

The Rise of Student Suicides due to Lack of Social Support

[Meningkatnya Kasus Bunuh Diri di Kalangan Mahasiswa Akibat Kurangnya Dukungan Sosial]

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INDONESIAN ABSTRACT

Bunuh diri pada mahasiswa merupakan salah satu permasalahan kesehatan masyarakat dan sosial yang semakin mendapat perhatian karena berkaitan erat dengan gangguan psikologis serta rendahnya dukungan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi terjadinya bunuh diri pada mahasiswa, menganalisis hubungan antara dukungan sosial dengan perilaku bunuh diri, serta mengidentifikasi strategi pencegahan yang efektif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode narrative literature review melalui sintesis berbagai jurnal ilmiah nasional dan literatur akademik yang relevan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa perilaku bunuh diri dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor yang saling berinteraksi, seperti konflik keluarga, tekanan akademik, kesepian, masalah interpersonal, dan gangguan kesehatan mental. Di antara faktor-faktor tersebut, rendahnya dukungan sosial dari keluarga, teman sebaya, dan institusi pendidikan menjadi faktor protektif yang paling menentukan terhadap munculnya ide bunuh diri. Berdasarkan teori integrasi sosial Durkheim, lemahnya keterikatan sosial meningkatkan kerentanan mahasiswa terhadap perilaku bunuh diri. Oleh karena itu, penguatan dukungan keluarga, jaringan teman sebaya, layanan konseling kampus, serta pendidikan kesehatan mental menjadi strategi penting dalam upaya pencegahan bunuh diri dan peningkatan kesejahteraan psikologis mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: Bunuh Diri; Mahasiswa; Dukungan Sosial; Kesehatan Mental

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Suicide among university students has become an increasingly important public health and social concern due to its association with psychological distress and inadequate social support. This study aims to examine the factors contributing to suicide among university students, analyze the relationship between social support and suicidal behavior, and identify effective prevention strategies. A qualitative approach using a narrative literature review was employed by synthesizing evidence from national scientific journals and relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that suicide is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including family conflict, academic pressure, loneliness, interpersonal problems, and mental health disorders. Among these factors, inadequate social support from family, peers, and educational institutions emerged as a significant predictor of suicidal ideation. Guided by Durkheim's theory of social integration, the study demonstrates that weak social connectedness increases students' vulnerability to suicide. Strengthening family relationships, peer support, university counseling services, and mental health education are essential strategies for suicide prevention. These findings emphasize the importance of developing comprehensive social support systems to promote psychological well-being and reduce suicide risk among university students.

Keywords: Suicide; University Students; Social Support; Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Suicide has become one of the most pressing global public health challenges, affecting individuals across all age groups, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bachmann, 2018). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), (2025), more than 700,000 people die by suicide every year, making it one of the leading causes of preventable death worldwide. Among young people aged 15–29 years, suicide ranks among the top four causes of mortality, reflecting the increasing vulnerability of adolescents and university students during their transition into adulthood. This phenomenon extends beyond an individual psychological problem and represents a multidimensional social issue influenced by biological, psychological, cultural, economic, and environmental factors. Consequently, suicide prevention requires an interdisciplinary understanding that integrates mental health, sociology, education, and community support.

University students constitute one of the most vulnerable populations for experiencing suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior (Eisenberg, 2007). The transition from adolescence to higher education introduces numerous developmental challenges, including academic pressure, financial difficulties, social adjustment, identity formation, career uncertainty, and separation from family (Côté & Bynner, 2008). These challenges often increase psychological distress, particularly among students who lack adequate coping mechanisms and supportive interpersonal relationships. Although universities provide opportunities for intellectual growth and personal development, they may simultaneously expose students to chronic stressors that negatively affect their psychological well-being. Numerous studies have shown that depression, anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, and emotional exhaustion are increasingly prevalent among university students and contribute significantly to suicidal thoughts.

