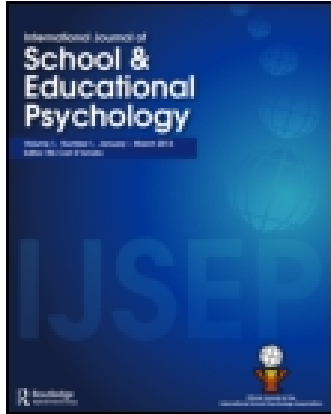


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# Perceived Stressors of Suicide and Potential Prevention Strategies for Suicide Among Youths in Malaysia

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The suicide rate among youths in Malaysia has increased over the years, giving rise to considerable public concern. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe potential stressors of suicide and suicide prevention strategies as perceived by youths in Malaysia aged 15–25 years. A qualitative approach was adopted and 625 students from different states of peninsular Malaysia, including East Malaysia, responded to two open-ended sentence completion questions on a survey. This paper reports on the thematic analysis of the two open-ended questions that yielded textual data. The findings showed that relationship problems, family problems, academic issues, and emotional problems were the top four perceived stressors for suicidality. Some protective factors were also elicited, which could provide insights for the development of prevention strategies of suicide. Some of the perceived stressors and strategies were related to cultural issues and are discussed against the backdrop of the Malaysian context.

**Keywords:** Stressors, suicide, Malaysian youth, suicide prevention

## INTRODUCTION: SUICIDE AS A SERIOUS WORLDWIDE ISSUE

Suicide among young people is now viewed as a serious public health problem worldwide (Tam, Lee, Har, & Chan, 2011). It is the third leading cause of death for young people ranging from the age of 15 to 24 years, after accidental injury and homicide (Toussaint, 2006). Baker's (2006) study in the United Kingdom found that more than 5,000 adolescents kill themselves each year, one every 90 min, while Greydanus

and Shek (2009) add that of the 4 million suicide attempts worldwide each year, at least 90,000 were adolescents (up to age 19) with one successful suicide in every 5 min.

Suicide is triggered by many things and can result from any one or a combination of personal, psychological, emotional, contextual, or familial issues. Researchers have identified various factors contributing to suicide including depression, abuse (psychological, physical, and sexual), loss of friends (including boy- or girlfriend), academic failure, social isolation, and substance abuse (Greydanus & Shek, 2009), as well as precipitating events, such as the death of a loved one or rejection by a boyfriend or girlfriend (Maltsberger, Hendin, Haas, & Lipschitz, 2003). Psycho-social problems and stresses also have a role, such as conflicts with parents, breakup of a relationship, school

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difficulties or failure, legal difficulties, social isolation, and physical ailments (including hypochondriac preoccupation) (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP] 2000).

Suicide is not an isolated individual phenomenon; it is related to the social environment in which individuals are located. Bronfenbrenner (1979) has contributed to our understanding of the influence of environment on individuals' development. Families and the communities in which the young people live, and also community cultural values and the community at large, have an influence on their development. This eco-system model may shed light on our understanding of the increased suicide phenomenon in Malaysia. Therefore, we need to take into account the extent to which the ecology of human development can have an effect on the resolution of developmental tasks. Using this theoretical model, family is regarded as the central ecological environment for developing children and young people. This is also emphasized by Vinas and associates (2002), who highlighted the role of family as an immediate environmental factor closely related with suicide ideation for preadolescents. School culture, learning environment, neighborhood, and societal culture and values have also asserted influence on the young.

