




Modeling the Relationship Between Meaning in Life and Suicidal Tendency with the Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the structural relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency and to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in this relationship among young adults living in Tehran.

Methods and Materials: The present study employed an applied descriptive-correlational design using structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of young adults aged 18 to 35 years residing in Tehran in 2025. A total of 400 participants were selected through cluster random sampling from different municipal districts. Data were collected using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), the Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (BSSI), and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES). After screening the data for missing values, outliers, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity, the proposed structural model was tested. Model adequacy was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices, including χ^2/df , RMSEA, CFI, NFI, GFI, and AGFI.

Findings: The proposed structural model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.41$, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .94, NFI = .92, GFI = .95, AGFI = .94). Meaning in life had a significant negative direct effect on suicidal tendency ($\beta = -.61$, $z = -6.57$, $p = .001$), indicating that greater perceived meaning was associated with lower suicidal tendency. Self-efficacy also showed a significant negative direct effect on suicidal tendency ($\beta = -.49$, $z = -4.27$, $p = .001$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of meaning in life on suicidal tendency through self-efficacy was significant ($\beta = -.19$, $z = -2.60$, $p = .009$), supporting the mediating role of self-efficacy in the model.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that meaning in life serves as a significant protective factor against suicidal tendency both directly and indirectly through self-efficacy. Young adults who perceive greater meaning and purpose in life tend to report stronger self-efficacy beliefs and lower suicidal tendency. Therefore, interventions designed to enhance life meaning and self-efficacy may contribute substantially to suicide prevention efforts among young adults.

Keywords: *Meaning in life; Suicidal tendency; Self-efficacy; Young adults; Structural equation modeling.*

1. Introduction

Suicidal tendency is one of the most serious mental health challenges worldwide and represents a major public health concern, particularly among young adults who experience numerous developmental, social, educational, and occupational transitions. Young adulthood is characterized by increased responsibility, identity formation, academic and career pressures, interpersonal challenges, and uncertainty regarding future life trajectories. While many individuals successfully adapt to these demands, others experience substantial psychological distress that may increase vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Contemporary theories of suicide emphasize that suicidal tendency emerges through the interaction of cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and environmental risk factors rather than from a single cause (Joiner, 2005; Klonsky & May, 2015; O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018). Consequently, identifying protective psychological factors that reduce suicidal tendency has become a major focus of contemporary psychological research and suicide prevention efforts.

Recent theoretical models have highlighted the importance of psychological resources that help individuals maintain hope, purpose, resilience, and adaptive coping during periods of adversity. Among these resources, meaning in life has received increasing attention as a protective factor against psychological distress and suicidal ideation. Meaning in life refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as purposeful, coherent, significant, and worthwhile. It encompasses both the presence of meaning and the active search for meaning. The presence of meaning reflects the degree to which individuals believe that their lives already possess purpose and value, whereas the search for meaning reflects efforts to establish or strengthen a sense of life purpose (Steger et al., 2006). Research has consistently shown that individuals who perceive greater meaning in life demonstrate higher levels of psychological well-being, resilience, life satisfaction, and adaptive functioning (Schulenberg et al., 2011; Steger et al., 2009).

The relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency has attracted considerable empirical attention. Existential theories propose that a perceived lack of meaning may result in feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, and despair, all of which are recognized risk factors for suicidal ideation. Conversely, when individuals perceive their lives as meaningful, they are more likely to maintain hope, pursue valued goals, and remain committed to life despite adversity.

Meaning in life provides a framework through which stressful experiences can be interpreted and integrated into a broader sense of purpose, thereby reducing the likelihood that temporary suffering will be perceived as unbearable or permanent. Studies have demonstrated that higher levels of meaning in life are associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation, depression, hopelessness, and psychological distress (Heisel & Flett, 2004; Sun et al., 2022).

