

# Behind the School Walls: The Unseen Battle with Loneliness and Suicidal Ideation among Southeast Asian Adolescent

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## BACKGROUND

### 01 Suicide Frequency

Globally, **suicide claims a life every 45 seconds**, with loneliness contributing to approximately 10% of these cases.

### 02 The Most Common Place

A significant majority of suicides, approximately 77%, **occur in low to middle-income countries, including those in Southeast Asia**. Adolescents in this region face several challenges, such as socio-economic inequalities, aggressive and health-risk behavior, substance misuse, and poor mental health exacerbated by limited social connections leading to loneliness.

### 03 A Lurking of Attempted Suicide

It is of the utmost importance to address this complex, as feelings of loneliness have been linked to suicidal ideation. **If left untreated, it can result in a greater danger of suicidal behavior: suicide attempt.**

### 04 Noticeable Gap in Research

Despite these challenges, **research about the experience of Southeast Asia adolescents is scarce**. Understanding the causes of loneliness and suicidal ideation in this demographic is crucial to creating effective interventions and support systems.

## OBJECTIVES

This study aims to investigate the **prevalence of and factors influencing feelings of loneliness and suicidal ideation** among adolescents in Southeast Asian countries, and **how these feelings correlate with suicide plans and attempts**.

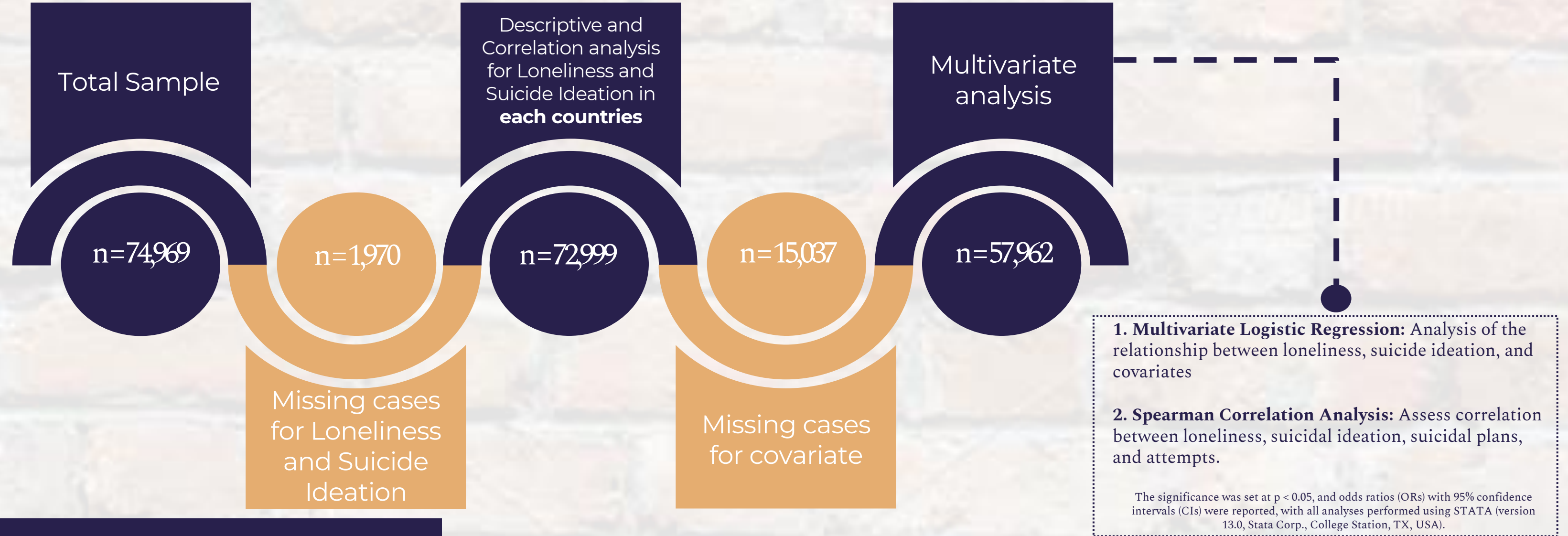
## METHODS

- Secondary analysis from **World Health Organization's (WHO) Global School Health Survey (GSHS)** within 2012-2016 from **ten Southeast Asian countries**.

