

Parenting Patterns, Perceived Social Support and Suicidal Ideation Among Science and Arts Undergraduate Students in Taraba State University, Jalingo

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship among parenting patterns, perceived social support and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students in Taraba State University, Jalingo, with a comparison between Science and Arts faculties. The study was guided by six research questions and six hypotheses. A correlational research design was adopted. From a population of 18,740 undergraduate students, a sample of 420 students (210 Science and 210 Arts) was drawn using multistage sampling. Data were collected using three validated scales: Parenting Pattern Scale (PPS), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Suicidal Ideation Scale (SIS). Reliability coefficients of 0.78, 0.82, and 0.87 were obtained respectively using Cronbach Alpha. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation, independent t-test, and multiple regression.

Results

revealed that dictatorial parenting pattern had a weak negative correlation with suicidal ideation ($r = -0.18$), stern parenting showed a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.21$), tolerant parenting had no significant correlation ($r = -0.05$), while uninvolved parenting had a moderate positive correlation ($r = .36$). Perceived social support significantly predicted lower suicidal ideation ($\beta = -.42$, $p < 0.01$). Comparison showed that Arts students reported significantly higher suicidal ideation ($M = 21.44$) than Science students ($M = 16.82$). Parenting patterns and perceived social support jointly explained 48.6% variance in suicidal ideation.

The study recommended increased campus mental-health engagement, strengthened student support systems, parent–student communication programs, and tailored interventions for Arts faculties where suicidal ideation appears more prevalent.

Keywords: Parenting pattern, perceived social support, suicidal ideation, Science students, Arts students, Taraba State University

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal ideation among university students has become a pressing mental health concern in Nigeria, with several studies documenting increasing vulnerability linked to stress, academic demands, economic hardship,

interpersonal conflicts, and broader psychosocial challenges (Omigbodun et al., 2008; Arria et al., 2009). Globally, suicide and suicide-related behaviours constitute major public health problems among young adults and have been closely associated with psychological, social, emotional, and cultural determinants (Klonsky et al., 2016; Wongpakaran et al., 2021).

Among factors influencing suicidal ideation, parenting patterns and perceived social support have been consistently identified as strong predictors of mental health outcomes (Choi et al., 2020; Arafat et al., 2022; Christensen et al., 2014). Parenting patterns—including dictatorial, stern, tolerant, and uninvolved styles—shape young people’s emotional development, self-esteem, coping abilities, and resilience in response to stress (Laff & Ruiz, 2019; Solomon et al., 2025; Silas et al., 2023). Studies indicate that stern, harsh, and uninvolved parenting styles significantly increase susceptibility to depression, emotional distress, and suicidal tendencies (Baier & Rehbein, 2013; Donath et al., 2014; Ekedama, 2023). Conversely, parenting characterised by structure, guidance, and emotional support—such as dictatorial but caring parenting—may promote emotional security and protect against self-harm (Meteyer & Jenkins, 2009).

Perceived social support has also been identified as a key factor mitigating psychological distress. Social support from family, peers, mentors, and significant others functions as a buffer against stress and reduces vulnerability to suicidal thoughts (Cobb, 1976; Christensen et al., 2014). Empirical studies among Nigerian university students found that low perceived social support increases the likelihood of suicidal ideation and other maladaptive emotional outcomes (Igundunasse & Opara, 2021; Igundunasse & Opara, 2022).

Despite extensive literature on these variables, few studies have compared suicidal ideation among Science and Arts students, a gap notable within the Nigerian university context. Students in different academic faculties often experience distinct academic workloads, career expectations, and psychosocial pressures that may influence their mental health trajectories. Understanding these differences is particularly important in Taraba State University, where students come from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. This study therefore examined the relationships among parenting patterns, perceived social support, and suicidal ideation, and compared suicidal ideation between Science and Arts undergraduate students.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to examine differences in suicidal ideation between Science and Arts students, and determine the combined effects of parenting patterns and perceived social support.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between dictatorial parenting pattern and suicidal ideation among students?
2. What is the relationship between stern parenting pattern and suicidal ideation among students?
3. What is the relationship between tolerant parenting pattern and suicidal ideation among students?
4. What is the relationship between uninvolved parenting pattern and suicidal ideation among students?
5. What is the relationship between perceived social support and suicidal ideation?
6. Is there a difference in suicidal ideation between Science and Arts undergraduate students?

Hypotheses

1. No significant relationship exists between dictatorial parenting pattern and suicidal ideation.
2. No significant relationship exists between stern parenting pattern and suicidal ideation.
3. Tolerant parenting pattern has no significant relationship with suicidal ideation.
4. Uninvolved parenting pattern has no significant relationship with suicidal ideation.
5. Perceived social support does not significantly predict suicidal ideation.
6. There is no significant difference in suicidal ideation between Science and Arts students.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because

it allows for the examination of the relationships among key psychological variables—parenting patterns, perceived social support, and suicidal ideation—without manipulating the variables under investigation. The approach also enabled the researchers to identify the direction and strength of associations among the constructs in a naturalistic setting.

