

The Role of Thwarted belongingness, Perceived Burdensomeness and Acquired Capability for suicide in Suicidal Behaviour among Adolescents and Young Adults



9th Suicide and Self-harm
Early and Mid-Career
Researchers' Forum

University
of Glasgow

2nd and 3rd June 2025



University of Glasgow,
Glasgow

Ana Huertes-Del Arco^{*,**}, Martina Medolla^{*,**}, María Elena Brenlla^{*}, Irene Caro-Cañizares^{*}, Eva Izquierdo-Sotorrío^{*}, Francisco Pablo Holgado-Tello^{**} & Miguel Ángel Carrasco Ortiz^{**}

^{*}Department of Psychology, School of Health and Educational Sciences, (UDIMA), Spain

^{**} National University of Distance Education (UNED), Spain

INTRO

Suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescents worldwide, highlighting the urgent need for effective prevention strategies (WHO, 2023). Understanding the differences between adolescents with no risk, suicidal ideation, planning, or suicide attempts is critical for targeted intervention.

According to Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (2005), suicidal ideation arises from thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness, while suicide attempts require acquired capability for suicide. This framework is particularly relevant for adolescents, where social and emotional experiences play a key role in suicide risk.

AIM

To analyze the presence of risk factors for suicidal behavior—particularly thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, and acquired capability—among adolescent and young adults groups with no risk, suicidal ideation, suicide planning, or previous suicide attempts.

RESULTS

Participants were divided into four groups based on suicidal behavior: no risk, ideation, planning, and attempt. Each group was analyzed separately to identify how risk factors varied across different levels of suicide risk.

Ideation (n = 46)

No statistically significant models were found for suicidal ideation in this group.

Planning without attempt (n = 60)

Thwarted belongingness was the only significant predictor of suicide planning ($R^2 = .07^*$; $\beta = .27^*$).

Individuals with a suicide attempt (n = 12)

Both thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness significantly predicted suicide attempts ($R^2 = .31^*$, $\beta_{\text{thwarted belongingness}} = .64^*$; $\beta_{\text{perceived burdensomeness}} = .66^*$). When acquired capability was added to the model, it also emerged as a significant predictor, further increasing the explained variance ($R^2 = .42^*$, $\beta_{\text{perceived burdensomeness}} = .54^*$; $\beta_{\text{acquired capability for suicide}} = .63^{**}$).

This pattern highlights the progressive importance of risk factors as suicidal behavior advances from ideation to action.

METHODS

Participants

1067 students (Age 12–21, $M = 15.78$, $SD = 2.19$) from Spanish schools; 55.2% female, 44.0% male, 0.8% other identities.

Female representation notably increased from the no-risk group (50.3%) to those with suicidal ideation (82.6%), with a slight decrease among planners (61.7%) and attempters (66.7%), indicating that females were overrepresented at higher risk levels, especially at the ideation stage.

Instruments

- Scale for the Assessment of Suicidal Behaviour in Adolescents (SENTIA; Díez-Gómez et al., 2020)
- Acquired Capability for Suicide Scale (ACCS; Van Orden et al., 2008)
- Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire (INQ-12; Van Orden et al., 2012)

Procedure

All participants and their legal guardians provided written informed consent.

Data analyses

Descriptive statistics and hierarchical regression.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of adolescent suicide risk groups revealed distinct patterns in risk factor contributions. Thwarted belongingness emerged as a significant predictor of suicide planning, while thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness both predicted suicide attempts. Notably, including acquired capability further improved prediction of suicide attempts, suggesting this factor is particularly relevant for adolescents progressing from ideation to action.

Although no significant risk factors were identified for ideation alone, the data suggest that early intervention targeting interpersonal distress may help prevent escalation to more severe suicidal behaviors, reinforcing the importance of addressing interpersonal distress (both thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness) and acquired capability for suicide in adolescent suicide prevention.

Further analysis by gender should be conducted in future research to explore potential differences in how these risk factors operate among females, males, and individuals with other gender identities.

REFERENCES

- Díez-Gómez, A., Pérez-Albéniz, A., Ortuño-Sierra, J., & Fonseca-Pedrero, E. (2020). SENTIA: An adolescent suicidal behavior assessment scale. *Psicothema*, 32(3), 382-389. doi:10.7334/psicothema2020.27
- Joiner, T.E. (2005). *Why people die by suicide*. Harvard University Press.
- Van Orden, K.A., Cukrowicz, K.C., Witte, T.K., & Joiner, T.E. (2012). Thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness: construct validity and psychometric properties of the Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire. *Psychological Assessment*, 24(1), 197-215. doi:10.1037/a0025358
- Van Orden, K. A., Witte, T. K., Gordon, K. H., Bender, T. W., & Joiner Jr, T. E. (2008). Suicidal desire and the capability for suicide: tests of the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behavior among adults. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 76(1), 72.
- World Health Organization. (2023). Suicidio. <https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>

