

# Psychological Precipitators of Suicidal Ideation amongst University of Ibadan Students

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**Abstract:** *The study was created to explore how psychological elements such as emotional intelligence and assertiveness impact suicidal thoughts among University of Ibadan undergraduates. The study used a descriptive research design and sampled 300 students via Simple Random Sampling. Through questionnaires covering demographics, emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and suicidal ideation, data was collected and analyzed using regression analysis and correlation testing. The findings revealed that both emotional intelligence and assertiveness had a significant negative correlation with suicidal ideation. Together, these factors accounted for 28.5% of the variance in predicting suicidal thoughts, with assertiveness having a relatively higher impact. The study suggests counseling services and training interventions in educational settings to improve emotional well-being among students.*

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, assertiveness, suicidal ideation.

## INTRODUCTION

In World Health Organization data from 2020, statistics indicate that there is a suicide every 40 seconds, with approximately one million people dying by suicide annually. Motahar and Rahgozar (2011) underscore suicide as a significant public health challenge requiring serious attention. Curtin, Warner, and Hedegaard (2016) highlight a consistent increase in suicide rates over the past 15 years, notably among individuals aged 15-19. The World Health Organization (2015) points out that the adolescent phase presents a notable period for self-injurious thoughts and behaviors. Keer, Owen, Pears, and Capaldi (2008) conducted a longitudinal study indicating that young adolescents often express suicidal thoughts to professionals, particularly during mid-adolescence marked by serious suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation, they note, poses a high risk for suicidal attempts and potentially successful suicides. Considering gender differences, Reinherz, Tanner, Berger, Beardslee, and Fitzmaurice (2006) suggest that while suicidal thoughts are more prevalent among female adolescents, it is a prevalent challenge among both genders.

The World Health Organization reports an annual 700,000 deaths by suicide and identifies it as the fourth leading cause of death among young people, particularly adolescents. Common methods of suicide worldwide include hanging, pesticide ingestion, and firearm use (WHO, 2021). Psychopathology's influence on suicidal attempts cannot be overlooked, as individuals expressing suicidal thoughts are often diagnosed with mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, depression, or substance abuse (Deleo et al., 2002). The study by Bi et al. (2017) in China revealed high rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among individuals with psychiatric conditions. Family dysfunctionality is another factor associated with suicidal ideation; a study indicated that a substantial number of students who reported suicidal ideation were female adolescents living with a single parent, potentially indicating physical or sexual abuse. Another study by Swanson and Colman (2011) suggested that suicidal ideation is more common among adolescents whose parents have a history of attempted suicide.

Suicidal ideation in Nigeria has received relatively limited attention. Developing and underdeveloped nations reportedly experience fewer instances of suicidal ideation compared to developed countries, though underdeveloped nations might have poorer records on causes of death. Asuni's (2017) study assessing coroner's reports in Western Nigeria from 1957-1960 indicated a very low suicide rate but higher suicidal ideation in rural areas. Research within the hospital population in Benin City reported a low ratio of suicide-related cases, with only seven cases out of 100,000. Alabi (2015) documented that over 70% of recorded suicide attempts involved individuals aged 30 and below, with the majority attributed to adolescents. The psychological aspect of suicide, particularly during the formative emotional and personality phases of adolescence, should be given careful consideration, reflecting the significance of emotional intelligence in managing and addressing suicidal thoughts

Emotional intelligence pertains to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and those of others. Emotional regulation forms a core component of emotional intelligence. Intense emotions such as anger, disappointment, and hatred may lead to social isolation, depression, and potentially suicidal thoughts and attempts. Various studies have explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation, as demonstrated by Soma and Sadhan (2011), who found that individuals with lower emotional intelligence are more prone to suicidal thoughts among student populations. Another study by Thomas and Gomez (2014) investigated the relationship between depression, emotional intelligence, and suicidal thoughts in nursing students, indicating emotional intelligence as a factor influencing suicidal ideation. Kopera, Jakubczyk, Suszek, Krasowska, Brower, and Wojnar (2018) examined the association between self-reported emotional intelligence and suicidal thoughts in a sample of 80 alcohol inpatients in Poland, revealing a connection between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation.