Adolescence is a progressive period characterized by rapid changes in physical and cognitive development, as well as psychological and social functioning. During this period adolescents seek their sense of belonging and identity. Far more than children, adolescents seek to know who they are, what they want to become, and where they are going in life (Santrock, 2010). Failure to achieve their roles in a healthy manner may result in confusion and thus creates added stress in adolescents' lives (Santrock, 2009). Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) is viewed as a distinct period in life which may be seen as having much unpredictable variability and presenting an array of diversity through new experiences. They include such things as coping with role expectation from family and society, exploration of new directions in life when young people start to pursue college or university education, entering into new relationships and even residential changes. Arnett (1998) conceptualized emerging adulthood as a life stage presenting the most ambiguity and uncertainty. Thus, it is evident that adolescence and young adulthood are two critical developmental stages in which challenges arise from coping with personal developmental changes and interactions with new environments, and during which suicide is more evident.

### SUICIDE IN MALAYSIA

In recent years, the suicide rates in Malaysia have increased significantly, generating public concern. According to Hendin and associates (2008), Malaysian suicide rates are low to medium, which is between 9.9 and 13.1 per 100,000.

However, according to the Malaysian National Representative of the International Association for Suicide Prevention, there has been a rise to mid-level, and these rates are getting closer to those of the United States (Tam et al., 2011). In 2007, 113 suicide cases were reported, increasing to 290 in 2008 and 328 in 2009 ("Suicide Rates Higher," 2011). There is also a higher rate of suicide attempts among males than females in the Malaysian context (Tam et al., 2011). The Health Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri LiowTiong Lai, reported in a recent news conference that the Chinese, among all the races of Malaysia, had the highest number of suicides (Liow, 2012).

The Malaysian Health Ministry (cited in Ng, 2011) has identified those aged 16–25 as being the highest-risk group. Therefore, both adolescents (15–19 years of age) and emerging adults (20–25 years of age) are included in this study as they seem to be most vulnerable (Tam et al., 2011) and a high-risk group in Malaysia (Hendin et al., 2008). Wong (2011) connected the high suicide rate in Malaysia to the diminishing traditional protective factors where normative restraints have been disrupted by various social changes. Adnam (Wong, 2011) has analyzed the suicide issue from a sociological perspective and highlighted the instability of the society as an important risk factor.

The sociocultural context of youths in the 21st century can be a concern to parents and educators in Malaysia. With globalization and Internet access, young people are exposed to various modern lifestyles. Most young Malaysians (close to 65% of the young population), are active Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2012). Keenan (2008) comments that, in a globalizing community, individuals typically suffer from significant disruptions in relationships, due to the erosion of the community's ability to regulate itself. This globalization effect may have disrupted the traditional ways of enforcing social norms. In many families in Malaysia, both parents have jobs. The differences in the average sizes of families in Malaysia are quite marked, with Chinese families living in smaller family units compared to Malay families. Chinese families also have fewer children and tend to live in nuclear rather than traditional extended family groups with grandparents and others who could once have provided child care and support. According to Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, and Verma (2003), changes in family structure and functioning lead to smaller families with less social support for the young, with a consequent effect on youth development. The lack of social support would not only impact the youth's facility for physical interaction, it would affect them emotionally as well and may create greater emotional stresses. Hence, this lack of support can be detrimental as it has negative consequences on youth development. Adolescents and young adults will be left struggling alone when there is insufficient social support to help them combat stressful life situations.

Academic stress resulting from the inability to meet academic expectations, such as failing subjects or perform-

ing below required standards, was found to be a significant element in a variety of mental and behavioral disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Ang & Huan, 2006). According to the studies by Ang and Huan (2006), children from Asian families are particularly exposed to academic stress due to their cultural norms. Chinese parents emphasize academic success and may impose unnecessary stress on their children.

