

The Meeting Link between Emotional Intelligence, Rumination and Suicidal Ideation

Wan Nurul Izza Wan Husin
Faculty of Human Development
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)
Malaysia

Nurul Asyikin Khairunnizam
Faculty of Human Development
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)
Malaysia

Abstract:- This paper aimed to study the relationship between emotional intelligence, rumination and suicidal ideation among youths. In addition, it also aimed to measure the gender differences in suicidal ideation. This research was conducted through survey method. A total of 131 undergraduate students participated in this study. Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), Repetitive Thinking Questionnaire-10 (RTQ-10) and Positive and Negative Suicidal Ideation Inventory (PANSI) were the instruments used in the study. Results indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. Meanwhile, rumination was reported to have a significant positive correlation with suicidal ideation. The implications of the study were discussed.

Keywords:- Emotional Intelligence, Rumination, Suicidal Ideation, Undergraduate Students, Youths.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, a young adult falls between the ages of 18 to 40 years old (Eagle, 1997). Polanco-Roman, Jurska, Quinones and Miranda (2015) mentioned that about a quarter of young adults have a history of self-harm behaviour. Notably, 10% of 18- 24 years old are having attempted suicide while 14-17% were engaging with non-suicidal self-injury. Based on this statistical figure, it is important to do screening to all ages group to prevent the worse scenario of mental illness. Meanwhile, Jose and Brown, (2008) proclaimed that this age group was selected due to evidence that rumination increases most dramatically across a period of adulthood. Garlow et al. (2008) also reported an increasing trend of suicidal ideation among university students and this finding showed that university students are considered as one of the at-risk populations.

Suicide is one of the most complex health problems with global concern (Turecki & Brent, 2016). Suicide is considered as one of the leading causes of injury and death in the worldwide context (World Health Organisation, 2014). Mortality rate causes by suicide are reported as 1.4 % of all deaths worldwide, placing suicide as 18th leading cause of death in 2016 (World Health Organisation, 2016). Suicide cases are still increasing drastically and become the second leading cases of injury or death after road traffic injuries

among 15- 29 years old adult globally (World Health Organisation, 2016). On the contrary, lack of intervention is implemented despite the increase of suicide rate. The increasing number had been observed in around 50 countries especially high-income countries and it has occurred right after the process of controlling the population ageing happens (World Health Organisation, 2016).

Rumination is also proved to be connected with suicidal ideation. McLean et al. (2008) stated that rumination is considered as a form of repetitive negative thinking. Their study showed that rumination is found to be one of the significant predictors for suicidal cases. Law and Tucker (2018) agree that repetitive negative thinking may lead to entrapment and hopelessness, and eventually causing suicidal ideation. Their research revealed that rumination in form of repetitive negative thinking patterns is associated with suicide. Meanwhile, some researchers consider rumination as a dysfunctional coping style or strategy (Abdollahi & Talib, 2015). Therefore, as rumination is one of the response styles, higher frequency of rumination is linked with the higher risk of suicidal thought.

Review of the literature revealed that there is a lack of empirical study on emotional intelligence and rumination as a factor for suicidal ideation especially among undergraduate students who had not been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Khisravani, Baseri, Kamali, Mohammadzadeh and Amirinezhad (2019) recommended that future research should focus on factors which are prominent in psychiatric disorder that affect suicidal thought of the individuals who had not been diagnosed with the psychiatric disorder. Furthermore, to date, none of the studies assessed gender difference in suicidal ideation among undergraduate students.

Jo, Jeon and Oh (2017) recommended replicating the studies on suicide ideation risk among samples with different sociodemographic and geographic diversity in order to gain insights on suicide risk. In light of this lacuna, the purpose of this study is manifold. The first objective was to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. Second, the research sought to study the correlation between rumination and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students. Third, it aimed to measure the significant difference between male and female undergraduate students on suicidal ideation.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

A total of 131 respondents completed the survey form on a voluntary basis. The participants consisted of undergraduate students from different universities in Malaysia. 27.3% of the respondents were male undergraduates and 72.7 % were female undergraduates. Majority of the respondent were Malay ethnic (91.6%) and the rest were Chinese and Indian ethnic (8.4%). As for the mental illness history, 10.7 % of the participants has a background of mental illness while 89.3 % of them have no mental illness history.

