

The Impact of High School Students' Sense of Security and Emotional Growth Beliefs on Attitudes Toward Suicide

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Abstract: Objective: To explore the influence of contemporary high school students' sense of security and emotional growth beliefs on their attitudes toward suicide. This study employed literature review and questionnaire methods to survey 386 high school students. **Results:** (1) Overall, high school students hold ambivalent or neutral attitudes toward suicide; their interpersonal security is relatively high, while their sense of control is lower. (2) Demographic variables such as gender, single-parent family status, and left-behind experience significantly affect high school students' sense of security, emotional growth beliefs, and attitudes toward suicide. (3) There is a significant correlation between high school students' sense of security, emotional growth beliefs, and attitudes toward suicide. (4) Sense of security mediates the relationship between emotional growth beliefs and attitudes toward suicide.

Keywords: High school students; Sense of security; Emotional growth beliefs; Attitudes toward suicide

1. Introduction

Suicide is a global public health issue, particularly among adolescents. The World Health Organization's 2017 report, *Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents: Guidance for Country Implementation*, highlighted that suicide and self-harm were the third leading cause of death among adolescents in 2015. High school students, undergoing the unique developmental stage of adolescence, face significant academic and social pressures, leading to a higher prevalence of suicidal behaviors. Suicidal behavior is often viewed as a continuum, ranging from suicidal ideation to attempted suicide and completed

suicide. Suicidal ideation is a critical risk factor for suicidal behavior, and attitudes toward suicide are closely related to suicidal ideation. The more an individual approves of suicide, the more likely they are to develop suicidal ideation^[1]. Additionally, numerous studies have found that negative emotions such as depression are significant risk factors for suicidal ideation^{[2][3]}. Both sense of security and emotional growth beliefs influence individuals' negative emotions^{[4][5]}. Therefore, it can be inferred that sense of security and emotional growth beliefs impact attitudes toward suicide, though the specific mechanisms remain unclear. Most existing research on suicide attitudes



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focuses on the relationship between suicide attitudes and suicidal ideation, primarily among college students. This study uses a questionnaire method to explore the mechanisms between sense of security, emotional growth beliefs, and attitudes toward suicide among high school students, providing empirical evidence for their mental health development.

2. Literature Review

(1) Overview of Emotional Growth Beliefs

Emotional growth beliefs are rooted in implicit theories, first proposed by Dweck et al.^[6]. These theories refer to individuals' beliefs about whether basic human attributes are malleable. Dweck distinguished between incremental beliefs (attributes are malleable and controllable) and entity beliefs (attributes are fixed and uncontrollable). Research on implicit theories initially focused on intelligence until Tamir et al.^[5] extended it to the emotional domain. Implicit emotion theories suggest that individuals' beliefs influence how they interpret and respond to adversity, affecting their emotional states, behaviors, and overall mental health and well-being^[7]. Some individuals believe they cannot change their emotions (entity beliefs), while others believe they can control or regulate their emotions (incremental beliefs)^[8]. Numerous studies have shown that implicit emotion beliefs significantly impact mental health. Tamir et al.^[5] found that college students with entity beliefs experienced fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions, along with higher levels of isolation, loneliness, and depression. Incremental emotion beliefs are also directly predictive of psychological well-being, with students holding incremental beliefs reporting higher levels of mental health and well-being^[7].

(2) Overview of Sense of Security

In psychology, sense of security is a crucial concept. An Lijuan and Cong Zhong^[15] defined sense of security as the anticipation of potential physical or psychological dangers and the individual's sense of control or helplessness in dealing with these risks, primarily manifested as a sense of certainty and control.

Several factors influence sense of security. An Lijuan et al.^[16] found that gender and being an only child significantly affect high school students' sense of security, with girls and only children reporting higher

levels of security. Mei Gaoxing et al.^[17] found that sense of security decreases as students progress through school grades. Sense of security is also a significant factor in mental health. Wang Zhongxing et al.^[18] found that interpersonal security negatively predicts suicidal ideation among college students. Other studies have shown that students with lower sense of security are more susceptible to negative events and more likely to develop suicidal ideation^[19].