Recent evidence indicates that psychological disorders alone cannot fully explain suicidal behavior. Instead, social determinants play an equally important role in shaping mental health outcomes (Kirkbride et al., 2024). Among these determinants, social support has consistently been identified as one of the strongest protective factors against suicide. Social support refers to emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal assistance provided by family members, friends, peers, lecturers, and the surrounding community. Such support enables individuals to manage stressful situations, strengthen resilience, improve self-esteem, and develop adaptive coping strategies. Conversely, inadequate social support may increase feelings of isolation, rejection, helplessness, and hopelessness, thereby elevating the risk of suicidal ideation.

For university students, social support is particularly essential because many students experience significant life changes during their academic journey (Wilcox et al., 2005). Students who migrate from their hometowns often encounter loneliness due to geographical separation from their families and established social networks (Girmay, & Singh, 2019). Difficulties in building new friendships, adapting to unfamiliar environments, and balancing academic responsibilities may further intensify emotional distress. In many cases, interpersonal conflicts, social exclusion, bullying, and the absence of meaningful relationships create a perception that no one understands or values them. Such perceptions frequently become antecedents of depression and suicidal ideation. Therefore, strengthening supportive social relationships within universities represents an important strategy for promoting student mental health.

The relationship between social support and suicide has attracted increasing attention from researchers in psychology, sociology, and public health (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2014). Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that students who perceive higher levels of family support, peer acceptance, and community connectedness exhibit significantly lower levels of suicidal ideation. Emotional support from parents promotes a sense of security and belonging, while peer support helps students adapt to academic and social environments. Likewise, institutional support through counseling services, mental health education, and peer mentoring programs has been associated with reduced psychological distress. However, many previous studies have primarily emphasized psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety without sufficiently exploring how deficiencies in social relationships contribute to suicidal behavior from a broader sociological perspective.

From a sociological standpoint, suicide cannot be understood solely as an individual decision but must also be interpreted within the context of social integration and social regulation. Emile Durkheim's classical theory of suicide argues that weak social integration increases the likelihood of egoistic suicide because individuals feel detached from society and perceive themselves as lacking meaningful social connections. Durkheim emphasized that suicide reflects broader social conditions rather than merely personal pathology. His perspective remains highly relevant in contemporary society, where modernization, urbanization, digital communication, and

changing family structures have transformed interpersonal relationships. Despite technological advancements that facilitate communication, many young people continue to experience emotional isolation, suggesting that the quantity of social interaction does not necessarily guarantee meaningful social support.

Although numerous studies have investigated suicide among adolescents and university students, several research gaps remain. First, previous literature has predominantly examined psychological variables while paying comparatively less attention to social support as an integrated protective factor. Second, existing studies often analyze family support, peer support, or institutional support separately, limiting understanding of how these dimensions collectively influence suicidal behavior. Third, studies focusing specifically on Indonesian university students remain relatively limited despite increasing public concern regarding student mental health. Cultural values emphasizing family cohesion, collective identity, and social harmony may shape the experience of social support differently from Western contexts, highlighting the need for context-specific investigations.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between inadequate social support and suicide among university students through a comprehensive narrative literature review. Rather than focusing exclusively on clinical symptoms, this study integrates sociological and psychological perspectives to explain how deficiencies in social relationships increase vulnerability to suicidal ideation. Durkheim's theory of social integration serves as the primary theoretical framework, complemented by contemporary concepts of social support and mental health. By synthesizing findings from previous studies, this research provides a broader understanding of the mechanisms linking social isolation, inadequate support systems, psychological distress, and suicidal behavior.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which combines sociological theory, psychological evidence, and educational perspectives to explain suicide among university students. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize individual psychopathology, this research positions social support as a central determinant influencing students' mental health and suicide risk. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of comprehensive suicide prevention strategies involving families, educational institutions, peer communities, and policymakers. Furthermore, this study seeks to strengthen awareness that preventing suicide requires not only psychological interventions but also the creation of supportive social environments that foster belonging, connectedness, and resilience among university students.

