

# The Cross-sectional Relationship Between Substance Use and the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

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## Background

- Suicide is a serious public health concern, accounting for the deaths of nearly 50,000 individuals in the United States each year (CDC, 2025).
- Excessive alcohol consumption, a risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STBs), is highly prevalent within the United States.
- The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (ITS) says that suicidal desire arises from the combination of thwarted belongingness (TB) and perceived burdensomeness (PB).
- How alcohol use connects to suicidal thoughts and how it fits into existing theories is not well understood.
- Interpersonal hopelessness has not been studied much since the ITS was created.
- Higher rates of substance use and impairment may increase feelings of not belonging by causing more conflict with others, social withdrawal, or being left out of groups that do not drink.

## Research Question

What is the relationship between substance use and suicidal ideation?

### Hypotheses

- Alcohol use is positively associated with ITS constructs.
- Greater AUDIT scores are associated with greater suicidal ideation severity.
- ITS constructs including interpersonal hopelessness mediate the relationship between alcohol use and STBs.

## Discussion

### Analyses

- We will conduct a mediation analysis examining the relationship between ITS alcohol and suicidal ideation.

### Anticipated Results

- We anticipate a complex relationship between alcohol and suicide with mediating factors such as capability, being incapacitated, and isolation.
- Individuals with chronically higher levels of alcohol consumption experience higher levels of STBs compared to those with lower average consumption.
- We expect these elevated ITS states to mediate the relationship between greater alcohol consumption and subsequent STBs.
- We anticipate that individuals with greater between-day fluctuation in suicidal ideation and ITS constructs will exhibit higher levels of suicidal ideation and greater likelihood of suicide attempt at follow-ups.

### Future Research

- Longitudinal and EMA studies are needed to better understand this relationship.

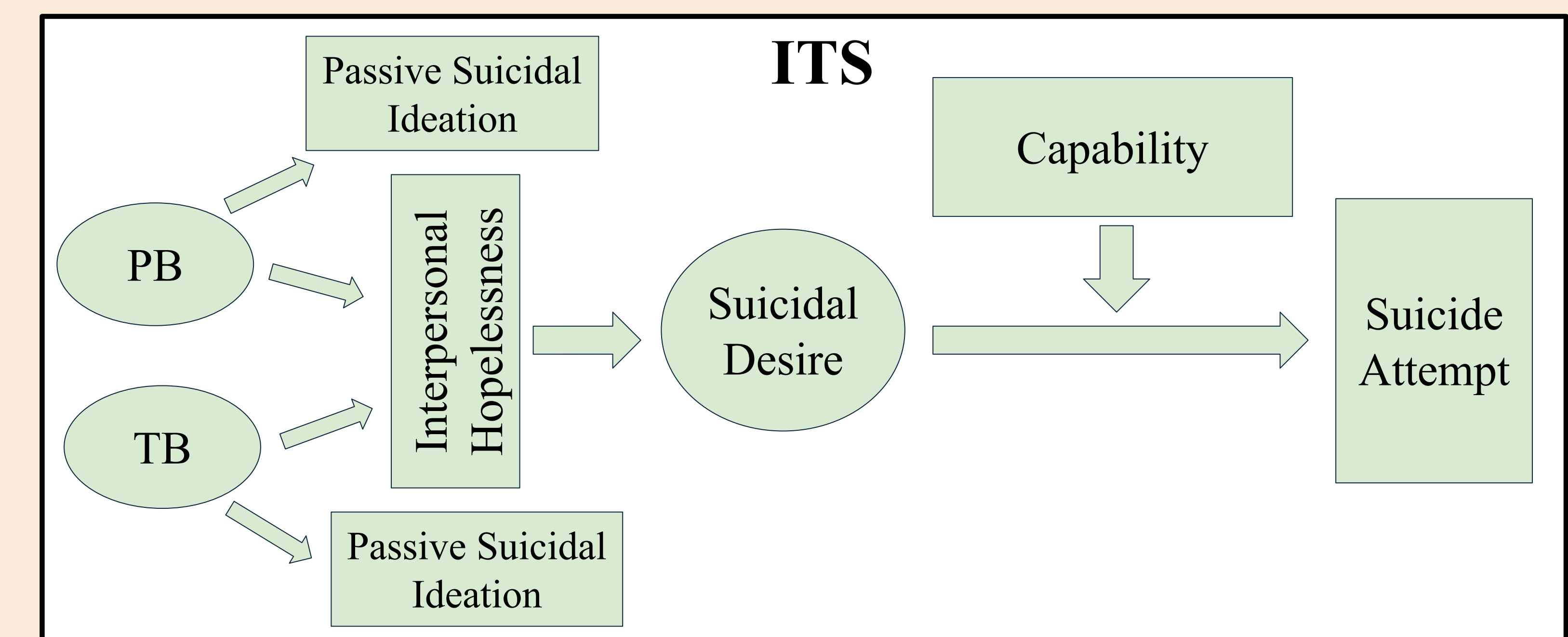
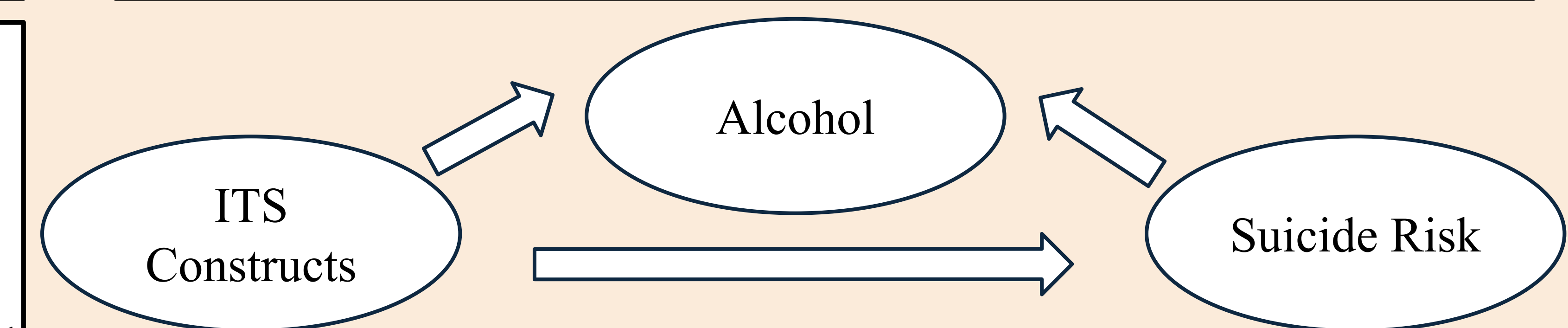
## Abstract