(3) Overview of Attitudes Toward Suicide

Research on attitudes toward suicide began in the 1950s and has yet to form a clear theoretical framework. This study adopts Tang Yongqing et al.'s^[20] definition of suicide attitudes as individuals' enduring and consistent tendencies toward suicide and suicidal individuals. Previous studies in China have found that primary, secondary, and college students generally hold ambivalent or neutral attitudes toward suicide^{[21][22][23]}. Demographic variables such as gender significantly influence suicide attitudes, with males more likely to reject suicide and females more likely to express tolerance and understanding. Many studies have shown a close relationship between suicide attitudes, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior. Zhan Qisheng et al.^[24] found a significant negative correlation between suicide attitudes and suicidal ideation among college students, indicating that individuals who oppose suicide are less likely to develop suicidal ideation or engage in suicidal behavior. Cai Yumeng et al.^[25] found that students with positive attitudes toward suicide scored lower on sense of security, interpersonal security, and control, suggesting that individuals with lower sense of security are more likely to develop suicidal ideation, plans, and behaviors.

The above literature suggests that emotional growth beliefs, sense of security, and attitudes toward suicide are interconnected. Lack of security is a risk factor for suicidal behavior, as individuals with lower sense of security are more likely to report depression, anxiety, and other negative emotions, which are also risk factors for suicidal behavior and positive attitudes toward suicide. Individuals with incremental emotion beliefs can better regulate negative emotions and experience higher subjective well-being. Therefore, it is hypothesized that sense of security and emotional growth beliefs are negatively correlated with positive attitudes toward suicide, meaning that higher scores

on sense of security and emotional growth beliefs are associated with more negative attitudes toward suicide.

3. Research Methods

(1) Participants

The study surveyed high school students from a high school in Hantai District, Hanzhong City, using cluster sampling. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, with 386 valid responses, including 160 males and 226 females.

(2) Research Tools

The study used Tamir et al.'s Emotional Growth Beliefs Scale^[5], Cong Zhong and An Lijuan's Sense of Security Scale^[16], and Xiao Shuiyuan et al.'s Suicide Attitudes Questionnaire^[26].

The Emotional Growth Beliefs Scale, revised by Tamir et al.^[5], consists of four items scored on a 6-point scale. Castella et al.^[7] revised the scale to use the first-person perspective, improving its internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.79$). The revised scale has higher internal consistency and better reflects individuals' emotional growth beliefs. The scale includes two items for entity beliefs and two for incremental beliefs, with entity

items reverse-scored. Higher scores indicate stronger incremental beliefs. In this study, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.66$.

The Sense of Security Scale, developed by Cong Zhong and An Lijuan, consists of 16 items across two factors: interpersonal security and control. Responses are scored on a 5-point scale. An Lijuan and Yang Meirong^[27] validated the scale with high school students, demonstrating high internal consistency and content and structural validity. In this study, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$.

The Suicide Attitudes Questionnaire (QSA), developed by Xiao Shuiyuan et al., consists of 29 items across four dimensions: attitudes toward the nature of suicide (F1), attitudes toward suicidal individuals (F2), attitudes toward the families of suicidal individuals (F3), and attitudes toward euthanasia (F4). Each item is scored on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating more negative attitudes toward suicide. This study used the F1 dimension, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.72$.

4. Results Analysis

(1) Current Situation Analysis

Table 1 Current Situation of Sense of Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Suicide

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitudes Toward Suicide	386	1.44	4.78	2.99	0.573
Sense of Security	386	1.25	4.88	2.94	0.689
Interpersonal Security	386	1.50	5.00	3.17	0.707
Control	386	1.00	4.88	2.71	0.762
Emotional Growth Beliefs	386	1.25	5.00	3.87	0.927

The results show that the mean score for attitudes toward suicide is 2.99, indicating that high school students generally hold ambivalent or neutral attitudes toward suicide, consistent with previous research. The sense of security scale uses a 5-point scale, with a theoretical mean of 3. The interpersonal security score is above 3, while the control score is below 3, indicating that high school students have relatively high interpersonal security but lower control. The mean score for emotional growth beliefs is 3.86, indicating that high school students generally hold incremental beliefs.

(2) Demographic Analysis of Sense of Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Suicide

The analysis shows that sense of security

significantly differs by gender, single-parent family status, and left-behind experience, but not by other variables. Emotional growth beliefs significantly differ by gender but not by other variables. Attitudes toward suicide significantly differ by gender, single-parent family status, and left-behind experience, but not by other variables.

