



Exploration on Perceptions of Suicidal Ideation Among Students of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

One of the world's leading causes of death among teenagers aged 15-29 is suicide. Students of higher institutions also involved in the specific group that was reported to have a high level of suicidal ideation. Thus, in order to overcome this issue, all factors that influence suicidal ideation should be identified. This article is intended to identify the factor that influences suicidal ideation among higher learning education students based on their perceptions. This study was conducted using a qualitative method using semi-structured interview questions to explore participants' perceptions towards suicidal ideation among students of higher learning institutions. As for data collection method, two focus group discussions were identified as main instrument. The findings show that factors identified to influence the existence of suicidal ideation among students of higher learning institutions can be categorized into two categories, external factors, and internal factors. These factors are peer pressure, pressure from society, social media influences, family factors, financial factors, intrapersonal and individual interpersonal factors, and low self-esteem factor. This study also found that counsellors and other professional bodies such as psychologists were not the choices of participants to express a problem that led to their suicidal ideation.

Keywords: Suicidal ideation; Mental health; Higher education; Counsellor

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INTRODUCTION

Lately, there is much suicidal news reported in every major newspaper. In the past five years, there has been an increase in suicidal

cases which involved students and adults who consisted of individuals from the various social and cultural background. Some of them committed suicide and before doing so killed their children. These suicides are committed by individuals regardless of their age, race, sex, religion and work status. For every person in the span of 40 seconds, The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that almost 800,000 people died each year in 2018 as a result of suicide. There have been claims that there might have been more than

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20 people considering suicide with each adult died from it. Suicide occurs over the lifetime and is the second major cause of death involving 15-29-year-olds globally (World Health Organization, 2018). According to Abdollahi and Talib (2015), Suicide is a major problem in public health, and continues to be a significant cause of death worldwide.

The tendency to commit suicide among adolescents in Malaysians alarmingly high. According to Malaysia National Suicide Registration statistics for the period 2008 to 2010, an average of one to two suicide cases was reported in Malaysia daily. While the Institute for Public Health (2018), revealed 11.2 percent of adolescents in the group had the idea of suicide, as well as 9 percent were contemplating suicide and 10.1 percent actually committed suicide. Based on the survey, the Kuala Lumpur recorded the highest percentage of teenagers intending to commit suicide which was 13.2 percent; Selangor has the highest percentage of adolescents planning to commit suicide which was 9.5 percent, while Perak recorded the third highest percentage of suicide attempts by adolescents which were 9.3 percent.

There were a few cases reported regarding suicidal behaviours among college students. For example, the case that was reported in Subang Jaya, Selangor involved a female student who was found dead on the fifth floor at one of private college (Justin Zack, 2017). Another case that was reported by Farik Zolkepli (2018) was the discovery of a body of a 19-year-old male student by a janitor. The boy was believed to have shot himself using a pistol that was stolen from a shooting club. According to Lerner and Steinberg (2004), changes from dependent children to independent individuals, caused adolescents

to have to adjust to many things. These adjustments are related to emotional maturity, developing an interest in the opposite sex, social maturity, independence outside the home, mental maturity, the beginning of financial independence, using leisure time appropriately or called the proper uses of leisure, ways of looking at life, and identification. This caused adolescents to encounter personal conflicts of self-image within themselves together with the community around them which contribute greatly to suicidal ideation.

Suicide scenario is increasingly alarming as this trend is growing among teenagers in Malaysia. Malkan and Amat (2018) reported that this trend was also apparent among university students. Their findings indicated a high level of suicidal ideation among this group.

At the tertiary education level, students with suicidal ideation are at a phase where they left the adolescence stage to enter the young adult stage and the adversities experienced in academic life (Dos et al., 2017). As revealed by Ang and Huan (2006), suicide is a major cause of death among teenagers and young adults.

A study was done by Said, Kypri and Bowman (2013) showed young university students suffer from certain mental disorders and display high-risk behaviours associated with suicide and its percentage was relatively high. Studies done by Ang and Huan (2006) suggested that stressful university students tend to experience mental health issues such as anxiety and depression leading to suicide ideation. Furr et al. (2001), concluded that 53 percent of the respondents reported experiencing depression from college onwards,

with 9 percent reporting that they had thought of committing suicide from college onward.

