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Suicidal behavior among learners: Preventive and intervention mechanisms as basis for policy recommendations

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Abstract

Suicide is a pressing global health concern and has become increasingly prevalent among Filipino youth, necessitating urgent preventive action. This study investigated the prevalence, risk factors, and preventive mechanisms of suicidal behavior among learners in five purposively selected DepEd divisions in region 10—Bukidnon, Cagayan de Oro City, Camiguin, Malaybalay, and Misamis Oriental—as a basis for policy recommendations. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered through focus group discussions, interviews, and validated questionnaires administered to school heads, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and learners. Results revealed that suicidal behavior was most prevalent among junior high school students, with females attempting suicide more frequently, while males recorded higher completion rates due to the use of more lethal methods. Identified risk factors included family-related issues such as parental absence and broken homes, experiences of abuse and trauma, socio-emotional instability, and academic pressure. Gaps were likewise observed in existing school interventions, particularly the shortage of licensed guidance counselors, the absence of consistent preventive programs, and weak referral mechanisms. To address these challenges, the study recommends multi-sectoral, gender-responsive strategies such as increasing the number of guidance counselors and social workers, revising qualification and workload standards, institutionalizing family engagement programs, and strengthening collaboration among schools, local government units, and national agencies to establish sustainable and culturally contextualized suicide prevention frameworks.

Keywords: Suicidal Behavior; Risk Factors; Prevention; Intervention; Policy Recommendations

1. Introduction

Suicide is a global concern and is ranked as the fourth leading cause of death among individuals aged 15 to 29. In the United States, it is the second most common cause of mortality among young people aged 15 to 19. In the Philippines, suicide rates have shown an alarming increase in recent years, underscoring the urgency of understanding suicidal behavior and developing effective prevention strategies. According to the World Health Organization (2019), it is essential to examine suicide trends and identify risk factors among Filipino youth to design appropriate interventions. Reported risk factors include being female, experiencing physical attacks or bullying, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, sleep difficulties, reduced physical activity, substance use, alcohol consumption, and limited parental supervision. Studies further reveal that although women attempt suicide more frequently, men complete suicide at higher rates due to the use of more lethal means (Lagman, Gara, Baweja, and Kim, 2021).

Local studies support these findings. Estrada et al. (2019) reported that suicidal ideation and behavior are prevalent among adolescent Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in Manila, with socio-demographic characteristics influencing attitudes toward suicide. The Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) indicated that 11.6% of

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Filipino teenagers aged 13–17 had suicidal ideation, while 16.8% had attempted suicide at least once in the past year.

The Department of Health (2011a, 2011b) also noted that intentional self-harm was the ninth leading cause of death among Filipinos aged 20–24 in 2003, accounting for 34% of all deaths among individuals aged 10–24. A more recent report suggested that approximately seven Filipinos attempt suicide daily (Butuyan, 2016). Findings from the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS 4) revealed that regions such as NCR, CARAGA, and Regions VII, X, and XI had over 10% of their youth population (ages 15–24) reporting suicidal ideation, with attempts increasing in the past decade.

Recent incidents in Misamis Occidental highlight the urgency of this issue. A Grade 7 student at Misamis Occidental National High School in Oroquieta City died by suicide, followed by several reported attempts among teachers and learners. Data from the school's guidance office and surveys using Department of Health questionnaires showed an upward trend in suicidal behavior, raising alarm over multiple predictive risk factors. While schools have initiated interventions such as counseling sessions, many risk factors—including cyberbullying—remain inadequately addressed. A study by Kwek (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of solution-focused interventions for victims of cyberbullying, yet comprehensive, contextualized programs for other risk factors are still limited. Thus, it is timely and necessary to establish a regional contingency plan that consolidates preventive and treatment mechanisms across the five (5) DepEd divisions in region 10 to effectively respond to and mitigate suicide risk factors among learners and school personnel.

