

Thwarted Belongingness and Burdensomeness as Moderators Between Entrapment and Suicide Ideation in College Students

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Introduction

College students are juggling stressors that often lead to mental health concerns including suicidality. The Integrated Motivational-Volitional (IMV) Model of Suicidal Behavior has established a 3-phase framework to describe the process of suicidality. Life factors and feelings of defeat lead to entrapment and suicidal ideation followed by suicidal ideation and behaviors, as influenced or intervened by moderating factors. The current study seeks to explore specifically how social motivational moderators (thwarted belongingness, burdensomeness) are currently moderating the relationship between entrapment and suicidal ideation in college students.

Methods

Participants

We used a subset of 65,355 participants ages 18–24 ($M = 20.50$, $SD = 1.73$) who completed all of the items of interest to the present study.

Procedures and Materials

The current study used archival data from the ACHA-NCHA III in Spring 2021. The survey is designed to evaluate college students across the United States regarding overall physical, mental, and emotional health and wellness, including questions measuring overall well-being, resilience, and suicidality. Items were pulled from the NCHA-ACHA III data to approximate for suicidal ideation, entrapment, thwarted belongingness, and burdensomeness. The relationship between entrapment and suicidal ideation was explored using correlational analysis. Thwarted belongingness and burdensomeness were tested as moderators using linear regression analysis with moderation effects. All analyses were conducted using RStudio and JASP. All raw scores were converted into z-scores.

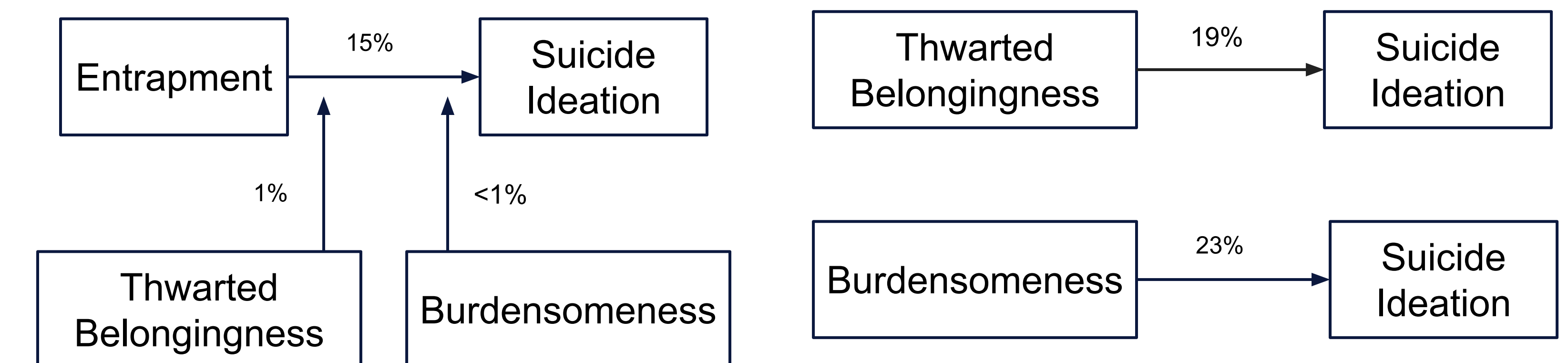
Hypotheses

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Hypothesis 1	Entrapment will be positively related to suicidal ideation in college students.
Hypothesis 2	Thwarted belongingness will moderate the relationship between entrapment and suicidal ideation in college students.
Hypothesis 3	Burdensomeness will moderate the relationship between entrapment and suicidal ideation in college students.

Results

Descriptive Statistics for Raw Scores

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	α
Suicidal Ideation	1.67	0.92	1.00	5.75	0.85
Entrapment	2.47	0.89	1.00	6.20	0.78
Thwarted Belongingness	1.91	0.62	1.00	3.00	0.81
Burdensomeness	2.45	1.03	1.00	6.33	0.70



Regression results indicated that the overall model significantly predicted suicidal ideation, $F(1, 65353) = 11489.85$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .15$. **Entrapment was a statistically significant predictor, $b = .40$, 95% CI = [0.40, 0.41], $p < .001$, accounting for 15% of the variance of suicidal ideation in college students.** The second model, consisting of entrapment and thwarted belongingness as predictors, explained 4% more of the variance in suicidal ideation, $F(1, 65352) = 7837.03$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .19$, $F\Delta = 3558.72$, $R^2\Delta = .04$, $p < .001$. The third model, in which the interaction term between entrapment and thwarted belongingness was added as a predictor, explained 1% more of the variance in suicidal ideation, $F(1, 65351) = 5448.06$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$, $F\Delta = 540.695$, $R^2\Delta = .01$, $p < .001$. **Thwarted belongingness did not moderate the relationship between entrapment and suicidal ideation, but accounted for 19% of the variance of suicidal ideation as a direct predictor.** The second model, consisting of entrapment and burdensomeness as predictor, explained 8% more of the variance in suicidal ideation, $F(1, 65352) = 9788.26$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .23$, $F\Delta = 6877.67$, $R^2\Delta = .08$, $p < .001$. The third model, in which the interaction term between entrapment and thwarted belongingness was added as a predictor, explained <1% more of the variance in suicidal ideation, $F(1, 65351) = 6637.28$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .23$, $F\Delta = 258.26$, $R^2\Delta = .00$, $p < .001$. **Burdensomeness did not moderate the relationship between entrapment and suicidal ideation but accounted for 23% of the variance of suicidal ideation as a direct predictor.**

Discussion

Results of this study found thwarted belongingness and burdensomeness to play large roles in suicidal ideation, further emphasizing the need for social support and connection in college students. With thwarted belongingness and burdensomeness able to be seen as predictors of suicidal ideation, this study may have further confirmed aspects of the interpersonal theory rather than the IMV Model, which says thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness are predictive of suicidal ideation. These findings underscore the importance of embodied Student Life opportunities, such as structured social opportunities and groups are available for students to become involved in. Maintaining healthy student organizations, affinity groups, intramural sports, and other student life programs may be an important protective factor, bolstering belongingness and connecting an individual to a community to protect against burdensomeness.

References available by request

Limitations & Future Directions

One limitation of the study is the use of archival data from a large national dataset used by participating colleges to explore student health within each college and as compared to a randomly selected national comparison group. While the dataset was the largest of its kind, providing strong generalizability in terms of sampling, some of the variables studied were approximated using various extracted items from the data existing survey. In addition, this data was also taken during the Spring of 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results and responses may be limited due to the hybrid format of universities at the time, and student participation potentially being lower than in the past. Future research would also benefit from continued exploration of validity of the IMV Model, establishing the validity of the overall model within college populations.