

## Suicidal Ideation and Forgiveness among Emerging Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood is a period of exploration. Identity formation and engaging in new life roles are the crucial process of emerging adulthood and they are at the peak of various risk behaviours. Suicide is the major public health concern in all societies and a leading cause of death. Emerging adults are at higher risk for suicide. Willingness to forgive can be an important element in successful transmission to adulthood. This present study examined the relationship between forgiveness and suicidal ideation among emerging adults and the difference in forgiveness and suicidal ideation with respect to the socio-demographic variables like gender, family type, and place of residence. The sample of the study consisted of 279 emerging adults, 115 males and 164 females, of age ranging from 18 to 25 years. It has been found that there is a significant negative relationship between forgiveness and suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation and forgiveness differ significantly with respect to gender. Males have higher suicidal ideation than females. Forgiveness and two types of forgiveness (to self and others) tends to be high among females than males. No gender difference was found in forgiveness to situations. Significant difference not found in suicidal ideation and forgiveness with respect to family type and place of residence. The findings communicate the importance of forgiveness to reduce suicide risk. This study imply that forgiveness can act as a factor which helps to be overcome “the thought of killing oneself”.

**Keywords:** *Emerging Adults; Suicidal Ideation; Forgiveness*

The age of 18 to 25 is the time when an individual is entering and settling long-term adult roles. As it is a period of change and exploration, it is a crucial time of life. This period, the age of 18 to 25 was termed as emerging adulthood by Jeffrey Arnett (2000). This era is considered as the most heterogeneous phase of life, during which changes and challenges are inevitable as the individual tries to establish new societal roles and takes the initiative to fulfil the young-adult responsibilities of a stable job, marriage, and parenthood. (Arnett, 2015, 2000; Munsey, 2009).

The decisions they take on have an impact on the rest of life. Learn to cope with the change and challenges at the same time the responsibility for making crucial foundations for the rest of their life is the cornerstone of this phase. Many enjoy this time by exploring possibilities for the future and embrace the change, but they also feel confused and overwhelmed by the

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changes and challenges. This era demands a high degree of emotional strength and flexibility to learn and cope with the changes (Seiter, 2009; Tribble, 2015). Hence, emerging adults have an increased vulnerability for various maladaptive behaviours like substance use, crime (Eisner, 2002). The clinical depression tends to peak at this era (Rao, Hammen, & Daley, 1999) and they are at high risk for suicide (Gomez, Miranda, & Polanco, 2011; Hamza & Willoughby, 2016).

Suicide is a major public health concern for all societies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every year nearly 8, 00,000 people die due to suicide and ten times more than this amount of suicide attempts are happening each year. Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death among persons aged 15–29 years. Every year, more than 1,00,000 people commit suicide in India, 1, 29,887 suicides were reported in the country during 2017, as per the data available from the National Crime Records Bureau on Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, 2017. India is one of the country with highest suicide rate (16.5 suicides per 100,000 people) in the South-East Asian region, according to statistics of suicide in the South-East Asian region by WHO (World Health Organization, 2020). The highest suicide rate was reported in Pondicherry (40.1) followed by A & N Islands (35.6), Sikkim (32.9), Kerala (22.6), and Chhattisgarh (22.5). Comparing with the previous year's suicide rate, there was 0.4 percentage decrease in the all India suicide rate. Even though there is a decrease in the overall suicide rate, the suicide rate in the age range of 18 and above to below 30 seemed to increase. In addition, among the age categories, the highest rate of suicide reported in this age range (NCRB, 2020).

Suicidal behaviour includes acts of self-harm with lethal intent, usually having the purpose of ending intolerable emotional pain (O'Carroll et al., 1996). Although completed suicide represents the extreme form of suicidal behaviour and it is one of the major concerns all over the world. Suicide ideation also represents an important public health concern. Because, suicide ideation is considered as the part of a continuum that concludes in suicide attempts, and completed suicide. Suicide ideation is considered as an important warning to later attempted and completed suicide. Suicidal ideation, defined as having thoughts or fantasies about killing oneself, can range from transient thoughts about death to more severe rumination and creation of a plan to take one's life. The outcome may be suicide or attempted suicide. Suicidal ideation is considered by some as the first step toward suicide; it indicates a higher chance of acting them out (Arria et al., 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Gili-Planas, Roca-Bennasar, Ferrer-Perez, & Bernardo-Arroyo, 2001). Depression is a strong indicator of suicide likewise higher levels of hopelessness, anxiety and perceived stress are also indicators of suicide (Arria et al., 2009; Cero & Sifers 2016; Gibb, Andover, & Beach, 2006; Kamble, 2015; O'Conno, 2003; Schotte, & Clum, 1987).