B. Instruments

Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong and Law, 2002) was used to measure emotional intelligence. There are 4 items which underline each factor. The factors are self-emotions appraisal, regulation of emotions, use of emotion and others-emotion appraisal. The respondents need to rate each item on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Kong (2017) mentioned that WLEIS subscales contain the alpha reliabilities ranged from 0.74 to 0.87, which indicates that this scale is reliable.

Repetitive Thinking Questionnaire-10 (RTQ-10) (McEvoy, Mahoney & Moulds, 2010) is espoused to measure the frequency of repetitive negative thinking. RTQ-10 is a short version of Repetitive Negative Thinking (RNT) scale with 10 highest loading items of RNT factors. The items in RTQ-10 were rated along with 5- point Likert scale same as the original version of RTQ. The 5-point likert scale were Not at all true (1), Somewhat true (3), or Very true (5). Gavazzeni, Anderson, Sörman and Kristiansson (2019) disclosed that RTQ-10 contain good reliability with an excellent Cronbach's α ($\alpha = 0.90$, $n = 674$). Gavazzeni and colleagues (2019) also reported that RTQ-10 contain good construct validity with spearman's rank correlation is above 0.6.

Positive and Negative Suicidal Ideation Inventory (PANSI) (Osman, Gutierrez, Kopper, Barrios & Chiros, 1998) was also used. This inventory consists of 14 items which capture two dimensions, positive ideation and negative ideation. PANSI contain only five-point Likert scale for respondent to choose starting with 1 (none of the time) to 5 (most of the time). PANSI facets score is unique because each dimension has its own scores. PANSI-Negative Suicidal Ideation subscales may range from 8 to 40 while PANSI-Positive Ideation subscales range from 6 to 30. Aloba, Adefemi and Aoba (2018) reported acceptable internal consistencies of the PANSI-NSI and PANSI-PI subscales among the Nigerian university students were 0.76 and 0.77. On the other hand, the discriminative validity reported by Aloba and colleagues shows a positive relationship between PANSI-NSI scores. This also indicates that PANSI-NSI could discriminate between the students who positively and negatively endorsed in experiencing suicidal ideation.

C. Procedures

This study employed cross-sectional design and was conducted using a survey method. The participants from one public university in Malaysia completed the survey form on a voluntary basis. The link for this online survey form was posted in the researcher's social media accounts particularly through WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Ethical permission was obtained prior to data collection and no reward or bonus points given to the participants. The data were then analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

Based on the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, findings showed that there was a significant positive correlation between rumination and suicidal ideation. ($r = .490$, $p = .000$ at .05 alpha level). The degree of correlation between rumination and suicidal ideation was moderate, and the positive direction indicated that as rumination increases, suicidal ideation will also increase and vice versa. Nonetheless, emotional intelligence was significantly negatively correlated with suicidal ideation ($r = -.444$, $p = .00$ at .05 alpha level). This result indicated that individuals with high emotional intelligence will observe low level of suicidal ideation, and the strength of the correlation was moderate (Cohen, 2013). Table 1 shows the correlation between emotional intelligence, rumination and suicidal ideation.

Table I:- Correlations between Emotional Intelligence, Rumination and Suicidal Ideation

Variables	1	2	3
Emotional intelligence	-		
Rumination	-.241*	-	
Suicidal ideation	-.444*	.490*	-

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Results from Mann-Whitney U test reported that male undergraduate students (Mean Rank: 68.93) showed higher mean rank than female undergraduate students (Mean Rank: 64.93) in relation to the level of rumination. This mean rank difference was significant. Meanwhile, result also indicated that male undergraduate students (Mean Rank: 75.89) reported higher mean rank than female undergraduate students (Mean Rank =62.40) on suicidal ideation. Nevertheless, the difference was not significant.

