

# Quality of Life as a Mediator between Emotional Intelligence and Suicidal Ideation among Chinese College Students: A Structural Equation Modeling Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The population of Chinese college students has been steadily increasing in recent years, accompanied by a growing number of students experiencing suicidal ideation. This study aimed to examine the levels of emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation among Chinese college students. Furthermore, it investigated the interrelationships among these variables, with a particular focus on how quality of life influences suicidal ideation. **Methods:** A convenience sampling approach was employed to collect data from 150 college students in Hebei Province, China, resulting in 148 valid responses. The survey included standardized measures of emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), and bootstrap testing. **Results:** The mean score for suicidal ideation among participants was 24.68 (SD = 19.12), indicating a relatively elevated level. The average quality of life score was 71.30 (SD = 19.66), while the mean emotional intelligence score was 113.29 (SD = 29.45). Emotional intelligence was found to be significantly correlated with both quality of life and suicidal ideation. Specifically, emotional intelligence was negatively associated with suicidal ideation and positively associated with quality of life. In turn, quality of life was negatively associated with suicidal ideation and partially mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation.

**Conclusions:** Quality of life serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. Enhancing students' quality of life—particularly within the campus environment—may help mitigate suicidal ideation. These findings highlight the importance for educational institutions and policymakers to consider students' quality of life in the development of mental health interventions and support services.

**Keywords:** Quality of Life, Emotional Intelligence, Suicidal Ideation, Chinese College Students

## INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of China's economy and the growth of its population, the number of enrolled college students has been increasing year by year. College serves as a critical transitional stage between school and society, playing a pivotal role in preparing students for adult life and future careers[1]. However, under the pressure of academic, social, and personal challenges, research has shown that the prevalence of suicidal ideation among Chinese college students has also been rising steadily[2]. Moreover, some studies have indicated that college students report higher levels of suicidal ideation compared to their non-college-attending peers [3, 4].

There are multiple contributing factors to the rising levels of suicidal ideation among college students. Research has identified various correlates, including academic stress, poor academic performance, lack of motivation, learning difficulties, low psychological resilience, and even emotional intelligence as significant influences [5, 6]. This phenomenon is not unique to China; similar trends have been observed in countries such as India and Nigeria [7, 8]. Some studies have also pointed out that the shift from the highly structured and disciplined environment of high school to the comparatively autonomous atmosphere of college life can contribute to increased suicidal ideation among students [9]. Additionally, the relative psychological immaturity of college students and their financial dependence on their families are also important factors that should not be overlooked [1].

The development of emotional intelligence constitutes a vital aspect of college students' psychological growth [10]. Emotional intelligence encompasses a range of abilities, including interpersonal communication, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. In academic settings, it often manifests through the regulation and experience of academic emotions, which can substantially influence learning outcomes and academic performance [11]. Moreover, previous research has indicated that emotional intelligence is closely associated with both quality of life and suicidal ideation among college students, suggesting that higher emotional intelligence may serve as a protective factor in mental health and well-being.

The trait emotional intelligence theory was used to explain the emotional intelligence in this study. Trait emotional intelligence relies on self-report questionnaires and emphasizes emotional self-efficacy [12]. In this research, a measure based on trait emotional intelligence theory was employed, acknowledging that there are no right or wrong answers in emotional intelligence assessment, and each option reflects an individual's emotional intelligence characteristics.

A substantial body of research has consistently demonstrated a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation [10, 13, 14]. Generally, individuals with higher emotional intelligence report lower levels of suicidal ideation, whereas lower emotional intelligence is often associated with an increased risk. Emotional intelligence enhances one's ability to understand and regulate emotions within interpersonal and social contexts, which is critical in mitigating the emergence and progression of suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, individuals who are well-integrated into their social environments—such as family, school, or workplace—tend to demonstrate greater emotional resilience and a reduced risk of suicide, even when encountering high levels of stress [15].

The concept of quality of life is often reflected through related constructs such as life satisfaction and happiness [16]. Although a considerable body of research has examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and quality of life, much of this work has focused on older adults or clinical populations, where quality of life is typically defined in health-related terms [17, 18]. In contrast, the World Health Organization [19] defines quality of life more broadly, encompassing not only physical and psychological health, but also social relationships and environmental factors. This broader conceptualization aligns closely with the external dimensions of emotional intelligence, particularly sociability and emotionality [20]. Studies have shown that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate stronger interpersonal communication and environmental adaptability, which contribute to enhanced overall quality of life [21].

