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Self-Esteem, Hope, and Suicidal Ideation Among University Students

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Abstract: Suicidal ideation among university students has become an increasing mental health concern, highlighting the need to identify psychological factors that may protect against its development. This study investigated the associations of self-esteem and hope with suicidal ideation among university students using a quantitative correlational design. Data were analyzed using Spearman's rank-order correlation. The findings revealed significant negative relationships between both psychological variables and suicidal ideation. Self-esteem was negatively associated with suicidal ideation ($rs = -0.399$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students with higher self-esteem reported lower levels of suicidal ideation. Similarly, hope showed a significant negative correlation with suicidal ideation ($rs = -0.322$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, the findings suggest that self-esteem and hope function as protective psychological resources that may reduce the likelihood of suicidal ideation among university students. These results highlight the importance of strengthening positive psychological resources as part of mental health promotion and suicide prevention efforts in higher education.

Keyword: Self-Esteem, Hope, Suicidal Ideation, University Student

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal ideation has become a major public mental health concern because it represents an early stage in the continuum of suicidal behavior and may progress to suicide attempts or suicide if left unaddressed. Early identification of suicidal ideation is therefore essential for effective prevention efforts. Evidence from large-scale international studies indicates that suicidal ideation is prevalent among university students. A meta-analysis of 36 college student samples comprising 634,662 students estimated pooled prevalence rates of 22.3% for lifetime suicidal ideation and 10.6% for suicidal ideation within the previous 12 months (Mortier et al., 2018). More recent evidence from a meta-analysis of 104 studies

conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic across 31 countries reported a pooled prevalence of 20.6% among university students (Du et al., 2023). These findings indicate that suicidal ideation represents a substantial concern among university students across different contexts.

Young people are among the populations vulnerable to suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior, with university students representing a particularly vulnerable group during the developmental transition into young adulthood (Arnett, 2015). During this stage, students are required to adapt to increasing academic expectations, changing social relationships, and other challenges associated with the transition to university, which may increase their vulnerability to psychological difficulties and suicidal ideation (Arria et al., 2009). Evidence from Indonesian university students further highlights this concern. In a recent cross-sectional study involving 420 university students from three state universities in Central and East Java, 180 participants (42.9%) were identified as having suicidal ideation (Dwidiyanti et al., 2026). Although this finding was obtained from a specific sample and should not be interpreted as a national prevalence estimate, it highlights the importance of further investigating suicidal ideation among university students in Indonesia. Recent Indonesian research has likewise documented suicidal ideation among students and identified psychological factors, including self-esteem, stress, anxiety, and depression, as relevant correlates (Murdhiono et al., 2025). These findings underscore the need to better understand psychological factors associated with suicidal ideation in Indonesian university students.

Psychological distress is common among university students, who may experience substantial academic and other university-related stressors (Beiter et al., 2015). Previous research among higher-education students has examined academic stress, family-related difficulties, and interpersonal problems in relation to suicidal ideation (Corpuz et al., 2025). When such difficulties remain unresolved, they may contribute to greater psychological vulnerability and suicidal ideation (Murdhiono et al., 2025). These findings underscore the importance of identifying psychological resources associated with lower suicidal ideation that may inform mental health promotion and suicide prevention strategies within higher education settings.

Suicidal ideation refers to thoughts, desires, or intentions to end one's own life and is widely recognized as a precursor to suicidal behavior (Klonsky et al., 2016). According to the American Psychological Association (n.d.), suicidal ideation encompasses intentional thoughts of suicide that vary in severity, ranging from transient thoughts to more deliberate consideration. Consistent with this perspective, suicidal behavior is generally understood as a progressive process in which suicidal ideation may precede suicide planning and suicide attempts (Idham et al., 2019; Sutarya et al., 2024). Although not all individuals who experience suicidal ideation proceed to suicidal behavior, early recognition of these thoughts remains essential because progression may occur rapidly in some individuals (Idham et al., 2019).

Among the psychological resources associated with suicidal ideation, self-esteem has received substantial attention because it reflects an individual's overall evaluation of the self (Rosenberg, 1965). Lower self-esteem has been associated with greater feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and negative self-evaluation, which may undermine psychological functioning and increase vulnerability to psychological difficulties (Orth & Robins, 2014; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). More direct evidence is provided by a recent meta-analytic review of 114 studies, which found a negative association between self-esteem and suicidal ideation ($r = -.435$), indicating that lower self-esteem is associated with greater suicidal ideation (Buecker et al., 2025). Evidence from Indonesian university students has also identified a significant association between self-esteem and suicidal ideation (Murdhiono et al., 2025). Research among university students in other contexts has similarly reported an association between self-esteem and suicidal ideation (Manani & Sharma, 2013). Taken together, these

theoretical and empirical findings provide a basis for expecting higher self-esteem to be associated with lower suicidal ideation among university students.