Religion, on the other hand, was found to lower suicidal behavior (Simpson & Conklin, 1989) in the West (though it may not be the case in the Malaysian context). The Muslim religion is not only highly integrated but is associated with a low suicide rate. Earlier studies in Malaysia have shown the influence of religion on suicidal behavior; Muslim Malays had the lowest rates while the Indians, who are mostly Hindus in Malaysia, had higher rates (Koh et al., 2002). The reason for the difference in suicide rates can be seen in Morris and Maniam's (2001) study, which stated that the Islamic religion, to which all ethnic Malays adhere, prohibits suicide among its followers. Therefore, as Malaysia is a multiracial and multireligious society, religious adherence could provide a possible key to suicide prevention and needs further exploration. However, the strong kinship system supported by Islam was also found among Hindus in India (Simpson & Conklin, 1989). Social change has resulted in smaller family size, however, the kinship ties that remained intact provide a sense of belonging, and individuals can count on the family to help them cope with life's problems (Simpson & Conklin, 1989). Hence, religious beliefs or practices *may be only one of the contributing reasons* into the differences in suicide rates.

In this study, the focus was on the stressors that could potentially lead a Malaysian youth to attempt suicide, as well as on the perceptions of factors that could help to develop preventative strategies. The researchers accepted that the environment had an influence on individuals, and thus family and religion could serve as protection whereas stressors from elsewhere would affect youths' suicidal behaviors.

## METHOD

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore the perceptions of Malaysian youths regarding stressors that could lead to suicide and possible prevention strategies. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) posited that the value of a qualitative approach is to "stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 5). Guba and Lincoln (2003) further indicated that the credibility or believability of qualitative research should emerge from the interpretative stance whereby multiple realities of the participants could be emphasized.

Our research participants were required to complete two open-ended statements: "I think young people commit

suicide because . . ." and "Ways of suicide prevention . . ." The opening statements were designed to give flexibility for the participants to describe their views on the two rather sensitive research questions and it was intended to elicit an open response from them. The researchers believed the participants could provide insight with their written comments on two open-ended statements into how they made sense of their life-world and their perceptions of suicide. We also accepted that working with written comments could be an effective way to reach out to a large pool of participants and at the same time give them freedom to express and provide rich narrative accounts of their perceptions.

A cross-sectional convenience sampling approach was employed. There were five secondary schools and five universities from different parts of Malaysia involved in this study, including Northern, Southern, Middle area, Eastern coast of West Malaysia, and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). Participants included those aged 15 to 25 and labeled as young people who are considered in the age range at the highest risk of suicide (Hendin et al., 2008; Tam et al., 2011). The total participant pool included 625 students (286 males and 339 females) from public secondary schools and public universities in the five regions of Malaysia. The racial distribution for this sample was 30.1% Malay ( $n = 205$ ), 40.5% Chinese ( $n = 275$ ), 14.8% Indian ( $n = 101$ ), and 6.3% others ( $n = 43$ ).

The data were collected in public secondary schools and universities with permission from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and relevant authorities in charge of various states such as Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri (State Ministry of Education). For students under the age of 18, the principal adopted a legal persona within the school environment and had the legal right to give consent. Informed consent forms were given to the students. The students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study, and reminded of the confidentiality of their personal information and responses. They were also assured that there were no right or wrong answers, that any answers that expressed their thoughts and feelings were acceptable, and that their teachers would not be allowed to know what any of them had written.

A survey instrument with the two open-ended statements (see above) was developed to explore the perceptions of youths regarding perceived stressors of suicide and suicide prevention strategies. The survey was administered in the classroom by the schoolteachers or guidance teachers who were present to help explain the procedures in the local language and to provide emotional support for the students. As Malaysia is a multicultural society, the original English version of the survey was also available in Malay and Chinese. The two researchers gave verbal instructions mainly in English, and the guidance teachers translated them into Malay, especially in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (National Secondary Schools). After completion of the survey, students submitted their responses in a sealed



envelope to which only the researchers had access. No schoolteacher or guidance teacher was privy to any of the responses in order to maintain confidentiality. Tokens of appreciation comprising a highlighter pen and a stationary note clipper were distributed at the end of the survey. Aware of the sensitivity of the topic, the researchers also set up a help line for participants in case any were upset by the topic and needed to talk to someone.