2. Methods and Materials

This study investigated suicide cases, preventive measures, and treatment mechanisms employed by the five (5) divisions of the Department of Education (DepEd) in region 10–Northern Mindanao as a basis for policy recommendations toward a comprehensive framework addressing suicidal behavior. A qualitative research design was used, specifically through focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. Records of suicidal cases served as baseline data, while the preventive and intervention strategies of each division were documented and analyzed. Participants included registered psychologists, psychometricians, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and learners, with only identified schools subjected to FGDs. Data collected from these discussions were thematically categorized with the assistance of division guidance counselors and later used in drafting contingency plans for both learners and teaching personnel. These plans aim to complement existing Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) policies by strengthening school-based prevention and intervention mechanisms, and to be integrated into the School Improvement Plan (SIP), Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), and curriculum development.

The research involved purposively selected divisions with approval from the Regional Director, and official endorsement letters were sent to each division. Consent and assent forms were distributed to all participants, clearly explaining the study's purpose, processes, and objectives. Before the FGDs, participants attended a brief orientation and voluntarily signed consent forms. Interviews were conducted in closed sessions using open-ended questions, and data were later validated by consultants. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: participants were fully informed of the study, confidentiality of responses and records was ensured, anonymity was maintained, and sensitive information was secured. No harm was inflicted during the process, and utmost care was taken to protect participants while addressing a highly sensitive topic.

3. Results and Discussions

The researcher collected data from the five (5) purposively selected divisions in region 10, based on their reported cases of suicidal behavior submitted to the regional office. These cases were verified and analyzed through this research. Data included records from both public and private schools, covering elementary and secondary levels.

Table 1 Profile of Learners in Terms of The Classification of Suicidal Behavior

Classification	Male	Female	Total
Completed Suicide	11	2	13
Suicidal Ideation	6	4	10
Attempted Suicide	46	77	123
Total	63	83	146

*88 out of 123 learners were assessed using the HEEADSSS form

Table 1 presents the classification of suicidal behaviors among learners. A total of 146 cases were documented, with 63 males and 83 females. The findings show that attempted suicide accounted for the largest portion (123 cases), followed by completed suicide (13 cases) and suicidal ideation (10 cases). While more females were reported to have attempted suicide, a higher number of males completed suicide. This finding supports global evidence that, although females often exhibit higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts, males are more likely to die by suicide due to the use of more lethal methods (e.g., hanging), which reduces the likelihood of intervention and survival.

This gender disparity highlights the complex dynamics of suicidal behavior. Male learners may display higher impulsivity and risk-taking tendencies, contributing to their higher completion rates. Female learners, on the other hand, are more likely to attempt suicide but with less fatal methods, leading to higher survival rates. The persistence of this gender gap across time and cultural contexts suggests that multiple socio-cultural, psychological, and biological factors interact in shaping suicidal behavior. Thus, further investigation into context-specific risk factors, particularly among Filipino learners, is necessary to design gender-responsive interventions and prevention strategies.

Table 2 Profile of Learners Having Suicidal Behavior in terms of Levels of Basic Education

Levels	Age Ranges	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary	10-12 yrs old	5	3.42
Junior High School	13-16 yrs old	132	90.41
Senior High School	17-18 yrs old	9	6.17
Total		146	100.00

The results reveal that the majority of learners exhibiting suicidal behavior (90.41%) are from junior high school, followed by senior high school (6.17%) and elementary (3.42%). This confirms that suicidal behavior is most prevalent during early to mid-adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, peer influence, and heightened emotional vulnerability.

This finding is supported by Estrada et al. (2019), who found that suicidal ideation and behaviors were highly prevalent among adolescent ALS learners in Manila, with socio-demographic characteristics strongly influencing their attitudes toward suicide. Similarly, Chavez, Labarda, and Cue (2022) analyzed the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) data and reported that Filipino junior high school students exhibited higher rates of suicidal behavior compared to their Indonesian peers, with female students and those experiencing loneliness or bullying at greater risk. In addition, Lagman, Gara, Baweja, and Kim (2021) highlighted those Filipino adolescents facing anxiety, lack of close friendships, and alcohol-related issues are significantly more prone to suicidal ideation and attempts.