Hope has likewise been recognized as an important psychological resource that may protect individuals from suicidal ideation. Snyder (2002) conceptualized hope as a cognitive-motivational process comprising two interrelated components: agency, the motivation to pursue desired goals, and pathways, the perceived ability to identify alternative routes when obstacles arise. Individuals with higher levels of hope are therefore more likely to maintain positive expectations about the future, adapt constructively to adversity, and engage in effective problem-solving. This perspective is consistent with Beck's cognitive model, which identifies hopelessness as one of the strongest cognitive predictors of suicidal ideation (Beck et al., 1975), as well as the Integrated Motivational–Volitional (IMV) Model, which suggests that perceived failure to attain valued goals contributes to the emergence of suicidal ideation (O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018; Ropaj, 2023). Consistent with these theoretical perspectives, empirical studies indicate that hope may reduce suicidal ideation by buffering hopelessness and strengthening coping resources (Huen et al., 2015; Snyder, 2002). Moreover, university students with higher levels of hope have been found to be less likely to engage in suicidal behavior, particularly when hope is accompanied by effective problem-solving abilities (Ropaj, 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that hope functions as a protective psychological resource that may reduce vulnerability to suicidal ideation by promoting goal-directed thinking, cognitive flexibility, and adaptive coping.

Taken together, the existing literature provides evidence that self-esteem and hope are distinct psychological resources associated with suicidal ideation. However, previous research has commonly examined self-esteem and hope as separate psychological correlates of suicidal ideation. Consequently, less is known about their concurrent associations with suicidal ideation when both psychological resources are examined within the same university-student sample. This gap is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where recent research has examined psychological factors associated with suicidal ideation among university students, but evidence examining self-esteem and hope concurrently remains limited (Murdhiono et al., 2025). Examining both constructs within the same study may therefore provide a more integrated understanding of psychological resources associated with suicidal ideation among university students. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationships of self-esteem and hope with suicidal ideation among university students. Accordingly, the present study examined the relationships of self-esteem and hope with suicidal ideation among university students and proposed the following hypotheses:

H_1: Higher self-esteem is associated with lower suicidal ideation among university students.

H_2: Higher hope is associated with lower suicidal ideation among university students.

METHOD

A quantitative correlational design was adopted to investigate the relationships between self-esteem, hope, and suicidal ideation among university students. This design was considered appropriate because it allows the examination of associations among variables without manipulating the study conditions (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). The study population comprised active undergraduate and diploma students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to recruit individuals who meet predetermined characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). This sampling technique was considered appropriate because the study specifically targeted active university students who met predefined eligibility criteria relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling facilitated the recruitment of participants who matched the characteristics of the target population and were able to provide data relevant to the study variables. Eligible participants were active university students aged between 18 and

40 years who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study by providing informed consent before completing an online questionnaire. Data collection took place from December 2025 to January 2026 using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed through university student groups, social media platforms, and electronic flyers to facilitate participant recruitment.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were asked to confirm that they understood the study and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study for research and scientific publication purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were explicitly informed that there was no coercion from any party. Participants were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers and were encouraged to provide responses that reflected their actual conditions. To protect participants' privacy, they were given the option to provide their full name, initials, or no name. The researcher's name and academic credentials were clearly provided in the questionnaire. Participants were informed that all information provided would be kept confidential and used only for research and scientific publication purposes. The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Paramadina.

Three standardized psychological instruments were administered in this study. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), originally developed by Rosenberg (1965) and adapted into Indonesian by Maroqi (2018). The RSES consists of 10 items rated on a four-point Likert scale and has been widely recognized as a reliable and valid measure of global self-esteem across diverse cultural settings (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). Hope was assessed using the Adult Hope Scale developed by Snyder (2002). The Indonesian adaptation by Novrianto and Menaldi (2022) comprises 12 items, including eight scored items and four filler items, and measures two cognitive dimensions of hope: agency and pathways.

