

Research Paper

Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

Sukhminder Kaur¹, Gurchhinder^{2*}

ABSTRACT

Punjab in India is one of the most adversely affected regions due to substance use particularly when it comes to the opioid dependence. The present study was aimed at analyzing the protective role of social support in emotional pain and suicidal ideation among young adults with opioid use disorder particularly heroin dependence. For the purpose, 101 males diagnosed with Opioid use disorder, recruited from rehabilitation centers located in the Patiala and Fatehgarh Sahib districts of Punjab. Correlational design was adopted to investigate the role of social support in emotional pain and suicidal ideation among individuals with heroin dependence. Further, finding of the moderation analysis has shown social support ($B = -.12$, $t = -2.58$, $p = .01$) as the significant moderator between suicidal ideation and emotional pain where the final model has explained 55% variance in overall analysis of moderation. The findings have greater implications that if support that inherent in social framework is exercised during clinical interventions it helps in tackling the psychological distress and suicidal ideation attributed by opioid use disorder or heroin dependence.

Keywords: *Opioid use disorder, heroin, social support, suicidal ideation, emotional pain*

Substance use, particularly opioid dependence, has emerged as a significant public health concern across the globe. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its World Drug Report 2024 has shown a sharp 20 percent rise in worldwide consumption of drugs from last decade. The malaise has not left India untouched where particularly the Punjab once known for its overall wellbeing is now hacked by drugs. The grave nature of the scenario can be obviously seen for example according to *Indian Express* (2023) report the Punjab government officials the number of drug-related mortalities rising annually and scaring part is that the incidents has increased by approximately 400 percent in just three years from 2021 to 2023 where many go unreported as well. There are one million individuals considering almost 3% of the state's total population with substance use disorder are those getting treatment under around 303 drug

¹Department of Psychology, Punjabi university, Patiala, Punjab
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7695-5992

²Department of Psychology, Punjabi university, Patiala, Punjab
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7044-5808

*Corresponding Author

Received: October 18, 2025; Revision Received: November 27, 2025; Accepted: December 01, 2025

Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

de-addiction and rehabilitation centers, encompassing both government-run and private facilities (New Indian Express, 2025).

Among the various opioids, heroin has become the most common and harmful substance, contributing to a complex social and health crisis in the region. National Institute on Drug Abuse (2021) define it as a semi-synthetic opioid derived from morphine having a significant potential for dependence. In an investigation by Avasthi et al, (2019) indicated that 46.2 percent opioid users were there among all 6600 respondents. Similarly, based on research in rural Punjabi localities, heroin was found to be the most frequently misused drug, with 20.8% of the sample reported its use (Sharma et al., 2017). Apart from that life-threatening diseases like HIV AIDS and brain dysfunctions are the simultaneously costs that drug users pay (Tolomeo et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2016). The family and society further exacerbated by psychosocial, economical, delinquent activities and incarceration among those addicted to heroin (McDonald et al., 2002).

Mental health professionals admit that being overwhelmed circumstance can increase the chances of developing suicidal ideation and attempts (Khanjani et al., 2023). India presents approximately seventeen percent of total and it has been steadily increasing (WHO, 2019). Suicides by the specific drug users is almost 13 times higher when compared to the peers who do not use heroin even when other factors, such as depression are controlled. The feeling of unbearable unease forces these individuals to think of suicide as a solution (Darke, 2002).

Further being in the state of addiction is momentous. Chronic intoxication is pervasive psycho-social burden where the person undergoes profound challenge in many areas of his or her life. Emotional or mental pain is one of the critical outcomes of persistent distress. At the same time, it has been found that social support function in reducing magnitude of fatalistic factors like suicidal and emotional pain (Tonglin et al., 2024). Yet, little research has been done to explore the association and role of social support particularly in relation to suicidal ideation and emotional pain among individuals with specific disorder. Thus, it is essential to notice the regional severity and the paucity of psychological studies in the specific context. Hence, the present study aims to address this gap by investigating the moderating role of social support in emotional pain and suicidal ideation among heroin dependent individuals in Punjab.

Hypotheses

1. Perceived Social support would be negatively associated with suicidal ideation among individuals with opioid use disorder.
2. Emotional pain would be positively associated with suicidal ideation among individuals with opioid use disorder.
3. Perceived Social support and Emotional pain would be negatively associated among individuals with opioid use disorder.
4. Perceived Social support will significantly moderate the relationship between Emotional pain and Suicidal ideation among individuals with opioid use disorder.

