

The Mediating Role of Self-Injurious Thoughts in the Relationship Between Psychological Distress and Death Obsession with Suicide Attempts Among Adolescents Experiencing War Anxiety

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the paragraph discussing war anxiety, the sentence “War anxiety has increasingly become a critical construct in psychological research...” should be supported by a more precise conceptual definition. The manuscript uses war anxiety as a central inclusion criterion and research context, yet it does not sufficiently distinguish war anxiety from general anxiety, trauma-related fear, acute stress reaction, or posttraumatic stress symptoms. A clearer operational and theoretical definition is needed.

In the introduction paragraph referring to “the military crisis involving the United States, Israel, and Iran,” the authors should provide a more cautious and academically neutral formulation. Because this is a politically sensitive and temporally specific

claim, the manuscript should avoid language that could appear journalistic or unverified and should state the crisis context in a precise, documented, and ethically sensitive manner.

In the introduction paragraph that states “suicide attempt represents one of the most severe manifestations of psychological crisis,” the authors should better justify why suicide attempt, rather than suicidal ideation or self-harm behavior, was selected as the main endogenous variable. Given the age of participants and the sensitivity of the outcome, the theoretical distinction among suicide attempt, suicidal ideation, self-injury, and self-injurious thoughts should be clarified.

In the paragraph discussing psychological distress, the manuscript states that “psychological distress may become more severe because the individual is repeatedly exposed to threat, uncertainty, loss of control, and disruption of ordinary life.” This is a strong theoretical claim, but it would benefit from a more direct connection to the study’s structural model. The authors should explain why psychological distress was hypothesized to affect suicide attempts both directly and indirectly through self-injurious thoughts.

In the paragraph on death obsession, the manuscript explains that death obsession involves “persistent, intrusive, repetitive, and distressing thoughts about death.” However, the rationale for including death obsession alongside war anxiety needs further elaboration. Since war anxiety itself may include fear of death and danger, the authors should clarify the conceptual non-overlap between war anxiety and death obsession to reduce concerns about construct redundancy.

In the paragraph that states “self-injurious thoughts may represent a critical transitional mechanism linking generalized distress and death-related preoccupation to actual suicidal behavior,” the mediation hypothesis is well articulated, but the authors should specify whether this mediation is theoretically full or partial. This is especially important because the results showed a significant direct path from psychological distress to suicide attempt, but no direct path from death obsession to suicide attempt.

In the methods paragraph beginning with “This study was conducted with the aim of developing and testing a multivariate causal model,” the use of the term “causal model” should be revised. Because the study is non-experimental, correlational, cross-sectional, and based on voluntary online sampling, causal claims are not methodologically justified. The authors should replace “causal model” with “hypothesized structural model” or “explanatory structural model.”

In the War Anxiety Scale paragraph, the fit index is reported as “RMSE = 0.079.” This appears to be a typographical error and should likely be “RMSEA.” The authors should carefully review all statistical abbreviations, because incorrect reporting of fit indices can reduce the perceived methodological rigor of the manuscript.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the methods paragraph reporting that “Data were collected concurrently with the early stages of the military crisis,” the authors should provide exact Gregorian dates for the data collection period. The phrase “over 30 days from the beginning of the war” is insufficient for scientific reproducibility and may create ambiguity for international readers. The start and end dates of data collection should be clearly stated.

In the sampling paragraph, the manuscript states that “2,789 individuals accessed the questionnaire link, of whom 918 registered initial responses,” but it does not provide a flow diagram or detailed exclusion breakdown. The authors should report how many responses were excluded for incompleteness, poor response quality, failure to meet the war anxiety cut-off score, age ineligibility, or other reasons. This would substantially improve transparency and reduce concerns about selection bias.

In the sentence “215 datasets were retained for the final analysis,” the authors justify the sample size by stating that it exceeded the minimum recommended threshold for SEM. This justification is too general. The authors should report a more rigorous sample-size rationale, such as number of estimated parameters, model complexity, anticipated effect sizes, statistical power, or Monte Carlo/power-based justification for structural equation modeling.

In the inclusion criteria paragraph, the threshold “scores above 45 on the War Anxiety Scale” requires stronger justification. The authors should explain whether this cut-off was empirically validated, theoretically defined, based on percentile

distribution, or recommended by the scale developers. Without this explanation, the screening criterion may appear arbitrary and may affect the interpretability and generalizability of the findings.

In the ethics paragraph, the manuscript states that “electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants.” Because the participants were adolescents aged 15 to 18, the authors should clarify whether parental or guardian consent was obtained, whether adolescent assent was collected, and how risk management was handled for participants who reported suicide risk. This is a major ethical issue that requires explicit reporting.

In the instruments section, the Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised is described as “Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised,” but the article’s variable is repeatedly labeled “suicide attempt.” The authors should clarify whether the instrument measures suicide attempt specifically or broader suicidal behaviors. If the total score reflects suicidal behavior or suicide risk rather than actual attempt, the terminology throughout the manuscript should be corrected to avoid overinterpretation.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.