Emotional intelligence also plays a crucial role in an individual's capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate their own emotions, thereby influencing their behavior and decision-making [22]. Individuals with lower emotional intelligence often experience greater difficulty in managing stress compared to those with higher emotional intelligence [23]. Furthermore, research suggests that individuals adopt different coping strategies based on their level of emotional intelligence when facing stressful situations [24]. Those with lower emotional

intelligence are more vulnerable to emotional disturbances in response to negative emotional experiences, which may, in turn, increase their risk of developing suicidal ideation [25].

Although numerous studies have investigated suicide-related issues among Chinese college students, relatively few have specifically examined the interrelationships between emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. Even within the same academic and social environment, students with different levels of emotional intelligence and perceived quality of life may experience varying degrees of suicidal ideation. Exploring the role of quality of life in this context holds considerable practical significance, as it can deepen our understanding of the psychological factors influencing suicidal ideation and inform the development of targeted prevention and intervention strategies.

Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation in a sample of Chinese college students. Specifically, it investigates whether quality of life serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. It is hypothesized that quality of life partially mediates the effect of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation.

## METHODS

### Participants

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to investigate the relationships among emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling from a university in China. The sample included students ranging from first-year undergraduates to graduate-level students. Individuals who had been clinically diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, such as depression, were excluded from participation to control for potential confounding variables.

### Measures

Participants completed an anonymous self-report questionnaire via a mobile phone scanning system. The questionnaire included three standardized scales measuring emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. In addition, demographic information was collected, including gender, academic year, ethnicity, only-child status, and religious affiliation.

#### 1) Emotional Intelligence

The Chinese version of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form (TEIQue-SF) was translated from the original English version [26] by native Chinese-speaking faculty members and graduate students proficient in English. The translation was subsequently reviewed and refined by a psychology professor with over 30 years of teaching experience to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance [27]. The TEIQue-SF uses a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). The scale consists of 30 items covering four dimensions: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Four items (Items 3, 14, 18, and 29) are not assigned to any specific dimension but are included in the calculation of the global trait emotional intelligence score.

#### 2) Quality-of-life

The World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment BREF Chinese Version (WHOQOL-BREF-CV), was used to assess participants' quality of life. This instrument consists of 26 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, covering four domains: physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental

factors. The WHOQOL-BREF-CV is a widely validated tool for measuring perceived quality of life across diverse populations.

### 3) Suicidal Ideation

The Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASIQ) is a 25-item instrument developed by Reynolds [28] to assess the frequency and severity of suicidal ideation in adults. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more frequent or intense suicidal thoughts. The ASIQ captures a continuum of suicidal ideation, ranging from passive thoughts such as wishing one had never been born, to more active and specific considerations of suicide, including thoughts about methods, timing, and leaving suicide notes. In addition to direct expressions of suicidal intent, the scale also addresses related cognitive and emotional themes, such as using suicide as retaliation, as a means to gain recognition from others, the belief that no one cares whether one lives or dies, and viewing suicide as a way to resolve life problems.

### Data Collection

Prior to participation, all individuals were informed of the purpose and content of the study and provided informed consent. Questionnaires were completed anonymously via a mobile phone by scanning a QR code, ensuring ease of access and participant confidentiality. The anonymized responses were accessible only to the primary researcher through a secured, password-protected platform, thereby maintaining data privacy. As a token of appreciation, participants received a small gift upon completing the questionnaire.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze participants' demographic characteristics, as well as scores on emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. To examine potential relationships among the main variables, Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the associations between emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. To further explore the mediating effect of quality of life in the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation, a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was utilized, along with bootstrapping techniques to test the significance of the mediation effect. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 29.0 and SmartPLS software.

## RESULTS

A total of 150 students participated in the survey, of which 148 provided valid responses after excluding incomplete or invalid questionnaires. Among the valid respondents, 90 (60.8%) were male, 116 (78.4%) identified as Han Chinese, 42 (28.4%) reported being an only child, and 127 (85.8%) indicated having no religious affiliation. Detailed demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 General and characteristics (n=148)

Variables	Category	N (%)
Gender	Male	90 (60.8)
	Female	58 (39.2)
Grade	First year	28 (18.9)
	Second year	26 (17.6)

	Third year	28 (18.9)
	Fourth year	42 (28.4)
	Postgraduate	24 (16.2)
Ethnic	Ethnic Minority	32 (21.6)
	Han	116 (78.4)
Only child	Yes	42 (28.4)
	No	106 (71.6)
Religion	Yes	21 (14.2)
	No	127 (85.8)

As shown in Table 2, the mean item score for emotional intelligence was 4.37, with a total mean score of 113.29. The mean total score for suicidal ideation was 24.68, indicating a relatively elevated level of suicidal thoughts among participants. For quality of life, the mean item score was 2.97, and the total mean score was 71.30.