METHODS

Participants

For the purpose, 101 male persons diagnosed with Opioid use disorder, recruited from Rehabilitation centers located in the Patiala and Fatehgarh sahib districts of Punjab. Age

Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

range of the respondents is ranged from 18 to 40 with mean age of 24.6 years, and standard deviation 4.2. All the respondents qualified above matriculation.

Measures

- **Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (BSI; Beck & Steer, 1991):** The scale is a self-report, has 19 items that detects the suicidal ideation among the individuals. Every item has 3 sub-items containing scoring of 0, 1 and 2. High score corresponds to higher suicidal ideation in individual.
- **Mental Pain Scale (Guimaraes et al., 2014):** It is a 24-item modified and psychometrically sound version of Orbach and Mikulincer (2003) original Mental Pain Scale. It is a self-rating 5-point Likert scale consisting 5 dimensions i.e. Emptiness, Irreversibility, Emotional flooding, Helplessness and Confusion. The scoring is ranging from 1 corresponding to 'strongly disagree' to 5 corresponding to "strongly agree". High score on the scale corresponds to high mental or emotional pain.
- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988):** The twelve-item tool assess three dimensions, or subscales, that is "family, friends, and significant others" to make up the composite score of the scale. It has seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "very strongly agree" to "very strongly disagree."

Procedure

Correlational design was adopted to investigate the role of social support in emotional pain and suicidal ideation among individuals with heroin dependence. Both rehabilitation centers were visited separately in order to obtain the data. After receiving written informed consent from the participants instructions were clearly explained and tools were given separately in a group consisting 3 to 5 individuals with a time gap of at least ten minutes after filling each of the questionnaire. After the completion of questionnaires, scoring was done as per the guidelines in the respective manuals.

Statistical analysis

The collected data was analyzed with the help of SPSS, Version 25.0. Descriptive statistics and moderation analysis procedure given by Aiken and West (1991) was employed to see the moderating effect of social support on suicidal ideation and emotional pain association.

RESULTS

The main objective of the present investigation was to see the moderating role of perceived social support in relation to emotional pain with suicidal ideation among individuals using heroin. Participants reported a mean score of 17.64 ($SD = 4.87$) on the dependent variable suggesting a moderate to high level of suicidal ideation in the particular. Suicidal Ideation is significantly negatively correlated with all the domains of Social Support ($r = -.66, p < .01$) and positively with emotional pain ($r = .62, p < .01$), In this case, the first hypothesis (H1) and hypothesis (H2) is likewise accepted here. Hypothesis number three reporting the relationship between social support and emotional pain ($-.59^{**}, p < 0.01$) is also incoherent with the previous studies as well.

Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

Table 1 Presenting moderation analysis of Social Support on the Relationship between Emotional pain and Suicidal Ideation

Variables	B	SE	t	R	R ²	F
Emotional Pain	0.13**	.03	4.21			
Social Support	-4.33**	.77	-5.62	.74	0.55	39.46
Emotional Pain x Social Support	-.12**	.05	-2.58			

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Further, Moderation Analysis was conducted to see if the social support moderates between emotional pain and suicidal ideation among individuals with opioid use disorder. Result findings revealed social support as significant negative predicting ($B = -4.33$, $SE = 0.77$, $p = .01$) suicidal ideation. Importantly, the interaction term between emotional pain and social support was also significant, ($\beta = -.12$, $t = -2.58$, $p = .01$), demonstrating that social support moderates the relationship between emotional pain and suicidal ideation. The overall model explained 55% variance in predicting suicidal ideation. Thus, revealing the end result perceived social support showing its impact in between and separately as well on both of the factors that is suicidal ideation and emotional pain.

DISCUSSION

Mental health professionals, especially counselors and therapists should continuously evaluate the thoughts related to suicide and must focus on the factors that protect the particular vulnerable population. Existing research highlights the impact of perceived social support in reducing psychological distress and suicidal ideation on the very same individuals. Support from various sources is vital in effectively dealing with Opioid use disorder as well that family and friends by providing emotional stability, reduce feelings of isolation and shame and encourage oneself to tackle the stressful circumstances (Rubio et al., 2020). Hence, the effective utilization of community resources along with establishment of a nurturing social and emotional environment can help in both harm reduction and psychological well-being of individuals struggling with the opioid use challenge.

Since the sample does not cover such a wide population of opioid users of the state. Also, study participants are undergoing medication and counselling, which clearly indicates that treatment effects could have also impact on the study. Socio demographic details should be comprehensively taken and lastly comorbid mental health conditions are commonly found in the particular individuals that could also be identified separately to make study more effective. In future research on the same population these shortcomings should be kept in mind to succeed to more impressive outcomes.

