

# Protective Factors for Suicidal Behaviors in Adolescents: Life satisfaction, reasons for living, and psychosocial resources across sex groups

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# Three protective constructs

This study focused on three protective constructs with solid theoretical grounding:

## Life Satisfaction

Global subjective wellbeing indicator

## Reasons for Living

Beliefs and expectancies that keep adolescents attached to life

## Psychosocial Resources

Perceived social and contextual assets in family, school, and community

# Why a Gender Lens?

WHO, SAGER Guidelines, and the APA all call for sex-disaggregated analyses as standard practice in mental health and suicide prevention research.

## The Gender Paradox in Suicidality

### Girls

- Higher rates of suicidal **ideation** and **attempts**

### Boys

- Higher rates of **completed suicide**

**The ratio itself is not fixed, it varies** from 1.3:1 (Southeast Asia, Caribbean) to 7:1 (Eastern Europe)— varies by region, culture, method availability, and sociopolitical context

# Explanatory Frameworks

## Biological & Neuropsychological

- Higher impulsivity and lower inhibitory control in males → faster transition from ideation to act
- Hormonal fluctuations in females → increased risk at specific reproductive phases

## Method Lethality

- Males choose more lethal means
- Females → higher survival rate
- Method choice is itself shaped by gender norms around control and decisiveness

# Explanatory Frameworks

## Gender Socialization & Psychological

### **Males:**

- Emotional suppression, restricted help-seeking, suicidality often invisible until crisis
- Suicidal act as escape from pain — but also as a last attempt to recover agency in a context of perceived failure and disconnection
- Higher drop out rates

### **Females:**

- Relational & cumulative process — not a single crisis event but the accumulated product of structural inequalities, care burden, chronic interpersonal invalidation, and emotional hypervigilance
- Greater help-seeking and social expressivity — distress more visible, survival more likely

## Structural & Cultural

- Ratio variation tracks sociopolitical transitions, historical context economic crises, and gender norm rigidity
- Cultural scripts and meanings
- Female suicidality interpreted as manipulative or histrionic → underdetection of real risk
- Male suicidality associated with honor and control
- In males suffering goes unrecognized before the act — invisible to clinicians, peers, and the men themselves
- Systematic underreporting across all regions — misclassified as accidents or undetermined causes — disproportionately affects female suicidality; the ratio we measure is partly an artefact of what gets counted and how

- If the pathways *into* suicidal behavior differ by sex, the protective pathways *out* of it likely differ too. **That is what this study set out to examine.**

## Study Aims

To examine whether life satisfaction, reasons for living, and psychosocial resources predict lower suicidal behavior in adolescents — and whether these protective patterns differ between girls, boys, and non-binary adolescents.

# Sample

Total Participants

Spanish middle-high students, N=1061

Mean Age

15-21 (M=15,78)

Girls

n = 502, 47.3%

Boys

n = 406, 38.3%

⚠ Only 7 (0.7%) participants identified as non-binary or other

# Measures



## Outcome: SENTIA

Adolescent Suicidal Behavior Assessment Scale (ideation, planning, and attempts.)



## SWLS — Life Satisfaction

Satisfaction With Life Scale; global indicator of subjective wellbeing



## RFL-A — Reasons for Living

Reasons for Living Inventory (adolescent version); captures beliefs that keep young people attached to life



## SENA — Psychosocial Resources

Perceived social resources and quality of family, school, and community context

# Analytic Approach

**Separate multiple regression models** for boys and girls — *which* protective factors matter, and *how much*, within each group.



