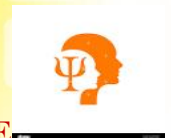




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## Impulsivity and Perceived Social Support as Predictors of Suicidal Ideation among Senior Secondary School Students in Nsukka Educational Zone of Enugu State

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### Abstract

*This study investigated impulsivity and perceived social support as predictors of suicidal ideation among senior secondary school students in Nsukka Educational Zone Enugu State Nigeria. Three hundred participants comprising 153 females and 147 males with age range of 13-17 years (M 14.77, SD 1.48) and were drawn using a multi-stage sampling technique (balloting, systematic and simple random methods). The study adopted a correlational research design in which multidimensional scale of perceived social support (Zimet et al., 1988), The Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire-JR (Reynolds, 1987) and Barratt Impulsive Scale -11: The BIS-11 (Stanford et al., 2009) were administered for data collection. While hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was used for data analysis. The results indicated that impulsivity positively predicted suicidal ideation among secondary school students  $\beta = 4.585$ ,  $t = 15.677$ ,  $P < .001$ ). This implies that students who are impulsive are at high risk of suicidal ideation. The results further revealed that perceived social support and its three dimensions did not predict suicidal ideation among secondary school students ( $\beta = 5.412$ ,  $t = 1.818$ , Significant others  $\beta = .745$ ,  $t = -.463$ , family  $\beta = 1.070$ ,  $t = .663$ , friends  $\beta = -2.519$ ,  $t = -.1.276$ ,  $P > .05$ ). Finally, impulsivity and perceived social support did not jointly predict suicidal ideation among secondary school students  $\beta = -.082$ ,  $t = -1.972$ ,  $p > .05$ . There is need for orientation/workshop among secondary school students to educate them against taking actions without foresight that are poorly conceived, prematurely expressed, unnecessarily risky, and inappropriate to situations at hand in the bid to forestall suicidal ideation.*

**Keywords:** *Impulsivity, Perceived Social Support, Suicidal Ideation, Senior Secondary School Students*

### Introduction

Suicide is a death arising from an act inflicted upon oneself with the intention to kill oneself (Rosenberg et al., 1988). Suicidal ideation serves as an anchor to suicide itself; suicide is an intentional act that brings life to an end stretching through decision making processes and exploring every available support that may sever as buffer toward overcoming the perceived life unsurmountable challenge. Suicidal ideation (or suicidal thoughts) is thinking about, considering, or planning suicide (Klonsky et al., 2016). Non-fatal suicidal thoughts and

behaviors usually precede successful suicide acts and should be seen as important cries for help and intervention, when they occur. They may be classified into three categories:

Social support is a broad term encompassing a variety of more specific characteristics of an individual's social world that might promote well-being and increase resistance to health problems (Cohen, et al, 2000). Perceived Social support is the perception of being cared for by others and having a reliable network to turn to when needed, in everyday situations or specific moments of crisis (Taylor, 2011). Perceived social support has been identified as one of the most significant psychosocial coping resources for people to combat severe mental problems and maintain subjective well-being (Qi et al., 2020). This is especially true for college students who are at a critical stage of exploring and adjusting to the emerging adulthood life and developing personal identity (Arnett, 2000).

Impulsivity has been described as a “predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli with diminished regard to the negative consequences of these reactions to the impulsive individual or to others” (Evenden, 1999; Moeller et al., 2001; Potenza & de Wit, 2010). Impulsivity has been related to multiple psychiatric conditions including bipolar, substance-use, and many different personality disorders (Chamorro et al., 2012; Moeller et al., 2001).

Suicidal ideation represents a growing global public health issue among youths and adolescents. Exposure to psycho-trauma and psychological pain due to difficulties of life, academic failure, exuberance, poor family background, low self-esteem, poor communication between parent and child/children, bullying and conflicts put the adolescent in a difficult circumstance that predisposes them to a range of mental health challenges including thought of killing themselves. Transition from junior secondary school to senior secondary school comes with a lot of psychological changes such as reorganization of self-worth and self-concept. Always faced with so many decisions to make, such as how to perform well in academics, how to belong and measure up to standard, how to initiate and maintain a relationship especially with the opposite sex etc.

This study meant to portray the part that impulsivity and perceived social support play in averting or promoting suicidal ideation. Hence, the following specific objectives:

1. To determine whether impulsivity will significantly predict suicidal ideation.
2. To determine whether perceived social support will independently and jointly predict suicidal ideation.
3. In addition, to verify whether impulsivity and perceived social support will jointly predict suicidal ideation.