Suicidal ideation was evaluated using the Revised Suicide Ideation Scale (R-SIS). The Indonesian version, translated and validated by Artissy et al. (2022), consists of 10 items representing two dimensions of suicidal ideation, namely overt-resolved plans and preparations and covert-suicidal desire. Participants responded to each item using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), with all items scored in the favorable direction. The Indonesian R-SIS has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .943, while the two subscales showed reliability coefficients of .90 and .92, respectively. Example items include *"I have thought about ways to end my life"* for overt-resolved plans and preparations and *"Life feels so overwhelming that I just want to give up"* for covert-suicidal desire.

The data analysis was conducted through several sequential procedures. Initially, the dataset was screened to identify invalid responses. To minimize duplicate submissions, the Google Forms questionnaire was configured to allow each participant to submit the questionnaire only once. All questionnaire items were also set as required, ensuring that submitted responses did not contain missing item-level responses. Item-level analysis was subsequently conducted using corrected item-total correlation coefficients, with a minimum coefficient of .30 established as the criterion for item retention.

For the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Item 8 showed a negative corrected item-total correlation ($r = -.107$) and was excluded from the final analysis. Following its removal, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient increased from .774 to .805, resulting in a final 9-item RSES. The negative item-total correlation for Item 8 may indicate that the item did not function consistently with the other RSES items in the present sample. Although its removal improved internal consistency, the deletion of an item may potentially narrow the representation of the self-esteem construct; therefore, the findings based on the final 9-item version should be interpreted with caution. For the Adult Hope Scale (AHS), the 12-item

structure consists of eight scored items and four filler items. The scored items represent two dimensions of hope: agency (Items 2, 9, 10, and 12) and pathways (Items 1, 4, 6, and 8). Items 3, 5, 7, and 11 are filler items and are not included in the calculation of the hope score. Accordingly, the present study calculated the total hope score using the eight scored items, combining the agency and pathways dimensions. The internal consistency of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha based on the current study sample, with coefficients of .70 or above indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The final 9-item RSES demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (α = .805), the eight scored items of the AHS demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .846), and the 10-item Revised Suicide Ideation Scale demonstrated high internal consistency (α = .961).

Before testing the study hypotheses, the distribution of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test. The relationships among self-esteem, hope, and suicidal ideation were analyzed using correlation analysis. Because the data did not satisfy the assumption of normality, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the associations between the study variables. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Participant Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. The majority of participants were 21–25 years old (66.7%), female (83.6%), and enrolled in a bachelor's degree program (95.0%). Most participants were in Semester 7 (39.0%), were single (96.2%), and were not employed (66.0%). The sample was predominantly female (83.6%), indicating that female students were substantially overrepresented relative to male students. This imbalance should be considered when interpreting the findings, as the observed relationships between self-esteem, hope, and suicidal ideation may reflect the characteristics of the predominantly female sample and may not be fully generalizable to male university students.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 159)

Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
Age (years)	18–20	44	27.7
	21–25	106	66.7
	26–30	6	3.8
	31–35	1	0.6
	36–40	2	1.3
Gender	Male	26	16.4
	Female	133	83.6
Current Educational Level	Diploma	6	3.8
	Bachelor's Degree	151	95.0
	Master's Degree	2	1.3
Current Semester	Semester 1	3	1.9
	Semester 2	2	1.3
	Semester 3	26	16.4
	Semester 4	6	3.8
	Semester 5	37	23.3
	Semester 6	6	3.8
	Semester 7	62	39.0
	Semester 8	10	6.3
	Semester 9	5	3.1
	Semester 10	1	0.6

Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
Marital Status	Single	153	96.2
	Married	1	0.6
	Divorced	5	3.1
Employment Status	Employed	54	34.0
	Unemployed	105	66.0

Source: Research Data

Distribution of Study Variables

As shown in Table 2, the majority of participants demonstrated a moderate level of self-esteem (55.35%, n = 88), followed by a high level (43.40%, n = 69), while only 2 participants (1.26%) were classified as having low self-esteem. Regarding hope, nearly all participants (98.74%, n = 157) were categorized as having a high level of hope, whereas only 2 participants (1.26%) demonstrated a moderate level, and none were classified as having low hope. This highly concentrated distribution toward the high-hope category may indicate a potential ceiling effect or restricted variability in hope scores, which should be considered when interpreting the correlation between hope and suicidal ideation. With respect to suicidal ideation, most participants (71.70%, n = 114) reported low levels of suicidal ideation. In addition, 27 participants (16.98%) were categorized as having moderate suicidal ideation, whereas 18 participants (11.32%) were classified as having high suicidal ideation. Overall, these findings indicate that the participants generally demonstrated moderate levels of self-esteem, high levels of hope, and low levels of suicidal ideation.