Table 1. Countries Surveyed

Countries	Survey Year	Response Rate	Total Sample	Descriptive Analysis	Multivariate Analysis
Brunei (BN)	2014	65%	2,599	2,563	2,016
Indonesia (ID)	2015	94%	11,142	10,899	9,723
Cambodia (KH)	2013	85%	3,806	3,717	-
Laos (LA)	2015	70%	3,683	3,662	3,355
Myanmar (MM)	2016	86%	2,838	2,812	2,335
Thailand (TH)	2015	89%	5,894	5,612	4,800
Timor Leste (TL)	2015	79%	7,408	6,938	4,814
Vietnam (VN)	2013	96%	3,331	3,238	-
Malaysia (MY)	2012	89%	25,507	25,151	23,728
Philippines (PH)	2015	79%	8,761	8,407	6,895
Overall			74,969	72,999	57,962

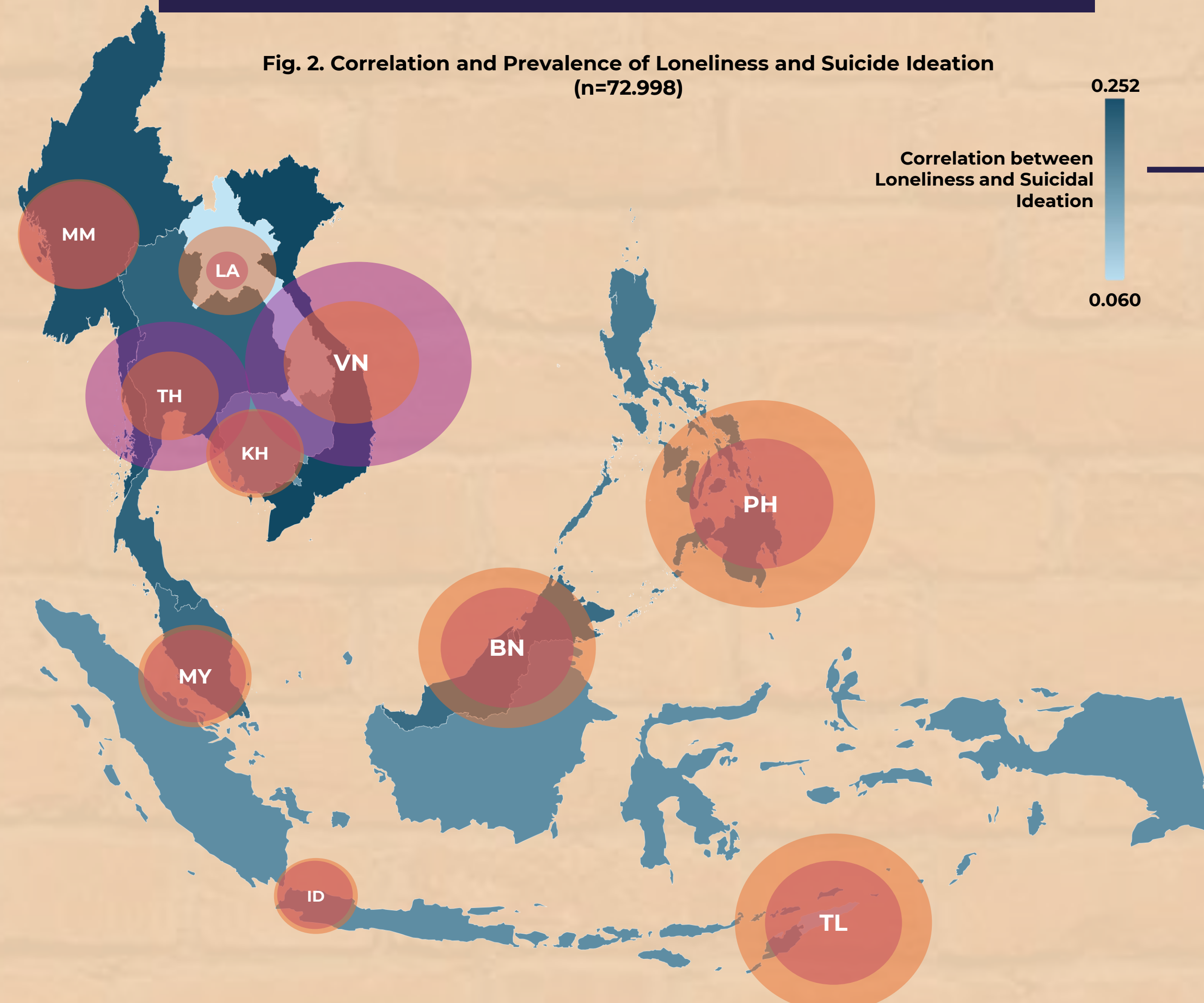
Fig. 1. Samples Analysed



1. **Multivariate Logistic Regression:** Analysis of the relationship between loneliness, suicide ideation, and covariates  
 2. **Spearman Correlation Analysis:** Assess correlation between loneliness, suicidal ideation, suicidal plans, and attempts.  
The significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ , and odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported, with all analyses performed using STATA version 13.0, Stata Corp., College Station, TX, USA.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 2. Correlation and Prevalence of Loneliness and Suicide Ideation (n=72,998)



This study reveals varying prevalence rates of loneliness and suicidal ideation among adolescents in Southeast Asian countries. **Loneliness rates range from 16.5% in Philippines to 6.1% in Indonesia, while suicidal ideation rates vary from 16.2% in Vietnam to 3.0% in Laos**. Some countries have a higher prevalence of loneliness while others have a higher prevalence of suicide ideation. **These disparities highlight significant mental health challenges influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors.**

Loneliness and suicidal ideation in Southeast Asian teens vary. **Vietnam ( $r=0.252$ ), Brunei ( $0.216$ ), and Myanmar ( $0.214$ ) had the strongest correlation between loneliness and suicidal thoughts**. Laos ( $r=0.061$ ) and Timor Leste ( $r=0.060$ ) have the lowest loneliness-suicidal ideation correlations. **Different social support networks, mental health stigma, or other environmental factors may attenuate the effect of loneliness on suicide ideation.**