TABLE 2 Levels of emotional intelligence, quality-of-life and suicidal ideation (n=148)		
Variables	Category	Mean ± SD
Emotional intelligence	Emotionally	4.15±1.56
	Self-control	4.53±1.46
	Well-being	4.36±1.61
	Sociability	4.45±1.60
	Item mean score (Score range: 1-7)	4.37±1.14
	Total mean score (Score range:7-210)	113.29±29.45
suicidal ideation	Dimension1	0.96±0.81
	Dimension2	0.96±0.78
	Dimension3	0.56±0.41
	Item mean score (Score range: 0-6)	0.82±0.64
	Total mean score (Score range: 0-150)	24.68±19.12
Quality-of-life	Physical	2.90±1.09
	Psychological	2.95±1.14
	Social	2.96±1.22
	Environment	3.05±1.08
	Item mean score (Score range: 0-5)	2.97±0.83
	Total mean score (Score range:0-130)	71.30±19.66

As presented in Table 3, significant correlations were observed among emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. Emotional intelligence was negatively correlated with suicidal ideation ( $r = -0.639$ ,  $p <$

0.01), indicating that higher emotional intelligence is associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation. Additionally, emotional intelligence was positively correlated with quality of life ( $r = 0.649$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while quality of life was negatively correlated with suicidal ideation ( $r = -0.569$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to report better quality of life and lower levels of suicidal ideation.

TABLE 3 Correlations among emotional intelligence, dimensions of quality-of-life and suicidal ideation.

<b>r</b>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Emotional intelligence	1	-.639**	.649**	.418**	.491**	.630**	.450**
2 suicidal ideation		1	-.569**	-.448**	-.327**	-.507**	-.423**
3 Quality-of-life			1	.709**	.744**	.674**	.771**
4 QL-Physical				1	.335**	.427**	.282**
5 QL-Psychological					1	.421**	.425**
6 QL-Social relationships						1	.398**
7 QL-Environment							1
** $p < 0.01$							

Based on the above findings, further path analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation. Figure 1 presents the structural model illustrating the direct path from emotional intelligence to suicidal ideation, without including any mediating variables. This figure highlights the direct effect of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation. Additionally, the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence—emotionality, self-control, sociability, and well-being—are displayed alongside the three dimensions of suicidal ideation, providing a more detailed view of the variable structure and their respective contributions to the model.

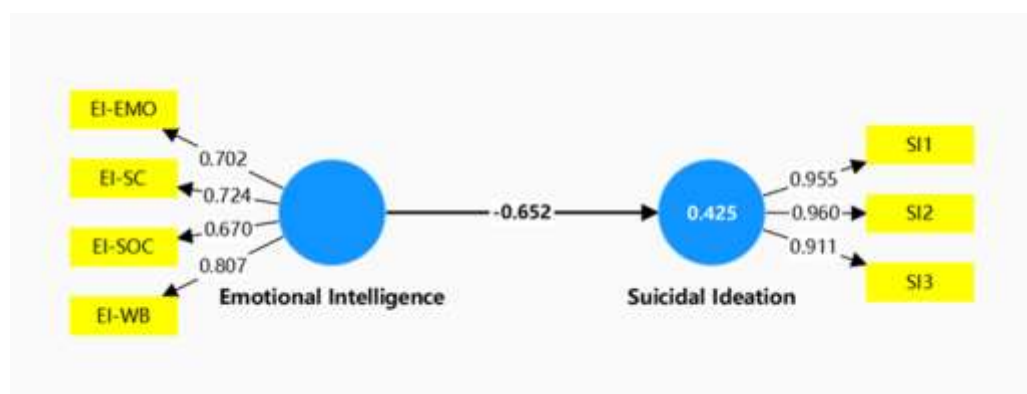


Figure 1 Path coefficients for total effect of emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation

To further examine whether the effect of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation is statistically significant,  $t$ -values for the path coefficients were calculated, and the significance levels of the direct and indirect paths were assessed. Figure 2 presents the structural model including the mediating variable—quality of life—and displays the corresponding path coefficients and  $t$ -statistics. The results indicate the extent to which emotional intelligence directly and indirectly influence suicidal ideation through the mediating effect of quality of life.