The protective role of meaning in life can also be understood within contemporary suicide theories. The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide suggests that suicidal thoughts emerge when individuals experience perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness while simultaneously losing motivation to remain connected to life (Joiner, 2005). Similarly, the Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model proposes that feelings of defeat, humiliation, entrapment, and hopelessness contribute to suicidal ideation, while protective factors can interrupt this process (O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018). The Three-Step Theory further emphasizes that suicidal ideation develops when psychological pain and hopelessness outweigh connectedness to life (Klonsky & May, 2015). Meaning in life may function as a powerful protective resource within these theoretical frameworks because it strengthens psychological connectedness, promotes future orientation, and enhances an individual's commitment to valued life goals.

Empirical evidence supports the importance of meaning in life in understanding suicidal processes. Research has shown that meaning in life mediates the relationship between depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation, suggesting that individuals who maintain a sense of purpose may be less vulnerable to suicidal thinking even when experiencing significant emotional distress (Sun et al., 2022). Similarly, studies have demonstrated that meaning in life mediates associations between adverse psychological experiences and suicidal thoughts, highlighting its role as a psychological mechanism through which risk factors influence suicidality (Fathi et al., 2025; Nikdel et al., 2022). Furthermore, interventions designed to strengthen life meaning have been associated with improvements in resilience, perceived social support, and emotional functioning among students and other populations (Karimi Dastaki & Mahmudi, 2024).

Another psychological construct that may play a critical role in understanding suicidal tendency is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs regarding their capacity to successfully organize and execute actions required to achieve desired outcomes and cope with challenges.



According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy influences cognitive processes, emotional regulation, motivation, persistence, and behavioral performance. Individuals with strong self-efficacy beliefs tend to perceive challenges as manageable, persist despite obstacles, and recover more effectively from setbacks. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy often experience helplessness, avoidance, self-doubt, and increased vulnerability to emotional distress (Luszczynska et al., 2005; Sherer et al., 1982).

The significance of self-efficacy extends beyond general psychological adjustment and appears particularly relevant to suicidal tendency. Individuals who believe they possess the ability to cope effectively with stressors may be less likely to perceive difficult circumstances as overwhelming or unsolvable. Consequently, they may be less vulnerable to feelings of hopelessness and entrapment that often precede suicidal ideation. Several studies have identified self-efficacy as a protective factor against suicidal thoughts and self-harming behaviors. Research among patients with chronic pain demonstrated that self-efficacy moderated the relationship between depression and suicidal ideation, reducing vulnerability to suicidal thinking even in the presence of significant psychological distress (Boroumand, 2020). Similarly, self-efficacy has been found to protect against non-suicidal self-injury among university students exposed to adverse childhood experiences and recent negative life events (Chen et al., 2022).

Evidence from educational and clinical settings further supports the protective role of self-efficacy. Among nursing students, mindfulness-based interventions that enhanced self-efficacy were associated with reductions in suicidal ideation and psychological symptoms (Ebrahem et al., 2022). Research among university students has also demonstrated that self-efficacy contributes significantly to the prediction of suicidal thoughts alongside other psychological variables, including cognitive emotion regulation, social support, perfectionism, and spiritual health (Mahmoudian et al., 2023). Additional studies have found that self-efficacy buffers the effects of psychosocial stressors and contributes to better psychological adjustment across various populations (Liu et al., 2023; Wan et al., 2025).

The relationship between self-efficacy and suicidality has also been observed among adolescents and young adults. Self-efficacy has been associated with lower levels of self-injurious behavior and greater psychological resilience among adolescents (Asmakhani Akbarinejad et al., 2022; Smkhani Akbarinejad et al., 2023). Likewise, self-efficacy

has been shown to mediate the relationship between family-related variables and suicidal ideation among adolescents, suggesting that beliefs about personal competence may represent a crucial mechanism through which environmental experiences influence suicide risk (Wu & Yaacob, 2019). These findings collectively suggest that self-efficacy functions as a protective cognitive resource that helps individuals navigate adversity and maintain psychological well-being.