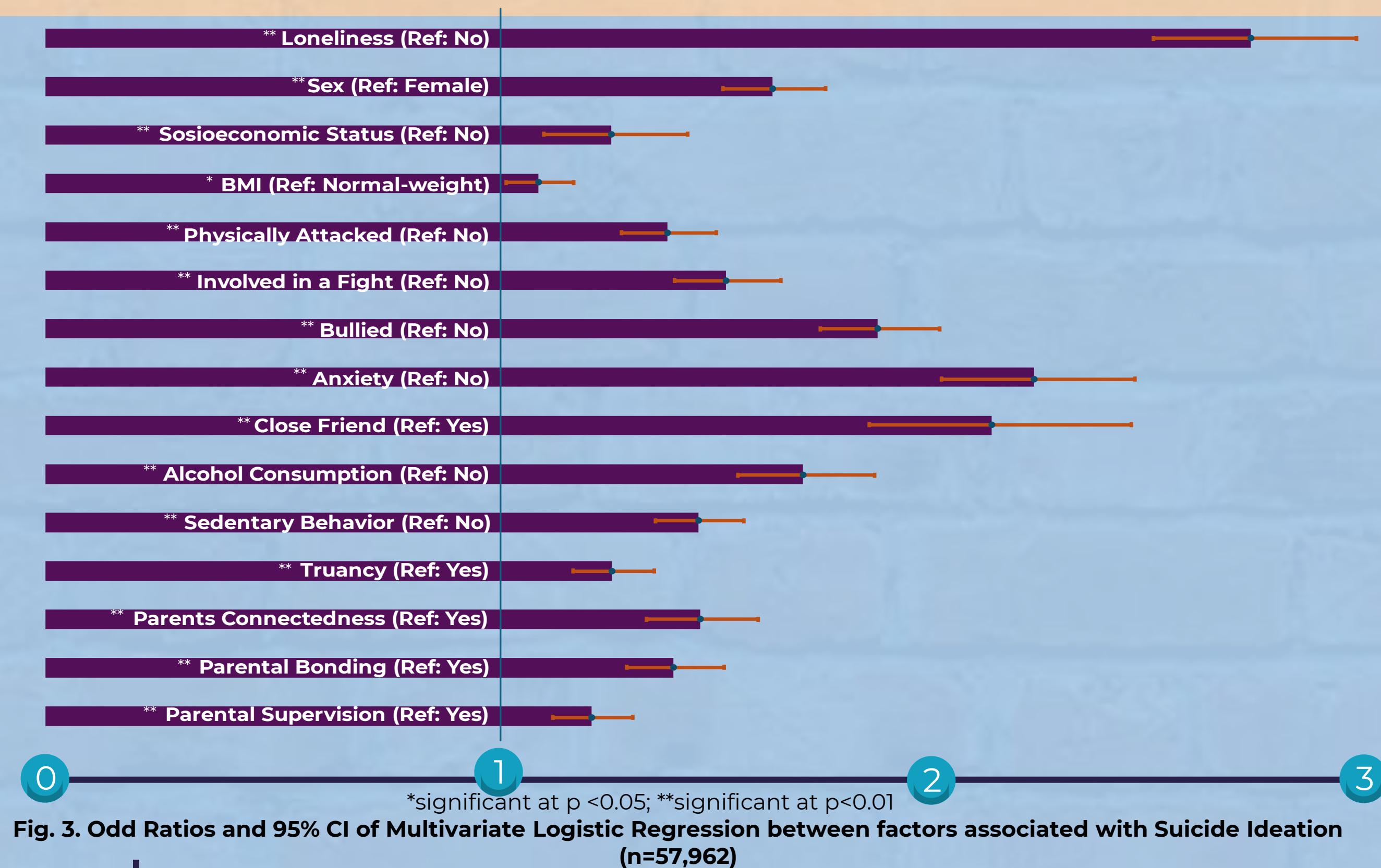


Fig. 3. Odds Ratios and 95% CI of Multivariate Logistic Regression between factors associated with Suicide Ideation (n=57,962)

The multivariate regression analysis demonstrates that **loneliness considerably increases adolescent suicide ideation**. Gender, socioeconomic status, BMI, hostility, conflict, bullying, anxiety, social isolation, substance use, sedentary habits, and truancy all contribute. Parental connectivity, bonding, and supervision reduce teenage suicide ideation, whereas their absence increases chances ratios. **These data demonstrate the complex interaction of individual, societal, and familial factors that should inform adolescent suicide prevention strategies.**



Fig. 4. Spearman Correlation among Factors Shows a Graded Correlation from Loneliness to Attempted Suicide (n=57,962)

The correlation among mental health factors in adolescents reveals that **loneliness correlates with suicidal ideation, suicide plans, and attempted suicide**. Suicidal ideation shows a stronger correlation between suicide plans and attempted suicide, while suicide plans exhibit the strongest correlation with attempted suicide, highlighting the urgency of early intervention to prevent the escalation of suicidal behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

Prevalence rates of loneliness and suicidal ideation among adolescents in Southeast Asia vary, highlighting **significant mental health challenges influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors**. Progressive correlations towards suicide attempts highlighted the **importance of early interventions that address not only individual psychological distress but also broader societal factors such as stigma, social support systems, and family dynamics.**

By addressing these multidimensional influences, policymakers and mental health professionals can develop more effective strategies to mitigate loneliness and prevent the escalation of suicidal behaviors among adolescents in Southeast Asia.



## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Datasets are available at <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/surveillance/systems-tools/global-school-based-student-health-survey> (accessed on August 1st 2024).

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