There are various factors why individuals choose to commit suicide. Various factors can cause suicidal thoughts for instance family, environment, self-management, and addiction (Mootin, 2017) and this researcher concluded in his study that suicidal ideation is associated with intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Suicide ideation that exists among college students is influenced by some factors. Among the factors that have been identified through the findings of previous studies were peer factors, depression, abuse, gender differences, low self-esteem, sickness, environment and internet addiction (Malkan & Amat, 2018). In addition, the concept of suicide among college students was significantly associated with everyday tension, general hopelessness, and social hopelessness (Heisel, Flett, & Hewitt, 2003); and factors such as family, marriage, education and lack of protective factors (Gururaj, Isaac, Subbakrishna & Ranjani, 2004).

There were studies on suicidal ideation among university students done by foreign and local researchers (Furr et al., 2001; Wallack, 2007; Wanyole, 2015; Dos et al., 2017). The findings found that family, financial and academic factors influence suicidal ideation among university students. Based on these studies, we can see that many young people started to experience stress in life-driven by problems. However, in Malaysia, studies on suicidal ideation are still insufficient (Chen et al., 2005 in Malkan & Amat, 2018). This situation is an alarming and effect on the development of human mental health especially among adolescents in Malaysia if there are

no prevention measures being taken accordingly. Therefore, there is crucial needs such study on suicidal ideation should be carried out among teachers' trainees in Malaysia.

This article aims to explore the perception of suicidal ideas among higher learning education students. To achieve this study objectives, the inquiry will build on the students' understanding of suicidal ideation, students' perceptions of factors that contribute to suicidal ideation, resources referring to their problems, the way they solve their problems to suicidal ideation, and the best prevention of suicide ideation.

Theories of Suicide

According to Davison, Neale, and Kring (2004), suicidal behaviour develops in a process. (1) The ideology of suicide, this stage is the process of contemplation of suicide, or a method used without taking action, even the sufferer at this stage will not state his idea if not pressed. (2) the intention of suicide, at this stage the patient begins to think and has committed a concrete plan to commit suicide. (3) suicide threats, at this stage the patient expresses the desire and intentions, even the threat to end his life (4) suicidal attitude, at this stage the patient shows destructive self-directed behaviours that aim not only threaten his life but have an attempt to commit suicide. (5) suicide attempts, at this stage the destructive behaviours of behaviours that have a specific indication want to die and not want to be saved.

The recent incidence of suicide exposed by social media can be explained in terms of sociology. Many sociological kinds of literature review the phenomenon of suicide in the community: Emile Durkheim, the figure of

classical sociology who is famous for suicide theory. According to Johnson (1965), Durkheim figure the cause of suicide is the influence of social integration. Durkheim also divided the types of suicide into four. (a) egoistic suicide (b) altruistic suicide (c) anomic suicide and (d) fatalistic suicide.

While the new generation of suicides theory is like the Interpersonal Theory introduced by Thomas Joiner and the Three Steps Suicide of Theory (3ST) introduced by David Klonsky and Alexis May. According to Klonsky and May (2015), Joiner suggested a particular implementation of the structure in which expectations of low association and high burdensomeness combined develop inclination for suicide, while high capacity for suicide facilitates high potential suicide attempts.

The Three Step Suicide Theory (3ST) also provides a separate explanation for (1) development of suicidal ideation (2) the progression from suicide ideation to attempts just as suicidal theory introduced by Joiner.

It can be concluded that this suicide theory was inspired based on the social phenomena faced by the people which caused them to have suicidal ideation and the reason they acted to commit suicide. This suicide theory is critical to be used as a guide to understanding problems that lead to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts and has important implications for suicide prevention and intervention. According to Klonsky and May (2014), the risk of suicide can be reduced by (a) reduce pain (b) increase hope, (c) improve connectedness and (d) reduce capacity.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to explore the perception of suicidal ideation among students of higher learning institution. The specific objectives of this study were to explore;

1. Students' knowledge of suicidal ideation.
2. Students' perceptions of factors that can influence suicidal ideation.
3. Students' perceptions to whom they will refer to on their problems.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a study in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants, ask broad and general questions, collects data in form of text words from the participants, explains and analyses the words in thematic forms and conducts interviews in a subjective and biased manner. This study was conducted using a qualitative method using semi-structured interview questions to explore participants' perceptions. As for data collection method, two focus group discussions were identified as main instrument.

According to Jasmi (2012), focus group interviews are a useful data collection technique in qualitative research. A focus group have been observed to be useful as a strategy for extricating student's opinions and understanding their involvement in learning (Fife, 2007). This study was conducted at a Sarawak Teacher Training Institute located in Northern Sarawak.