Although meaning in life and self-efficacy have each been independently associated with lower suicidal tendency, growing evidence suggests that these constructs may be closely interconnected. Meaning in life may enhance self-efficacy by providing individuals with valued goals, motivational direction, and a sense of purpose that strengthens confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles. When people perceive their actions as meaningful and aligned with personal values, they may become more persistent, resilient, and confident in confronting challenges. In this way, meaning in life may contribute to stronger efficacy beliefs and greater psychological adaptability.

Recent research supports this proposition. Studies have demonstrated significant associations between meaning in life and various forms of self-efficacy across different populations. For example, meaning in life has been linked to pain self-efficacy among individuals with chronic health conditions, suggesting that meaningful life perceptions enhance confidence in coping with adversity (Yousefi Afrashteh et al., 2023). Similarly, investigations into psychological well-being have shown that self-efficacy and meaning in life jointly contribute to positive mental health outcomes and may operate as complementary psychological resources (Kyriazos & Poga, 2024). These findings indicate that meaning in life and self-efficacy may interact in ways that promote resilience and reduce vulnerability to psychological difficulties.

Theoretical perspectives further support the possibility that self-efficacy may mediate the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency. Meaning in life provides a reason for living and a sense of purpose, while self-efficacy provides confidence in one's ability to cope with life's challenges and pursue meaningful goals. Individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful may develop stronger beliefs in their capacity to influence outcomes, persist through difficulties, and solve problems effectively. Enhanced self-efficacy may subsequently reduce feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and entrapment, thereby decreasing suicidal tendency. Thus,

self-efficacy may represent an important psychological mechanism through which meaning in life exerts its protective influence on suicidal outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature examining meaning in life, self-efficacy, and suicidal tendency, important gaps remain. Many studies have focused on direct associations among these variables, whereas fewer investigations have examined integrated structural models that simultaneously assess direct and indirect pathways. Furthermore, previous studies have often examined specific populations such as patients with chronic illness, adolescents, or clinical samples, limiting understanding of these relationships among young adults in community settings (Boroumand, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Young adulthood represents a particularly important developmental period because individuals encounter numerous stressors and transitions that may influence both existential meaning and perceived personal competence.

Understanding the mechanisms through which meaning in life influences suicidal tendency among young adults may have important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, identifying mediating processes contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of protective factors within contemporary suicide models. From a practical perspective, findings may inform prevention and intervention programs designed to strengthen meaning in life and self-efficacy among young adults. Mental health professionals, counselors, educators, and community organizations may benefit from understanding how these psychological resources interact to reduce suicide risk. Additionally, enhanced knowledge of these relationships may contribute to the development of targeted interventions focused on promoting resilience, purpose, and coping confidence among vulnerable populations (Hendrix, 2023; Karimi Dastaki & Mahmudi, 2024).

Therefore, the present study aimed to model the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency with the mediating role of self-efficacy among young adults.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of method. The study was conducted using a structural equation modeling approach in order to examine the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency with the mediating role of self-efficacy in young adults. In the proposed model, meaning in

life was considered the exogenous predictor variable, self-efficacy was considered the mediating variable, and suicidal tendency was considered the endogenous outcome variable. This design was appropriate because the main aim of the study was not to manipulate variables, but to test the direct and indirect relationships among psychological constructs within a theoretically grounded structural model.

The statistical population consisted of all young adults aged 18 to 35 years living in Tehran in 2025. The sample size was determined as 400 participants. Participants were selected using cluster random sampling. For this purpose, several municipal districts of Tehran were selected from among the 22 districts, and eligible young adults from these selected areas were invited to participate in the study. The inclusion of participants from different districts was intended to increase the representativeness of the sample and reduce the limitations associated with sampling from a single geographic area.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. After providing informed consent, they completed the research questionnaires. The final sample consisted of young adults who met the study criteria and completed the main research instruments related to meaning in life, self-efficacy, and suicidal tendency.