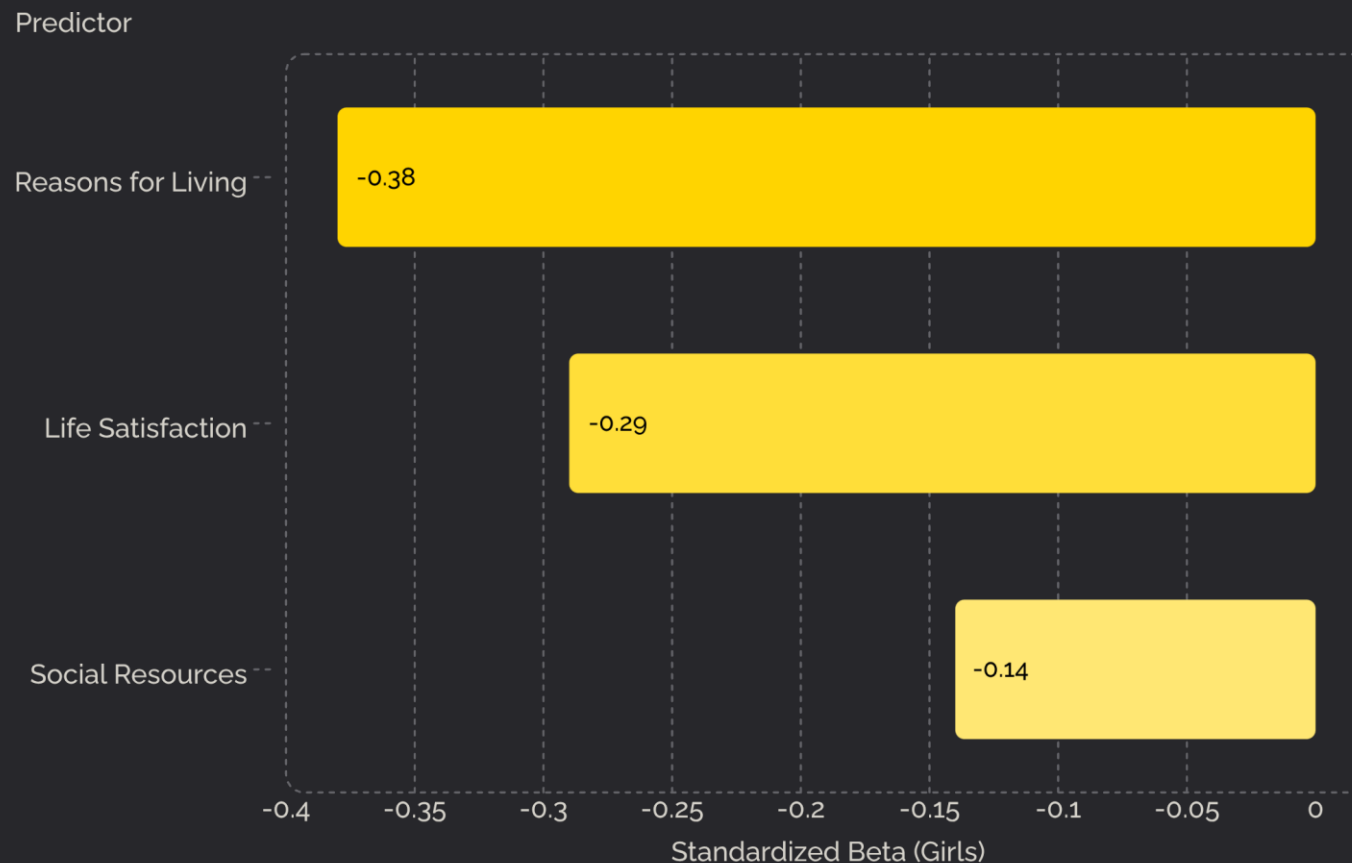
Step 1: Age

Step 2:  
Protective  
Predictors

# Results: Girls

Model  $F(8, 491) = 24.11, p < .001$ .  
Age did not predict suicidal behavior.

For girls, protection is driven mainly by **meaning-related variables**: reasons for living and life satisfaction carry most of the protective weight, complemented by perceived social resources.