These consistent findings across local studies emphasize the urgent need for age-appropriate and gender-responsive mental health programs, particularly focused on junior high school learners, to mitigate the developmental and psychosocial risk factors that heighten their vulnerability to suicidal behaviors.

The respondents' perceptions on interpersonal self-efficacy were gathered using a modified standardized survey checklist form, comprising 15 adapted suggestive statements from Veldman et al.'s (2017) study. For morale assessment, the study by Miraj et al. (2018) was employed. Finally, information on respondents' personality traits was collected through a standardized test developed by Goldberg in 1992, consisting of 50 suggestive statements.

Table 3 Risk Factors of Suicidal Behavior

Theme	Sub-Themes
Family-Related Factors	Parental Absence, Broken Families
Abuse and Trauma	Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse
Socio-Emotional Factors	Broken Relationships, Emotional Instability
Academic-Related Factors	Academic Pressure, Performance Demands

Theme 1: Family-Related Factors. Parental absence and broken family structures emerged as major contributors to suicidal behavior. Many parents are either working abroad or separated, leaving children without sufficient guidance. One parent shared:

“Ang iyang mama toa sa abroad ako gatrabaho pud, lisod ug walay inahan nga magtambag...” A guidance counselor added:

“Dako gyud ug role sir ang ginikanan... kay abroad ang usually parents aning nay ga attempt ug suicide.”

Learners from broken families also expressed difficulty accepting separation, often leading to suicidal tendencies:

“Akong estudyante mam dili man ka kadawat sa pagbulag sa iyang ginikanan, maong mag attempt nalang siyag suicide.”

These narratives resonate with studies showing that parental absence and family conflict heighten the likelihood of suicidal ideation and attempts because children lack the protective factor of parental support. Industry Dive (2022) stressed that trauma from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—such as neglect, family violence, or absence of caregivers—strongly predicts psychiatric illnesses including depression and suicidality. Similarly, Estrada et al. (2019) documented that Filipino adolescents exposed to dysfunctional family dynamics exhibited higher levels of suicidal ideation, while Lagman, Gara, Baweja, and Kim (2021) emphasized that limited parental supervision significantly increases vulnerability to self-harm among Filipino youth. On a broader scale, the World Health Organization (2019) highlighted that family disconnection, poor communication, and unresolved conflicts are among the most consistent predictors of suicidal behavior worldwide. Taken together, these findings affirm that family stability and parental presence are critical protective factors, and their absence creates an emotional void that, when coupled with other stressors, may lead learners to suicidal behavior.

Theme 2: Abuse and Trauma. Physical and sexual abuse emerged as major risk factors for suicidal behavior, as revealed in both learner testimonies and counselor observations. During the focus group discussion, guidance counselors disclosed that several learners who attempted or contemplated suicide had histories of abuse, often by relatives.

One counselor explained:

“There are learners having suicidal behavior who were sexually or physically abused by their relatives.” Learners themselves admitted being haunted by these experiences, with one saying: *“Di na gyud nako malimtan ang nahitabo, hangtod karon magbalik-balik sa akong hunahuna.”* Another shared:

“Lisod kaayo makig-atubang sa klase og uban nga tawo kay mura gyud gihapon ko hilabtan.”

Shafer (2017) emphasized that children exposed to sexual or physical violence are more likely to develop suicidal tendencies because such experiences distort their beliefs about themselves and the future, fostering a sense of despair. Jakubczyk (2014) further explained that early traumatic events can alter neurological development, impair coping mechanisms, and leave long-term psychological vulnerabilities. Similarly, Castroman (2013) noted that childhood sexual abuse has a particularly strong association with suicidal ideation and attempts later in life. Local studies confirm these patterns: Estrada et al. (2019) found that Filipino adolescents who experienced maltreatment or abuse showed significantly higher levels of suicidal ideation compared to peers. On a global level, the World Health Organization (2019) identified child maltreatment and sexual violence as among the most consistent predictors of adolescent suicide. Taken together, the learners’ testimonies and research findings highlight that abuse and trauma not only cause

immediate distress but also produce long-lasting emotional wounds, emphasizing the urgent need for trauma-informed interventions, psychological support, and safeguarding mechanisms in schools.