The inclusion criteria were being between 18 and 35 years old, living in Tehran, willingness to participate in the study, ability to understand and complete the questionnaires, and providing informed consent. Participants also had to complete the main research instruments without substantial missing responses.

The exclusion criteria included unwillingness to continue participation, incomplete or invalid questionnaire responses, failure to respond to the main study measures, and any condition that prevented the participant from understanding or completing the questionnaires accurately. Questionnaires with excessive missing data or patterned responses were excluded before the final statistical analysis.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected using standardized self-report questionnaires. The main instruments included the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, the Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation, and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. These instruments were selected because they directly measured the principal variables of the proposed structural model.

Meaning in life was measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire developed by Steger and colleagues. This instrument assesses individuals' perception of meaning and purpose in life. It includes two main dimensions: presence of meaning and search for meaning. The presence of meaning refers to the extent to which individuals feel that their lives are meaningful, purposeful, and coherent. The search for meaning refers to the degree to which individuals are actively seeking meaning, purpose, and significance in their lives. In the present study, the total score and subscale scores of this questionnaire were used to represent meaning in life, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of meaning or a greater search for meaning.

Suicidal tendency was measured using the Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation developed by Beck, Steer, and Brown. This scale is designed to assess the severity of suicidal thoughts, wishes, and intentions. It evaluates dimensions such as desire to live, desire to die, reasons for living or dying, frequency and duration of suicidal thoughts, sense of control over suicidal ideation, and preparation for suicide. In the present study, suicidal tendency was operationally defined as the score obtained from this scale, with higher scores indicating greater suicidal ideation and tendency.

Self-efficacy was assessed using the General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Sherer and colleagues. This questionnaire measures individuals' general belief in their ability to manage difficult situations, overcome obstacles, initiate actions, and persist in goal-directed behavior. Higher scores indicate stronger perceived self-efficacy. In the present study, self-efficacy was considered a mediating variable that could explain the pathway between meaning in life and suicidal tendency.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were used to describe demographic characteristics and the main study variables. Before testing the structural model, data screening procedures were conducted. Missing data, outliers, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were examined to

ensure that the data met the assumptions required for structural equation modeling.

Structural equation modeling was used to test the proposed model of the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency with the mediating role of self-efficacy. The direct effect of meaning in life on suicidal tendency, the direct effect of meaning in life on self-efficacy, and the direct effect of self-efficacy on suicidal tendency were examined. In addition, the indirect effect of meaning in life on suicidal tendency through self-efficacy was tested to determine whether self-efficacy mediated this relationship.

Model fit was evaluated using common fit indices, including the chi-square statistic, the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom, comparative fit index, goodness-of-fit index, adjusted goodness-of-fit index, normed fit index, Tucker–Lewis index, root mean square error of approximation, and standardized root mean square residual. The significance of direct and indirect paths was examined using standardized path coefficients and corresponding significance values. Data analysis was conducted using statistical software for descriptive analysis and structural equation modeling.

3. Findings and Results

The study was conducted on 400 young adults aged 18 to 35 years living in Tehran. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the distribution of the main study variables, including meaning in life, self-efficacy, and suicidal tendency. The descriptive results showed that the mean score for presence of meaning was 22.14 (SD = 6.74), and the mean score for search for meaning was 23.11 (SD = 5.40). Regarding self-efficacy, the mean score for general self-efficacy was 39.27 (SD = 8.60), and the mean score for social self-efficacy was 17.06 (SD = 5.55). For suicidal tendency, the mean scores were 5.12 (SD = 1.82) for death wish, 6.09 (SD = 1.74) for preparation for suicide, and 4.37 (SD = 1.38) for actual suicidal tendency. The skewness and kurtosis values of all variables were within the acceptable range, indicating that the variables had approximately normal distributions.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics of the Main Study Variables*