Accordingly, this study aims to (1) identify the major factors contributing to suicide among university students, (2) examine the relationship between inadequate social support and suicidal behavior, and (3) explore evidence-based strategies that educational institutions, families, and communities can implement to strengthen social support and reduce suicide risk among university students. These findings are expected to provide valuable insights for researchers, mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in designing holistic interventions that promote student well-being and prevent suicide..

LITERATURE REVIEW

Suicide has long been recognized as both a psychological and sociological phenomenon (Mueller, 2021). Among the most influential perspectives is Émile Durkheim's theory of suicide, which argues that suicide is not merely an individual act but a social fact shaped by the level of social integration and moral regulation within society. According to Durkheim (1973), individuals who experience weak social bonds are more likely to develop feelings of isolation and hopelessness, increasing their vulnerability to suicidal behavior. He classified suicide into four categories: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic suicide, each reflecting different imbalances in social integration and regulation. Egoistic suicide occurs when individuals feel disconnected from society, whereas altruistic suicide results from excessive social integration. Anomic suicide emerges during periods of social instability or significant life changes, while fatalistic suicide is associated with excessive regulation and oppression.

In the context of university students, Durkheim's concept of egoistic suicide is particularly relevant because inadequate social support can weaken students' sense of belonging and connectedness. According to Ruihua et al. (2025), family, peers, and educational institutions play crucial roles in providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support that enhances resilience and psychological well-being. Conversely, limited social support may increase loneliness, stress, depression, and suicidal ideation (Silva et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding suicide through both sociological and psychological perspectives provides a more comprehensive framework for

developing effective prevention strategies and strengthening social support systems within higher education environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a narrative literature review to examine the relationship between inadequate social support and suicide among university students. The narrative review method was selected because it enables researchers to synthesize and interpret findings from previous studies comprehensively while providing broader theoretical insights into complex social phenomena. Secondary data were collected from published national journals, scientific articles, conference papers, and relevant literature discussing suicide, social support, mental health, and student well-being. The collected literature was selected based on its relevance to the research objectives and its contribution to understanding the factors associated with suicidal behavior among students. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative techniques involving data collection, classification, organization, comparison, interpretation, and synthesis of the selected literature. This analytical process allowed the researchers to identify recurring themes, explain the relationship between social support and suicidal behavior, and formulate evidence-based recommendations for suicide prevention among university students through stronger social support systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors Contributing to Suicide Among University Students

The narrative review identified that suicide among university students is influenced by multiple interrelated factors rather than a single determinant. The reviewed literature consistently indicates that psychological, familial, academic, interpersonal, and social factors interact to increase students' vulnerability to suicidal ideation. Although mental disorders such as depression and anxiety are frequently recognized as direct predictors of suicide, they often emerge from prolonged exposure to stressful social environments characterized by inadequate emotional support.

One of the most frequently reported factors is family-related problems. Family functions as the primary source of emotional security during adolescence and early adulthood (Holt et al., 2018). However, family conflicts, parental divorce, domestic violence, financial instability, or ineffective communication may weaken students' psychological resilience. According to Li et al. (2026), students who perceive low parental acceptance or emotional neglect often experience feelings of rejection and loneliness, which increase their susceptibility to depression and hopelessness. Since family relationships generally provide long-term emotional attachment, their absence significantly affects students' ability to cope with stressful life events.

Another important contributing factor is psychological pressure resulting from academic and personal demands (Chemagosi, 2024). University students face numerous challenges, including examinations, assignment deadlines, research requirements, financial burdens, and uncertainty regarding future employment (Hagedom et al., 2022). These pressures become particularly harmful when students possess limited coping strategies or perceive little emotional support from people around them. Chronic academic stress may gradually develop into anxiety disorders, emotional exhaustion, and depressive symptoms, eventually increasing suicidal ideation.