The textual descriptions given by the participants for the two open-ended questions were analyzed using a thematic analysis and inductive coding approach (Creswell, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). There was no predetermined, theory-based codebook, and the researchers focused on gaining an in-depth understanding by analyzing participants' comments and also via previous reading and research. Throughout the coding procedure, the researchers used thematic coding to conceptualize the meanings of the answers provided. Most of the students wrote their responses to the questions in English, while 25% responded in Malay, and a handful responded in Chinese. All the Malay and Chinese responses were translated into English for analysis. Discussion was held with colleagues who were well versed in Malay and Chinese to confirm the meanings whenever answers were written in Malay or Chinese. Coding was done by the two researchers and all discrepancies resolved in discussion. This is to ensure the validity of the interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The role of the third researcher was to help with the categorizing of emerging themes. Merging of themes and categories was finalized in discussions among the three researchers to improve the consensus and credibility of the findings.

A large number of codes were developed and each statement was read carefully to give a code that could summarize its meaning. After the first round of coding, similar concepts or meanings were clustered into different themes and in response to the central question for this project, namely perceptions of youths in Malaysia regarding potential stressors for, and protective measures against, suicidality. All themes emerged from the textual analysis as a bottom-up process, and were organized in terms of *perceived stressors of suicide* and *perceived protective measures against suicidality*. For example, a word such as *putuscinta* (breaking up with boyfriend or girl friend in Malay) was coded together with "being dumped," with "no love" under the concepts of boy-girl relationship, and later merged with "misunderstood by others" into a bigger cluster of relationship problems. This later emerged into an overarching theme of *perceived stressors of suicide*. There were a few incidents when the participants wrote "do not talk too directly" as a stressor of suicide. The researchers were able to clarify with the participant, and found that the young people thought it was hurtful when adults (meaning parents or teachers) scolded them or told them off directly. We retained the multiple voices of the participants (the quotations cited in the findings were original verbatim

without trying to polish the voice of the participants). Key concepts emerged from the two statement completions, and member checking was utilized, with three coders collaborating to check the emergent themes. Discussions were held to clarify discrepancies in coding and resolve conflicting interpretations.

## FINDINGS

The common themes that emerged through the analysis are reported in this section, and provide a summary of similar concepts emerging from the open-ended text responses of the participants. The thematic analysis of texts presented by the participants showed a range of perceived stressors potentially contributing to suicidality amongst youths in Malaysia, while a few protective measures also emerged from the youths' responses to the two open-ended statement completions. Quotations from the participants were included to allow transparency on how the themes emerged.

### Perceived Stressors of Suicide

Table 1 summarizes the stressors potentially contributing to suicidality amongst Malaysian youths who participated in this study. Codes revealed four emerging themes related to perceived stressors of suicide, namely relationship problems (mostly indicating boy-girl relationship and peer interactions), family problems, academic problems (including lack of problem solving), and emotional problems (negative feelings, lack of emotional control, and low self-esteem). Although other themes emerged (e.g., financial problems, lack of religion, and media), these were considered of lesser

TABLE 1  
Stressors Potentially Contributing to Suicide

Relationship Problems	I feel very stressed out with relationships. They do not have friends. A lot of young people commit suicide because of a breakup in a romantic relationship. Being bullied by peers.
Family Problems	Too much stress caused by family. Lack of family love. Tortured by family. Having a child out of an affair. They did not think about the consequences, effect on the family, honor and future.
Academic Problems	I feel stress with my studies. Learning stress. Problems faced in school. Failure in studies or exam.
Emotional problems	There might be a certain point in life when they feel too confused, at a loss and there is no one else to help. They were overwhelmed by feelings of sadness or disappointment until they couldn't think straight and acted brashly. Frustrated.

importance given the low number of responses that matched these codes. Mental disorders, referring to diagnosed depression or anxiety, were not perceived by the youths as stressors of suicidality. Thus, further discussion will focus on the four common stressors of suicidality as perceived by Malaysian youths in this study.