Variable	Component	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Meaning in life	Presence of meaning	22.14	6.74	1.14	0.28
Meaning in life	Search for meaning	23.11	5.40	0.01	-0.09
Self-efficacy	General self-efficacy	39.27	8.60	-0.12	-0.55
Self-efficacy	Social self-efficacy	17.06	5.55	-0.15	-0.98
Suicidal tendency	Death wish	5.12	1.82	-0.07	-0.88
Suicidal tendency	Preparation for suicide	6.09	1.74	-0.14	-0.73
Suicidal tendency	Actual suicidal tendency	4.37	1.38	-0.05	-0.86

The descriptive findings indicated that the study variables were suitable for subsequent structural equation modeling. Although presence of meaning showed a relatively positive skewness value, all skewness and kurtosis indices remained within the acceptable range for structural analysis. Therefore, the assumption of univariate normality was considered acceptable.

Before testing the structural model, the data were screened for missing values, outliers, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. Missing values were identified and replaced using the median replacement method. Outliers were examined using standardized scores, and values outside the acceptable range were replaced with the mean of the relevant variable. The normality of the variables was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis indices. The results showed that none of the indicators had skewness or kurtosis values outside the acceptable range of -3 to +3; therefore, the distribution of the variables was considered approximately normal.

The assumption of linearity among the study variables was also examined and supported. In addition, the absence

of multicollinearity among predictor variables was checked before conducting the structural equation modeling analysis. The results of these preliminary analyses indicated that the data met the necessary assumptions for testing the proposed structural model.

Before examining the structural paths, the measurement model was evaluated. The results showed that all observed indicators had significant factor loadings on their corresponding latent variables. For meaning in life, presence of meaning had a standardized factor loading of .53, and search for meaning had a standardized factor loading of .47. For self-efficacy, general self-efficacy had a standardized factor loading of .56, and social self-efficacy had a standardized factor loading of .54. For suicidal tendency, death wish had a standardized factor loading of .68, preparation for suicide had a standardized factor loading of .51, and actual suicidal tendency had a standardized factor loading of .20. All factor loadings were statistically significant at the .001 level.

Table 2*Standardized Factor Loadings of the Measurement Model*

Latent variable	Indicator	Standardized loading	p
Meaning in life	Presence of meaning	.53	.001
Meaning in life	Search for meaning	.47	.001
Self-efficacy	General self-efficacy	.56	.001
Self-efficacy	Social self-efficacy	.54	.001
Suicidal tendency	Death wish	.68	.001
Suicidal tendency	Preparation for suicide	.51	.001
Suicidal tendency	Actual suicidal tendency	.20	.001

These findings confirmed that the indicators of meaning in life, self-efficacy, and suicidal tendency loaded significantly on their respective latent constructs. Therefore, the measurement model was acceptable for testing the structural relationships among the variables. Structural

equation modeling was used to examine the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency with the mediating role of self-efficacy. The fit indices showed that the proposed model had an acceptable fit to the data. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was 2.41, which

was below the recommended cutoff of 3. The root mean square error of approximation was .07, indicating acceptable model fit. Other fit indices also supported the adequacy of

the model: comparative fit index = .94, normed fit index = .92, goodness-of-fit index = .95, and adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .94.

Table 3

Fit Indices of the Structural Model

Fit index	Value	Recommended criterion
χ^2/df	2.41	< 3
RMSEA	.07	< .10
CFI	.94	> .90
NFI	.92	> .90
GFI	.95	> .90
AGFI	.94	> .90

Overall, the model fit indices indicated that the proposed model adequately explained the observed data. Therefore, the structural model of the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency through self-efficacy was supported.

The direct path from meaning in life to suicidal tendency was negative and statistically significant, $\beta = -.61, z = -6.57, p = .001$. This finding indicates that higher meaning in life was associated with lower suicidal tendency among young

adults. In other words, as young adults reported a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in life, their suicidal tendency decreased. The direct path from self-efficacy to suicidal tendency was also negative and statistically significant, $\beta = -.49, z = -4.27, p = .001$. This result indicates that higher self-efficacy was associated with lower suicidal tendency. Therefore, young adults who reported stronger beliefs in their ability to manage difficulties and cope with life challenges were less likely to report suicidal tendency.