Forgiveness is a virtue that allows to let go of the motivation to take revenge against the source that has transgressed against a person. It promotes constructive actions toward the offender, inhibits destructive actions toward the offender and help to share better connections with others (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). Forgiveness helps to foster psychological resilience. There is a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and psychological resilience (Abid & Sultan, 2015; Anderson & Mauren, 2006; Maltby, Day, & Barber 2005). Psychological tension and other negative experiences tend to increase with lower levels of forgiveness (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003). Forgiveness was inversely related to depression, which means that forgiveness is related to decreased levels of depression and failure to forgive is positively related to depression (Brown, 2003).

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Forgiveness helps to accept one's choices and experiences. The tendency to forgive oneself influence the perception about suicide ideation, that forgiveness helps to increase the self-acceptance and decrease the urge to escape from uncomfortable emotions that associated with suicidal ideation (Cheavens, Cukrowicz, Hansen & Mitchell, 2015). Higher levels of forgiveness predicted lower suicidality. The individuals with past suicide attempt history tend to have significantly less belief in forgiveness by others and were less likely to forgive themselves, and others. As the forgiveness increases, it weakens depression, suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Hirsch, Webb, & Jeglic, 2012; Nagra, Lin, Upthegrove, 2016; Quintana-Orts, & Rey 2018; Sansone, Kelley, & Forbis 2013). In addition, forgiveness of self was a significant moderator in the association between inward and outward-directed anger and suicidal behaviours (Hirsch, Webb, & Jeglic, 2012). Self-forgiveness also moderates the relationship between perceived burdensomeness and suicidal ideation (Cheavens, Cukrowicz, Hansen, & Mitchell, 2015).

The suicidal tendencies among emerging adults is an important problem that has to be addressed. In seeking to prevent and treat suicidal behaviours, it is essential to investigate protective factors that may play a significant role in moderating the impact of risk factors. This study had the major objective to explore the relationship between suicidal ideation and forgiveness

### **METHOD**

#### *Participants and Procedure*

The sample was collected from various educational institutions in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The sample was selected through convenience cum purposive sampling method. Both online and direct filed survey was done to collect data. The inclusion criteria was being the age range of 18 to 25 and not belong to the stream of psychology. The final sample included 164 female participants and 115 male participants.

#### *Measures*

Suicidal ideation was measured on Suicidal Ideation Scale (Devendra Singh Sisodia & Vibhuti Bhatnagar, 2011). It is a self-report questionnaire comprising 25 statements, measures suicidal ideation of the individual. The scale consists of 21 positive statements and 4 negative statements. High score indicates high suicidal ideation. As per the instrument, there are five categories of score ranging from very low suicidal ideation (25-30) to very high suicidal ideation (121-125).

Forgiveness was measured by Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) (. This 18-item measure is comprised of three subscales: forgiveness of self, of others, and of situations. Higher score on HFS indicate that one is usually forgiving of oneself, others, and uncontrollable situations.

#### *Statistical analysis*

Descriptive statistical methods such as mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequencies were used to summarize and organize the data to find out the nature of the data. Various nonparametric tests were used to analyze the study hypotheses as the collected data did not meet the criteria for parametric tests. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to find out the relationship between forgiveness and suicidal ideation. Kruskal Wallis test and Mann Whitney U test were used to find the significant difference in forgiveness and suicidal ideation with respect to selected socio-demographic variables like gender, place of residence, family type, and religion.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

A total 308 participants took part in the study in which 24 response sets were rejected due to incomplete data and 279 response sets were retained for analysis.