Sense of security, emotional growth beliefs, and attitudes toward suicide all significantly differ by gender. Males have higher sense of security and emotional growth beliefs and are more likely to reject suicide.

Sense of security and control do not significantly differ by single-parent family status, but interpersonal security and attitudes toward suicide do. Students from single-parent families are more tolerant of suicide and

have lower interpersonal security.

Left-behind experience is defined as having one or both parents away for more than three months. Emotional growth beliefs do not significantly differ

by left-behind experience, but sense of security and attitudes toward suicide do. Students with left-behind experience are more tolerant of suicide and have lower sense of security.

Table 2 Differences in Attitudes Toward Suicide, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Sense of Security by Demographic Variables

Variable		Attitudes Toward Suicide (M±SD)	Sense of Security (M±SD)	Interpersonal Security (M±SD)	Control (M±SD)	Emotional Growth Beliefs (M±SD)
Gender	Male	3.10±0.58	3.03±0.70	3.26±0.71	2.81±0.80	4.03±0.92
	Female	2.91±0.56	2.87±0.68	3.11±0.70	2.64±0.73	3.76±0.92
	t-value	3.21**	2.28*	2.04*	2.23*	2.85**
Single-Parent Family	Yes	2.80±0.59	2.79±0.67	2.99±0.69	2.59±0.74	3.81±0.97
	No	3.03±0.56	2.97±0.69	3.20±0.71	2.73±0.76	3.89±0.92
	t-value	-2.76**	-1.82	-2.13*	-1.32	-0.59
Left-Behind Experience	Yes	2.94±0.59	2.80±0.66	3.03±0.70	2.58±0.71	3.81±0.91
	No	3.03±0.56	3.04±0.69	3.27±0.69	2.80±0.78	3.92±0.94
	t-value	-1.38	-3.34**	-3.42**	-2.85**	-1.08

*Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

(3) Relationship Between Sense of Security, Suicide Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward **① Correlation Analysis**

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Between Sense of Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Suicide

Variable	Attitudes Toward Suicide	Sense of Security	Interpersonal Security	Control	Emotional Growth Beliefs
Attitudes Toward Suicide	1				
Sense of Security	.313**	1			
Interpersonal Security	.276**	.933**	1		
Control	.310**	.942**	.757**	1	
Emotional Growth Beliefs	.194**	.506**	.453**	.495**	1

② Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression model was used to explore

the extent to which sense of security and emotional growth beliefs predict attitudes toward suicide.

Table 6 Summary of Stepwise Regression Models for Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Suicide

	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F
1	.194a	.038	.035	15.044
2	.316b	.100	.095	21.211

Table 7 Regression Equation Coefficients for Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Suicide

Model	B	β	t	Sig.	VIF
1 (Constant)	2.527		20.491	.000	
Emotional Growth Beliefs	.120	.194	3.879	.000	1.000
2 (Constant)	2.171		15.720	.000	
Emotional Growth Beliefs	.030	.048	.851	.395	1.345
Sense of Security	.240	.289	5.137	.000	1.345

*Note a Predictors: Emotional Growth Beliefs; b Predictors: Sense of Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs; c Dependent Variable: Attitudes Toward Suicide.

The results show that sense of security and emotional growth beliefs explain 10% of the variance in attitudes toward suicide, with emotional growth beliefs alone explaining 3.8%. The regression models are: Model 1: $Y = 2.527 + 0.03X$; Model 2: $Y = 2.171 + 0.007X_1 + 0.015X_2$. After adding sense of

security, the significance of emotional growth beliefs disappears, suggesting that sense of security mediates the relationship between emotional growth beliefs and attitudes toward suicide^[28].

③ Mediating Effect of Sense of Security

Table 8 Regression Analysis of Variable Relationships in the Mediation Model

Predictor	Equation 1: Sense of Security			Equation 2: Attitudes Toward Suicide			Equation 3: Attitudes Toward Suicide		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Gender	-0.057	0.064	-1.230	-0.161	0.059	-3.172	-0.176	0.060	-3.383
Single-Parent Family	0.070	0.087	1.561	0.096	0.079	1.936	0.115	0.081	2.259
Left-Behind Experience	0.115	0.065	2.475	0.020	0.060	0.384	0.050	0.061	0.960
Emotional Growth Beliefs	0.483	0.033	10.768	0.021	0.035	0.371	0.150	0.031	2.954
Sense of Security				0.266	0.047	4.689			
R ²		0.284			0.138			0.087	
F		14.840**			5.421**			3.564**	

*Note: (1) Model 1: Effect of independent variable on mediator; (2) Model 2: Effect of independent and mediator variables on dependent variable; (3) Total effect of independent variable on dependent variable; (4) * $p < 0.01$.