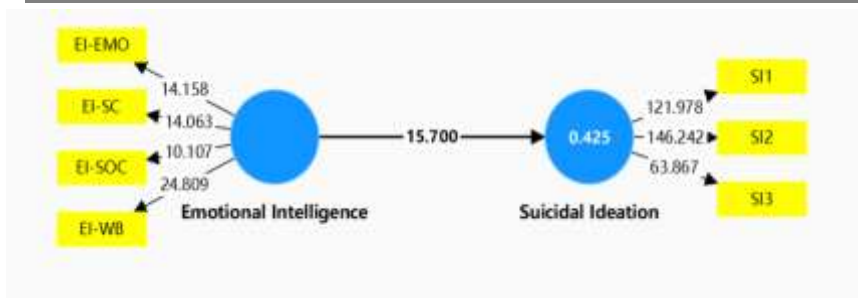


Figure 2 T-statistic value of total effect of emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation

Table 4 presents the path coefficient and corresponding t-statistic for the total effect of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation. The path coefficient was  $-0.652$ , with a t-statistic of 15.700. According to conventional significance criteria, a path is considered statistically significant when the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, these results indicate that emotional intelligence has a significant negative effect on suicidal ideation. In other words, emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among college students, with higher levels of emotional intelligence associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation.

TABLE 4 Results for total effect of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation

Path	Path Coefficients	T-statistic	Standard Error	P-value
Emotional Intelligence => suicidal ideation	$-0.652$	15.700	0.042	$<.001$

To assess the overall model fit, several fit indices were examined. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value for the estimated model was 0.084, which falls within the acceptable threshold of 0.10, indicating an adequate model fit [29]. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.831, suggesting a reasonably good fit between the proposed model and the observed data. Additionally, the squared Euclidean distance ( $d_{ULS} = 0.470$ ) and the geodesic distance ( $d_G = 0.173$ ) further support the plausibility of the model. These results suggest that the structural model demonstrates an acceptable level of fit and can be considered appropriate for further analysis.

Figure 3 illustrates the structural model depicting the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation, with quality of life serving as a mediating variable. In this model, quality of life is represented as a multidimensional construct comprising four subdomains: physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental factors. The figure displays the path coefficients among the variables, highlighting both the direct and indirect effects of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation through the mediating role of quality of life.

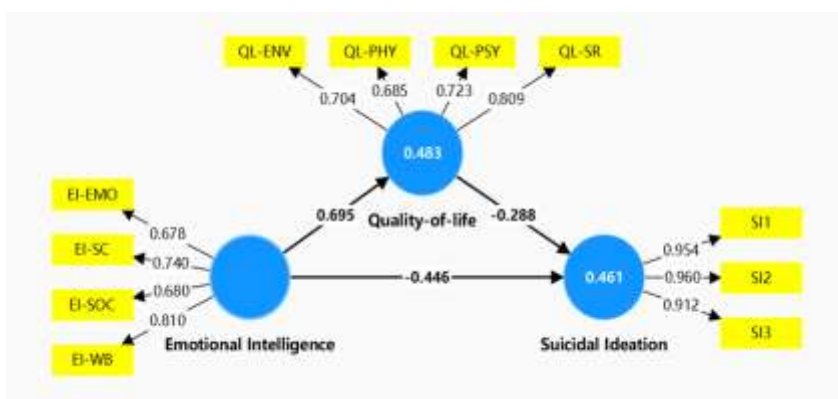


Figure 3 Path coefficients with the mediating role of quality-of-life on the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation

The significance of the mediating effect was assessed by examining the t-statistics of the indirect paths. In addition, the significance levels of all path coefficients were evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure provided by SmartPLS. Figure 4 presents the results of the bootstrap analysis, including the t-values and significance levels for each path. These results provide further support for the mediating role of quality of life in the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation.