Table 4

Direct Effects in the Structural Model

Predictor	Outcome	Effect type	β	z	p
Meaning in life	Suicidal tendency	Direct	-.61	-6.57	.001
Self-efficacy	Suicidal tendency	Direct	-.49	-4.27	.001

The results showed that both meaning in life and self-efficacy had significant protective effects against suicidal tendency. The stronger direct effect belonged to meaning in life, suggesting that this variable was a major predictor of suicidal tendency in the tested model. The mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between meaning in life and

suicidal tendency was examined using the Sobel test. The results showed that the indirect effect of meaning in life on suicidal tendency through self-efficacy was statistically significant, $\beta = -.19, z = -2.60, p = .009$. This finding indicates that self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency.

Table 5

Indirect Effect of Meaning in Life on Suicidal Tendency Through Self-Efficacy

Predictor	Outcome	Mediator	Effect type	β	z	p
Meaning in life	Suicidal tendency	Self-efficacy	Indirect	-.19	-2.60	.009

The negative indirect coefficient indicates that higher meaning in life reduced suicidal tendency partly through increased self-efficacy. In other words, young adults with a stronger sense of meaning in life tended to report higher self-efficacy, and higher self-efficacy was associated with lower suicidal tendency. Therefore, self-efficacy functioned as a

significant psychological mechanism explaining part of the protective effect of meaning in life on suicidal tendency.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between meaning in life and suicidal tendency with the mediating role of self-efficacy among young adults. The findings supported the proposed structural model and demonstrated that meaning in life had a significant negative direct effect on suicidal tendency. In addition, self-efficacy had a significant negative direct effect on suicidal tendency. Furthermore, the indirect pathway from meaning in life to suicidal tendency through self-efficacy was statistically significant, indicating that self-efficacy partially mediated this relationship. Overall, the results suggest that young adults who experience greater meaning and purpose in life tend to report lower levels of suicidal tendency, and part of this protective effect occurs because meaningful life perceptions strengthen individuals' beliefs in their ability to cope effectively with challenges.

The first major finding indicated that meaning in life negatively predicted suicidal tendency. This result suggests that young adults who perceive their lives as purposeful, valuable, and coherent are less likely to experience suicidal thoughts and tendencies. This finding is consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the protective role of existential meaning against psychological distress and self-destructive thoughts. Meaning in life provides individuals with a sense of direction and helps them interpret difficult experiences within a broader framework of personal significance. Consequently, challenges and setbacks are less likely to be perceived as overwhelming or unbearable when individuals possess meaningful life goals and values.

The present finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating inverse associations between meaning in life and suicidal ideation. For example, research has shown that meaning in life serves as a significant mediator between depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation, reducing the negative impact of emotional distress on suicide-related outcomes (Sun et al., 2022). Similarly, studies among women with substance dependence revealed that meaning in life mediates the relationship between depression and suicidal ideation, highlighting its role as an important protective mechanism (Nikdel et al., 2022). Moreover, recent evidence indicates that meaning in life significantly contributes to reducing suicidal thoughts even in the presence of adverse childhood experiences and other psychological vulnerabilities (Fathi et al., 2025). The current findings extend this literature by demonstrating that the

protective role of meaning in life is also evident among young adults in a nonclinical community sample.

One possible explanation for this finding is that meaning in life strengthens psychological resilience and future orientation. Individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to maintain hope during adversity because they believe that their experiences contribute to valued goals and personal growth. Meaning creates a sense of continuity between present struggles and future aspirations, reducing the likelihood that temporary distress will result in suicidal thinking. Previous intervention studies have shown that programs designed to enhance meaning in life can improve resilience, reduce negative affect, and strengthen perceived social support, all of which contribute to psychological well-being (Karimi Dastaki & Mahmudi, 2024). Therefore, meaning in life may function as a psychological resource that helps individuals remain committed to life despite challenges.

