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A Systematic Review on Factors That Associated With Suicidal Ideation among LGBT

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Abstract

To undertake a systematic review of the international research literature on factors or causes that associated with suicidal thought or suicidal behavior on LGBT sexual minority group in order to summarize current finding and finding research gap for future study. Electronic search was conducted in Oct 2016 of the database SCOPUS; 10 studies was identified as related with this topic. LGBT had higher odd of suicidal ideation compared to non-LGBT overall. Victimization was the risk factors that had significant correlation to suicidal ideation. School climate and family connectedness were protective factors associated with suicidal ideation among LGBT. Teachers act important role in school to forbid the occurrence of victimization on LGBT through education. In short, social support from family, peers, school, LGBT may lead a healthy psychological state rather than suicidal thought. **keywords**: Suicidal Ideation, Factors, LGBT, Systematic Review.

Introduction

The suicide rate in Malaysia is high especially among youth which is up to 1.03 per 100,000 populations in 2009 (Lakshiny, 2015). Suicide behavior is well predicted by suicidal ideation or suicidal thought. One of the factors that lead to suicidal ideation is sexual orientation. Sexual minority group which composed of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) have more tendency to report suicidal ideation compared to heterosexual group (Arnarsson et al., 2015; Hatzenbuehler et. al, 2014; Silenzio et al., 2007; Stone et al., 2014; Ybarrra et. al. 2015). LGBT people suffer from discrimination and prejudice if they reveal their sexual orientation publicly. Although some countries such as the US, Spain, Italy etc had accepted homosexual marriage legally, it was still unable to obtain conformity in society. They may be perceived as weird and more likely to become the victim of peer harassment and bullying in school and society compared to heterosexual groups (Arnarsson et al., 2015; Baiocco, et al., 2014); Liu & Mustanski, 2012; Ybarrra et. al., 2015.

Suicide can be prevented, and prevention is better than cure. Before the LGBT committed suicide, it is essential to identify the risk factors and protective factors associated with suicidal

ideation. Once the risk factors and protective factors were identified, corresponding effective intervention strategies can be designed and implemented to decrease the odd of suicidal ideation. Risk factors are defined as characteristics, situations or circumstances that elevated the odds of occurrence of health or mental health problems. In contrast, the protective factors may mitigate the odd occurrence of health or mental health problems (Whitaker et al., 2016). A systematic review on international research literature regarding factors that associated with LBGT suicidal ideation was needed to summarize the current knowledge and finding the gap for future research. This study undertake a systematic review of the international research literature on factors or causes that associated with suicidal thought or suicidal behavior on LGBT sexual minority group in order to summarize current finding and finding research gap for future study.

Method

Electronic search was conducted in October 2016 of the database SCOPUS for the years 2006 - 2016. The terms "suicidal thought" and "suicidal ideation" was set as keywords combine with "gay" or "LGBT" as well as "factor?" or "cause?" in the advance search in the SCOPUS database. The references identified through the search were screened with its abstract as reference based on four inclusion criteria: (1) empirical study; (2) the title had either "suicidal thought" or "suicidal ideation" keywords; (3) the respondents were either lesbian, gay, bisexual men or women, or transgender (LGBT); (4) reports which were published in a journal, or were in press. Case study, systematic review, meta-analysis, letters, dissertation were excluded in this study.

The overall quality of the survey studies was identified by using some questions which were modified from systematic review by Platt et al. (2010) on Table 1. Score 1 indicated higher quality than score 0 (refer to Table 1). The analysis of quality and summary of 10 studies are tabulated on Table 2.

Table 1

Quality rating scale

No.	Criteria	Score
1	Aim	
	The aim of the study in relation to the correlation of factors associated with	1
	LGBT(either one or all) is clearly stated.	
	The aim of the study in relation to the correlation of factors associated with	0
	LGBT(either one or all) is clearly stated.	
2	Information on response rate	
	The response rate is stated and more than 60%.	1
	The response rate is not stated or is less than 60%.	0
3	Sample demographic	
	The sample is clearly stated its age range.	1
	The sample is not clearly stated its age range.	0
4	Statistical comparison	
	The study makes statistical comparison with heterosexual group.	1
	The study does not make statistical comparison with heterosexual group.	0
5	Statistical correlation of factor to suicidal ideation or suicidal thought	