Theme 3: Socio-Emotional Factors. Broken relationships and socio-emotional struggles emerged as significant contributors to suicidal behavior among learners. During interviews, counselors and teachers noted that several cases of suicide attempts were linked to romantic conflicts, particularly among male students who exhibited poor emotional regulation. One tragic incident involved a student who jumped off a bridge after a breakup, highlighting how loss of intimate relationships can trigger extreme despair. A guidance counselor observed:

“Kasagaran sa mga lalaki sir kay dili makontrol ilang emosyon, kung mag-away sila sa uyab, maghulga na ug suicide.”

Similarly, a learner shared:

“Pagbulag namo sa akong uyab murag wala na koy pulos, mao nga naghunahuna gyud ko og dautan.”

These narratives resonate with Erikson’s psychosocial theory, which situates adolescence in the stage of identity versus role confusion and the pursuit of intimacy (Erikson, 1968/1994). Relationship loss at this stage destabilizes self-concept and belongingness, often intensifying feelings of rejection and hopelessness. Stroebe (2005) described this as the “broken heart” effect, wherein mourning and loneliness after romantic loss heighten suicidal ideation. Empirical studies support this connection: Liu et al. (2020) reported that breakups significantly increased suicidal risk among adolescents who lacked coping strategies. Estrada et al. (2019) also documented that Filipino adolescents facing relationship conflicts had higher levels of depressive symptoms linked to self-harm tendencies. More recently, Lagman and Baweja (2022) emphasized that poor emotional regulation and lack of peer or parental support compound the risks. Taken together, socio-emotional instability during adolescence—especially when linked to broken relationships—emerges as a critical risk factor for suicidal behavior, underscoring the need for schools to integrate socio-emotional learning and counseling support in their programs.

Theme 4: Academic-Related Factors. Academic demands, particularly in high-performing tracks like STEM, surfaced as another major factor influencing suicidal behavior. Several learners expressed feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to excel in challenging subjects such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Calculus. One STEM student admitted: “Pressured kaayo mi sa among academics... kay STEM mi, kinahanglan taas among grado, lisod kaayo.” Another counselor recalled:

“Naay estudyante nga mag-attempt ug suicide kay dili makapasar sa Calculus ug grabe na ka-pressure sa pamilya.”

These testimonies align with research highlighting the heavy toll of academic stress on adolescents. Rogayan, Rafanan, and de Guzman (2021) identified course difficulties and grade expectations as leading stressors among Senior High School students in the Philippines, directly linked to anxiety and depressive symptoms. International studies corroborate these findings: Shi et al. (2017) revealed that excessive academic pressure increases vulnerability to suicidal ideation among Chinese students, while Ralph and Lewis (2018) found similar outcomes among American high schoolers balancing multiple academic requirements. Nelson and Powell (2018) stressed that such stress may push students toward maladaptive coping, including self-harm, rather than resilience. Likewise, Saterbak et al. (2016) emphasized that the rigor of STEM-related courses can be both motivating and destructive depending on available support. Jimoh and Hassan (2020) also documented how inadequate coping mechanisms under high academic workloads directly predict suicidal tendencies in African students. Taken together, these findings illustrate that while academic rigor aims to prepare learners for higher education and careers, it often creates emotional and cognitive strain that, without proper support systems, can escalate to suicidal behavior.