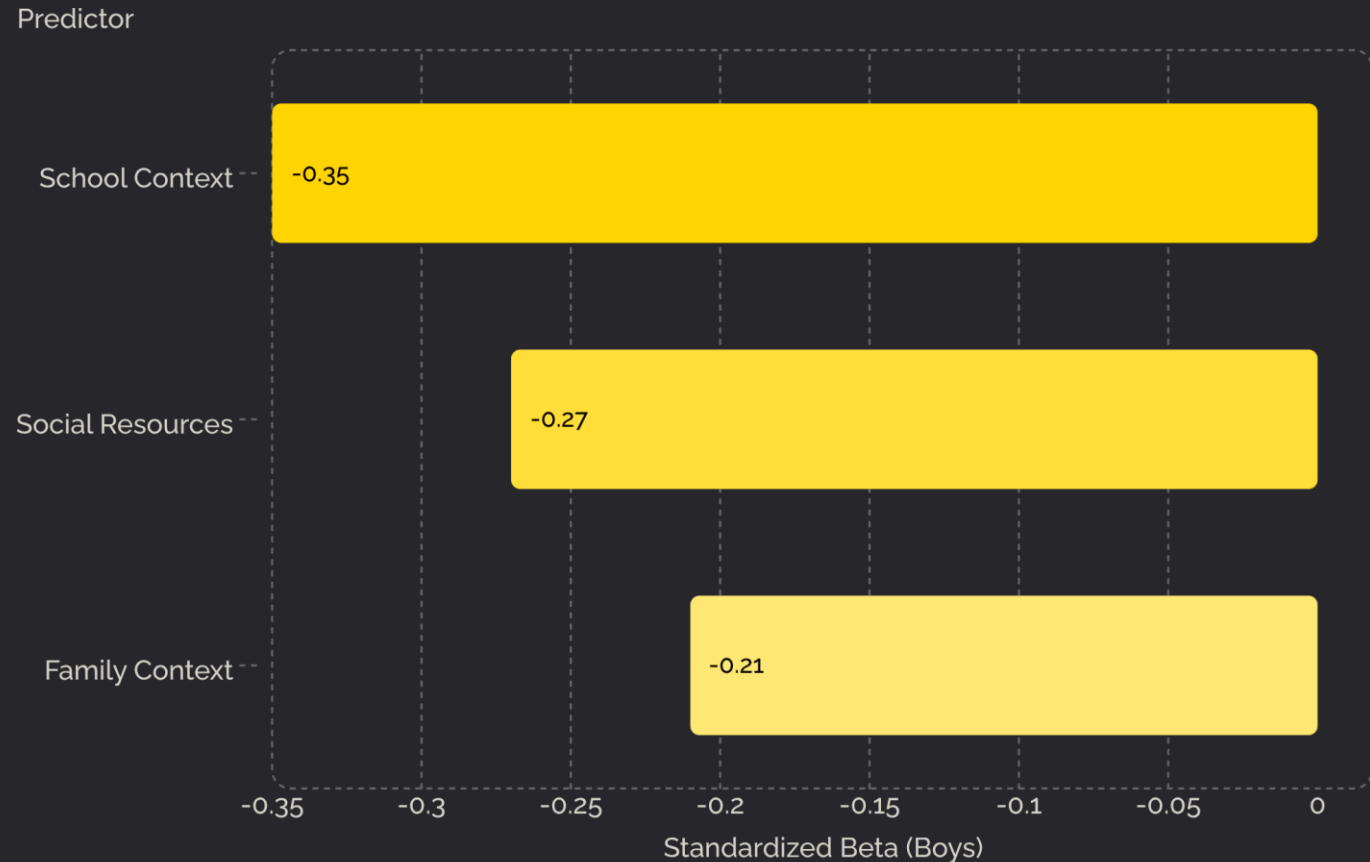


*Family, school, and community context subscales did not reach significance in the model*

# Results: Boys

Model  $F(8, 396) = 15.69, p < .001$ .  
Age did not predict suicidal behavior.

For boys, protection is driven mainly by **contextual variables**: school context emerged as a distinct and independent predictor, while reasons for living and life satisfaction lost relative weight when psychosocial variables were included.



*Reasons for living and life satisfaction did not reach significance once contextual variables were controlled.*

# Non-Binary & Other-Identity Group (n = 7)

## A Call for Inclusive Research

Non-binary adolescents are consistently identified as a high-risk group — because of discrimination, barriers to gender-affirming care, institutional violence, etc.

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Future studies need: oversampling strategies, partnerships with LGBTQ+ youth organizations, and multi-site samples designed *a priori* to achieve adequate power for gender-diverse groups.

# Implications for Prevention

One-size-fits-all prevention may be leaving protective leverage on the table.:

## GIRLS

### Meaning- & Wellbeing-Focused

- Strengthen reasons for living, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose
- Components from positive psychology and meaning-centered approaches
- Robust social support networks
- Gender norms psychoeducation

## BOYS

### School-Based & Relational Contexts

- School climate, connectedness, and trusted adult relationships
- Universal school-climate programs and gatekeeper training for teachers
- Approaches that don't depend on the adolescent initiating help-seeking
- Gender norms psychoeducation



These are **complementary emphases**, not exclusive prescriptions. Knowing where the strongest protective signal lies for each group helps prioritize when resources are limited.

# Limitations



## Cross-Sectional Design

Cannot establish causality or directionality. Protective factors and suicidal behavior may influence each other over time. **Longitudinal designs are the necessary next step.**



## Self-Report Measures

All variables were self-reported. Measurement invariance across sex groups remains an important **follow-up analysis.**



## Non-Binary Sample Size

Too small for reliable estimation, **limiting the inclusiveness** of our conclusions about gender-diverse adolescents.



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from Open University of  
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**Special Issue Information:** Suicide remains a major psychosocial and public health concern, accounting for more than 700,000 deaths worldwide each year and causing profound suffering not only to individuals, but also to families, communities, and society at large. The aim of this Special Issue is to advance the understanding of suicidal behaviors and to promote more effective prevention efforts among vulnerable populations. We welcome theoretical contributions, original research articles, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses that deepen knowledge of suicidal behaviors within these groups and contribute to the development of context-sensitive and evidence-informed prevention and intervention strategies.

**Keywords:** **suicide; suicide prevention; vulnerable population; elderly adolescence; migration; social exclusion**

**Submission Deadline: 10 November 2026**



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# Thank You

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