REFERENCES

- All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi & Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM). (2016). *Punjab opioid dependence survey (PODS): A brief report*. Government of Punjab.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev; DSM-5TR). American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Avasthi, A., Basu, D., Subodh, B. N., Gupta, P. K., Goyal, B. L., Sidhu, B. S., ... & Ghosh, A. (2019). Epidemiology of dependence on illicit substances, with a special focus on opioid dependence, in the State of Punjab, India: Results from two different yet complementary survey methods. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 39, 70-79.

Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

- Ayub, N. (2015). Predicting suicide ideation through intrapersonal and interpersonal factors: The interplay of Big-Five personality traits and social support. *Personality and mental health, 9*(4), 308-318.
- Beck, A. T., & Steer, R. A. (1991). Manual for the Beck scale for suicide ideation. *San Antonio, TX: Psychological Corporation, 63*.
- Darke, S., & Ross, J. (2002). Suicide among heroin users: rates, risk factors and methods. *Addiction, 97*(11), 1383-1394.
- Elliott, J. C., Hasin, D. S., Stohl, M., & Des Jarlais, D. C. (2016). HIV, hepatitis C, and abstinence from alcohol among injection and non-injection drug users. *AIDS and Behavior, 20*, 548-554.
- Guimaraes, R., Fleming, M., & Cardoso, M. F. (2014). Validation of the Orbach & Mikulincer Mental Pain Scale (OMMP) on a drug addicted population. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology, 49*(3), 405-415.
- Indian Express. (2023, December 25). *Deaths due to 'overdose' of drugs: A harrowing picture of loss in Punjab's hinterland*. The Indian Express.
- Indian Express. (2023, December 25). *Deaths due to 'overdose' of drugs: A harrowing picture of loss in Punjab's hinterland*. The Indian Express.
- Khanjani, M. S., Younesi, S. J., Abdi, K., Mardani-Hamoooleh, M., & Sohrabnejad, S. (2023). Prevalence of and factors influencing suicide ideation, attempt, and completion in heroin users: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Addiction & Health, 15*(2), 119.
- McCrary, B. S., Epstein, E. E., & Sell, R. D. (1996). Theoretical bases of family approaches to substance abuse treatment. *Treating substance abuse: Theory and technique, 117-142*.
- McDonald, D., Russell, P., Bland, N., Morrison, A., and De la Cruz, C. (2002). Supporting families and carers of drug users: A review. Scottish Executive – Effective Interventions Unit.
- Meerwijk, E. L., & Weiss, S. J. (2011). Toward a unifying definition of psychological pain. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 16*(5), 402-412
- Miller, A., Esposito-Smythers, C., & Leichtweis, R. (2015). Role of social support in adolescent suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. *The Journal of adolescent health: official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine, 56* 3, 286-92.
- National Crime Records Bureau. Accidental deaths & suicides in India—2022; 2022.
- National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS). (2016). *National mental health survey of India, 2015–16: Prevalence, patterns and outcomes*. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2021). *Heroin drug facts*. National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- New Indian Express. (2025, January 6). *Punjab plans to launch drug policy focusing on de-addiction alongside centralised patient registry*. New Indian Express. Retrieved from
- Rubio, A., Oyanedel, J. C., Cancino, F., Benavente, L., Céspedes, C., Zisis, C., & Páez, D. (2020). Social support and substance use as moderators of the relationship between depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation in adolescents. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 539165.
- Sharma, B., Arora, A., Singh, K., Singh, H., & Kaur, P. (2017). Drug abuse: Uncovering the burden in rural Punjab. *Journal of family medicine and primary care, 6*(3), 558-562.

Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder

- Tolomeo, S., Steele, J. D., Ekhtiari, H., & Baldacchino, A. (2021). Chronic heroin use disorder and the brain: Current evidence and future implications. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry*, *111*, 110148.
- Tonglin, J., Yuntana, W., Lu, Z., Zhenhui, L., Xin, L., & Yongzhi, J. (2024). Social Trauma and Suicidal Ideation among College Students: The Roles of Psychache and Optimism. *Journal of Psychological Science*, *47*(4), 1008.
- Tossani, E. (2013). The concept of mental pain. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, *82*(2), 67-73.
- World Health Organization. Suicide in the world: global health estimates. 2019.
- Zimet, G. D., Powell, S. S., Farley, G. K., Werkman, S., & Berkoff, K. A. (1990). Psychometric characteristics of the multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of personality assessment*, *55*(3-4), 610-617.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sukhminder, K. & Gurchhinder (2025). Exploring The Protective Role of Social Support in Emotional Pain and Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *13*(4), 1644-1649. DIP:18.01.151.20251304, DOI:10.25215/1304.151