Assertiveness, on the other hand, relates to the ability to express oneself effectively, regardless of pressure or confrontation. It signifies an individual's capacity to communicate emotions and points of view. There is a presumed correlation between assertiveness and suicidal ideation, with potential implications for communication skills and distress expression. Individuals who can express their distress assertively may have better chances of seeking help or making necessary adjustments. However, those unable to communicate their distress under emotionally challenging circumstances may face a higher risk of depression, a significant factor linked to suicidal ideation. Although direct links between assertiveness and suicidal ideation are not extensively documented, a few studies have associated assertiveness with depression. For instance, Borovay's study (1977) found that a lack of assertiveness among college females led to experiences of depression. Another experimental approach conducted by Fagan (1979) compared group assertion training to group psychotherapy among 19 female adolescents with depression, concluding that assertion training significantly improved participants' conditions compared to psychotherapy.

School administrators face the challenge of addressing suicidal ideation among adolescents in higher education institutions. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 800,000 people die by suicide annually, with Nigeria reportedly becoming one of the countries with a high rate of suicide incidents. The suicide rate in Nigeria, ranked 67th globally and 10th in Africa according to the World Population Review, underscores this concern. Notable cases of suicide include that of a mathematics professor in April 2019, a University of Port Harcourt engineering student, and a first-year student at Kogi State University, all tragic incidents related to students' suicidal acts. One adolescent reportedly committed suicide due to severe depression caused by accommodation challenges. Given these circumstances, this study aims to explore the interplay between emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and suicidal ideation

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan. In particular, the objectives of this research are as follows:

- To assess the influence of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation within the University of Ibadan undergraduate student population.
- To determine the combined effect of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation among the University of Ibadan undergraduate students.
- To explore the respective contributions of emotional intelligence and assertiveness to suicidal ideation among the University of Ibadan undergraduate students.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the significant relationship between emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and suicidal ideation of the University of Ibadan undergraduate students?
- What is the joint contribution of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation among the University of Ibadan undergraduate students?
- What is the relative contribution of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation among the University of Ibadan undergraduate students?

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the research methodology for this study is outlined, covering the Research Design, Population, Sampling Technique and Sample Size, Instrumentation, Method of Data Collection, and Method of Data Analysis.

**Research Design:** This study employed a descriptive survey research design. It utilized empirical statistical tools to analyze collected data in order to gain insights and explanations about observed phenomena.

**Population:** The study aimed to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Therefore, the population of interest comprised undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** A sample size of 300 respondents was selected for this study. The simple random sampling technique was employed to choose 50 students from each of the university's faculties, including Education, Arts, Social Science, Engineering, Law, and Pharmacy.

### **Instrumentation**

The study utilized a questionnaire as its primary instrument to collect data, structured into four sections:

**Section A - Demographic Characteristics:** This section covered respondents' background details including sex, department, age, religion, and academic level. Participants selected one answer from various alternative options.

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**Section B - Suicidal Ideation Scale:** The study adopted the Suicidal Ideation Scale (SSI) developed by Beck, Kovacs, and Weissman (1979). The SSI consists of 12 items designed to measure various dimensions of self-destructive thoughts or desires, using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). Example items included thoughts about active suicide attempts and confidence in carrying out suicide attempts. The SSI had established content and construct validity, with a reported internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. A revalidation with a separate group showed a reliability of 0.82.

**Section C - Emotional Intelligence Scale:** The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS) developed by Schutte (1998) was employed to assess respondents' emotional intelligence. Comprising 33 items, it gauged emotional understanding in oneself and others, as well as the use of emotions in problem-solving. Participants provided responses on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Schutte (1998) reported an internal consistency of 0.90 using Cronbach's alpha. A separate revalidation showed a reliability of 0.87.

**Section D - Assertiveness Scale:** The Assertiveness Skills Scale (ASS) by Alberti and Emmons (2002) was used to evaluate participants' assertiveness. With 16 items measured on a four-point Likert scale from "never" to "practically always," the scale assessed behaviors like speaking out in protest when someone jumps a line. The authors reported content and convergent validity, as well as an internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. A separate revalidation revealed a reliability of 0.84

### Procedure

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to participants across different faculties, providing an introduction to the study's objectives and instructions on accurate form completion. The researcher was available to address any difficulties faced by respondents while filling out the questionnaire.

