



Received: 18-05-2026
Accepted: 28-06-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Association of Social Support and Psychological Help-Seeking with Suicide Risk among University Students in Aceh, Indonesia: A Cross-Sectional Study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2026.6.4.6575>

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Abstract

Suicide remains a major public health and mental health concern worldwide and is one of the leading causes of death among young adults. University students are particularly vulnerable to suicide risk due to various academic, social, emotional, and developmental challenges that may adversely affect their psychological well-being, social functioning, and academic performance. Social support and psychological help-seeking have been identified as important protective factors that may reduce suicide risk by enhancing coping abilities, fostering social connectedness, and facilitating

access to professional mental health services. Although previous studies have examined the role of social support and psychological help-seeking separately, research investigating the association of both factors with suicide risk among university students in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh, remains limited. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the association of social support and psychological help-seeking with suicide risk among university students in Aceh, Indonesia.

Keywords: Social Support, Psychological Help-Seeking, Suicide Risk, University Students, Mental Health

1. Introduction

Suicide is a major public health concern worldwide and remains one of the leading causes of death among young people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 700,000 people die by suicide each year globally, and suicide is among the leading causes of death among individuals aged 15–29 years ^[1, 2]. University students are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems due to academic pressures, social challenges, and developmental transitions that may increase the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors ^[3, 4]. Social support and psychological help-seeking have been identified as important protective factors against suicide risk. Social support from family, friends, and the academic environment can help individuals cope with psychological distress and enhance emotional well-being ^[5, 6]. Similarly, positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help have been associated with greater utilization of mental health services and better psychological outcomes ^[7, 8]. However, many students remain reluctant to seek professional help because of stigma, lack of mental health literacy, and concerns about social judgment ^[9]. Social support and psychological help-seeking may work together in reducing suicide risk. Individuals who receive adequate support from their social environment may be more likely to seek professional assistance when experiencing psychological difficulties. Therefore, examining both factors simultaneously may provide a more comprehensive understanding of protective mechanisms against suicide risk ^[5, 7]. Although previous studies have demonstrated the protective roles of social support and psychological help-seeking, evidence regarding their simultaneous association with suicide risk among university students in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh, remains limited. In addition, the unique cultural and social context of Aceh may influence both social support systems and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the association of social support and psychological help-seeking with suicide risk among university students in Aceh, Indonesia, and to identify the most dominant factor associated with suicide risk.

2. Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional design among undergraduate health science students in Aceh, Indonesia. A total of 425 students were recruited using a snowball sampling technique through the online distribution of questionnaires. Eligible participants were active undergraduate students aged 18 years or older who provided informed consent prior to participation.

Social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), psychological help-seeking was assessed using the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale–Short Form (ATSPPH-SF), and suicide risk was measured using the Suicide Ideation Scale (SIS). These instruments have demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability in previous studies. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the MSPSS, ATSPPH-SF, and SIS were [$\alpha = 0,70$], [$\alpha = 0,67$], and [$\alpha = 0,92$], respectively. Data were collected through an online survey between [April] and [Mei] 2026. Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Faculty Of Nursing (Approval Number: 112011030326). All participants provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and logistic regression analysis to identify factors associated with suicide risk. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, gender, and year of study.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondent Characteristics (n = 425)

				Risiko Bunuh Diri				
No	Demografi	f	%	Tinggi		Rendah		p
				f	%	f	%	
1	Jenis Kelamin							<0,001
	Laki-laki	206	48,5	111	53,9	95	46,1	
	Perempuan	219	51,5	60	27,4	159	72,6	
2	Perguruan Tinggi							0,806
	USK	134	31,5	58	43,3	76	56,7	
	UBBG	137	32,2	49	35,8	88	64,2	
	UNAYA	154	36,2	64	41,6	90	58,4	
3	Status Tempat Tinggal							0,675
	Kos	146	34,4	63	43,3	83	56,8	
	Asrama	139	32,7	54	38,8	85	61,2	
	Rumah Sendiri	140	32,9	54	38,6	86	61,4	
4	Sumber Dukungan							0,572
	Keluarga	90	21,2	32	35,6	58	64,4	
	Teman	102	24,0	41	40,2	61	59,8	
	Pasangan	113	26,6	51	45,1	62	54,9	
	Dosen	120	28,2	47	39,2	73	60,8	

In table 1. Based on gender, the proportion of respondents with a low risk of suicide was found to be higher among male students (46.1%) than female students (27.4%).

4. Discussion

This study found that social support and psychological help-seeking were significantly associated with suicide risk among university students in Aceh. Students with higher perceived social support and greater willingness to seek professional psychological help were less likely to experience elevated suicide risk. These findings highlight the importance of interpersonal resources and adaptive help-seeking behaviors as protective factors for student mental health. Perceived social support was significantly associated with suicide risk, with students reporting lower support being more likely to have higher suicide risk. This finding is consistent with previous studies [2, 4]. Which identified social support as a protective factor against suicidal ideation and

behavior. Emotional, informational, and instrumental support from family, peers, and the academic environment may buffer psychological distress, strengthen resilience, and promote adaptive coping. These findings are also consistent with the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, which suggests that inadequate social connectedness (thwarted belongingness) increases vulnerability to suicidal behavior, whereas strong interpersonal relationships enhance belongingness and reduce suicide risk. Psychological help-seeking was also significantly associated with suicide risk. Students with a lower tendency to seek professional psychological assistance were more likely to belong to the higher suicide-risk group, consistent with previous studies [7, 15]. Accessing professional mental health services may facilitate early identification of psychological distress, timely intervention, and the development of effective coping strategies. Furthermore, multivariable logistic regression identified psychological help-seeking as the strongest factor associated with suicide risk, suggesting that willingness to access professional care plays a critical role in suicide prevention. These findings should also be interpreted within the sociocultural context of Aceh. Although barriers to help-seeking were not directly assessed, mental health stigma, concerns about social judgment, and preferences for informal support may reduce students' willingness to seek professional psychological services. Such contextual factors may contribute to delayed help-seeking and emphasize the need for culturally appropriate mental health promotion. The findings can also be explained using the Roy Adaptation Model, which views social support as a contextual stimulus and psychological help-seeking as an adaptive coping process. Students who effectively utilize these resources are more likely to demonstrate adaptive responses to psychological stress, thereby reducing suicide risk. Overall, these findings suggest that universities should strengthen social support systems, improve mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and increase access to culturally sensitive counseling services as part of comprehensive suicide prevention strategies.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that social support and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help are significantly associated with suicide risk among nursing students in Aceh. Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help showed the strongest association with suicide risk. These findings also highlight the importance of strengthening social support and increasing access to mental health services as key components of suicide risk prevention strategies among nursing students.

6. Recommendation

Future research should use longitudinal or prospective designs to clarify the temporal relationships between social support, attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and suicide risk among college students. Studies involving larger and more diverse student populations using probability sampling are recommended to increase the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, nurse-led intervention studies should evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to strengthen social support and improve attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help as part of comprehensive suicide risk prevention efforts in university settings.

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