The present findings can also be interpreted within contemporary theories of suicide. According to the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, suicidal ideation develops when individuals experience feelings of burdensomeness and social disconnection (Joiner, 2005). Similarly, the Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model emphasizes the role of defeat, entrapment, and hopelessness in the emergence of suicidal thoughts (O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018). The Three-Step Theory proposes that suicidal ideation emerges when pain and hopelessness exceed an individual's sense of connectedness to life (Klonsky & May, 2015). Meaning in life may counteract these processes by increasing connectedness, strengthening purpose, and fostering hope. As a result, individuals with higher levels of meaning may be less vulnerable to the psychological mechanisms that contribute to suicidal ideation.

The second major finding revealed that self-efficacy had a significant negative direct effect on suicidal tendency. This finding indicates that young adults who possess stronger beliefs in their ability to manage challenges, solve problems, and cope effectively with adversity are less likely to report suicidal thoughts and tendencies. This result is consistent with social cognitive theory, which proposes that self-efficacy influences cognitive appraisals, emotional responses, motivation, and behavioral adaptation (Luszczynska et al., 2005; Sherer et al., 1982). Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to perceive difficulties as manageable and temporary, whereas those with low self-efficacy may experience helplessness, hopelessness, and emotional distress.

The current finding is supported by several empirical studies. Research among patients with chronic pain demonstrated that self-efficacy significantly weakens the relationship between depression and suicidal ideation, suggesting that confidence in one's coping abilities serves as a protective factor against suicide risk (Boroumand, 2020). Similarly, studies among college students found that self-efficacy protects against self-injurious behaviors and reduces the impact of adverse childhood experiences and stressful life events on psychological maladjustment (Chen et al., 2022). Research involving nursing students also showed that interventions that increased self-efficacy contributed to reductions in suicidal ideation and psychological symptoms (Ebrahim et al., 2022). The present findings are therefore consistent with a growing body of evidence identifying self-efficacy as an important psychological buffer against suicide-related outcomes.

Additional support for the present findings comes from studies examining self-efficacy in adolescent and young adult populations. Investigations have shown that lower levels of self-efficacy are associated with greater engagement in self-injurious behaviors and poorer psychological adjustment (Asmakhani Akbarinejad et al., 2022; Smkhani Akbarinejad et al., 2023). Likewise, self-efficacy has been found to mediate the relationship between paternal approval and suicidal ideation among adolescents, suggesting that efficacy beliefs help translate social and familial experiences into psychological outcomes (Wu & Yaacob, 2019). Similar findings have been reported among university students, where self-efficacy emerged as a significant predictor of suicidal thoughts alongside emotional and cognitive factors (Mahmoudian et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies support the conclusion that self-efficacy functions as a critical protective resource across diverse populations.

A plausible explanation for this relationship is that self-efficacy enhances perceived control over stressful situations. Suicidal thoughts often emerge when individuals perceive themselves as trapped, powerless, or incapable of changing their circumstances. High self-efficacy reduces these perceptions by strengthening confidence in problem-solving abilities, help-seeking behaviors, emotional regulation, and coping strategies. Consequently, even when faced with significant life stressors, individuals with strong self-efficacy may be more likely to identify adaptive solutions and maintain hope regarding future outcomes.

The most important finding of the present study was that self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between

meaning in life and suicidal tendency. This result suggests that meaning in life reduces suicidal tendency not only directly but also indirectly by increasing individuals' confidence in their ability to cope with challenges. In other words, young adults who perceive greater meaning and purpose in life tend to develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs, which subsequently decrease vulnerability to suicidal thinking.