### Method of Data Analysis

As for the data analysis, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical methods was employed. Descriptive statistics such as tables, percentages, ranges, means, and standard deviation were utilized to comprehend the data's characteristics. In addition, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to examine relationships between variables concerning the research questions, maintained at a significance level of 0.05. Furthermore, Multiple Regression was employed to assess the collective and relative impact of independent variables on the dependent variable.

## RESULTS

### Demographics characteristics of the respondents

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondent by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	77	38.5%
Female	123	61.5%
Total	200	100.0%

Table 1 exposes that out of 200 respondents, 61.5% of the respondents are female while 38.5 % of them are male .This implies that most of the respondents are female.

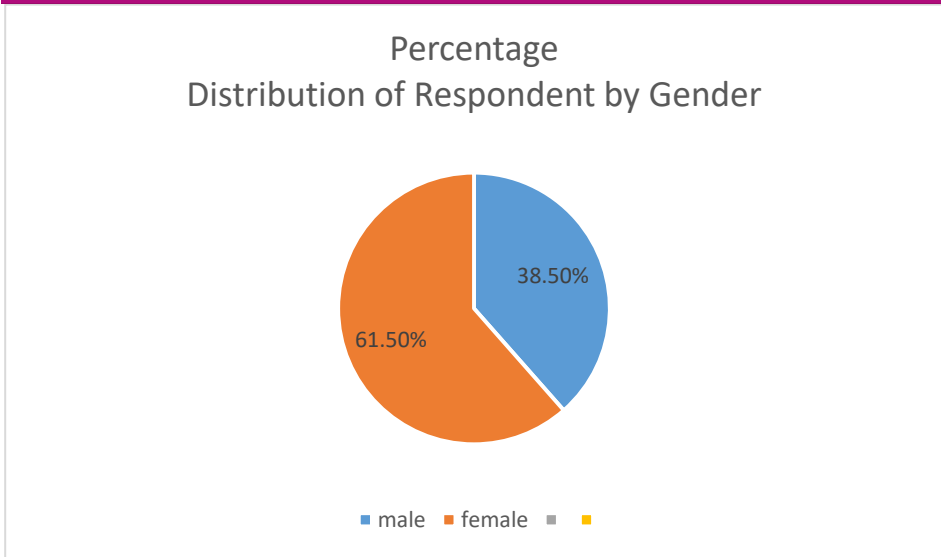


Figure 1: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of respondent by Gender.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondent by Age

Age	frequency	Percent ( %)
17-21years	106	53.0%
22-26years	77	38.5%
27-31years	17	8.5%
Total	200	100%

The data in Table 2 revealed that among 200 respondents, 53.3% fell within the age range of 17 to 21 years, 38.5% were aged between 22 and 26 years, and 8.5% were within the 27 to 31 years bracket. It indicates that a majority of the respondents, accounting for more than half, were between the ages of 17 and 21 years.