## **Review of Related Literature**

The three steps theory (Klonsky & May, 2015) describes the conditions under which desire for suicide and suicide attempts occur. It is offered as a parsimonious theory that explains suicide in terms of just four factors: pain, hopelessness, connectedness, and capability for suicide. This theory explains suicide as a journey which starts from ideation to the suicide itself precipitated by four different conditions namely pain, hopelessness, connectedness and capability. To further see the link between social support and suicidal ideation, some past studies were reviewed to include:

Ayodele and Ojo (2022) who explored suicide ideation and its correlates among university undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria. This paper examines the potential social factors that are shaping suicidal ideation among young people in two universities in Nigeria. Based on a mixed-method design, a survey was conducted among a proportionate sample of 500 young people (18–25 years that are undergraduates). Four focus group discussion sessions were also held among the same group and six semi-structured interviews with social workers at both universities. Findings from the qualitative component also considered undergraduates that have academic challenges, engage in substance abuse, and have parents with marital problems to be prone to suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation among these young people is embedded in their network of relationships, which can be mitigated when the quality of support systems is responsive and adequately accessed. In the same vein, the link between impulsivity and suicidal ideation was examined via previous studies such as: Klonsky (2015), at

University of British Columbia, elevated impulsivity is thought to facilitate the transition from suicidal thoughts to suicidal behaviour. Therefore, impulsivity should distinguish those who have attempted suicide (attempters) from those who have only considered suicide (ideators-only). This hypothesis was examined in three large nonclinical samples: (1) 2,011 military recruits, (2) 1,296 college students, and (3) 399 high school students.

Evan et al. (2016) at Department of Psychology, George Mason University, Fairfax, explored the moderating role of social support on the relationship between impulsivity and suicide risk the present study examined the role that social support plays in the relationship between impulsivity and suicide risk. Participants were 169 undergraduates who completed self-report measures of impulsivity and social support. Suicide risk was assessed using an interview measure. Social support moderates the relationship between impulsivity and suicide risk, such that those who are highly impulsive are less likely to be at risk for suicide if they also have high levels of social support. Social support can be a useful buffer to suicide risk for at-risk individuals who are highly impulsive. Despite the robust nature of past studies in suicidal ideation, there seems to be depth of studies in adolescents which actually motivated this study.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were three hundred (300) senior secondary school students comprising 153 females and 147 males. The participants age range were 13-17 years (Mean age = 14.77, Standard Deviation = 1.48) and were drawn using a multi-stage sampling technique (balloting, systematic and simple random methods) from Nsukka educational zone of Enugu State through Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB). The schools are Community secondary school Ede Obala, Girls secondary school Opi, Urban girls' secondary school Nsukka (UGSSN), Community secondary school Umunko, and Community secondary school Nimbo in which 297 participants were Christians and 3 participants were Muslim. All participants are from Igbo tribe. Thus, gender, age, class of study and religion were controlled in this study.

### **Instruments**

Three sets of instruments were used namely: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Support (Zimet et al., 1988), Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire-JR (Reynolds, 1987) and Barratt impulsive scale -11 (Stanford et al., 2009).

### **Procedure**

The researchers visited the five schools selected on different days, the various principals were consulted whereby they gave their permission enabling the researchers to have access to the students together with the class monitors who acted as research assistants. Three hundred and thirteen students who gave their consents to the study were sampled, thirteen copies of the research questionnaires were discarded for improper filling, whereas, the remaining 300 copies correctly filled were used for data analysis.

### **Design and Statistics**

A correlational research design was adopted based on the fact that this investigation involves the use of observation and measurement of variables to establish a linear relationship. Thus, hierarchical multiple regression was applied as a statistical tool based on a set of continuous predictor variables (impulsivity and social support) as independent variables, and one continuous criterion variable (suicidal ideation) as a dependent variable. The statistical test for data analysis was Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

## Results

**Table 1:** Mean, Standard Deviation and Inter-Correlation among variables (impulsivity, perceived social support and suicidal ideation).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Suicidal ideation (1)	47.78	42.46	1										
Impulsivity (2)	78.86	9.42	.960*	1									
PSS (3)	10.71	6.39	-.833*	-.848*	1								
Significant others (4)	3.48	2.17	-.667*	-.671*	.935*	1							
family (5)	3.39	2.27	-.707*	-.714*	.952*	.907*	1						
Friends (6)	3.90	2.47	-.942*	-.969*	.882*	.704*	.745*	1					
School (7)	3.06	1.25	-.031	-.011	.005	.046	.017	-.034	1				
Class (8)	1.94	.88	-.004	-.025	.007	-.024	.000	.032	.025	1			
Gender (8)	1.49	.50	-.110**	-.112**	.108**	.082	.108**	.101**	.041	.006	1		
Religion (10)	1.01	10	-.036	-.034	.075	.055	.123**	.031	.075	.045	.103**	1	
Age (11)	14.77	1.48	-.030	-.025	.058	.058	.066	.052	-.061	.028	-.014	.016	1