Table 4 Existing Intervention and Preventive Mechanisms

	Intervention	Description	Remarks/Feedback
1.	Referral system	This is done in school with no registered guidance counsellors. One of the advice services offered to students is referral, which enables them to access further support or services that deal with their mental health or other issues. This calls for a variety of internal partners (such as counselors, teachers, nurses, and school administrators), external partners (such as the government, nongovernmental organizations, and agencies), and people with various occupations, fields of expertise, and areas of interest.	Time consuming and slow feedback mechanism
2.	Psychosocial First Aid Modules	Series of activities will be given to the learners as tool to make them ready for the face-to-face classes. Based on the idea of human resilience, psychological first aid (PFA) is a method based on solid research. In the aftermath of a traumatic incident, natural disaster, public health emergency, or simply a personal crisis, PFA tries to lessen stress symptoms and aid in a healthy recovery.	The activities are effective in providing interventions for an individual who had been through behavioural crisis. Needs sustainability of activities in a school year
3.	Homeroom Guidance Counselling Program	Homeroom Guidance is a flexible program that gives students the skills to handle problems that aren't included in the curriculum but are still crucial to their growth. Comparing students who participated in Homeroom Guidance to those who did not, it was discovered that the former dramatically reduced inappropriate behavior and showed a favorable attitude toward school (Baker and Gerler, 2001).	The activities need to contextualize for the needs of every learner in every grade level. Teachers must be able to capacitate to facilitate in the conduct of program.
4.	Collaborative effort of the NGO's	Non-government organizations are extending their emotional support to schools having learners with suicidal behavioral problems.	Limited access to the services offered

The results in Table 4 show that schools in region 10 are implementing various preventive and intervention mechanisms to address suicidal behavior among learners, but these approaches still face significant gaps. The referral system, often used in schools without registered guidance counselors, connects students with available services, but is criticized as time-consuming and lacking prompt feedback. Similarly, the use of Psychosocial First Aid (PFA) modules provides immediate relief for learners who have experienced crises and is rooted in the principle of human resilience, yet the challenge lies in sustaining these activities throughout the school year. Meanwhile, the Homeroom Guidance Counseling Program offers students essential life skills beyond the academic curriculum and has shown positive effects in reducing misbehavior and fostering better school engagement, but its success requires proper contextualization and teacher capacity building. Lastly, NGO collaborations provide additional emotional support, although access to these services remains limited, highlighting the need for stronger and more consistent partnerships between schools and external stakeholders.

The effectiveness and limitations of these mechanisms are supported by existing literature. For instance, referral systems are widely acknowledged as a best practice in school-based mental health care, but delays in response and lack of feedback reduce their impact (Shafer, 2017; Estrada et al., 2019). Psychological First Aid has been validated by the World Health Organization (2019) as an effective early intervention tool in crises, but sustainability requires institutional commitment and trained facilitators. Homeroom guidance programs, as noted by Baker and Gerler (2001), can significantly reduce behavioral issues and improve attitudes toward school, provided that facilitators are adequately trained and content is adapted to learners' developmental needs. Moreover, collaborations with NGOs align with Arango et al. (2018), who emphasized the protective role of connectedness and community partnerships in mitigating suicidal tendencies. Collectively, these findings underscore that while existing mechanisms offer valuable

starting points, their effectiveness depends on systemic improvements—particularly in sustainability, contextualization, and accessibility.

Table 5 Preventive Mechanisms

Preventive Mechanism		Description	Remarks
1.	Parenting Seminar	This is a school initiative during the opening of the new school year. In this event, parents are oriented of their role in guiding and moulding the behavior of their children.	Parents are oriented of their roles in values and moral development of their children.
2.	Assessment of the HEeADSSS	The name HEeADSSS stands for a comprehensive psychosocial assessment instrument that helps health professionals and young people develop a plan together by identifying risk and protective variables. The acronym stands for: Home, Education/Employment, Eating, Activities, Drugs, Sexuality, Suicide/Depression, and Safety. This interview format is flexible and can be catered to all adolescents.	The activities are effective in providing interventions for an individual who had been through behavioural crisis. Needs sustainability of activities in a school year
3.	Visibility of the Guidance Counselors	Guidance counselors are licensed professionals who work in educational settings like schools or universities to help and guide students on academic and personal choices. They offer students individualized counseling, evaluate students' aptitude and potential, and collaborate with other experts on issues pertaining to pupils. They will facilitate when unusual behavior is being observed immediately.	The activities need to contextualize for the needs of every learner in every grade level. Teachers must be able to capacitate to facilitate in the conduct of program.