The first group participants consist of six students from the 6th semester and the second group participants consist of six students

from the 8th semester. Morgan (1997), recommended that the appropriate size or numbers of participants in the main target groups should range between four to eight persons. An informed consent form was given to each participant before proceeding with the data collection, and all the participant agrees to participate in an interview audio recorded. Interviews with the participants were only focused on suicidal ideation based on stated research questions. The data in this study were analysed using thematic analysis method. Specifically, data analysis uses thematic analysis based on six simple steps introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six steps are: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating the initial code, (3) finding themes, (4) examining the theme, (5) refining and naming the theme, (6) produce report. Member-checking and peer debriefing techniques were performed to obtain meaningful themes for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings gathered from the interviews from the two focus groups of students from the Sarawak Teacher Training Institute will be elaborated in detail based on the stated objectives.

Students' Understanding of Suicidal Ideation

Overall, the participants of this study understood the concept of suicidal ideation. Participants' understanding of suicidal ideation can be defined into three subthemes, namely (1) hopelessness, (2) wanting to end the pain and (3) depression. The following statement illustrates the understanding of the participant (R) against the suicidal ideation. For an understanding of the concept of hopelessness,

most of the participants expressed feelings of despair for life or no other way to solve the problems faced.

As stated by P6a *"What I understand about this suicide idea is actually in the beginning, one will try to solve the problem, but when the pressure increases and cannot be accommodated, there will be a sense of despair, feel the desperation and lost hope of surviving for the days."*

While P2b stated that *"... when it has reached the level where the problem is not resolved ... such as raped person cases, there is no way to solve the problem. For such victims, the value of their dignity is very high, and they cannot have anyone demolish or jeopardize their dignity."*

As for P5a, *"In my opinion, suicidal ideation is an idea that an individual can think of after going through some of life difficulties or pressures in life. Before that, they tried to find solutions but failed to end the stress. "*

According to P3a *"In my opinion, suicide simply shows that one is desperate with their life, tired of his life and cannot think anymore."*

For an understanding of the concept of wanting to end the pain, participants claim that death is an idea that can end the pain or suffering experienced by an individual. As stated by; P1a *"In my opinion, suicidal ideation will arise when one is faced with intense pressure and wants to end the pain experienced."*

P2a stated that *"...this suicidal ideation is the fastest solution to solving the problems faced*

because he cannot bear the burden any longer."

While R4b states *"In my opinion, suicide is an act of self-injury in the hope that death can solve the problem faced."*

For an understanding of the concept of depression, most participants state the characteristics of an individual who has negative thoughts. As stated by; P7a *"In my opinion, the idea of suicide occurs when something is provoking him ... provoking refer to the whisperings in mind"*.

P6b stated, *"In my opinion, the idea of suicide occurs when an individual is in a poor state of mind, and the person is too emotional to that, after that the person thinks of only one solution."*

While P4a stated *"...the person who has this idea of suicide is a person who has no sense of appreciation for life and wants to die."*

Analysis of the findings shows that overall, the participants of this study understood the concept of suicidal ideation even though not much in depth. Knowledge of suicidal ideation is essential because this knowledge can save one's life from taking action to commit suicide when they face stress and lose hope for life. This knowledge can also help someone to evaluate factors that can contribute to the suicidal ideation among students of higher institutions. According to Carlton and Deane (2000), lack of knowledge about suicidal ideation and less ability to solve problems as one of the factors that can induce individuals to commit suicide.

Students' Perceptions of Factors That Can Influence Suicidal Ideation

The findings of the study on student perceptions on factors that can influence the suicidal ideation among students of higher learning institutions are generally categorized into two factors namely external factors and individual internal factors. The categories emerging from external factors that influence the suicidal ideation tend to be (1) peer pressure factor, (2) pressure from society, (3) social media, (4) family, and (5) financial problems factors. While the categories that arise from individual internal factors include (1) interpersonal factors, and (2) low self-esteem factor.

External Factor

For external factors, the data analysis found that peer pressure factor was the most common factor followed by pressure from society, family pressure, and factor with the least influence was the financial factor.