\* Correlation is significant at  $P < .001$ , \*\* at  $p < .05$

$N = 300$

Note: PSS = Perceived Social Support

Gender is coded as 1 (male) and 2 (female)

Class is coded as 1(SS1) 2(SS2) 3(SS3)

Religion is coded 1(Christianity) 2(muslim) 3(traditional)

The correlation table revealed that impulsivity had a positive relationship with suicidal ideation ( $r = .960$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This implies that students who are impulsive are also prone to suicidal ideation. The table also revealed that perceived social support and all the three dimensions (significant others, family and friends) showed significant negative correlation with suicidal ideation ( $r = -.833$ ,  $-.667$ ,  $-.707$ , and  $-.942$ , respectively at  $P < .001$ ).

This holds that students who had no, or low social support have more suicidal ideation. Gender had a negative relationship with suicidal ideation ( $r = -.110$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Males are more at risk for suicidal ideation. Impulsivity had negative correlation with perceived social support and all its three dimensions ( $r = -.848$ ,  $-.671$ ,  $-.714$ , and  $-.969$ , respectively at  $P < .001$ ). This means that impulsive students received low or no social support while those who receive adequate social support are nonimpulsive. Gender yielded a negative correlation with impulsivity ( $r = -.112$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

This indicates that males are more impulsive than female students. Gender positively correlated with perceived social support and its two dimensions (family and friends) ( $r = .108$ ,  $.108$  and  $.101$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This implies that female students receive more social support especially from family and friends.

**Table 2:** Model Summary Analysis of impulsivity and perceived social support as predictors of Suicidal ideation.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.962 <sup>a</sup>	.925	.924	11.70569
2	.962 <sup>b</sup>	.925	.924	11.72825
3	.963 <sup>c</sup>	.926	.924	11.73577

a. Predictors: (Constant), Impulsivity\_PSS, impulsivity, PSS

b. Predictors: (Constant), Impulsivity\_PSS, impulsivity, PSS, PSS significant others, PSS family, PSS friends

c. Predictors: (Constant), Impulsivity\_PSS, impulsivity, PSS, PSS significant others, PSS family, PSS friends, class, sex, age of students, school, religion

The results of the regression analysis as presented in table 2 showed that the control variable and the predictor variables (impulsivity and perceived social support) accounted for 96.2% ( $R^2$  change) variance in suicidal ideation which is significant to F change (3,296) = 1212.86,  $P < .001$ . See ANOVA table in appendix.

**Table 3:** Hierarchical Regression coefficient analysis of impulsivity, perceived social support and suicidal ideation

		<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	-306.984	23.121		-13.277	.000
	Impulsivity	4.585	.292	1.017	15.677	.000
	PSS	5.412	2.977	.814	1.818	.070
	Impulsivity_PSS	-.082	.041	-.788	-1.972	.050
2	(Constant)	-259.759	47.675		-5.449	.000
	Impulsivity	4.044	.563	.897	7.184	.000
	PSS	4.324	3.769	.651	1.147	.252
	Impulsivity_PSS	-.052	.051	-.506	-1.034	.302
	PSS significant others	-.745	1.607	-.038	-.463	.643
	PSS family	-1.070	1.614	-.057	-.663	.508
	PSS friends	-2.519	1.974	-.146	-1.276	.203
3	(Constant)	-248.868	52.621		-4.729	.000
	Impulsivity	3.919	.586	.869	6.684	.000
	PSS	3.944	3.918	.593	1.007	.315
	Impulsivity_PSS	-.050	.053	-.485	-.952	.342
	PSS significant others	-.330	1.631	-.017	-.202	.840
	PSS family	-.916	1.634	-.049	-.561	.576
	PSS friends	-2.806	2.012	-.163	-1.395	.164
	School	-.921	.561	-.027	-1.642	.102
	Class	1.101	.775	.023	1.420	.157
	Gender	-.191	1.376	-.002	-.139	.890
	Religion	1.418	7.180	.003	.198	.844
	Age	.000	.465	.000	-.001	.999



Table 3, (regression coefficient table) revealed that impulsivity significantly and positively predicted suicidal ideation ( $\beta = -4.585$ ,  $t = 15.677$ ,  $P < .001$ ). Thus, the first hypothesis which stated that impulsivity will significantly predictor suicidal ideation is hereby accepted. This means that impulsive students are at high risk of suicidal ideation.