Interpersonal relationships also play a significant role. The literature suggests that romantic relationship problems frequently become emotional stressors for university students. According to Clayton et al. (2009), many students rely heavily on their partners as their primary support system, particularly those studying away from their hometowns. Relationship conflicts, emotional betrayal, or separation may therefore create profound psychological distress because students lose what they perceive as their strongest source of emotional comfort. Consequently, emotional dependency within romantic relationships may unintentionally increase vulnerability when those relationships deteriorate.

Furthermore, loneliness and social isolation emerged as dominant themes across the reviewed studies. Students who migrate to different cities often experience difficulties adapting to new academic and social environments (Girmay & Singh, 2019). Limited friendship networks, homesickness, cultural adjustment, and reduced family interaction contribute to feelings of isolation (Hofhuis et al., 2019). Persistent loneliness reduces an individual's sense of belonging, making students more likely to experience hopelessness and suicidal thoughts. The reviewed literature also emphasizes the importance of the biopsychosocial perspective, which explains suicide as

the interaction between biological vulnerability, psychological conditions, and social environments. Physical illnesses, previous mental health disorders, chronic stress, and negative social experiences collectively increase suicide risk. Therefore, suicide should not be interpreted solely as an individual psychological problem but as the cumulative outcome of complex interactions among multiple personal and environmental factors.

The Relationship Between Social Support and Suicidal Behavior

A consistent finding across the reviewed literature is the strong negative relationship between social support and suicidal behavior among university students (Chen et al., 2026). Individuals who perceive higher levels of emotional, informational, and instrumental support generally demonstrate lower levels of psychological distress and suicidal ideation (Vilhjálmsón, 1998). Conversely, inadequate social support contributes to loneliness, stress, depression, and feelings of hopelessness, which substantially increase suicide risk.

Family support represents the most influential protective factor (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009). Families provide emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging that cannot easily be replaced by other social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Students who receive encouragement, empathy, and open communication from their parents tend to develop stronger psychological resilience when facing academic or personal challenges. In contrast, emotionally distant family relationships often leave students feeling unsupported during periods of crisis.

Peer support is equally important because university students spend most of their daily lives interacting with classmates and friends (Awang et al., 2014). Positive peer relationships foster acceptance, mutual trust, and emotional sharing, all of which contribute to psychological well-being. However, negative peer experiences including bullying, social exclusion, discrimination, and interpersonal conflict can seriously damage students' self-esteem and increase emotional distress. Repeated exposure to such negative interactions may create perceptions of social rejection that gradually develop into suicidal ideation.

Support from educational institutions also contributes significantly to suicide prevention. Universities are expected to provide counseling services, peer mentoring, psychological consultation, mental health education, and supportive academic environments. Students who perceive their campus as caring and responsive are generally more willing to seek professional help when experiencing emotional difficulties. Unfortunately, the reviewed studies indicate that many students remain reluctant to utilize mental health services because of stigma, lack of awareness, or fear of being judged. Consequently, many students continue to experience severe psychological distress without receiving appropriate intervention.

These findings strongly support Durkheim's theory of social integration. According to Durkheim, individuals with weak social attachment are more vulnerable to egoistic suicide because they experience limited connection with their surrounding social environment. The reviewed evidence demonstrates that inadequate family relationships, poor peer interaction, and weak institutional support collectively reduce students' social integration, increasing psychological vulnerability. Thus, suicide among university students should be understood not only through individual psychopathology but also through deficiencies in social connectedness.

The findings further suggest that social support functions both as a preventive mechanism and as a resilience-building factor. Emotional support encourages adaptive coping, while informational support helps students solve problems effectively. Instrumental support, such as financial assistance or academic guidance, reduces practical stressors that might otherwise contribute to suicidal thoughts. Therefore, strengthening social support networks should become a priority in university mental health policies.