	The study makes statistical correlation of factor(s) with suicidal ideation or suicidal thought.	1
	The study does not make statistical correlation of factor(s) with suicidal ideation or suicidal thought.	0
6	Limitations of the methodology	
	The authors of the study stated their research methodology's limitations.	1
	The authors of the study did not state their research methodology's limitations.	0
7	Number of items in measure for factors associated with suicidal ideation	
	More than one item is used to measure each factors of suicidal ideation	1
	Only one item is used to measure each factors of suicidal ideation	0
8	Number of items in measure of suicidal ideation	
	More than one item is used to measure suicidal ideation.	1
	Only than one item is used to measure suicidal ideation.	0

Result

A total of 49 journals' abstract was screened carefully, journals in which it's finding or aim was unrelated with the factors and causes of suicidal thought and ideation among LGBT were eliminated. There were 16 journals that met inclusion criteria. However, only 10 journals were subscripted by University Putra Malaysia (UPM) and able to assess its full PDF (refer to Figure 1)

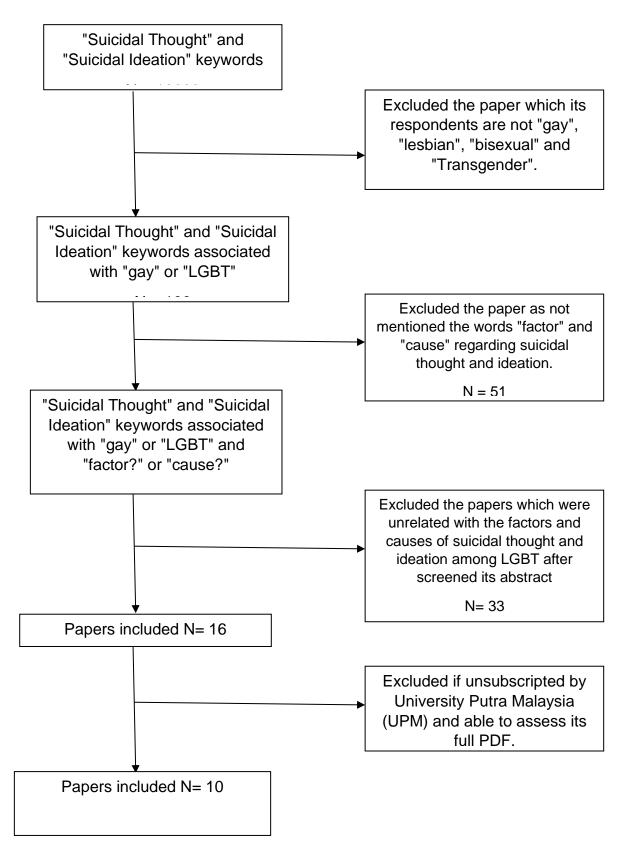


Figure 1. Flow chart of systematic review process

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Table 2

Prevalence and factors associated with Suicidal Ideation among LGBT

Authors and locatio n	Responden ts & Setting		Sexual Minority Group	Prevalence	Factors contributed to Suicidal ideation / thought	Limitation	Quality
Ybarrra et al., 2015 (US)	Youth aged from 13-18 years	5542	LGB	sexual minority group (LGBQ=31%, Bisexual=39%, unsure sex=24%) was higher	non-victimized youth. (OR=5.61; 95% Cl, 4.11, 7.54).	measure of suicidal ideation is suboptimal. - Besides recruited respondents through some organization, researcher	8
Arnarss on et al., 2015	Grade 10 Icelandic adolescents aged 15-16 years old	3813	LGB	-LGB were 5-6 times reported suicidal ideation compare to non-LGB.	- Among few variables eg. family conflict and rejection, drug and alcohol abuse and depression, bullying was the significant risk factor identified to be associated with suicidal ideation and suicide in LGB	respondents is too few (119 out	7

(Iceland)			attempted suicide while female LGB is just 6 times more	- Even it was not significant, but easy communicate with parents and friends was associated with lower odd of suicide ideation		
Eisenbe Grade 9th rg et al., & 12th 2006 (-) students	21927 L	.GB	had more suicidal ideation than non- GLB male (34.3%).	Family connectedness (OR=.52 for males, OR=.53 for females), school safety (OR=.83 for males & females) , adult caring (OR=.92 for males, OR=.82 for females) were significantly protective factors to suicidal thought and attempts.	represent vast racial and ethnic diversity	7

