findings of the current study and those of earlier studies (Preston et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

It has been established that university students are a vulnerable population in terms of suicide risk, and suicidal ideation is the preliminary factor for suicide attempts. Therefore, it is important to identify danger signs for suicidal thoughts. The results of the present investigation suggest that depression acts as a mediator between suicidal ideation and FNE. Consequently, it is of great importance to monitor students with impulsive traits for symptoms of depression, as this can lead to the development of suicidal ideation, putting them at high risk for suicide attempts. And students with social anxiety, or FNE, should also be considered at risk of developing depression and suicidal ideation as a result of that. In order to spread awareness regarding the implications of the present study, awareness sessions for students can be organized, and screening services can be offered to students by their in-house counselors or clinical psychologists. This might make early intervention possible. Counseling should be offered to those with impulsive traits and/or FNE, or social anxiety, so that they can overcome their issues before they progress to depression or suicidal ideation.

5.1. Recommendation

The study's sample size was rather small due to limitations in resources and time. Moreover, the C-SSRS has to be administered individually to each participant, making the data collection process slightly more time-consuming and complicated. Some students seemed reluctant to share information regarding suicidal ideation and behavior, and this might have led to some incorrect or incomplete reports. There was a language barrier since the questionnaires were in English, which is not the first language for the students in Pakistan. Even though the medium of instruction at most universities is English and students know the language, they are not always familiar with the phrases and terms used in questionnaires. Efforts were made to explain such unfamiliar terms to the students, but some effect of this on the data was inevitable. For future studies, it is recommended to use a larger sample of students and translated tools that are consistent with the everyday language used by university students in Pakistan. Moreover, it might be of interest to also study other interaction pathways between these variables since some studies have shown that impulsivity moderates the association among FNE

and suicidal ideation, and when it occurs in comorbidity with major depressive disorder, it can significantly the likelihood of developing suicidal thoughts and actions.

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