*Table 1 Nature and extend of suicidal ideation and forgiveness among emerging adults*

Variable	Mean	SD
Suicidal ideation	55.01	15.13
Total forgiveness	79.15	12.21
Forgiveness to self	26.02	5.49
Forgiveness to others	26.94	5.64
Forgiveness to situations	26.19	5.68

\*N=279

The findings revealed that the participants have an average level of suicidal ideation, which is alarming. Suicide ideation is considered as the part of a continuum that concludes in suicide attempts and completed suicide. Suicide ideation is considered as an important warning to later attempted and completed suicide. Hence, the finding indicates a higher risk for suicide among emerging adults. Emerging adulthood, the period of life between ages 18 and 25, is thought to be a time of identity exploration. The individual has to make critical life choices (such as educational and career plans, intimate relationships, starting a family) in this time that greatly affects the long-term adjustment of the individual. The hallmark characteristics of emerging adults are identity exploration, feeling in between, and a period of instability self-focus and time of possibilities. They try to become autonomous. In order to handle uncertainty and changes, emerging adulthood demands high emotional flexibility from individuals. The challenges and changes during this time make them more vulnerable to risk factors, the depression tends to be peak at this time of age, and they have heightened risk for suicide (Eisner, 2002; Rao, Hammen & Daley, 1999). This finding is in line with the reports of the National Crime Record Bureau, that the suicide rate is high among this age group. The present findings were consistent with existing findings that high risk for suicide was reported among emerging adults (Gomes et al., 2019; Gomez, Miranda & Polanco, 2011; Hamza & Willoughby, 2016).

Another important finding of the present study was that participants have moderate level of forgiveness. Emerging adulthood is a crucial period of identity formation and engaging in new life roles. Identity formation requires fruitful interaction with the environment. Forgiveness helps to deal with conflicts, which hinders fruitful interaction with the social environment of the individual. Forgiveness tends to help in dealing with conflicts, which hinders fruitful interaction with the environment. They try to practice some degree of forgiveness (Doumen et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2013). Forgiveness tends to increase with age; younger adults tend to have lower levels of forgiveness than older adults (Devi & Jyotsana, 2018). They tend to be more affected by hurtful situations and less tends to forgive (Konrath, O'Brien & Hsing, 2011). The finding that the participants have a moderate level of forgiveness is consistent with existing literature (Kumar & Dixit, 2014).

*Table 2 Correlation between forgiveness and suicidal ideation*

Variable	Suicidal ideation	P
Total forgiveness	-0.50	0.01
Forgiveness to self	-0.41	0.01
Forgiveness to others	-0.24	0.01
Forgiveness to situations	-0.42	0.01

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The major objective of the present study was to find out the relationship between suicidal ideation and forgiveness. Findings show that there is a significant negative correlation between suicidal ideation and forgiveness. The finding was consistent with the emerging literature on this subject (Nagra, Lin, & Upthegrove, 2016; Quintana-Orts, & Rey 2018). Forgiveness is a voluntary process of “letting go” desire to take revenge on the source of transgression. This also helps to overcome the negative effects like anger and vengeance associated with it. One of the major causes of suicide is depression and the shame, anger, and revenge also tend to increase the risk of suicide. Forgiveness causes a cognitive-affective transformation following a transgression. The victim makes a realistic assessment of the harm done and acknowledges the perpetrator's responsibility and freely chooses to “cancel the debt” giving up the need for revenge or deserved punishments and any quest for restitution. Hence, forgiveness function to reduce anger and vengeance (Barber, Maltby & Macaskill, 2005; Ross, Hertenstein & Wrobel, 2007) and decrease the risk for suicide (Hirsch, Webb & Jeglic, 2012). Forgiveness helps to foster interpersonal relationship, which in turn help the individual to ensure social support in times of crises, in this way, forgiveness indirectly reduces the chance for suicide. The individual who has high levels of forgiveness tends to have better physical health and psychological health (Brannan, Davis & Biswas-Diener, 2016; Webb, Hirsch, Visser, & Brewer, 2013; Webb, Toussaint, Kalpakjian, & Tate, 2010). This aspect of forgiveness also acts as a buffer against suicide.

According to the cubic model of suicide by Shneidman (1985), suicide is the way to stop the unbearable psychological flow of pain; psychache. According to Freud (1917), the suicidal act is in fact a re-direction of aggressive and murderous wishes towards another, turned to the self. Ultimately, the decision to harm or kill oneself results as a belief that there is no pathway to improvement for the self. That is, the person who is at heightened risk for suicide often feels that they have done something for which there is no resolution, that they are a burden to others, or that they are incapable of evolving from their perceived flawed state. Such thoughts and feelings are hallmark characteristics of the person who is unforgiving of the self. Self-forgiveness is the “willingness to abandon self-resentment”, to accept one’s vulnerabilities and imperfections, and to foster “love toward oneself”, and this will act as the antidote to suicide (Cheavens, Cukrowicz, Hansen, & Mitchell, 2015; Hirsch, Webb, & Toussaint, 2019).