B. Discussion

The obtained result showed that there was a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. The negative relationship indicates that as emotional intelligence increases, the suicidal ideation will decrease, and vice versa. This finding is supported by a recent study which highlights the role of emotional intelligence as coping strategies to non-suicidal self-injury. Moran (2019) conducted a research to assess the role of emotional intelligence as the coping strategies for individuals who engaged in non-suicidal self-injury. The research was conducted on university students whose age ranging from 16-23 years old. The result reported that emotional intelligence

was significantly linked to coping strategies and it implies that individuals who showed higher level of emotional intelligence usually applied more coping strategies.

This result is also consistent with a research done by Domínguez-García and Fernández-Berrocal (2018) who reported that emotional understanding and regulation were found to be the strongest protective factor towards suicidal ideation. Meanwhile, research by Kopera Jakubczyk, Klimkiewicz, Suszek, Krasowska, Brower and Wojnar (2017) revealed that emotional intelligence as protective factor because the deficiency of mood regulation is strongly correlated with lifetime suicide attempts. Mérida-López, Extremera and Rey (2018) also found that psychological distress factor highly intercedes the impact of self-report emotional intelligence on suicide risk.

Findings of the present study also indicated that there is a significant correlation between rumination and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students. This finding is also consistent with the result found by Hasking, Boyes, Finlay-Jones, McEvoy and Rees (2018). Hasking et al. (2018) reported that rumination interceded the relationship with suicidal ideation. Besides, a research done by Law and Tucker (2018) also stated that repetitive negative thinking or rumination arousal significantly predicts the suicide attempt. Thus, this finding indicated that rumination is associated with suicidal ideation.

In addition, this finding was also consistent with the Response Style Theory proposed by Nolen-Hoeksema et al (1992). Based on the Response Style Theory, rumination can be considered to be interlinked with suicidal ideation because rumination is one of the techniques for adaptation. It includes self-reflection and repetitive focus on one's negative feelings that usually happen when an individual is experiencing distress or depressive mood. This theory is also related to one of the domains for rumination construct, that is brooding. A research done by Roger, Schneider, Tucker, Law, Anestis and Joiner (2017) revealed that certain type of over arousal may assist as device in interconnection between brooding and suicidal ideation as well as suicide attempts. In sum, it can be inferred that higher level of rumination will alleviate the level of suicidal ideation risk.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that both emotional intelligence and rumination are significant factors which influence suicidal thought. Therefore, an emphasis should be placed on enhancing emotional management competency as well as reducing rumination. Past researches highlighted that emotions play an important role in human life despite the fact that the human ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions vary between individuals. Emotional intelligence plays a role in almost every aspect of human life including education, workplace, social adjustment and psychological functioning (Rivers et.al., 2012). Therefore, conducting self-development programmes to enhance emotional intelligence of undergraduate students will be beneficial as emotional intelligence is found to be one of the

important factors in directing human behaviour toward greater life successes.

An initiative to conduct self-development programme to eliminate rumination and suicidal thoughts is also important as it is believed that such kind of programme will create awareness to the affected individuals as well as the public. Hence, the number of suicide cases and individuals with suicidal ideation will be reduced. The university management also should take a precautionary measure such as screening the at-risk individuals, inviting them to seek help from professional psychologists or providing intervention to those who have been affected with suicidal thoughts. The prevention acts are always useful in solving most of the problems either physical illness or psychological problems.

SOURCE OF FUNDING

This study is self-financed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no personal, professional or other conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Eagle, M. (1997). Contributions of Erik Erikson. *Psychoanalytic review*, 84(3), 337- 347.
- [2]. Polanco-Roman, L., Jurska, J., Quiñones, V., & Miranda, R. (2015). Brooding, reflection, and distraction: Relation to non-suicidal self-injury versus suicide attempts. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 19(3), 350-365.
- [3]. Jose, P. E., & Brown, I. (2008). When does the gender difference in rumination begin? Gender and age differences in the use of rumination by adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37, 180-192. doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9166-y
- [4]. Garlow, S. J., Rosenberg, J., Moore, J. D., Haas, A. P., Koestner, B., Hendin, H., et al. (2008). Depression, desperation, and suicidal ideation in college students: results from the American foundation for suicide prevention college screening project at Emory University. *Depression and Anxiety*, 25(6), 482–8. doi: 10.1002/da.20321
- [5]. Turecki, G., & Brent, D. A. (2016). Suicide and suicidal behaviour. *The Lancet*, 387(10024), 1227-1239.
- [6]. World Health Organization. (2014). *Mental health Suicide prevention*. Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved August 1, 2014, from [http:// www.who.int/mental_ health /prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/)
- [7]. World Health Organization. (2016). *World health statistics 2016: monitoring health for the SDGs sustainable development goals*.
- [8]. Khisravani, V., Baseri, A., Kamali, Z., Mohammadzadeh, A., & Amirinezhad, A. (2019). Direct and indirect effects of behavioral inhibition/ activation systems on depression and current suicidal ideation through rumination and self- reflection. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 1-21.
- [9]. Jo, A., Jeon, M., & Oh, H. (2017). Age-differentiated risk factors of suicidal ideation among young and