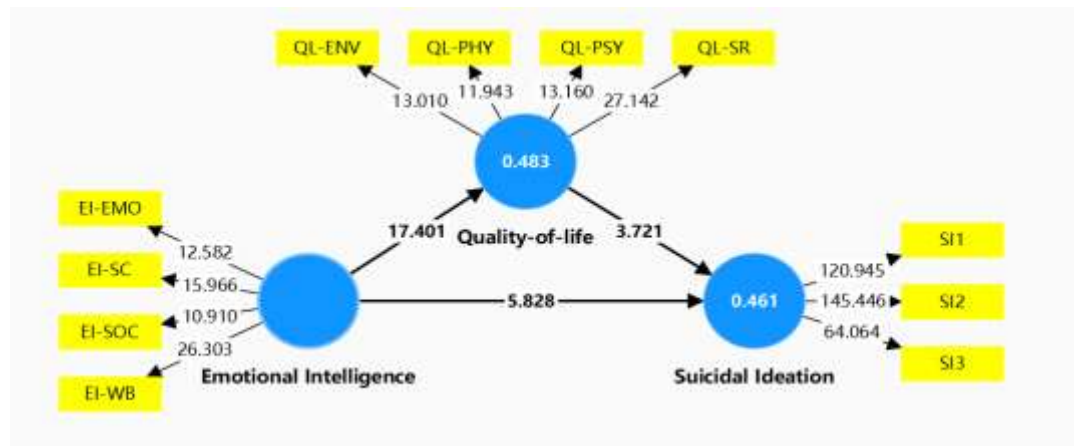


Figure 4 T-statistic value with the mediating role of quality-of-life on the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation

According to Table 5, the path coefficient from emotional intelligence to quality of life was 0.695, from quality of life to suicidal ideation was  $-0.288$ , and from emotional intelligence to suicidal ideation was  $-0.446$ . All corresponding t-statistics exceeded the threshold of 1.96, with values of 17.401, 3.721, and 5.828, respectively, indicating statistical significance at the 0.05 level. These results support the following conclusions: (1) emotional intelligence has a significant positive effect on quality of life; (2) quality of life has a significant negative effect on suicidal ideation; and (3) emotional intelligence has a significant negative effect on suicidal ideation. These findings confirm both the direct and indirect influence of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation, mediated by quality of life.

TABLE 5 Results with the mediating effect of quality-of-life

Path	Path Coefficients	T-statistic	Standard Error	P-value
Emotional Intelligence=>Quality-of-life	.695	17.401	0.040	<.001
Quality-of-life=>suicidal ideation	-.288	3.721	0.077	<.001
Emotional Intelligence=>suicidal ideation	-.446	5.828	0.043	<.001

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated the levels of emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation among Chinese college students, and examined the interrelationships among these variables. In particular, the mediating role of quality of life in the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation was explored. The results indicated that, while participants exhibited moderately high levels of emotional intelligence, the prevalence of suicidal ideation remained relatively high. This finding aligns with previous research, which suggests that Chinese college students may not necessarily lack emotional intelligence, but still report elevated levels of suicidal ideation due to a range of contextual stressors, including academic pressure, job market uncertainty, and



psychosocial challenges [30-32].

The results of this study suggest that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to report a higher quality of life. In this research, quality of life encompasses not only physical well-being but also psychological health, social relationships, and environmental satisfaction. Therefore, it can be inferred that students with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to regulate their psychological states, foster positive interpersonal relationships, and adapt effectively to their social and environmental contexts. Conversely, lower emotional intelligence may hinder one's ability to cope with stressors across these domains. These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the positive association between emotional intelligence and various dimensions of quality of life [33, 34].

In the assessment of quality of life within the environmental domain—such as perceptions of living conditions, safety, access to social resources, and availability of information—individuals with higher emotional intelligence are often more capable of interpreting their surroundings in a positive manner. Even in the face of limited objective conditions, they are more likely to adapt flexibly and find constructive ways to optimize available resources. This is particularly relevant for college students, who are typically in a transitional stage of life and highly dependent on their immediate environment, including dormitory conditions, campus activities, and access to academic resources [35]. Students with higher emotional intelligence may be more adept at managing stress resulting from environmental changes and may actively enhance their surroundings through positive emotional regulation and interpersonal engagement—for example, by fostering harmonious roommate relationships or promoting a cooperative atmosphere in group settings. Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki [36] also found that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to perceive environmental adversity as manageable and to identify and utilize positive environmental resources, thereby enhancing their overall evaluation of quality of life.

In traditional Chinese culture, individuals are often encouraged to suppress their emotions and maintain outward harmony. This tendency is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where the expression of emotions such as sadness, anxiety, or helplessness is frequently perceived as a sign of weakness or immaturity. Such a cultural atmosphere may undermine the practical application of emotional intelligence, making it more difficult for individuals to accurately recognize and express their emotional needs, thereby increasing the accumulation of psychological distress. Furthermore, academic achievement is highly valued in most Chinese families, and rural college students often carry the expectation of transforming their family's socioeconomic status. This high-pressure environment can intensify feelings of anxiety and loneliness, and without adequate emotional support, may lead to a sense of hopelessness and even suicidal ideation.