*Relationship stressors*

Females indicated more relationship stress than their male counterparts did, except for social problems. Most participants stated that relationships with friends, classmates, and romantic partners contributed to potential suicidality. The relationships included romantic relationships (e.g., “broken hearted,” “dumped by love one,” and “a lot of young people commit suicide because of a breakup in a romantic relationship”). Some also reported being bullied (e.g., “fighting with friends” and “being bullied by peers”), stressful situations with friends (e.g., “interpersonal relationship problems”), and loneliness (e.g., “they do not have friends,” “no one to share their feelings to,” and “no people to turn to”) as potential stressors. Relationship stressors were seemingly an important contributor to Malaysian youths’ perceptions of the risk for suicidality (e.g., “I feel very stressed out with relationships,” “Pressures from society and peers,” and “Stressed from friends or lover”).

*Family stressors*

Family constituted another perceived stressor among Malaysian youths. The most frequently stated stressor with the family involved “endless problems coming from family problems” and “too much stress caused by family.” Family conflict (e.g., “Having a child out of an affair,” “Family going through divorce,” and “Family problems”), and feeling unloved by family or abused (e.g., “Lack of family love,” “They feel no one cares about them or no one loves them,” “Abuse in homes,” and “Tortured by family”) also contributed toward family stressors. Some participants also felt a lack of attention or feeling overprotected within the family were potentially contributing stressors that could lead to suicidality.

*Academic stressors*

The third most prevalent stressor perceived by the participants in this study was academic stress. Both male (30%) and female (33%) participants perceived academic issues as potential stressors. It also seemed that more Chinese participants (38%) considered academic stressors as a potential risk for suicidality when compared to Malay (33%), Indian (14%), and other racial groups (30%). As indicated above, Chinese parents seemingly placed much stress on their children’s academic performance and this added to the perceived stressors for this group of youths in Malaysia.

*Emotional problems*

As expected, emotional problems were also perceived as a stressor for suicidality. The emotional problems mentioned included negative feelings such as, “They feel that they are useless,” “No confidence,” “Feel lack of self worth.” Participants included a lack of strategies or control over stress or difficulties they faced: “Feel lost as there was lack of principles”; “Lack of emotional control.”

Perceived Protective Mechanisms for Suicidality

Apart from exploring the potential stressors of suicidality among youths in Malaysia, we also explored their perceptions about possible protective or prevention strategies. Table 2 summarizes the strategies perceived by Malaysian youths as providing protection against suicidality. The most important perceived protections were social support, guidance, problem-solving skills, religion, and recreational activities.

DISCUSSION

Stressors of Suicide

We found that relationship problems were the most often mentioned as potential stressors, followed in descending order by family stressors, academic problems, and emotional problems. The stressors of suicide found in this

TABLE 2  
Potential Prevention Strategies Against Suicide

Social support	Share anything that is kept in their hearts to a friend, or someone who would hear what we would want to share. Ask for advice from friends or family. Find someone to share the problems and find a solution.
Guidance	Seeking for counseling treatment. Seeing a psychologist to help solve their problems. School counselors provide proper counselling to motivate students to think positively in life. Young people can be given talk about the ways to solve problems but not commit suicide.
Problem solving	Always think rationally. Most of all, always consider the impact after suicide. 'To view a problem as a positive challenge in life. Avoid overwhelming stress.
Religion	Immerse yourself with religious teaching. Improve knowledge of religion. Always pray to be blessed. Churches can organize camps to guide young people to God.
Recreational activities	Holidays. Joining extracurricular activities. Involving oneself in beneficial activities. Sports.

study were quite similar to previous samples from a study done in Malaysia, in which coping with boy-girl relationships, family issues, and stress from schoolwork were viewed as the top three potential factors for suicide (Kok & Goh, 2012). An additional theme of “emotional problems” emerged from this study. Emotional problems were different from mental disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety) in that these focused more on self-appraisal than on actual emotional distress. For the most part, emotional problems for the Malaysian youths in this study comprised negative feelings, low self-esteem, and emotional disturbance arising from a lack of coping strategies. The analysis of qualitative texts has also provided more stressors, thus helping us to understand the issues at stake in greater detail.

