

# Multiple Dimensions of Social Support Buffer the Relationship Between States of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress and Suicidal Ideation



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## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Suicide is a leading cause of death among college students. College students encounter increased stressors and are prone to anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- ❖ However, while not every student with these negative states will experience suicidality, higher levels of symptoms may precede or worsen suicidal ideation.
- ❖ Previous research has found robust associations between social support and decreased mood symptoms.
- ❖ Therefore, we examined dimensions of perceived social support (family, friends, and significant others) as a buffer between three negative states (depression, anxiety, and stress) and suicidal ideation.

## METHODS

- ❖ N = 725 undergraduates (67% female; 62% white;  $M_{age} = 19.63$ ,  $SD = 3.09$ ) completed:
  - ❖ Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)
  - ❖ Suicidality subscale of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale – Revised (CESD-R)
  - ❖ Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales – 21 (DASS-21)
- ❖ Several moderation analyses were employed through SPSS PROCESS to examine the role of perceived social support in the link between depression, anxiety, and stress and suicidal ideation, while controlling for sex.

## RESULTS

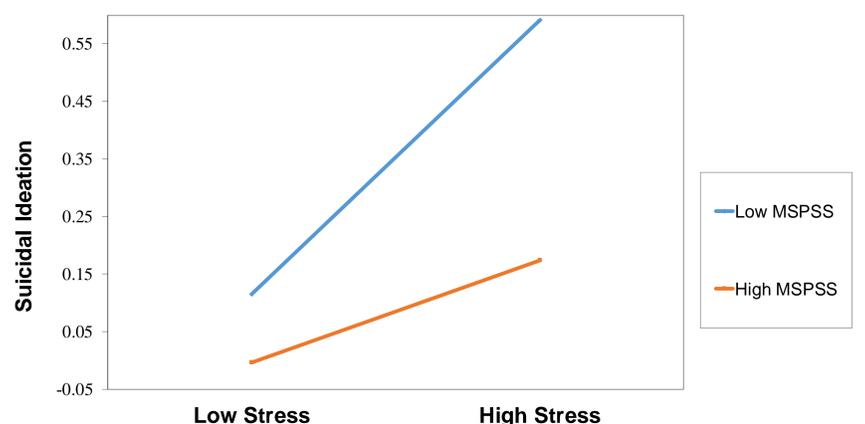
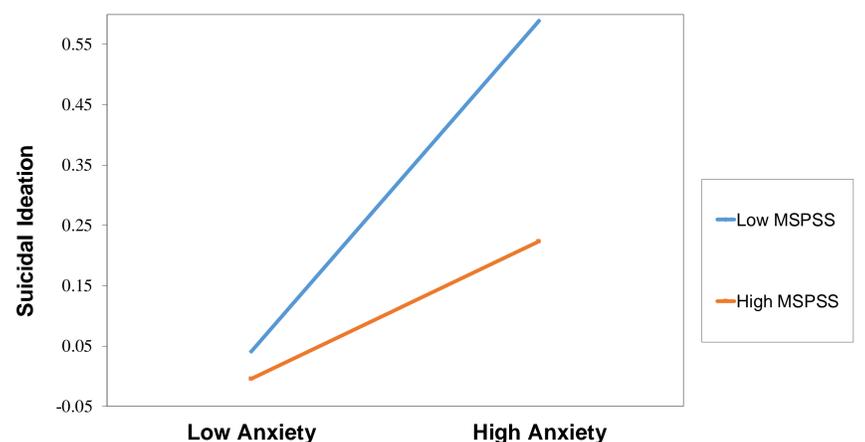
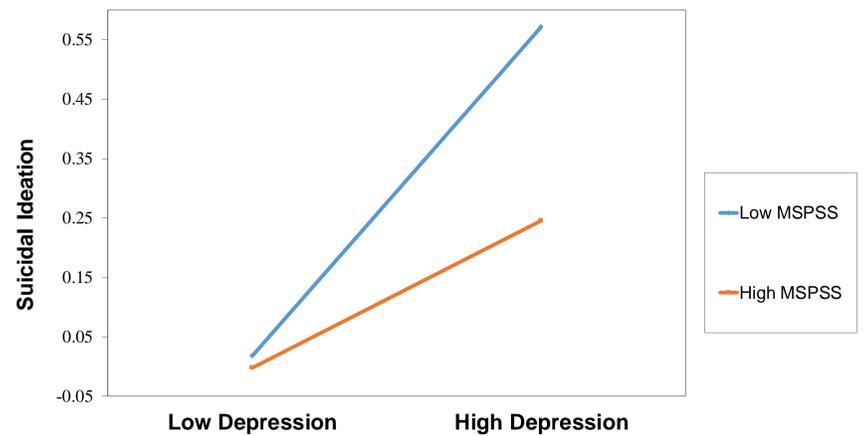
- ❖ Results indicated significant interaction effects for depression ( $b = -.471$ , 95% CI [-.651, -.292],  $t = -5.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ), anxiety ( $b = -.514$ , 95% CI [-.709, -.319],  $t = -5.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and stress ( $b = -.505$ , 95% CI [-.703, -.307],  $t = -5.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- ❖ The significant interaction effects held for all three subscales of perceived social support.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Depression	.71	.48	-					
2. Anxiety	.65	.47	<b>.73**</b>	-				
3. Stress	.83	.44	<b>.79**</b>	<b>.76**</b>	-			
4. MSPSS	1.61	.33	<b>-.24**</b>	<b>-.18**</b>	<b>-.10*</b>	-		
5. Suicide	.23	.49	<b>.46**</b>	<b>.44**</b>	<b>.37**</b>	<b>-.27**</b>	-	
6. Sex	1.70	.47	.09	.06	<b>.17**</b>	<b>.15**</b>	-.02	-

Note. Significant correlations are bolded.  
\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

References available upon request  
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Panel 1. Graphical representations of the perceived social support moderating effect.

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ Perceptions of higher quality support from friends, family, and significant others buffered the effects of negative states on increased suicidal ideation.
- ❖ Social support systems foster psychological well-being and are a suicidality protective factor during negative moods.
- ❖ Results point to transdiagnostic implications for community-based suicide prevention in college students.
- ❖ Future research should explore causal relationships, further variables of interest (e.g., positive affect), and potential contexts that impair real or perceived social support, such as:
  - ❖ Substance use
  - ❖ Excessive reassurance seeking
  - ❖ Self-esteem
  - ❖ Stigma