The findings in Table 5 highlight three preventive mechanisms currently being practiced in schools to address the risk of suicidal behavior among learners. The parenting seminar, typically conducted at the start of the school year, orients parents on their roles in shaping their children’s moral and behavioral development, strengthening the protective role of family involvement. Meanwhile, the He ADSSS assessment tool offers a comprehensive psychosocial framework for identifying risks and protective factors across domains such as home, education, sexuality, and mental health. It is effective in tailoring intervention plans for at-risk learners, though its implementation requires continuity and consistent application throughout the school year to ensure sustainability. The visibility of guidance counselors is also a critical component, as they provide immediate interventions when unusual behaviors are observed, offering both academic and emotional support. However, the success of this mechanism depends on contextualizing interventions per grade level and ensuring that teachers are capacitated to assist in program facilitation. Collectively, these preventive mechanisms emphasize the importance of proactive measures that strengthen family engagement, enhance psychosocial assessment, and guarantee accessible counseling services.

The relevance of these practices is supported by existing studies and frameworks. Parenting interventions are widely recognized as protective factors against adolescent risk behaviors, with the World Health Organization (2017) stressing that family support and supervision significantly reduce vulnerability to suicidal tendencies. The HEeADSSS tool is endorsed in adolescent health research as a flexible and comprehensive assessment framework, proven effective in addressing psychosocial challenges and guiding early interventions (Shafer, 2017; WHO, 2019). The visibility and active role of guidance counselors are likewise crucial; Baker and Gerler (2001) found that structured counseling reduces inappropriate behavior and fosters positive school adjustment, while Lagman et al. (2021) emphasized that limited access to professional counseling increases learners’ susceptibility to mental health crises. These citations affirm that the identified preventive mechanisms are evidence-based but also highlight the need for greater institutional support to sustain parenting programs, fully integrate HEeADSSS in school health initiatives, and expand the availability of trained guidance counselors across grade levels.

Table 6 Policy Recommendations

No.	Agency/Organization	Issue	Policy Recommendations
1	School	Lack of sustainable intervention and preventive mechanisms in counselling learners with suicidal behavior	Provide sustainable intervention and preventive mechanisms in dealing with the learners with suicidal behavior
2	School	Absence or lack of referral procedures in cases where schools have no registered guidance counselors	Obtain school policy on referral system through linking the LGU and non-LGU's to mitigate problems on suicidal behavior
3	School	Designated guidance counselors are teachers and have maximum hours rendered as subject teachers	Craft policy issuance in reducing the number of teaching loads of teachers designated as guidance designate to schools
4	Civil Service Commission	Lack of Guidance Counselors plantilla position items in school	Add more plantilla position items for Guidance Counselors
5	Philippine Guidance Counselors Association	Expensive assessment tool for behavioral assessment	Provide budget allocation for standardized tool on behavioral assessment to learners
6	Department of Social Welfare Development	Slow process of feedback for learners referred to who have suicidal tendencies or behavior	Expedite the feedback mechanism regarding the learners with suicidal behavior especially those were referred by schools
7	Department of Social Welfare Development	Lack of human resources and availability of social worker to remote schools	Allow social workers to be in-charge in schools once-week for on-site conduct of counselling to schools with no guidance counselors
8	Department of Social Welfare Development	Parents have lack of social responsibility to their children	Strengthened issuance of responsible parenthood law to address parents and relatives with delinquencies
9	Civil Service Commission	High qualification standards to graduates of psychology or guidance counselling to be hired in the Department of Education	Reduce and revisit the qualification standards of plantilla position items of Guidance Counselors to be hired in the Department of Education
10	Civil Service Commission/Department of Budget Management	Low salary grade level of guidance counselor items despite of high educational qualifications	Increase salary grade level of guidance counselors 1 to 3
11	Civil Service Commission/Department of Budget Management	Stagnant position items of guidance counselors	Add more items for guidance counselors such as Guidance Counselor IV to VI
12	Commission of Higher Education (CHED)	Lack of courses offered in psychology and guidance counselling	Revisit program or courses to be offered in tertiary educations based on needs especially courses demanded in basic education
13	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)	Parent's absence to work abroad	Craft policy on constant communication for parents working abroad and their children in ensuring family time. Create more job opportunities in the country