Baiocco et al., 2014 (Spain & Italy)	316gaymen(183fromItaly;133fromSpain)&228lesbianwomen(152(152fromItaly;76from Spain)	544	Gay & Lesbian	level (highest in Spanish Gay) of internalized sexual stigma (ISS) which is represented by identity, sexuality and social discomfort than lesbian. Gay: Sexuality (M=1.32, SD=.69), Identity (M=1.87,	 (RI>ISS>Repulsion by life) Spanish: (0.07; t=2.77,p<.01) Italian : (0.06; t=2.31,p<.05) Victimization which increased the ISS degree is connected with suicidal ideation in Spanish but not in Italian. (Victimization> ISS> Repulsion by life: 0.03; t=2.06; p<.05 	other sexual minority group eg. transgender and bisexual - Unable to generalize to suburban areas of Italy & Spain - limited variables
				Identity (M=1.45,		
Liu & Mustan	Youth aged 16-20 years	246	LGBT	-	Low social support (p=0.02), victimization (p=0.03), impulsivity (p=0.01) and attempted	

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suicide history (p=0.05) were factors that

2012 (US)				increased the risk of suicidal ideation.	 Small sample size is hard to detect the small effects' significance. Investigated the LGBT as whole group rather than examined separately. 	
Hatzen 8 buehler jurisdiction et al., s youths 2014 (US)	55599	LGB	reported significantly for Lesbian & Gay (odds ratio [OR]=3.28; 95% confidence interval [CI]=2.40, 4,47), Bisexual ([OR]=4.52; 95%, [CI]=3.79, 5.40) & those who were	 supportive school climates. supportive school climates refer to following: school have safe space and gay-straight alliance for LGBTQ youths have health related curricula eg. HIV which beneficial to LGBTQ prevent the harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity training that contributed to supportive environment for LGBTQ were introduced to staff to participate make easy accessible to school property 	was finding on 2007, but study of relationship between school climate with LGB is on 2010.	6

Silenzio , et al., 2007 (-)	Youth aged 18-26years old	14322	LGB	rate of suicidal ideation (762		-	6
Whitak er et al, 2016 (US)	All San Francisco High School 9th & 11th grade students	356	LGB	reported as LGB while	ideation (odds ratio = .59, p=.005) - Caring relationships with adults and feeling safe at school did not had negative significance relationship with suicidal ideation.	 measure of sexual orientation varied with different researcher based on attraction, behavior, identity. identify sexual identity with 1 item only. 	5
Stone et al., 2014 (US)	Youth	46552 (merg ed data from 2001- 2009)	Sexual Minority Youth	Sexual Minority Youth (SMY) had higher Suicide ideation compared to non-SMYs	Being threatened with a weapon, physical dating violence, hopelessness& hard drug use were risk factors that associated with suicidal ideation among female SMY. - Hopelessness, marijuana use, sexual violence were associated with suicidal ideation among male SMY. - Same sex contact and both sex contact had higher odds of suicidal ideation compared with opposite-sex contact.	-	4

	Community	1530	Gay		Highest cause was romantic gay relationship -	2
al.,	(gay bars in			ideation before and	•	
2015	9 large			12.55% attempted	2nd higher cause was self-rejection of	
(China)	cities)			suicide at least once.	homosexuality 30.77%	
					Followed by below in order	
					 difficulty find gay partner (16.92%) 	
					- pressure from being pushed to get married	
					(14.87%)	
					- Difficulty getting used to a marriage life	
					(11.79%)	
					- sudden emotional stress from unexpected	
			events (11.54%)			
					- lack of legislation of same sex marriage	
					(11.31%)	
					- the less influential cause disclosure of	
					homosexuality (7.69%)	

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Discussion

There are two aspects will be discussed in this systematic review: prevalence of LGBT to suicidal ideation and factors that associated with suicidal ideation. Three major factors were found in these 10 journals and will be discussed in the following subtopics.

Prevalence of LGBT to Suicidal Ideation

LGBT group had reported increased odd of suicidal ideation compared with non-LGBT group in most of the studies (Ybarrra, et. al., 2015; Hatzenbuehler et. al., 2014; Silenzio, et al., 2007; Arnarsson et al., 2015; Stone, et al., 2014). For few studies that did not compare the LGBT group with heterosexual group, the finding still reported increased odd of suicidal ideation at the range of 20-30% out of LGB sample from the result by Chen et al. (2015) in China and Whitaker et. al. (2016) in the US. The result from Stone et al. (2004) was even higher which was more than half of LGB students reported suicidal thought. This prevalence suggested that LGBT group or sexual minority group would have more tendency of suicidal thought even across different countries (e.g., US, Iceland, Italy, China and Spain).