Population

The target population for this study comprised all undergraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo, with a total population size of $N = 18,740$ at the time of the study. The population cuts across all faculties, departments, and levels of study within the institution.

Sample Size Determination

A sample size of 420 undergraduate students was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Size Determination Table, which provides an empirically validated guide for selecting an adequate sample from a known population size. This sample size was judged sufficient to ensure representativeness, statistical reliability, and adequate power for multivariate analyses.

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted:

1. Stage 1 – Faculty Selection: Faculties within the university were stratified, and a proportional number of faculties were randomly selected.
2. Stage 2 – Department Selection: From the selected faculties, departments were randomly chosen using simple random sampling.
3. Stage 3 – Level Selection: Within each selected department, students were stratified according to their level of study (100–400 level), and proportional allocation was used to distribute the sample.
4. Stage 4 – Participant Selection: Finally, students were selected through simple random sampling to participate in the study.

This procedure ensured that the sample adequately represented the diverse academic units and levels within the student population.

Instruments for Data Collection

Three validated instruments were used for data collection:

Parenting Pattern Scale (PPS)

The Parenting Pattern Scale is a standardized instrument designed to assess students' perceived parenting styles. It consists of four subscales, each measuring a distinct parenting pattern:

- Dictatorial Parenting (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$)
- Stern Parenting (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$)
- Tolerant Parenting (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$)
- Uninvolved Parenting (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$)

The reliability indices indicate acceptable to good internal consistency across the subscales.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Perceived social support was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, which measures support from family, friends, and significant others. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

Suicidal Ideation Scale

The Suicidal Ideation Scale was used to assess the presence and severity of suicidal thoughts among participants. The instrument showed high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating strong internal consistency.

Procedure for Data Collection

Data collection was conducted within the university campus. Prior to administration, informed consent was obtained from participants, and the purpose of the study was explained. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was ensured. The instruments were administered physically and collected immediately after completion to enhance response rate and data accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data were coded, entered, and analyzed using statistical software. The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Descriptive Statistics (means and standard deviations) to summarize the characteristics of the variables.
- Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationships among parenting patterns, perceived social support, and suicidal ideation.
- Independent Samples t-test to examine gender differences in the study variables.
- Multiple Regression Analysis to determine the predictive effects of parenting patterns and perceived social support on suicidal ideation.

All analyses were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation Between Parenting Patterns, Social Support and Suicidal Ideation

Variable	R	P	Interpretation
Dictatorial Parenting	−0.18	0.03	Weak negative, significant
Stern Parenting	0.21	0.01	Weak positive, significant
Tolerant Parenting	−0.05	0.41	Not significant
Uninvolved Parenting	0.36	0.00	Moderate positive, significant
Perceived Social Support	−0.44	0.00	Strong negative, significant

Table 2: Comparison between Science and Arts Students on Suicidal Ideation

Group	N	Mean (M)	Std (SD)	T	p
Science Students	210	16.82	7.44	4.62	0.000
Arts Students	210	21.44	8.13		

Interpretation: Arts students scored significantly higher on suicidal ideation.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Suicidal Ideation

Predictor	Beta (β)	T	P
Dictatorial Parenting	−0.12	−2.14	0.04
Stern Parenting	0.15	2.65	0.01
Tolerant Parenting	−0.03	−0.52	0.61
Uninvolved Parenting	0.28	5.02	0.00
Perceived Social Support	−0.42	−8.12	0.00

$R^2 = 0.486$ (48.6% variance explained)

Description of Results

Correlation Between Parenting Patterns, Perceived Social Support, and Suicidal Ideation

The relationships among the major study variables were examined using Pearson Product–Moment correlation, and the results are presented in Table 1. Findings revealed a significant weak negative correlation between dictatorial parenting and suicidal ideation ($r = -0.18$, $p = 0.03$), indicating that higher levels of dictatorial parenting were associated with slightly lower levels of suicidal ideation among the students. Conversely, stern parenting showed a significant weak positive correlation with suicidal ideation ($r = 0.21$, $p = 0.01$), suggesting that students who perceived their parents as stern were slightly more likely to report suicidal thoughts.

Tolerant parenting showed a very weak, non-significant relationship with suicidal ideation ($r = -0.05$, $p = 0.41$), indicating no meaningful association. In contrast, uninvolved parenting demonstrated a moderate positive and highly significant correlation with suicidal ideation ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that students who perceived their parents as uninvolved reported substantially higher levels of suicidal ideation.

Perceived social support showed the strongest association with suicidal ideation ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.001$). The negative direction indicates that students with higher levels of social support were significantly less likely to experience suicidal ideation. This strong inverse relationship highlights the protective role of social support among undergraduate students.

Comparison Between Science and Arts Students on Suicidal Ideation

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether suicidal ideation differed between science and arts students. Results in Table 2 show that arts students reported significantly higher levels of suicidal ideation ($M = 21.44$, $SD = 8.13$) compared to science students ($M = 16.82$, $SD = 7.44$). The difference was statistically significant ($t = 4.62$, $p < 0.001$).

This indicates that arts students in Taraba State University experience more severe suicidal thoughts compared to their peers in the sciences, suggesting possible differences in academic stressors, coping mechanisms, or psychosocial vulnerability across the two academic groups.