14	Local Government Unit of Oroquieta City	Support and collaboration	Strengthen collaboration and partnership in honing the learners' holistic development among the LGU Officials, Barangay Officials, PTA Officials, and Other external stakeholders.
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The data presented in Table 5 highlights a comprehensive set of policy recommendations designed to address the multidimensional issues surrounding suicidal behavior among learners. At the school level, the recommendations call for sustainable intervention and preventive mechanisms, formalized referral systems (especially in the absence of registered guidance counselors), and workload adjustments for teachers designated as guidance counselors. This reflects the pressing need to institutionalize counseling services as a formal and adequately supported function within schools rather than treating them as secondary responsibilities. At the level of national agencies, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) is urged to create more plantilla items for guidance counselors, revisit qualification standards to make the profession more accessible, and improve compensation and career progression. Similarly, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is tasked with expediting referral feedback, addressing human resource shortages, and promoting parental responsibility. These recommendations underline the importance of inter-agency collaboration, as the issues surrounding suicidal behavior extend beyond the school and require support from health, social welfare, and labor institutions.

These proposed measures are consistent with existing research and global best practices. For example, the World Health Organization (2019) stresses that effective suicide prevention requires a multi-sectoral approach involving education, health, labor, and social welfare sectors. The need to reduce guidance counselor workloads and provide more plantilla positions echoes Lagman et al. (2021), who found that inadequate counseling services are a major barrier to addressing adolescent mental health in the Philippines. Policies supporting parental responsibility and communication, particularly in families with members working abroad, align with studies showing that family connectedness and supervision serve as protective factors against suicidal tendencies (Arango et al., 2018; Estrada et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the recommendation to expand CHED course offerings and OWWA programs reflects the ecological model of suicide prevention (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), which emphasizes interventions at the individual, family, institutional, and societal levels. Finally, strengthening LGU partnerships resonates with evidence that community-based interventions improve sustainability and cultural responsiveness of mental health programs (Lee, Hong, and Espelage, 2010). Collectively, the recommendations in Table 5 form a policy blueprint that operationalizes research findings into actionable measures, ensuring systemic and holistic support for learners at risk of suicidal behavior.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that suicidal behavior among learners in region 10 is an urgent and complex concern, with the majority of cases affecting junior high school students. Consistent with global and local studies, females recorded more attempts, while males had higher rates of completion due to the use of more lethal means. The most prominent risk factors identified were broken families, abuse and trauma, socio-emotional instability, and academic pressure, underscoring how personal vulnerabilities intersect with familial, educational, and systemic influences. The scarcity of guidance counselors, the absence of sustainable preventive programs, and the inadequacy of school-based interventions further aggravate these risks. These findings confirm that suicidal behavior is not solely an individual issue but a collective societal challenge requiring holistic, gender-responsive, and multi-sectoral approaches.

In light of these findings, the study recommends a comprehensive, evidence-based, and multi-level response. At the school level, sustainable preventive and intervention mechanisms must be institutionalized, including structured referral systems, contextualized homeroom guidance programs, and regular parenting seminars. The recruitment of more guidance counselors and social workers, supported by revised qualification standards and reduced teaching loads for designated counselors, is essential to ensure adequate mental health services. At the policy level, the Civil Service Commission, Department of Budget and Management, and CHED should collaborate to expand plantilla positions, adjust salary grades, and strengthen psychology and counseling programs in higher education. The DSWD must also expedite referral feedback and deploy more social workers to underserved schools, while OWWA and LGUs should strengthen family support and community-based interventions. These recommendations are consistent with the World Health Organization's (2019) call for multi-sectoral suicide prevention strategies, as well as local studies (Estrada et al., 2019; Lagman et al., 2021) highlighting the protective role of connectedness, family engagement, and accessible counseling.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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