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Editorial

Predicting Suicide Rates in Southeast Asian Countries

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There has been limited research in recent years on suicidal behavior in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC), and there have been efforts to stimulate suicide research and suicide prevention in these countries (Lester & Arafat, 2026). The present editorial sought to look for correlates of suicide rates in Southeast Asian Countries. Southeast Asia comprises eleven countries (see Table 1). The suicide rates vary widely, ranging from 1.2 per 100,000 per year to 16.6, according to World Health Organization suicide rates (see footnote 2).

Data for the population, population density, fertility rate, median age and the percentage of urban population came from https://www.worldometers.info, and the Human Development Index came from wordpopulationreview.com. The suicide rates from the two sources were strongly associated ($r=0.89$, $p<.001$). The suicide rate in 2023 was significantly associated only with the fertility rate ($r=-0.65$, $p<.05$) and median age ($r=0.72$, $p<.05$). The significant correlations were the same for the male suicide rate and the female suicide rate. The female/male suicide rate ratio was not significantly associated with any of the predictor variables.

Table 1: Suicide rates in Southeast Asian countries

	Suicide rate 2023[1]		**2021[2]**	
	Total	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Brunei	4.35	6.50	1.94	3.0
Cambodia	3.96	5.84	2.35	4.5
Indonesia	1.87	2.43	1.28	1.2
Laos	4.63	6.55	2.68	4.6
Malaysia	3.56	5.46	1.45	5.7
Myanmar	5.37	8.93	2.05	2.9
Philippines	3.79	6.05	1.46	3.5
Singapore	9.44	12.74	6.00	8.1
Thailand	12.48	21.24	4.41	16.6
Timor-Leste	4.15	5.52	2.72	3.6
Vietnam	9.65	12.63	6.68	7.3

A multiple regression to predict the total suicide rate had four significant beta coefficients in a backward multiple regression: fertility rate beta=0.686 ($p<.05$), median age beta=1.057 ($p<.001$), Human Development Index beta=0.597 ($p<.05$) and the percentage of Muslims beta=-0.776 ($p<.001$), with an $R^2=0.974$.

Obviously with a small sample of countries, it is not easy to find correlates of the suicide rates. However, two correlates were found (the fertility rate and the median age) indicating that countries with an aging population had a higher suicide rate. It is well-documented that, in most countries, suicide rates rise with age. The fact that four predictor variables provided an extremely high R^2 is noteworthy. Further research on Asian countries would be welcome.

[1] From https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/suicide-rate-by-country

[2] From https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.SUIC.P5; same as https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/crude-suicide-rates-(per-100-000-population)

References

Lester, D., & Arafat, Y. S. M. (2026). Studying suicide in low- and middle-Income countries: A pathway. In progress.