Table 2. Distribution of Participants Across Study Variables (N = 159)

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Self-esteem	Low	2	1.26
	Moderate	88	55.35
	High	69	43.40
Hope	Low	0	0.00
	Moderate	2	1.26
	High	157	98.74
Suicidal Ideation	Low	114	71.70
	Moderate	27	16.98
	High	18	11.32

Source: Research Data

Normality Test

A normality test was conducted to determine whether the study variables met the assumptions for parametric statistical analysis. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, with a significance level of .05. A *p*-value greater than .05 indicates that the data are normally distributed, whereas a *p*-value less than .05 indicates a non-normal distribution.

Table 3. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test of Normality

Variable	Kolmogorov–Smirnov *p*-value	Interpretation
Self-esteem	.048	Not normally distributed
Hope	< .001	Not normally distributed
Suicidal ideation	< .001	Not normally distributed

Source: Research Data

As presented in Table 3, all study variables showed significant results ($p < .05$), indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the relationships between self-esteem, hope, and suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis Testing

Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationships between self-esteem, hope, and suicidal ideation. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Analysis of the Study Variables

			SE	FH	SI
Spearman's rho	**SI**	**Correlation Coefficient**	-.399**	-.322**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.
		N	159	159	159

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data

As shown in Table 4, self-esteem was significantly and negatively correlated with suicidal ideation (rs = −.399, $p < .001$), indicating that students with lower levels of self-esteem tended to report higher levels of suicidal ideation. Likewise, hope was significantly and negatively correlated with suicidal ideation (rs = −.322, $p < .001$), suggesting that students with lower levels of hope were more likely to experience suicidal ideation. These findings support both research hypotheses, indicating that higher levels of self-esteem and hope are associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation among university students.

Discussion

The present study demonstrated that both self-esteem and hope were significantly associated with suicidal ideation among university students, supporting the proposed hypotheses. Higher levels of both psychological resources were associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation, reinforcing their roles as protective factors during the transition to adulthood. Notably, self-esteem showed a numerically larger correlation with suicidal ideation than hope, suggesting that positive self-evaluation may represent a particularly important psychological resource within the present sample. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening positive psychological resources as part of comprehensive mental health promotion and suicide prevention strategies in higher education settings.

The present study found a significant negative association between self-esteem and suicidal ideation, indicating that students with higher self-esteem were less likely to experience suicidal thoughts. The observed correlation (rs = −0.399) represents a moderate negative association (Schober et al., 2018), suggesting that self-esteem is a meaningful psychological resource associated with suicidal ideation, although it is unlikely to account for suicidal thoughts in isolation. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting that self-esteem is an important protective factor against suicidal ideation among university students (Manoa et al., 2025) and with the meta-analysis by Buecker et al. (2025), which identified low self-esteem as one of the most robust psychological predictors of suicidal thoughts and behaviors across adolescent and young adult populations. The observed relationship may be explained by Rosenberg's (1965) conceptualization of self-esteem as a global evaluation of personal worth. Students with more positive self-evaluations are likely to

perceive academic, interpersonal, and developmental challenges as manageable, whereas those with lower self-esteem may be more vulnerable to self-blame, emotional distress, and hopelessness when facing setbacks (Orth & Robins, 2014; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Consequently, higher self-esteem may facilitate more adaptive responses to stress during emerging adulthood (Manani & Sharma, 2013), thereby reducing vulnerability to suicidal ideation. From a practical perspective, the moderate magnitude of the observed association suggests that strengthening self-esteem may represent a valuable component of university mental health promotion and suicide prevention initiatives, particularly when integrated with broader psychological support and early intervention programs.

The present study also found a significant negative association between hope and suicidal ideation. Although the correlation coefficient for hope ($r_s = -0.322$) was numerically smaller than that observed for self-esteem ($r_s = -0.399$), both coefficients fall within the moderate range according to Schober et al. (2018). This suggests that hope is a meaningful psychological resource associated with suicidal ideation, although its contribution appears less pronounced in the present sample and is unlikely to fully explain suicidal thoughts on its own. The relatively smaller correlation between hope and suicidal ideation compared with self-esteem may suggest that the association between hope and suicidal ideation should be considered alongside other psychological and social resources. This interpretation is consistent with Snyder's (2002) Hope Theory, which conceptualizes hope as the integration of agency, the motivation to pursue meaningful goals, and pathways, the perceived ability to identify alternative routes when obstacles arise. Students with higher levels of hope may therefore be better able to maintain goal-directed thinking, adapt to academic and personal challenges, and perceive stressful situations as manageable rather than overwhelming. The present findings are also consistent with previous studies showing that hope is associated with lower suicidal ideation by strengthening adaptive coping and reducing hopelessness (Huen et al., 2015; Ropaj, 2023). Moreover, evidence suggests that the protective influence of hope becomes stronger when combined with other psychological resources, such as effective emotional regulation, perceived social support, and a greater sense of meaning in life (Ropaj, 2023). From a practical perspective, these findings indicate that interventions designed to foster hope may be most effective when integrated with broader mental health programs that strengthen complementary psychological and social resources, rather than implemented as stand-alone strategies.