Strategies for Preventing Suicide Through Strengthening Social Support

The reviewed literature consistently emphasizes that suicide prevention requires comprehensive interventions involving families, universities, peers, and the wider community (Mann et al., 2005). Since suicidal behavior results from multiple interacting factors, preventive efforts should address both psychological well-being and social connectedness simultaneously.

The first preventive strategy involves strengthening family relationships. Families should establish open communication, provide emotional warmth, and encourage students to express their concerns without fear of criticism. According to Wiyasih et al. (2025), emotional availability from parents significantly reduces feelings of loneliness and reinforces students' confidence in managing stressful situations. Family-based interventions may therefore become an effective long-term protective factor against suicide. The second strategy focuses on

developing supportive campus environments. According to Harris et al. (2022), Universities should improve access to professional counseling services, mental health screening, crisis intervention programs, and peer-support initiatives. Mental health education should be integrated into student orientation programs to increase awareness of depression, anxiety, stress management, and available support resources. Reducing stigma surrounding psychological counseling is equally important to encourage students to seek professional assistance before experiencing severe emotional crises.

Another essential strategy involves strengthening peer support networks. Peer mentoring programs, student organizations, and collaborative learning activities encourage meaningful social interaction and foster a sense of belonging. Positive peer relationships reduce loneliness while providing opportunities for emotional sharing and mutual encouragement. Students who feel accepted within their social environment are generally more resilient when facing academic or personal challenges.

The reviewed literature also highlights the importance of adaptive coping strategies. Based on Lazarus' coping theory, students may employ both problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping encourages students to identify solutions to academic, financial, or interpersonal problems through planning, seeking information, and communicating with trusted individuals. Emotion-focused coping helps students regulate emotional responses through positive reinterpretation, emotional acceptance, relaxation, spiritual practices, and seeking emotional support from significant others. Both approaches contribute to reducing psychological distress and strengthening resilience.

Effective suicide prevention requires collaboration among families, educational institutions, mental health professionals, policymakers, and communities. Universities should establish integrated mental health systems that combine early identification, psychological counseling, social support enhancement, and continuous monitoring of students at risk. Such comprehensive interventions not only reduce suicidal ideation but also promote healthier academic environments where students experience belonging, connectedness, and psychological safety.

The findings demonstrate that inadequate social support is a significant risk factor for suicidal behavior among university students. Consistent with Durkheim's sociological perspective, weak social integration increases emotional vulnerability and diminishes resilience in coping with life stressors. Consequently, strengthening social support systems across family, peer, institutional, and community settings represents one of the most effective approaches for preventing suicide and promoting sustainable mental well-being among university students.

CONCLUSION

This narrative literature review highlights that suicide among university students is a complex phenomenon resulting from the interaction of psychological, social, familial, and academic factors. The findings indicate that inadequate social support is one of the most significant contributors to suicidal ideation, as it increases feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, stress, and depression. Family support, peer relationships, and institutional support collectively function as protective factors that strengthen students' resilience and reduce their vulnerability to mental health problems. Conversely, weak social integration, interpersonal conflict, academic pressure, and limited access to emotional support may increase the risk of suicidal behavior.

The review also confirms the relevance of Durkheim's theory, which explains that weak social integration can lead to egoistic suicide. This perspective demonstrates that suicide should not be understood solely as an individual psychological problem but also as a consequence of insufficient social connectedness. Therefore, effective suicide prevention requires comprehensive and collaborative efforts involving families, universities, mental health professionals, and communities. Universities should prioritize accessible counseling services, peer-support programs, and mental health education to foster a supportive academic environment. Strengthening social support systems is essential for promoting students' psychological well-being, enhancing resilience, and reducing the prevalence of suicidal ideation among university students. Future studies are encouraged to employ empirical and longitudinal research designs to further validate the relationship between social support and suicide risk across diverse educational and cultural contexts.

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