- middle-aged Korean adults. *Osong public health and research perspectives*, 8(3), 201.
- [10]. Wong, C. S., & Law, K. S. (2002). The effect of leader and follower emotional intelligence on performance and attitude: An exploratory study. *Leadership Quarterly*, 13(3), 243–274.
- [11]. Kong, F. (2017). The validity of the Wong and Law m Emotional Intelligence Scale in a Chinese sample: Tests of measurement invariance and latent mean differences across gender and age. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 116, 29–31. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2017.04.025
- [12]. McEvoy, P. M., Mahoney, A. E. J., & Moulds, M. L. (2010). Are worry, rumination, and post-event processing one and the same? *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 24(5), 509–519. doi:10.1016/j.janxdis.2010.03.008
- [13]. Gavazzeni, J. A., Andersson, T., Sörman, K., & Kristiansson, M. (2019). Psychometric Properties of the Swedish Version of the Brief Repetitive Thinking Questionnaire (RTQ-10): An Internet-Based Study on Degrees of Affective Symptoms and Levels of Distress. *Psychopathology*, 1–9. doi:10.1159/000502388
- [14]. Osman A, Gutierrez PM, Kopper BA, Barrios FX, Chiros CE (1998). The positive and negative suicide ideation inventory: development and validation. *Psychol Rep.* 1998;82:783–793.
- [15]. Aloba, O., Adefemi, S., & Aloba, T. (2018). Positive and Negative Suicide Ideation (PANSI) Inventory: Initial Psychometric Properties as a Suicide Risk Screening Tool Among Nigerian University Students. *Clinical Medicine Insights: Psychiatry*, 9, 117955731775191. doi:10.1177/1179557317751910
- [16]. Moran, S. M. (2019). Nonsuicidal Self-injury in a College Age Population: The Role of Coping Strategies and Emotional Intelligence (Doctoral dissertation, University of Hartford).
- [17]. Domínguez-García, E., & Fernández-Berrocal, P. (2018). The association between emotional intelligence and suicidal behavior: a systematic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9.
- [18]. Kopera, M., Brower, K. J., Suszek, H., Jakubczyk, A., Fudalej, S., Krasowska, A., ... & Wojnar, M. (2017). Relationships between components of emotional intelligence and physical pain in alcohol-dependent patients. *Journal of pain research*, 10, 1611.
- [19]. Mérida-López, S., Extremera, N., & Rey, L. (2018). Understanding the Links Between Self-Report Emotional Intelligence and Suicide Risk: Does Psychological Distress Mediate This Relationship Across Time and Samples? *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9. doi:10.3389/fpsy.2018.00184
- [20]. Hasking, P., Boyes, M. E., Finlay-Jones, A., McEvoy, P. M., & Rees, C. S. (2018). Common pathways to NSSI and suicide ideation: The roles of rumination and self-compassion. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 1–25. doi:10.1080/13811118.2018.1468836
- [21]. Law, K. C., & Tucker, R. P. (2018). Repetitive negative thinking and suicide: a burgeoning literature with need for further exploration. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 22, 68–72. doi:10.1016/j.copsy.2017.08.027
- [22]. Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Girgus, J. S., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1992). Predictors and consequences of childhood depressive symptoms: A 5-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 101, 405–422.
- [23]. Rivers, S. E., Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2012). Measuring emotional intelligence in early adolescence with the MSCEIT-YV: psychometric properties and relationship with academic performance and psychosocial functioning. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 30, (4), 344–366.