Among the four identified stressors, relationship, family, and emotional problems were, obviously, closely related to interpersonal relationships. The current results confirm the framework initiated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as discussed earlier. The immediate environment, especially the immediate family and school community, asserts determining and influential force on the developing young people and has contributed to the perceived suicide stressors for the young people in Malaysia. This finding about the emotional problems was also grounded in the interpersonal relationships around them, and is consistent with results from work done among the university students from Macao where interpersonal variables were found to be able to explain suicidality (Zaroff, Wong, Ku, & van Schalkwyk, 2014).

Our participants revealed romantic relationships among youths as a perceived stressor for suicide. Those who had opposite-sex intimate relationships mentioned that they were heartbroken when the relationship did not work out, and that they were too shy to seek help from parents or school counselors for relationship problems. Those who were not involved in a romantic relationship mentioned that they were not popular and not liked by their peers.

The family problems Malaysian youths faced were multifaceted and included stress experienced from different generations. In Malaysia, many parents are involved in the workforce and leave their children in the care of grandparents or nannies (child minders) when the child is under school age, and with institutions for before- and after-school care while they are in primary school. More than half of the female participants in this study mentioned they were traumatized or stressed by family problems, and they mentioned being unloved by their family. The females in this study seemingly placed great importance on the family as a potential stressor for suicidality. This emphasis on family love by female participants was in line with the study showing that girls and females in emerging adulthood suffered more emotionally than boys from a lack of parental support or love (Murberg & Bru, 2004).

Academic stressors were identified as the third most emphasized perceived stressor that could potentially lead

to suicide. Academic stress seems to be more task- or achievement-focused compared to the other three perceived stressors, which were more relationally focused. However, it was found that the academic stress was also derived from the relational aspect, as the stress of coping with academic matters arose mainly from coping with family expectations and peer comparison. Our findings are consistent with the research done by Ang and Huan (2006), who found that academic stress could lead to suicidal ideation among students. Chinese families in Malaysia put great emphasis on their children’s education, and will ferry their children to various tutor classes after school. Mothers would even take annual leave to accompany their child doing review during the examination period (Ong, 2012). Academic performance was seen as an important criterion not only for the well-being of the individual but also for the individual’s whole family. Chinese parents valued education and they had very high aspirations for their children’s academic achievement (Li, 2006). This value could be traced back to the teachings of Confucius, which emphasized the importance of education as a tool for social mobility (Li, 2006). Perhaps the Chinese in Malaysia struggling for survival in this multicultural environment hoped their children would be successful in a country that predominantly privileged Malays, who were seen as *Bumi Putera* (the Prince of the Soil). The social and political environment thus added additional extra stress on families and might have contributed to the findings in these studies (Lee, 2000).

Furthermore, students spent long hours at school despite the official school hours for secondary schools ending at 1:00 p.m. Most students were required to stay at school for co-curricular activities in the afternoon, participating in two or more activities. For those academically weak students, extra classes were offered in the afternoons. Parents also arranged for various kinds of tutor classes for their children, for almost all the subjects. Most Chinese parents in this study were overly involved, adding additional stress. As secondary school students spend most of their time at school, stress from studies was going to affect them tremendously. Those who were poor academically would also experience low self-esteem, and it could lead to suicidal ideation (Wilburn & Smith, 2005).

These findings revealed the vulnerable emotional aspect of young people. Young people are sensitive to negative criticism, especially from someone who is important in their lives, such as friends, family members, and teachers. Participants in this study mentioned that negative criticism could be a stressor in suicide (e.g., “Please do not criticize using harsh words,” “Communication doesn’t have to be too direct,” “Words from adults were too harsh”). Participants indicated that when they received negative comments, particularly from parents and teachers, or are called names (given derogatory nicknames) by peers, it would hurt them deeply and affect their self-appraisal.

