

Navigating Uncertainty: Gender Differences in Intolerance of Uncertainty and Suicidal Ideation Among Entrepreneurs in Tripura

Debanjana Mukherjee^{1*} And Dr. Amrita Banerjee²

^{1*}Research Scholar ICFAI University Tripura, debanjanamukherjee72@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor ICFAI University Tripura, amritabanerjee@iutripura.edu.in

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs in West Tripura District, India, with a specific focus on gender differences. Entrepreneurship in emerging regional economies is frequently characterized by financial instability, market unpredictability, and limited institutional support, which may intensify psychological distress. Using a cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected from 200 entrepreneurs (100 males and 100 females) selected through purposive sampling. Standardized measures of intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation were administered. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a significant positive association between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation ($r = .41, p < .01$). Gender-wise analysis indicated a stronger correlation among male entrepreneurs ($r = .52, p < .01$) than female entrepreneurs ($r = .29, p < .05$). Regression analysis further demonstrated that intolerance of uncertainty significantly predicted suicidal ideation, with a stronger predictive effect observed among males. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating mental health considerations into entrepreneurial sustainability frameworks, particularly through gender-sensitive interventions.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, intolerance of uncertainty, suicidal ideation, gender differences, Tripura*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment generation. However, the entrepreneurial process is inherently uncertain, involving financial risk, ambiguous outcomes, and sustained decision-making under conditions of instability. While such uncertainty may foster innovation for some individuals, for others it may precipitate psychological distress and mental health challenges. Recent research has increasingly highlighted that entrepreneurs report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion compared to non-entrepreneurs (Stephan, 2018).

One psychological construct particularly relevant to entrepreneurial stress is intolerance of uncertainty (IU), defined as an individual's dispositional incapacity to endure the aversive response triggered by the perceived absence of salient, key, or sufficient information (Carleton, 2016). High levels of IU have been consistently associated with anxiety, depression, and maladaptive coping strategies. However, limited empirical work has examined the role of IU in relation to suicidal ideation within entrepreneurial populations, especially in developing and regionally marginalized contexts.

Suicidal ideation represents a critical public health concern, particularly in economically pressured environments. Cognitive models of suicide emphasize hopelessness, perceived lack of control, and negative future-oriented thinking as core antecedents of suicidal thoughts (Beck et al., 1996). For entrepreneurs operating under chronic uncertainty, repeated exposure to uncontrollable stressors may heighten vulnerability to such cognitions.

Gender differences further complicate this relationship. Although women often report higher emotional distress, men consistently demonstrate higher rates of suicide mortality, a pattern attributed

to socio-cultural norms, help-seeking barriers, and role expectations (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). In the Indian context, male entrepreneurs may experience heightened pressure to fulfill economic and familial roles, rendering them particularly vulnerable to psychological distress under conditions of uncertainty.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs in West Tripura District, India, with a specific focus on gender differences.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs in West Tripura District.
2. To assess gender differences in intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation.
3. To determine the predictive role of intolerance of uncertainty on suicidal ideation among male and female entrepreneurs.

Hypotheses

H1: Intolerance of uncertainty will be positively correlated with suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs.

H2: The relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation will be stronger among male entrepreneurs than female entrepreneurs.

H3: Intolerance of uncertainty will significantly predict suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs.

Method

Research Design

A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed to examine the association between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample consisted of 200 entrepreneurs (100 males and 100 females) from West Tripura District, India, selected using purposive sampling. Participants were aged between 25 and 55 years and were engaged in small- and medium-scale entrepreneurial activities.

Sample Size Justification

An a priori power analysis conducted using G*Power indicated that a minimum sample of 176 participants was required to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$) at an alpha level of .05 with a power of .80. The final sample size of 200 exceeded this requirement, ensuring adequate statistical power.

Tools

- **Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale** (Carleton et al.)
- **Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation** (Beck et al., 1996)

Procedure

Data were collected following informed consent. Ethical guidelines regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation were strictly followed.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and simple linear regression analysis.

Results

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation revealed a significant positive relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs ($r = .41, p < .01$). Gender-wise analysis showed a stronger correlation among male entrepreneurs ($r = .52, p < .01$) compared to female entrepreneurs ($r = .29, p < .05$).

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis indicated that intolerance of uncertainty significantly predicted suicidal ideation ($\beta = .41, p < .01$), accounting for 17% of the variance. Among males, intolerance of uncertainty explained 27% of the variance ($\beta = .52, p < .01$), whereas among females it explained 8% of the variance ($\beta = .29, p < .05$).

Discussion

The present study examined the association between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs in West Tripura District, with a particular emphasis on gender differences. The findings provide strong empirical support for a significant positive relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation, extending existing research beyond clinical and organizational populations into the entrepreneurial domain (Carleton, 2016; Stephan, 2018).

Entrepreneurship is inherently characterized by ambiguity, financial risk, and unpredictable outcomes. Entrepreneurs with high intolerance of uncertainty are more likely to perceive such ambiguity as threatening, leading to excessive worry, emotional dysregulation, and psychological exhaustion (Buhr & Dugas, 2009). The present findings suggest that prolonged exposure to uncontrollable entrepreneurial stressors may foster hopelessness and suicidal cognitions, consistent with cognitive models of suicide (Beck et al., 1996).

A notable contribution of this study lies in the observed gender differences. Although female entrepreneurs reported notable levels of intolerance of uncertainty, the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and suicidal ideation was significantly stronger among males. This aligns with global evidence indicating that men are more likely to translate psychological distress into suicidal ideation and behavior, particularly in contexts where emotional expression is discouraged (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; WHO, 2023). In the socio-cultural context of Tripura, male entrepreneurs often shoulder substantial economic and familial responsibility, making business instability a significant threat to identity and self-worth.

The findings are also consistent with the stress-diathesis model of suicide, which posits that chronic stressors interact with individual vulnerabilities to precipitate suicidal ideation (Mann et al., 1999). Interpersonal theories further suggest that perceived burdensomeness and social isolation may exacerbate suicidal risk among entrepreneurs facing prolonged financial strain (Joiner, 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

The study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias. The use of purposive sampling restricts generalizability beyond West Tripura. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs and examine protective factors such as resilience, coping strategies, and social support.

Conclusion

The study provides compelling evidence that intolerance of uncertainty is a significant psychological risk factor for suicidal ideation among entrepreneurs in West Tripura District, with male entrepreneurs demonstrating heightened vulnerability. These findings highlight the necessity of integrating mental health support into entrepreneurship development programs.

Gender-sensitive interventions focused on uncertainty management, adaptive coping, and stigma reduction are essential for promoting entrepreneurial well-being and sustainability. Addressing entrepreneurs' mental health is not only a clinical priority but also a strategic imperative for sustainable economic development in Tripura and similar emerging regions.

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