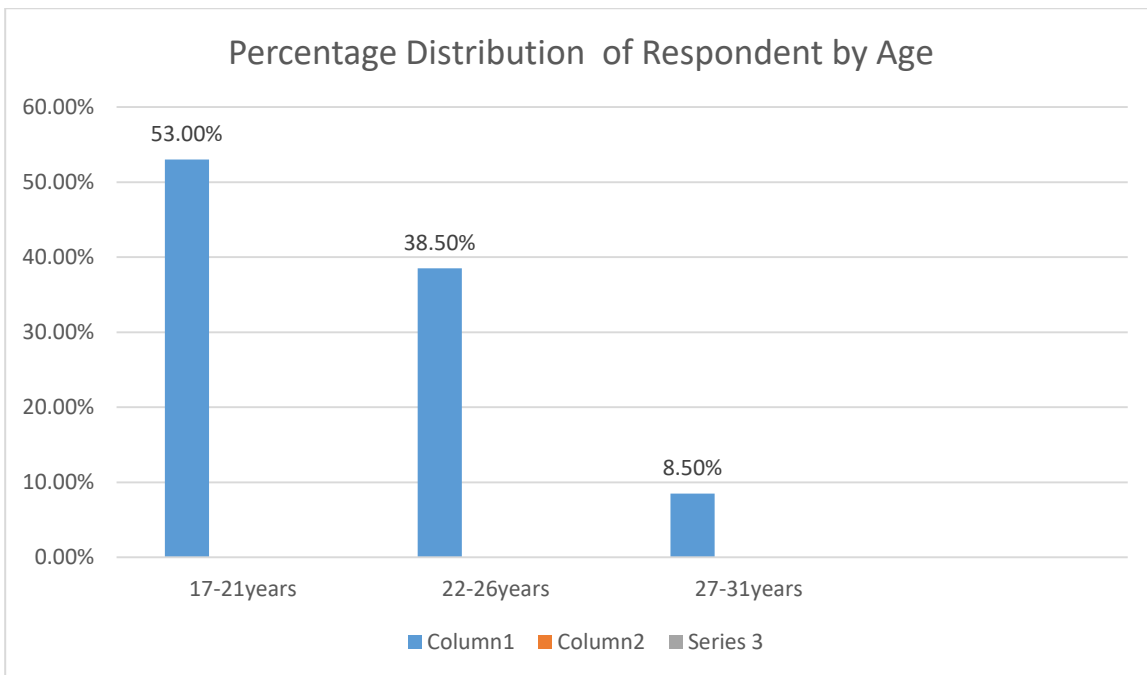


Figure 2: Bar chart showing percentage distribution of respondent by Age.

**Research Question One**

To what extent will emotional intelligence and assertiveness influence suicidal ideation among University of Ibadan undergraduate students?

**Table 3:** Zero order correlation summary showing the influence of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Suicidal ideation	34.0350	7.39576	1			
Emotional intelligence	40.3350	2.15967	-.471**	1		
Assertiveness	49.2764	8.92047	-.346	.066	.090	1

Table 3 illustrates a notable impact of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation. It's evident that both variables exhibit a negative correlation with emotional intelligence ( $r = -.471$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a strong relationship. However, the relationship is not statistically significant with assertiveness skills ( $r = -.346$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that an enhancement in emotional intelligence and assertiveness could potentially reduce suicidal ideation among undergraduate students.

**Research Question Two**

What is the joint contribution of the independent variables (emotional intelligence and assertiveness) on suicidal ideation among university of Ibadan undergraduate students?

**Table 4: Multiple Regression summary showing Analysis on Suicidal ideation**

Multiple R = .516 Multiple R <sup>2</sup> = .266 Adj R = .255 Standard error of estimate = 6.38207					
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1757.681	3	585.894	496.016	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	231.506	196	1.1812		
Total	1989.187	199			

Table 4 presents the collective impact of the independent variables (emotional intelligence and assertiveness) on the prognosis of undergraduate suicidal ideation. The model summary indicates  $R = .516$ ,  $R^2 = .266$ , and  $Adj R = .255$ , suggesting that when both factors are combined, they explain 28.5% of the variance in the anticipation of undergraduates' suicidal ideation. The remaining unexplained percentage of variance may be attributed to variables beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, the ANOVA table indicates a substantial joint influence of the independent variables in projecting suicidal ideations among undergraduate students;  $F(3,196) = 496.016$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

**Research Question Three**

What is the relative contribution of the independent variable (emotional intelligence and assertiveness) on the dependent variable (suicidal ideation) among adolescents at the University of Ibadan?

**Table 5: Relative contribution of each of the independent factors on the prediction of suicidal ideation.**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	19.432	3.578		5.430	.000
Emotional Intelligence	-.091	.015	-.390	-5.952	.000

Assertiveness	-.112	.051	-.346	-2.182	.030
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Table 5 demonstrates that emotional intelligence and assertiveness significantly predict suicidal ideation among undergraduates. Notably, assertiveness emerged as the primary predictor of suicidal ideation ( $\beta = -0.346$ ,  $t = -2.182$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), followed by emotional intelligence ( $\beta = -.390$ ,  $t = -5.952$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results suggest that higher levels of assertiveness and emotional intelligence will lead to a reduction in suicidal ideation among undergraduate students by approximately 13.6% and 39%, respectively.

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Discussions

#### Research Question One

Research question one aimed to explore the connection between emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and suicidal ideation among University of Ibadan undergraduate students.