This finding is consistent with emerging evidence demonstrating close relationships between meaning in life and self-efficacy. Research has shown that meaning in life contributes to psychological well-being partly through enhancing efficacy beliefs and adaptive functioning (Kyriazos & Poga, 2024). Similarly, studies among individuals with chronic health conditions found that meaning in life is associated with greater self-efficacy, which in turn contributes to improved quality of life and psychological adjustment (Yousefi Afrashteh et al., 2023). These findings support the notion that meaning in life and self-efficacy are interconnected psychological resources that jointly promote resilience and mental health.

The mediating role of self-efficacy may be explained through motivational mechanisms. Meaning in life provides individuals with personally valued goals and reasons for living. When people perceive their lives as meaningful, they become more motivated to pursue these goals and persist despite obstacles. Repeated engagement with meaningful goals may strengthen perceptions of competence and mastery, thereby enhancing self-efficacy. Increased self-efficacy subsequently reduces suicidal tendency by promoting adaptive coping, emotional regulation, and problem-solving. Thus, self-efficacy appears to function as a psychological pathway through which meaning in life translates into reduced suicide risk.

The findings also highlight the complementary nature of meaning in life and self-efficacy. Meaning in life provides direction and purpose, whereas self-efficacy provides confidence in one's ability to pursue that purpose successfully. Individuals may experience meaning but remain vulnerable if they lack confidence in their coping abilities. Conversely, individuals may possess strong skills and competence but still experience existential distress if they lack meaningful goals. Therefore, the simultaneous presence of meaning in life and self-efficacy may create a particularly strong protective system against suicidal tendency.

Another important implication of the findings concerns prevention and intervention efforts. The results suggest that

suicide prevention programs should focus not only on reducing psychological symptoms but also on strengthening positive psychological resources. Meaning-centered interventions may help individuals identify values, goals, and sources of purpose, while self-efficacy enhancement programs may improve confidence in coping with challenges. Integrating these approaches could potentially produce stronger protective effects than focusing on either factor alone. Such interventions may be particularly valuable during young adulthood, a developmental period characterized by identity exploration, uncertainty, and numerous life transitions.

Overall, the findings support contemporary theoretical perspectives emphasizing the importance of protective psychological factors in understanding suicidal tendency. Meaning in life and self-efficacy appear to function as interconnected resources that help young adults remain psychologically connected to life, maintain hope, and believe in their ability to overcome adversity. By reducing feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and existential emptiness, these factors may significantly decrease vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present study. First, the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design, which prevents definitive conclusions regarding causality among the variables. Second, all data were collected through self-report questionnaires, making the results potentially vulnerable to social desirability bias, response bias, and inaccuracies in self-perception. Third, the sample was limited to young adults residing in Tehran, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, cultural contexts, or geographical regions. Fourth, although the proposed model explained a substantial proportion of variance in suicidal tendency, other potentially important variables such as depression, hopelessness, emotion regulation, loneliness, trauma history, and social connectedness were not included in the model.

Future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify the causal relationships among meaning in life, self-efficacy, and suicidal tendency. Researchers may also investigate additional mediating and moderating variables that could influence these relationships, including resilience, coping strategies, psychological flexibility, emotional intelligence, and social support. Replication studies across different cultural groups, educational settings, and clinical populations would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, future

research could compare the effectiveness of different intervention approaches aimed at enhancing meaning in life and self-efficacy for reducing suicidal ideation and suicide risk.

Mental health professionals should consider assessing both meaning in life and self-efficacy when evaluating individuals at risk for suicidal thoughts. Counseling and psychotherapy programs may benefit from incorporating interventions that help clients identify personal values, clarify life goals, strengthen purpose, and cultivate a sense of meaning. Simultaneously, clinicians can enhance self-efficacy through problem-solving training, mastery experiences, cognitive restructuring, and coping-skills development. Educational institutions, universities, and community organizations may also develop preventive programs focused on fostering purpose, resilience, personal agency, and confidence in managing life challenges. Strengthening these positive psychological resources may contribute substantially to reducing suicidal tendency and promoting long-term psychological well-being among young adults.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the study and participated in the research with informed consent.

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