**Table 3** *Difference in suicidal ideation by gender, place of residence and family type*

Variable	Category	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	P
Gender	Female	164	130.23	21357.00	7827	0.01
	Male	115	153.94	17703.00		
	Total	279				
Place of residence	Urban	103	138.96	14312	8956.50	.99
	Rural	174	139.03	24190		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
	Joint	27	118.28	3193.50		
Family type	Nuclear	250	141.29	35309.50	2815.50	.16
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				

The study findings show that suicidal ideation differ significantly among males and females and males have higher suicidal ideation than females. Contrary findings were reported about the difference in suicidal ideation. In a study by Ravikumar & Gopalakrishna (2020) stated

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that gender conflicts existing in the society are influencing the gender difference observed in the suicidal ideation and study reported that females tend to have higher suicidal ideation than males. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of Ibrahim, Amit, Che Din, and Ong (2017). It may be because of the difference in the attitude towards suicide and the greater psychiatric comorbidity found among males than females (Vishnuvardhan & Saddichha, 2012). Found that there is no significant difference in suicidal ideation with respect to family type and place of residence. Contrary findings were reported regarding the difference in suicide among nuclear and joint family types. Studies reported that greater number of suicides reported among joint families (Adityanjee, 1986; Chandrashekhar et al., 1979; Sharma & Gopala Krishna, 1978). The probability of available level of support in the nuclear families was much lower than joint families. So, this is stated as a contributor to the higher number of suicide attempters in the nuclear family type than joint family type (Lath, Bhat, & D'Souza, 1996). In recent decades, there is a drastic change in the family structure in India that more people moving out of joint into nuclear family structures, these changes may also take in consideration while checking the difference in suicide among the different family type. In this study, no such difference is found. Families act as a good support system during crises, this aspect of family act as a protective factor against suicide. Parenting style, family history of mental illness and suicide, and physical and sexual abuse in childhood are the risk factors of suicide related to family (Srivastava, 2013). This finding implies that the risk for suicide may depend upon the quality of the interpersonal relationship between family members rather than the type of family because whichever be the family type, if the family structure is disorganized it fails to provide adequate support in the time of crises. Existing literature reports contradictory findings on the topic whether rural or urban residence n significantly differ in suicidal ideation, with some suggesting that individuals who are living in the rural area are at the heightened risk for suicide (Gessert, 2003; Stark, & Riordan, 2011). Some studies report people living in more urbanized areas are at a higher risk of suicide than their counterparts in less urbanized areas. However, this excess risk is largely eliminated when adjusted for personal marital, income, and ethnic differences (Vijayakumar, John & Whiteford, 2005; Qin, 2005).

**Table 4** *Difference in suicidal ideation by gender, place of residence and family type*

Forgiveness	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	P
Forgiveness	Female	164	155.24	25459	6931	.01
	Male	115	118.27	13601		
	Total	279				
Forgiveness To self	Female	164	153.02	25096	7294	.01
	Male	115	121.43	13964		
	Total	279				
Forgiveness to others	Female	164	157.15	25772.50	6617.50	.01
	Male	115	115.54	13287.50		
	Total	279				
Forgiveness to situations	Female	164	146.82	24078	8312	.09
	Male	115	130.28	14982		
	Total	279				

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**Table 5 Difference in suicidal ideation by place of residence**

Forgiveness	Place of residence	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	P
Forgiveness	Urban	103	146.33	15072	8206	.24
	Rural	174	134.66	23431		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
Forgiveness To self	Urban	103	150.04	15454	7824	.08
	Rural	174	132.47	23049		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
Forgiveness to others	Urban	103	140.81	14503	8775	.77
	Rural	174	137.93	24000		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
Forgiveness to situations	Urban	103	139.92	15072	8866	.24
	Rural	174	134.66	23431		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				