Peer pressure. The findings show that peer pressure factors are the most common among participants. P2a, for example, stated *"In my opinion, the factors that can influence the suicidal ideation are peer pressure. As students in the higher learning institution, we need to have friends in order to create a healthy social environment. However, some people enable to develop such a relationship. ... in cases where friends at IPT isolated them, they gang up to avoid this one person, and the victim will experience stress because going to class alone, in class no one friend to talk about the assignment, when the individual wants to talk about an assignment they will avoid the person. Individuals who can deal with such an issue can cope being alone. However, very few students have the resilience to do so."*

It was subsequently supported by P5b who said *"I think the individual feels very lonely because the person does not have friends, have no one wants to talk and connect with him or her, the person will be like being isolated because no one wants to make friends. The person will experience loneliness and become negative."*

The findings of this study are in line with the findings from the previous study which stated that the problem of peer pressure resulted in the existence of suicidal ideas in the participants. Among the previous researchers who stated that the peer pressure factor was one of the factors that motivated students to have suicidal ideation. A student who are left out by friend will experience stress as they left alone to deal with loneliness. They will have no one to discuss their problem or keep them company (Greydanus & Shek, 2009; Heilbron & Prinstein, 2010; Malkan & Amat, 2018). While according for Bearman and Moody (2004), teenagers who are separated from the teenage community are likely to present a greater risk to suicidal thoughts than girls who are in stable networks of friendships. In conclusion, peer pressure is a significant factor affecting life among high school students. Therefore, choosing a good friend can help high-school students reduce the risk of suicidal ideation.

Pressure from society. The findings showed that suicidal ideation occurred when students face stress from their surroundings such as by the family, college colleagues, lecturers as well as friends in social media. Based on P4a's statement which stated that *"For individuals who are not mentally strong they will feel the views of the people around him greatly affecting him, and this is also one of the factors that induced him to feel worthless,*

useless, and he feels he should not live because of people's negative views around him..."

The findings showed that pressure from society factor was the second most influential factor of suicidal ideation among students of higher institutions. Humans are social beings who cannot live alone but live in society. Society groups will provide comfort, happiness at one time. However, at other times it will cause sadness, even psychologically can hurt each other. The findings of this study are parallel to the findings of the previous research which illustrated the local community's view that resulted in high school students tend to have suicidal ideation (Gamayanti, 2014; Malkan & Amat, 2018). The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide also supports this finding. According to the theory. The most dangerous form of suicidal desire is caused by the simultaneous presence of two interpersonal constructs (a) thwarted belongingness and (b) perceived burdensomeness (Joiner, 2005). Thus, pressure from people around can be one of the causes of an individual acting out of control by committing suicide as a solution to the problem.

Family. The findings from interview data found that family factors also contributed to the suicidal ideation. Four of the participants have perceptions that family factors can contribute to the occurrence of suicidal ideation among high school students. As stated by P4b *"... external factors that can be added are like, conflict with parents, conflict with friends or so will cause a person to feel overwhelmed."*

This statement is supported by P1a which stated *"In my opinion, I will emphasize factor from expectation, parent's expectation. I*

am the youngest of our siblings, so my three brothers excelled. In the SPM exam. This set the precedence. While waiting for my SPM result, my parents always expected me to achieve this kind of result. So when I think of my parents' expectation, I feel, but thankfully, the situation did not worsen."

Pressure from people around such as family members can be one of the causes of an individual acting out of control by committing suicide as a solution to the problem. The findings of this study are parallel to previous studies which explain that family conflict factors such as conflicts with parents and spouses, and also expectation factors from parents can influence suicidal ideation. (Spirito & Overholser, 2003).

Social media. Based on data evaluated from the interview, it found that social media factors also contributed to the occurrence of suicidal ideation among higher education students. The results of the interview analysis found that three participants stated that social media factors were one of the factors that could influence the existence of suicidal ideas amongst higher education students. As stated by P1a *"... I want to add social media factors because there is a post about a suicide case on social media when someone reads such post, that person considers suicide a trend has become a trend, the unhealthy trend is, they are affected by what is posted in social media. Their perception that it is the norm. When they are depressed, they will commit suicide because they might think that is a right solution. Because many do so why not me ... "*. This statement is supported by P1b who stated *"... my point is a social media factor. If we see now many suicide stories are posted in social media, those who*

looked at the stories might think the way to get rid of the problem is suicide".

Social media offers a wide range of information and information to the public, especially about current affairs, both inside and outside the country. Social media is also beneficial to the development of today's education. However, at the same time, social media may also contribute towards negative effects. Social media and suicidal behaviour are arguably a new phenomenon. In recent years there have been widespread suicides triggered by social media in many countries. According to data from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the range of 2010 to 2015, suicide rates tended to increase along with the amount of social media use in teenagers in the United States. Two decades before when social media did not yet exist, suicide rates in US adolescents tended to decline. According to Luxton, June, & Fairall (2012) argued that social media and internet have evidently, been the main culprit behind suicide-related behaviour. In addition, according to Ruder, Hatch, Ampanozi, Thali, & Fischer (2011), copycat suicides have also been stimulated by suicide notes posted on online social media.