Another possible explanation for the comparatively more modest association between hope and suicidal ideation concerns the characteristics of the study sample. Most participants reported high levels of hope, resulting in limited variability in hope scores and potentially indicating a ceiling effect. Restricted score variability can attenuate correlation coefficients because reduced variance limits the extent of covariance that can be detected between variables (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Consequently, although the association between hope and suicidal ideation was statistically significant, the magnitude of this association may have been attenuated in the present study.

Taken together, the present findings suggest that self-esteem and hope should be viewed as complementary psychological resources associated with lower suicidal ideation rather than as independent protective factors. Although self-esteem demonstrated a stronger association with suicidal ideation in the present sample, both constructs appear to contribute through different but complementary psychological mechanisms. This interpretation is consistent with the Integrated Motivational–Volitional (IMV) Model of Suicidal Behaviour (O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018), which proposes that protective psychological resources buffer the progression from psychological distress to suicidal ideation. Within this framework, self-esteem may strengthen positive self-evaluation and confidence in coping with adversity, whereas hope may sustain goal-directed motivation and cognitive flexibility when facing

obstacles (Rosenberg, 1965; Snyder, 2002). Together, these resources may enhance students' capacity to manage academic, developmental, and interpersonal stressors, thereby reducing vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

The present findings also have practical implications for suicide prevention initiatives in higher education. Given that both self-esteem and hope were associated with lower suicidal ideation, university mental health programs should complement risk identification with interventions that strengthen positive psychological resources. Strategies such as cognitive-behavioral counseling, hope-based interventions, resilience training, strengths-based psychological programs, and psychoeducational workshops may enhance students' self-evaluation, goal-directed thinking, and adaptive coping. Because suicidal ideation is influenced by multiple psychological and environmental factors, these approaches are likely to be most effective when integrated into comprehensive mental health services alongside early detection, counseling, and appropriate referral systems.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the present findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inferences regarding the relationships among self-esteem, hope, and suicidal ideation. Second, the use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the participants included in this study. The predominantly female composition of the sample may further limit the generalizability of the findings across genders. Third, because all variables were assessed using self-report instruments, the findings may have been influenced by response bias and social desirability bias. In addition, the relatively homogeneous distribution of hope scores may have restricted score variability, which may reflect a potential ceiling effect and may have attenuated the observed correlation between hope and suicidal ideation. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ longitudinal designs and probability sampling methods to clarify the temporal relationships among these variables. Future studies should also seek more balanced representation across genders and examine additional psychological resources, such as social support, resilience, coping strategies, and meaning in life, as well as potential mediating and moderating mechanisms, to further enhance understanding of how self-esteem and hope are associated with suicidal ideation among university students.

CONCLUSION

This study found significant negative associations between self-esteem and suicidal ideation and between hope and suicidal ideation among university students. Students with higher levels of self-esteem and hope tended to report lower levels of suicidal ideation, with the association being stronger for self-esteem than for hope. These findings support the relevance of positive psychological resources in understanding suicidal ideation among university students.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to the literature by highlighting self-esteem and hope as complementary psychological resources that represent distinct but related processes associated with suicidal ideation. Self-esteem concerns individuals' evaluations of their own worth, whereas hope reflects goal-directed motivation and perceived pathways toward desired goals. Examining these two resources concurrently provides a broader perspective on psychological factors associated with suicidal ideation than examining either construct in isolation. The study also adds evidence from Indonesian university students, contributing to the limited literature on the concurrent associations of self-esteem and hope with suicidal ideation in this population.

Although the cross-sectional correlational design does not allow causal conclusions, the findings suggest that strengthening positive psychological resources may be relevant to mental health promotion and suicide prevention efforts in higher education. Future research

using longitudinal and multivariate designs is needed to further examine how self-esteem and hope interact with other psychological and social factors in relation to suicidal ideation.

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