Questions arised whether gay or lesbians have difference on suicidal ideation and suicidal attempt, and Arnarsson et al. (2015) reported that percentage of gay attempted suicide for five times or more was higher than lesbian while no difference was exist with more frequent suicide ideation. Sexual orientation had effect on the suicidal thought but it was still considered small portion contributed to suicidal ideation. Eisenberg et al. (2006) suggested the most powerful explanatory of suicidal thought was the environment and personal perception on their sexual orientation. Hence it was crucial to further explain the risk factor and protective factor that lead to suicidal thought.

Factors Associated with Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation is a complex issue that composed of multiple factors. However, researchers still attempted to explain this issue by looking into associated risk factors and protective factors. Risk factors accelerated the odd of suicidal ideation while protective factors decreased the potential of suicidal ideation. From 10 studies reviewed, factors associated with suicidal ideation can be summarized. The most influential risk factor for suicidal ideation was victimization and few studies had reported its impact. On the other hand, the protective factors that were suggested by few researchers simultaneously are school climate and family connectedness. Religious acceptance will be discussed too.

Victimization

There were few studies that reported victimization have significance positive relationship with suicidal ideation such as Ybarrra et. al. (2015), Baiocco et al. (2014), Liu and Mustanski (2012), and Arnarsson et al. (2015). These studies are described below:

Ybarrra, et. al. (2015) investigated the extend of bullying and peer harassment on suicidal ideation among LGB youth compared to non-LGB youth. 5542 LGB was targeted in US and result reported that victimization of bullying and peer harassment were more likely reported suicidal ideation than non-victimized youth. In this study, bisexual respondents were concerned as finding indicated bisexual respondents who were victim of bullying were reported suicidal ideation twice as their similar peers. Ybarra et al. attributed this to lack of greater community connection in bisexual contrast to gay and lesbian. Another issue discussed was LGB had prolonged victimization and more consistently compared to others.

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Baiocco, et al. (2014) aimed to study the role of internalized sexual stigma (ISS) in suicidal ideation among Spanish and Italian lesbian and gay young adults. 316 gay men (183 from Italy; 133 from Spain) & 228 lesbian women (152 from Italy; 76 from Spain) were samples of this study and findings indicated ISS was a potential moderator of the effect of self-disclosure of sexual orientation, religious involvement and history of victimization. Result showed the direct effect of past experience of victimization at school to increase the odd of suicidal ideation in Spanish but not in Italian. Baiocco attributed this difference to educational campaigns and multicultural diversity on psychological processes.

Liu and Mustanski (2012) targeted their study on 246 LGBT who aged between 16-20 years old to identify the associated risk factors with suicidal ideation and self-harm behavior in US. Victimization of LGBT was risk factor for both suicidal ideation and self-harm. However, social support and impulsivity predicted the suicidal ideation while self-harm was associated with sensation-seeking, gender and gender nonconformity. This finding indicated that suicidal ideation and self-harm were related but relatively difference.

Arnarsson et al. (2015) conducted their research on 3813 LGB adolescents aged between 15-16 years old to investigated the risk factors and protective factors associated with suicidal ideation. Out of few variables examined, bullying was significantly correlated with suicidal ideation among LGB adolescents.

In summary, victimization was a risk factor to suicidal ideation that cannot be underestimated among LGBT. Even though some risk factors such as depression, family conflict and rejection, alcohol and drug use were risk factors that investigated by researchers, these factors did not show statistically significance relationship with suicidal ideation except victimization (Arnarsson et al., 2015; Ybarrra, et al., 2015).

School Climate

School climate acts as a protective factor that decreased the odd of suicidal ideation. School climate referred to service, program, facilities that were equipped for LGBTQ personnel as suggested by Hatzenbuehler et. al, (2014). This included school had safe space and gay-straight alliance for LGBTQ youths, provided health related curricula eg. HIV, prevented the harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, provided training that contributed to a supportive environment for LGBTQ to staff as well as made easy accessible to school property for LGBTQ regarding health & other services. Hatzenbuehler et. al, (2014) targeted 55599 youth from 8 jurisdictions. Result indicated that the LGBTQ from more supportive school climate had significantly reported less suicidal ideation compared to those from less supportive school climate. Although suicidal plan and attempt was less reported associated with supportive school climate but it is not statistically significant.