Financial. Based on interview data, one participant stated that financial factor is also one of the factors that can influence the occurrence of suicidal ideation among high school students. As stated by P1a *"Aside from the family, contributing to this problem would be a financial problem. Not all of us are from wealthy families there are among us who are born poor and have difficulties entering university "*. Participant biographical data shows that six of the participants came from low-income families.

Findings of this study are in line with the research made by Wanyole (2015). His studies found that students who have had low amount of money encounter problems in their study at university. Insufficient money to cover tuition fees, upkeep and housing can cause stress among these students. Students today are faced with challenging issues and tests their physical and mental strength. Among the most challenging issues they faced are financial problems. According to Alecia and Anuar (2017), students are now in need of money to cover their rising costs of living and study due to inflation in the country. It is also supported by Abdul-Rahman and Zulkifly (2016), which states that the rising cost of spending is increasingly burdening students who have had financial constraints due to unemployment.

Internal Factor

The result of this study found that some participants thought that individual internal factor is also a factor that can influence the occurrence of suicidal ideation among higher education students. Among the themes that arise under these internal factors are interpersonal factors, and low self-esteem factor.

Interpersonal. The definition of interpersonal is something related to communications, relationships or interactions between people. Among the opinions expressed by the participants who describe this theme are as stated by P5a: *"Actually it is not caused by our friends but due to our self-development of individual social skills or interpersonal factors."*

An individual who faces interpersonal conflict will feel burdened and ignorant of the people around them. This kind of person also

has no meaningful relationship with other people, and always blame themselves for mistakes made by others. Besides, individuals ignore the views of others and feel that relationships with others are not meaningful. An individual also often think that others criticize them. According to Tang and Qin (2015), Suicide ideation is essentially linked to lack of social contacts as found in study by Tang and Qin (2015).

Low self-esteem. The results of the interview data show that some participants have a perception that low self-esteem factor also contributes to the suicidal ideation among higher education students. P5a stated *"... low self-esteem will make an individual feel that the problems in the world are placing their shoulders"*.

Self-esteem is how an individual sees oneself. Someone who has high self-esteem loves their life and life optimistically and feels joyous, exuberant, and happy. Therefore, people with high self-esteem will not commit suicide. While people who have low self-esteem in living their lives often feel unlovable, feel with pessimism, tend to feel depressed, feel helpless, cannot handle problems and feel inferior, feel that their abilities are low and believe that they are worthless. Therefore, if a person with low self-esteem is faced with a problem, they may choose to commit suicide. According to Sun et al. (2006), students who low self-esteem and have low self-concept tend to have suicidal ideas. This finding also strongly supported by Malkan and Ahmad (2018).

Combination Factor

The results of the interview data analysis found that some participants thought that a

combination of several factors would strengthen the occurrence of suicidal ideation.

The P6b perceptions illustrate the situation above; *"... if outsiders' perceptions look negative on him but his internal factor is strong he will be able to cope with the challenge, but when external factors combine with weak internal factors, that is why the idea of suicide is easy to arise..."*

The findings are also in line with the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide who proposed by Joiner (2005), which stated that the combination of low belongingness and high burdensomeness could bring a desire for suicide. It is also supported by Klinsky and May (2015) who proposed the Three Step Theory of Suicide, suggest that if someone feels pain and hopelessness, it can lead to suicide ideation.

As mention earlier, Arria et. al. (2009) stated that coping with higher education can lead to suicidal ideation. This finding also strongly supported by Gururaj et.al. (2004). In conclusion, this study has found various factors that can influence suicide ideation among students in the Teacher Training Institute. Based on the analysis of the interviews, the factors that can influence the suicidal ideation among students in the Teacher Training Institute, especially in Miri Sarawak are like peer pressure, pressure from society, family, social media, financial problems, interpersonal, emotion quotient, and low self-esteem. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the previous research which found that there are various factors that can influence the suicidal ideation amongst education students (Wallack, 2007; Pratiwi & Undarwati, 2014; Gamayanti, 2014; Wanyole, 2015; Malkan & Amat, 2018).