The stigma surrounding mental health issues further exacerbates the situation. In many cases, students refrain from seeking professional help for fear of being labeled as “problematic,” which leads to prolonged emotional suppression. Additionally, interpersonal relationships are considered highly important in Chinese culture. However, rural college students may experience marginalization due to urban-rural divides, economic hardship, or cultural adjustment difficulties, all of which contribute to a weakened social support system and reduce their capacity to cope with psychological stress. These cultural and environmental factors may not only amplify the impact of emotional intelligence on mental health but also play a significant role in the development of suicidal ideation.

According to the results presented in Table 5, quality of life serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation among Chinese college students. Specifically, the direct effect of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation was reduced when quality of life was included as a mediating variable, indicating that part of the influence of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation operates indirectly through its impact on students' perceived quality of life. This finding suggests that quality of life plays a crucial

role in mitigating suicidal ideation, particularly among students with lower levels of emotional intelligence. In other words, enhancing students' quality of life may serve as an effective intervention pathway to buffer the negative psychological outcomes associated with low emotional intelligence.

Previous research has consistently shown that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to have better mental health and lower levels of suicidal ideation. The path analysis conducted in this study further confirmed the significance of this negative correlation [37]. As discussed earlier, emotional intelligence is also positively associated with quality of life. Favorable living conditions, strong social support, and greater adaptability to the environment can buffer individuals from overreacting to negative life events and reduce feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Moreover, a higher quality of life can enhance an individual's sense of self-worth and life meaning, thereby contributing to lower suicidal ideation.

This study examined the interrelationships among emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation, and proposed a mediation model in which quality of life plays a mediating role. The findings highlight the importance of enhancing emotional intelligence and improving quality of life as potential strategies for reducing suicidal ideation among college students.

This study has several limitations. First, the gender distribution of the sample is slightly imbalanced, with a higher proportion of male students. As a result, the findings should not be generalized or interpreted from a gender-specific perspective. Second, given the vast and diverse population of college students in China, the researchers were constrained by limited resources and were unable to collect data from a larger or more geographically diverse sample. Nonetheless, this limitation does not necessarily compromise the representativeness of the sample, as the participants still reflect key characteristics of the broader student population.

Suicidal ideation and mental health problems among college students are not only individual concerns but also pose substantial challenges for China's educational system and broader society. As future intellectuals and contributors to national development, college students occupy a pivotal role in the country's progress. Various factors—such as emotional intelligence, quality of life, family dynamics, psychological resilience, and social support—can influence the emergence of suicidal ideation. The findings of this study provide important insights into the underlying causes of suicidal ideation among college students and can serve as a valuable reference for the formulation of targeted and effective intervention strategies by educational institutions and policymakers.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study provides preliminary evidence regarding the relationships among emotional intelligence, quality of life, and suicidal ideation in Chinese college students. The results indicate that emotional intelligence is significantly associated with both quality of life and suicidal ideation. Moreover, quality of life partially mediates the negative relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. These findings contribute to the existing body of literature on college student mental health and may offer implications for broader applications across different populations and contexts.

At the same time, the findings of this study offer a foundational basis for the development of intervention programs aimed at alleviating suicidal ideation among college students by enhancing their quality of life and reducing stress. In light of these findings, psychological counselors and university mental health educators are encouraged to integrate emotional intelligence training into freshman orientation or first-year adjustment programs, helping students build emotional awareness and regulation skills from the outset. Additionally, universities should consider establishing peer support networks and mentoring systems to foster a sense of connection and emotional support among students. Improvements in campus infrastructure and psychosocial

environments—such as increasing access to green spaces, creating safe and inclusive communal areas, and promoting open dialogue around mental health—may also contribute to enhancing students' perceived quality of life and overall well-being. Future research should focus on designing and implementing such targeted interventions, rigorously evaluating their effectiveness, and exploring their long-term impact. These efforts will be crucial for promoting the psychological well-being and overall mental health of Chinese college students.

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## Ethics Approval

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the University Technology Malaysia Research Ethics Committee (UTM REC) of Johor Bahru, Malaysia (Approval No. UTMREC-2024-80).

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