There were few studies used different terms but have similarity with school climate as protective factor for suicidal ideation. Eisenberg et al. (2006) had found that the school safety have significant correlation with reduced the odd of suicidal ideation. This finding indicated the LGB perceived school is a safe place.

Another study that related to school climate is from Arnarsson et al. (2015) who had found that liking school were protective factors for suicidal ideation although it did not mitigate the effect of sexual activity and LGB attraction. School climate is perceived as a key developmental context for sexual minority adolescents by Hatzenbuehler et. al. (2014). LGBT felt supportive from school when school provided and designed curricula and program

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purposely for them. Besides, LGBT felt safe in school which meant they were free from bullying and peer harassment. This is crucial protective factor for suicidal ideation since adolescents valued peers more than parents during their developmental stage.

Family Connectedness and Religious Acceptance

LGBT conceal their actual sexual orientation to avoid discrimination from society as well as their family and peers. Eisenberg et al. (2006) had found that the family connectedness is one of the protective factor that significant associated with suicidal ideation. Eisenberg et al. (2006) did not further elaborate the relatedness of family connectedness with suicidal ideation. From items under this family connectedness, perhaps LGBT obtained love from family in terms of care, shared their problems and being respected of their privacy had psychological balance and reduce the odd of suicidal ideation. Arnarsson et al. (2015) had similar result that easy communication with parents decreased the odd of suicidal ideation. On the other hand, Baiocco, et al. (2014) had found that the mediating effect of concealment of sexual orientation to suicidal ideation. This self-disclosure had no direct relationship with suicidal ideation but act as mediated effect by internalized sexual stigma (ISS) on suicidal ideation. Besides, Baiocco, et al. (2014) also concerned the impact of religious involvement in suicidal ideation. Religious involvement (RI) mediated by ISS can lead to suicidal ideation due to negative voices from religious organization about gay and lesbian for both Spanish & Italian. However, this concealment of sexual orientation and religious involvement were just a mild effect towards suicidal ideation.

Implication For Future Research

There is a lack of research on suicidal ideation on LGBT especially in Malaysia context. However, as agreed with McDaniel et al. (2001), it is difficult to conduct study on LGBT people as the population is unknown. Even finding respondents is a challenging process. This is because LGBT refers to sexual orientation that its characteristics can be concealed from others. There are few methods that can be referred to outreach the LGBT group. Chen et al. (2015) approach gay bars in China and by snowball sampling approach to recruit more respondents. Snowball sampling approach is a recruiting process by upper layer of potential respondents to lower layer from their acquaintances. Another method of identifying respondents was through data gained from some organization as done by Ybarrra et. al. (2015). However, most of the studies use self-report methods (Whitaker et. al, 2016); Hatzenbuehler et. al, 2014; Liu & Mustanski, 2012).

Most of the studies were focus on adolescent which believed is the stage of finding their gender identity and this ambiguity easily lead to suicidal ideation if they realized they maybe one of the sexual minority group. Internationally especially the US had vast studies on adolescents but less was carried up on community. Perhaps the future research can focus on the aged group ranging from 30-60. However, it is worth to conduct study on adolescents in Malaysia context since there is a lack of empirical study in this field. It would be interesting to conduct LGBT research in Malaysia as homosexual was not accepted legally and religions such as Islam and Christianity may not accept homosexual in their religious teaching. The factors such as victimization, school climate, family connectedness and religious acceptance can be studied in depth in Malaysia context.

Most of the research agreed on their limitation of just focusing on sexual identity to identify sexual orientation, Sexual orientation can be determined by sexual identity (gay, lesbian,

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bisexual), sexual behavior (sexual contact with opposite, same or both sexes) and sexual attraction (Stone et al, 2014). A more detailed investigation to identify sexual orientation is needed for future research.

Conclusion

Sexual orientation is not an only reason to contribute to suicidal ideation but had statistically proved to have elevated risk. Discrimination and bullying that confronted by the sexual minority group is an influential risk factor towards suicidal ideation. Teachers play an important role in school to forbid the occurrence of victimization on LGBT through education. Besides, creating a positive school climate is important for LGBT have a safe alliance and be able to seek help from school facilities and services. Family connectedness is another protective factor for suicidal ideation that cannot be overlooked.. With social support from family, peers, school, LGBT may lead a healthy psychological state rather than suicidal thought.

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