This finding is also supported by the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide proposed by Thomas Joiner. Joiner who suggest that suicidal ideation is driven by the feeling of low belongingness and high burdensomeness, especially when one feels hopeless that these feeling will change (Van Oden et al., 2010 in Klonsky & May, 2015).

Resources Referring to Problem

While all participants are aware that counselling services are available to help students cope with the problems faced, however, participants do not choose counsellor as the primary reference individual in case of problems. On the contrary, all participants choose nonclinical sources of resources as their primary references, such as people they know (close friends, siblings and mothers), strangers and some preferred dealing with their problems alone.

P6a stated *"If I have a suicidal problem, I will share with my closest friend, because we are like siblings. We are best friends who have always been together since childhood."*

While one participant chose to share her problem with someone who does not know her. P2b stated, *"If I have suicidal ideation, I will meet someone who is not familiar with me and does not know me in social media."*

Three participants stated they would not share their suicidal ideation problem with others but only express it by writing in dairies or making self-reflection. As stated by P3b *"I write in my diary only, because I suppose if I tell my feelings with others, I might make them worried. That person may not be able to do anything regarding my issues, so I think I should write "*

The results of this article are consistent with prior studies that identified most participants who indicated that they would seek support from various sources for distinct types of issues, but acquaintances and peers were considered the most likely to be the source of support. (Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2001). According to Glasser (2001), when faced with a problem, some individuals chose to refer to someone who nonprofessional (something more practical to them) than a professional.

Counselling services at the tertiary level are a standard practice that has been aimed at ensuring students' mental wellbeing as well as guidance and student referrals for career development and direction after graduation. Counsellors at universities play a role in helping students balance their mental health and ability to learn. Those who are depressed can meet with professionals to help them deal with problems that cause them to have suicidal ideas (Carlton & Deane, 2000). However, this article finds that all survey participants do not like to share their problems with professionals such as counsellors or psychologists.

Among the reason why participants did not choose counsellor as a reference is because they do not trust counsellors, are uncomfortable discussing their issues, fear of stereotype problematic and they do not aware of counsellor role. Among the reason expressed by the participants are as stated by P7a: *"I do not want to see a counsellor because they are not emotionally connected with us so I do not trust them."*

For P1a states *"I do not feel comfortable sharing the problem with the counsellor.*

when in primary school, our school counsellor was not working and when I was in high school, they were very active, but I did not like the way they approach the student."

P3a stated, *"In my opinion, we will be stereotyped because when you see a counsellor, it is assumed that you have troubles. In high school, anyone entering the counsellor's room was considered a problem. Thus despite our issues, we refrained from going to the counsellor "*

P5a stated, *"Some of us still do not know the counsellor's function, how to find or how to refer the counsellor...."*

The findings of this article are in line with previous studies linking stigma and scepticism in influencing the attitudes of counselling, especially public stigma (Pedersen & Paves, 2014; Mason, Keyser-Marcus, Snipes, Benotsch, & Sood, 2013). In this article, the majority of participants suggested that negative views of others such as peers were the main barriers deferring participants from getting counselling services. This finding is also supported by previous studies that found personal attitudes as well as wanting privacy to be a barrier to getting counselling services. According to Eisenberg, Golberstein & Gollust (2007), university students are scepticism about counselling as they prefer to deal with their problems, questioning the effectiveness of counselling to solve problems, believing the pressure is normal, inadequate and worried about what others think of them. This finding shows that counsellors need to play a more proactive role to educate students about the benefits of counselling services in helping to overcome personal problems and for long-term mental well-being.

CONCLUSION

Students' understanding of suicidal ideation is essential to clarify what can cause a person with suicidal ideation. This knowledge also allows students to identify factors that can influence the existence of suicidal ideation among the students of higher institutions. The identified factors affecting the occurrence of suicidal ideas among students of the higher institution can be classified into two categories, namely external factors, and internal factors. External factors are peer pressure, community pressure, social media influence, family factors and financial factors. While internal factors are interpersonal and low self-esteem factors.

The participants prefer to choose nonprofessional sources of resources as their primary references, such as people they know (close friends, siblings and mothers), and strangers rather than professional bodies such as counsellors and psychologists. This suggests that the counsellor should play a more proactive role to change the social stigma towards counselling services. As the rate of suicide increases from year to year, mental health awareness programs need to be intensified so that the public has an awareness of the importance of mental health and early prevention can be implemented to help young people, especially students of higher institutions who will be the leaders of the nation in the future.

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