Over 10 million Americans experience suicidal thoughts each year. Alcohol use is common and increases suicide risk, but the exact connection between substance use and suicidal thoughts is still not fully understood. Research shows alcohol is involved in about 20% of suicide deaths. However, few studies have examined how substance use connects to suicide theories like the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide.

The theory posits that the presence of thwarted belongingness (i.e., loneliness and isolation) or perceive burdensomeness (i.e., self-hatred and liability) lead to suicidal ideation. The combination and intractability of these states (i.e., interpersonal hopelessness) lead to intensified suicidal ideation (e.g., specific plans).

This study will follow people over time to examine how alcohol use relates to suicidal thoughts and these interpersonal factors. About 300 participants who have experienced suicidal thoughts within the past month will complete a baseline assessment and a one-month follow-up.

It is expected that our hypothesis will be supported with a complex relationship between alcohol use and suicide ideation. It is also expected that interpersonal factors may influence this relationship, meaning individuals with higher interpersonal distress may experience more severe suicidal thoughts. These findings may help improve screening, prevention, and treatment for people at risk of suicide.



### Key Terms

**Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (ITS)** : suicide occurs when an individual has TB, PB, and acquired capability.  
**Perceived Burdensomeness (PB)**: belief that one's existence, life, or situation is a burden or liability to family, friends, or society.  
**Thwarted Belongingness (TB)** : feeling profoundly alone or detached from others.  
**Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors (STBs)**: thinking about, formulating plans, and preparing for a self-inflicted death, and attempting suicide.

### References

For a full list of our references please scan the QR code.



## Methods

### Participants

- Participants will be students at Florida State University, over the age of 18, who speak English and have experienced suicidal thoughts at least once in the past 30 days.
- Recruit a total of 300 participants.

### Materials

- Self-report survey (Qualtrics)
- Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview-Revised (SITBI-R)
- Depression Symptom Index-Suicidality Scale (DSI-SS)
- Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire-15 (INQ-15)
- Multidimensional Capability for Suicide Scale (MCSS)
- Interpersonal Hopelessness Scale (IHS)
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)

### Procedure

- Participants provide informed consent.
- Participants will spend 30 minutes completing questionnaires.