## Suicide Prevention

When asked about preventive strategies, the participants suggested a range of protective mechanisms. Both family and religion were considered as potential sources for providing protection against suicidality, particularly when needing social support and guidance, as well as for problem solving. Among the participants who mentioned religion as a protective factor, it seemed that Malay youths adhering to the Muslim religion perceived their strong faith as preventing them from being depressed or harming themselves (Zuraida & Ahmad 2007). Females also reported religion as a protective strategy more frequently as compared to males. This finding is supported by Gau and Wiecko (2010), who found females to be more religious than males.

Male participants in the present study, on the other hand, more frequently reported guidance as a preventive mechanism for suicide, meaning males were more likely to seek guidance and even get social support among friends and family members when distressed. Most participants mentioned that they needed listening ears when experiencing emotional distress. The finding regarding males seeking help more than females could be attributed to the male dominance in the local population. In patriarchal or male-dominant societies, men are expected to act according to the privileges and responsibilities of their leadership position, providing a source of strength for others (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Thus, accepting advice and guidance from others, particularly the fathers of society, could be internalized at an early age and contribute to their proclivity toward help-seeking behavior. In the present study, guidance was viewed as the direction and advice given by family, peers, teachers, or religious leaders and professional helpers. Therefore, parents and teachers could better understand our youth and schools, or communities could set up guidance and counseling services, as the young people who participated in this study expressed a need for guidance and they were open to seek counseling in times of need. Guidance and counseling services should focus on the development of various problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, positive thinking skills, and peer support programs that would be valuable, as participants indicated that social support and the development of skills were lacking and would serve as preventive strategies.

Prevention programs should consider cultural and religious sensitivity, as there were some differences found in the preventive strategies among different ethnic groups in the present study. Chinese students viewed social support as an important preventive strategy, while Malay youths valued the protection they received from their religious affiliation. The finding of two diminishing protective factors highlighted by Adnam (Wong, 2011), namely religion and family factors, may be partially true, because while it is true

that religion was revealed as a protecting factor for Malay young people, it was not the case for the Chinese youth. The reason is that Chinese communities in Malaysia do not have one common religion that unites them all. Furthermore, those Chinese students who identified themselves as traditional Buddhists might not go to temple as regularly as Malays would go to the mosque. However, social support was identified as a potential protecting mechanism against suicide.

On the whole, though, most of the participants viewed friends and family members as a common source for help-seeking. It is therefore important to establish a caring and nurturing family and school community so that young people can seek help in times of need. Developing peer support programs in school would also be beneficial. Therefore, while the perceived stressors for suicide were found to be mostly relational, developing stronger relationships with families and peers also seemed to be the preventive strategy identified within the realm of social support and religion.

## CONCLUSION

The present study uncovered four main perceived stressors that could potentially lead to suicidality among Malaysian youths, as well as a number of possible protective mechanisms that could be effective in reducing the high incidence of suicide in Malaysia. The perceived stressors of suicide lie mainly in the relational aspects, and suggested protective mechanisms gave us insights for the further development of suicide prevention strategies for youths living in Malaysia. Relationships, both within the family and among peers, seemed to be part of both the stressors and the protective strategies, particularly for the Malaysian youths who participated in this study. Therefore, professionals working with youths in Malaysia could focus on developing strategies for strengthening relationships in order to protect youths against suicidality and provide adequate protection.

Nonetheless, there were some limitations to the present study. The analysis of two open-ended sentence completion questions lacks in-depth dimensions and clarification was rather limited. Further research is needed to explore the phenomenon of suicidality in Malaysia in greater depth by having some face-to-face interviews with young people in order to further develop effective preventive strategies and to lower the rising suicide rates in Malaysia.

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