**Table 6 Difference in suicidal ideation by family type**

Forgiveness	Family type	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	P
Forgiveness	Joint	27	147.93	3994	3134	.54
	Nuclear	250	138.04	34509		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
Forgiveness To self	Joint	27	154.61	4174.50	2953.5	.28
	Nuclear	250	137.31	34328.50		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
Forgiveness to others	Joint	27	135.19	3650	3272	.79
	Nuclear	250	139.41	34853		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				
Forgiveness to situations	Joint	27	149.48	4036	3092	.47
	Nuclear	250	137.87	34467		
	Missing	02				
	Total	279				

Another important findings of the study was that there is a significant difference in forgiveness with respect to gender. Findings show that forgiveness, forgiveness to self and others differ significantly among males and females but not found significant difference in gender for forgiveness to situations. Khan and Singh, (2013) reported a consistent finding with the present study that females tend to have higher forgiveness than males. Besides, Meta-analytical review on gender difference in forgiveness by Miller, Worthington, and McDaniel (2008) reported a result which is in line with the findings of the present study. The difference in forgiveness among females and males can be explained in terms of evolutionary-based models of coping and attributional patterns. Aggressing or fleeing may be somewhat adaptive for males than females and females tend to take less vengeance and focus on more relationship harmony (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005; Taylor et al., 2000). So women tend to be more forgiving than men. There is a lack of comprehensive literature consistent with the finding that males and females do not differ significantly in gender in the dimension of forgiveness; the forgiveness to situations.

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Study found that forgiveness and types of forgiveness (to self, others and situations) do not significantly differ with respect to the place of residence and family type. Social harmony will depend largely on people's ability and willingness to repair interpersonal damage. Forgiveness seems to be an adapting strategy, which permits an individual to manage unfavorable backgrounds. Therefore, forgiveness may differ with demographic factors such as an increased probability of conflict rather than rural-urban differences. There was no comprehensive literature found which supports or contradicts present finding. Family structure tends to have an important role in the development of forgiveness. Family provides a scenario in which child experience and exercise forgiveness. The way in which parents practice forgiveness is correlated with the way in which children practices forgiveness (Denham et al., 2005).

### *Implications*

Emerging adulthood is a period of exploration and change in which the individual take decisions which act as a foundation for the rest of their life. An average level of suicidal ideation found in emerging adults it indicates risk for future suicide and suicide attempts. It indicates that their inefficiency to adaptively cope with stressors or the inability to effectively deal with the stressful situations. The emerging adulthood is a crucial period in an individual's life by establishing and fulfilling long-term adult's roles. The suicide of younger individual can hinder the productive growth of the societies.

The identification of protective factors for risks at this time of life may be of particular importance. The findings communicate the importance of forgiveness to reduce suicide risk. Forgiveness can act as a factor which helps to overcome "the thought of killing oneself". It is also helpful to create fruitful interactions with the one's environment and heal the interpersonal conflicts, which help, to foster social support. Emerging adulthood is the period were individual make many decisions which will affect rest of their life and there is a higher probability that mistake happens which cannot be cancel out. In such circumstances, individual may feel unworthy and think to end the life. By practicing forgiveness, one can overcome such circumstances.

### *Recommendations*

The suicide among emerging adults is one of the major issues around the world. Emerging adulthood is a period of possibilities and at the same time, are at the peak of various risk factors. Suicide prevention programmes can be conducted in educational institution and organizational settings. Training programmes for psychologists and counselors can be formulated especially focusing on the key characteristics of emerging adults. Awareness programmers for parents and teachers and other adults who deal with emerging adults can be formulated in order to act as a support system for emerging adults in their successful transmission to adulthood. As the identity formation continues from adolescence to emerging adulthood, this can be taken as a major focus of awareness programmes for parents and teachers and other adults who deal with emerging adults. Educational institutions and organizations have to plan and implement various policies, programmes, and strategies to enhance forgiveness among this age group.

Forgiveness based interventions will help emerging adults for a successful transition to adulthood and also ensure their mental and physical health. This will be helpful in reducing the risk of suicide in this age group. Other than this, there is an immediate need of policies, programmes, and strategies to reduce the suicide among this age group and while planning such interventions, gender differences have to be taken in account.



### CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to identify the relationship between forgiveness and suicidal ideation. An average level was found and there was a significant negative relationship between forgiveness and suicidal ideation was found. These indicate urgent need for the development and implementation of various policies and programmes to reduce the suicide rate and enhance forgiveness among emerging adults.

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