**Emotional Intelligence and Suicidal Ideation** The investigation revealed a significant negative association between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. This outcome indicates that an increase in emotional intelligence could lead to a reduction in undergraduate students' suicidal ideation. This aligns with Tomas and Gomez's (2014) study on the predictors of suicidal ideation in nursing students. Although their study identified depression as the primary predictor, it also highlighted other factors such as social support, emotional adaptation, and self-esteem as contributors to suicidal ideation. Similarly, Soma and Sadhan (2011) explored the impact of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation, concluding that students with lower emotional intelligence were more prone to such thoughts. This emphasizes that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to better navigate socio-psychological challenges and avoid negative stimuli that might trigger suicidal thoughts. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to smoother social relationships by enabling individuals to understand and manage their emotions. Recognizing others' temperaments and behaviors can help individuals avoid situations that could lead to emotional distress, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

**Assertiveness and Suicidal Ideation** The research also indicated a significant negative relationship between assertiveness and suicidal ideation. In other words, higher assertiveness levels among respondents were associated with lower suicidal ideation. This finding is supported by Kazunobu, Ikeshita, Katsumi, et al. (2020), who conducted a study employing assertiveness training to address suicidal ideation. Their randomized controlled trial (secondary analysis) concluded that assertiveness training notably reduced suicidal ideation compared to the control group. Analyzing this finding, the components of assertiveness, such as open expression, emotional control, and consideration for others, play a crucial role in emotional management. Individuals who express themselves openly find it easier to interact appropriately, reducing their emotional burden and thereby lowering the risk of emotional distress or depression that could lead to suicidal ideation. Likewise, mastering emotional regulation allows individuals to swiftly adapt and avoid getting depressed or having suicidal thoughts

#### Research Question Two

Research question two is concerned with investigating the collective influence of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation among University of Ibadan undergraduate students. The results indicated a combined effect of these independent variables on suicidal ideation. This suggests that when both emotional intelligence and assertiveness were taken into account together, they jointly explained 28.5% of the variation in undergraduates' suicidal ideation. Both emotional intelligence and assertiveness have been established as factors that positively impact behavior. The connection between emotional intelligence and assertiveness is particularly noteworthy. An emotionally intelligent individual comprehends their own emotions and can assertively express them in situations of conflict, contributing to a more favorable social environment for problem-solving. The ability to express oneself is a powerful social factor. Conversely, an individual lacking significant emotional intelligence might develop hostility and emotional absorption, potentially leading to a climate of depression and subsequent emergence of suicidal thoughts and self-injurious behaviors.

#### Research Question Three

The third research question delved into examining the varying contributions of emotional intelligence and assertiveness on suicidal ideation. The findings indicated that assertiveness was the more significant contributor to reducing suicidal ideation compared to emotional intelligence. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of assertiveness are better equipped to manage and reduce suicidal thoughts than those with high emotional intelligence. Previous studies that explored these independent factors in predicting suicidal ideation include the works of Prinstein, Boergers, and Spirito (2001); Nock and Prinstein (2005); Soma and Sadhan (2011); Tomas and Gomez (2014); and Kazunobu, Ikeshita, Katsumi et al (2020).

## Recommendations

In light of these findings, several recommendations have been suggested:

- Encouraging students to utilize professional counseling services provided by university counseling units when dealing with socio-emotional challenges.
- Advocating for university management to allocate more resources to school counseling units to organize programs and activities geared towards nurturing good emotional intelligence and assertiveness among undergraduate students, promoting emotional balance and social competence.
- Encouraging educational policymakers to integrate emotional intelligence and assertiveness training into the educational curriculum at all levels to assist students in growing into more confident and emotionally balanced adults.

## Limitations of the Study

The study focused solely on undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan in Oyo State, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader context of Oyo State. There might be other factors not considered in this study that could also predict suicidal ideation.

## Suggestion for Further Studies

To further expand the understanding of this area, several suggestions for future studies are recommended:

- Enlarging the sample size and including more universities in Nigeria to enhance the generalizability of the findings.
- Incorporating additional potential factors to predict suicidal ideation for a more comprehensive analysis.
- Conducting experimental research to address issues related to suicidal thoughts and attempts within the educational system, employing effective psychotherapeutic interventions.

## Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and suicidal ideation among University of Ibadan undergraduate students. It uncovered associations between these factors and illustrated the combined and individual effects of the independent variables on suicidal ideation. The study provided valuable insights, generated appropriate recommendations, and suggested future research directions.

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