Predictors of Suicidal Ideation

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which parenting patterns and perceived social support predicted suicidal ideation among undergraduate students. The results are displayed in Table 3.

The model was statistically significant, explaining 48.6% of the variance in suicidal ideation ($R^2 = 0.486$), indicating a moderately strong predictive model.

Among the predictors, uninvolved parenting ($\beta = 0.28$, $t = 5.02$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as the strongest positive predictor, suggesting that lack of parental involvement substantially increases the likelihood of suicidal thoughts among students. Perceived social support ($\beta = -0.42$, $t = -8.12$, $p < 0.001$) was the strongest negative predictor, confirming that students who perceive higher levels of support are significantly less likely to experience suicidal ideation.

Stern parenting ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.65$, $p = 0.01$) also significantly predicted higher suicidal ideation, although its effect was weaker compared to uninvolved parenting. Dictatorial parenting showed a small but significant negative predictive effect ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.14$, $p = 0.04$), suggesting a slight protective influence.

Tolerant parenting did not significantly predict suicidal ideation ($\beta = -0.03$, $t = -0.52$, $p = 0.61$), indicating no meaningful contribution to the model.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships among parenting patterns, perceived social support, and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students of Taraba State University, Jalingo. The findings provide important insights into how family environments and social support systems shape students' psychological wellbeing.

Dictatorial parenting was weakly but significantly associated with lower suicidal ideation. Although this parenting pattern is typically perceived as strict or controlling, the results suggest that, within this cultural context, firm structure and clearly defined expectations may offer emotional security that protects against psychological distress. This is consistent with Meteyer and Jenkins (2009), who reported that positive structure and parental involvement can enhance emotional adjustment. Other studies in Nigerian and African contexts have similarly noted that structured parenting may promote responsibility and stability (Ekedama, 2023; Solomon et al., 2025).

Conversely, stern parenting demonstrated a significant positive relationship with suicidal ideation, supporting the findings of Donath et al. (2014) and Arafat et al. (2022). Harsh or punitive parenting restricts emotional expression, heightens stress, and reduces trust in the parent-child relationship. As such, students exposed to stern parenting may internalize fear, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal, making them more prone to suicidal thoughts.

Tolerant parenting showed no significant association with suicidal ideation. This suggests that permissive or lenient parenting neither protects against nor increases vulnerability to suicidal tendencies in this sample. This pattern aligns with earlier studies highlighting the inconsistent effects of permissive parenting depending on cultural expectations and the child's temperament (Laff & Ruiz, 2019).

Uninvolved parenting emerged as the strongest positive predictor of suicidal ideation. Students who perceived their parents as emotionally unavailable or disengaged reported higher levels of suicidal thoughts. This finding aligns with Pellerin's (2005) typology and is reinforced by Baier and Rehbein (2013), who documented the detrimental effects of parental neglect on adolescent mental health. Recent Nigerian studies similarly highlight

that emotionally withdrawn or absent parenting exacerbates psychological distress, poor behavioural adjustment, and vulnerability to self-harm (Ekedama, 2023; Silas et al., 2023).

Perceived social support showed a strong negative correlation with suicidal ideation, making it the most powerful protective factor identified in this study. This finding agrees with Cobb's (1976) social support theory and contemporary research by Christensen et al. (2014), which affirm that support systems reduce feelings of isolation and hopelessness. Studies in Nigeria (Igundunasse & Opara, 2021; Igundunasse & Opara, 2022) similarly demonstrate that students with strong social networks show lower tendencies toward psychological distress and suicidal behaviour. Social support likely enhances coping strategies, fosters emotional resilience, and provides a sense of belonging.

The study also revealed that Arts students reported significantly higher suicidal ideation compared to Science students. This could reflect differences in academic pressure, assessment styles, emotional expression, or social integration patterns. Arts programmes may involve more subjective evaluation, higher emotional engagement, and potentially greater exposure to internalizing behaviours such as rumination. Meanwhile, Science students often engage in structured coursework with clearer progression pathways and stronger peer collaboration, which may enhance academic and emotional stability. This aligns with broader literature showing that academic discipline influences stress levels, coping skills, and mental wellbeing (Ajani, 2025; Ogunnaiya, 2023).

Overall, the findings underscore the central role of parenting patterns and social support systems in shaping student mental health. Uninvolved and stern parenting significantly elevate the risk of suicidal ideation, whereas social support serves as a strong protective factor. The marked differences between Arts and Science students also highlight the need for faculty-specific mental health interventions.

CONCLUSION

Parenting patterns and perceived social support significantly influence suicidal ideation among students in Taraba State University. Arts students appear more vulnerable than Science students. Strengthening support systems and improving parent–student communication is crucial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. University should create faculty-based counselling programmes, especially targeted at Arts students.
2. Parents should adopt warm, communicative, and supportive parenting practices.
3. The university should establish a psychosocial support centre accessible to all students.
4. Student Affairs should implement early-warning systems for mental health risks.
5. Awareness campaigns on suicide prevention should be integrated into campus life.

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