Table 9 Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Security.

Mediation Path	Effect	SE	95% CI		Effect Size
			LLCI	ULCI	
Total Effect	0.093	0.031	0.031	0.154	100%
Emotional Growth Beliefs - Attitudes Toward Suicide	0.013	0.035	-0.056	0.082	13.98%
Emotional Growth Beliefs - Sense of Security - Attitudes Toward Suicide	0.080	0.022	0.040	0.125	86.02%

The results show that the direct path from emotional growth beliefs to attitudes toward suicide includes 0 in the 95% confidence interval, while the other paths do not, indicating that sense of security mediates the relationship between emotional growth beliefs and attitudes toward suicide.

5. Discussion

(1) Demographic Analysis of Emotional Growth Beliefs

Emotional growth beliefs significantly differ by gender but not by other variables. This difference may be related to self-fulfilling prophecies. Females are often stereotyped as emotional and less rational, which may lead them to believe they cannot control their emotions. Additionally, research shows that females have better emotional recognition and memory but are also more susceptible to negative emotions^[29], which may make them more likely to hold entity beliefs.

(2) Demographic Analysis of Attitudes Toward Suicide

Attitudes toward suicide significantly differ by gender, single-parent family status, and left-behind experience. Males are more likely to reject suicide, consistent with Hu Huimin et al.'s findings^[22]. Traditional cultural expectations may lead males to value life more and reject suicide as a cowardly act.

Students from single-parent families are more tolerant of suicide, likely due to experiencing more negative life events and emotions^[22]. Students with left-behind experience are also more tolerant of suicide, as they often have fewer social and family resources, leading to higher levels of loneliness and lower well-being^[30].

(3) Relationship Between Sense of Security, Emotional Growth Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Suicide

Sense of security is positively correlated with attitudes toward suicide, consistent with Cai Yumeng

et al.^[25] and Gan Yulu et al.^[19]. Individuals with lower sense of security are more susceptible to negative events and may develop suicidal ideation and positive attitudes toward suicide.

Sense of security is also positively correlated with emotional growth beliefs. Tamir et al.^[5] found that individuals with entity beliefs experience more negative emotions and less social support over time. Recent research^[31] suggests that individuals who believe they cannot control their emotions are more likely to ruminate and less likely to use cognitive reappraisal, leading to lower sense of security.

Emotional growth beliefs are positively correlated with attitudes toward suicide. Research^[7] shows that individuals with entity beliefs report more severe depression, lower well-being, and higher levels of stress and anxiety. De France et al.^[8] found that individuals with incremental beliefs experience fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms over time. These findings support the study's conclusion that emotional growth beliefs influence attitudes toward suicide.

The regression analysis shows that sense of security and emotional growth beliefs directly predict attitudes toward suicide. Both factors influence negative emotions, which are also predictors of suicide attitudes. Additionally, sense of security mediates the relationship between emotional growth beliefs and attitudes toward suicide. This suggests that emotional growth beliefs can influence attitudes toward suicide by affecting sense of security. Individuals with incremental beliefs are more likely to feel secure and in control, reducing the likelihood of developing positive attitudes toward suicide. Conversely, individuals with entity beliefs may feel helpless and hopeless, leading to lower sense of security and more positive attitudes toward suicide. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, sense of security is a basic need, and its absence can cause significant distress and increase the risk of suicidal behavior^[33]. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance high school students' sense of security through psychological support, positive relationships, and coping skills to reduce their risk of developing positive attitudes toward suicide.

Conclusion

(1). Gender and left-behind experience significantly affect high school students' overall sense of security and

its dimensions. Single-parent family status significantly affects overall sense of security and interpersonal security but not control.

(2). Gender significantly affects emotional growth beliefs, but other demographic variables do not.

(3). Gender, single-parent family status, and left-behind experience significantly affect attitudes toward suicide.

(4). There is a significant correlation between sense of security, emotional growth beliefs, and attitudes toward suicide.

(5). Sense of security mediates the relationship between emotional growth beliefs and attitudes toward suicide.

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