Perceived social support did not jointly or independently predict suicidal ideation ( $\beta = 5.412$ ,  $t = 1.818$ , Significant others  $\beta = .745$ ,  $t = -.463$ , family  $\beta = 1.070$ ,  $t = .663$ , friends  $\beta = -2.519$ ,  $t = -1.276$ ,  $P > .05$ ). Hence, the second hypothesis which stated that perceived social support will jointly and independently predict suicidal ideation was rejected. This indicates that the level of perceived social support the students receive through significant others, family or friends do not relate with their suicidal thought.

Impulsivity and perceived social support did not jointly predict suicidal ideation  $\beta = -.082$ ,  $t = -1.972$ ,  $p > .05$ . Thus, the third hypothesis which stated that impulsivity and perceived social support will jointly and significantly predict suicidal ideation was rejected. Students who are impulsive and non impulsive together with receiving social support or not, do not differ in suicidal ideation.

### Summary of Findings

The result of impulsivity and perceived social support as predictors of suicidal ideation was summarized as follow:

- ❖ There is a positive statistically significant prediction of impulsivity on suicidal ideation of students.
- ❖ There is no significant prediction of perceived social support and its three dimensions on suicidal ideation.
- ❖ Impulsivity and perceived social support failed to jointly predict suicidal ideation.
- ❖ None of the five dimensions of the five demographic variables controlled in this study (school, gender, class, religion and age) predicted suicidal ideation.

### Discussion

This study investigated impulsivity and perceived social support as predictors of suicidal ideation among senior secondary school students. The first hypothesis which stated that impulsivity will predict suicidal ideation was accepted as findings indicate that impulsivity positively predicted suicidal ideation. Also, the second hypothesis which stated that perceived social support will jointly and independently predict suicidal ideation was rejected as findings indicate that perceived social support and its dimensions did not predict suicidal ideation among senior secondary school students. This outcome demonstrates that the availability of perceived social support and its dimensions reduce the chances of suicidal ideation. Invariably, the third hypothesis tested which stated that “impulsivity and perceived social support will jointly predict suicidal ideation” is hereby rejected. This implies that impulsivity did not vary with the type of social support received by senior secondary school students in relation to their suicidal ideation.

### Implications of the findings

On the theoretical implication, this study is in line with the stated theoretical framework in which the 3-step theory of suicide ideation was adopted based on its theoretical assumptions which stated that an “ideation-to-action” framework should guide suicide theory, research, and prevention. From this perspective, the development of suicide ideation and the progression from ideation to suicide attempts are distinct processes with distinct explanations. Practically, having understood the role of impulsivity in increasing suicidal ideation, those in educational sector, education policy makers, school management and teachers are hereby encouraged and advised to imbibe ‘impulsivity’ as a subject across all the classes to further deepen the knowledge and prevent students from taking actions without due considerations. Also, the services of qualified psychologists should be employed to help in managing these students in time of life crises to forestall taking actions without foresight that are poorly conceived, prematurely expressed, unnecessarily risky, and inappropriate to the situation.

On the other hand, families, friends, extended family members (significant others) are through this study called upon to pay attention to their child/children and wards and possibly provide all the needed informational, emotional, esteem, social network support, and tangible support. This study further showed that peradventure, this support is not coming suicidal ideation may occur as the individual may feel unwanted even in the home and by friends, etc. This study on its empirical implication has succeeded in adding to the body of existing literatures on the variables concerned, therefore, it will serve as a resource to researchers who want to study further on impulsivity, perceived social support and suicidal ideation. This study explored impulsivity and perceived social support as predictors of suicidal ideation. Finally, this study explored impulsivity and perceived social support as predictors of suicidal ideation.

A significant positive association was found between impulsivity and suicidal ideation among senior secondary school students, while perceived social support and its dimensions negatively predicted suicidal ideation among senior secondary school students. On the other hand, impulsivity and perceived social support did not jointly predict suicidal ideation among senior secondary school students. There is need for serious orientation among secondary school; student against being impulsive in the bid to forestall suicidal ideation.

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