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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Association between age and attitudes toward suicide

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### KEYWORDS

Suicide;  
Risk factors;  
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### Abstract

**Background and objective:** Attitudes toward suicide is one of the important determinants for help-seeking behaviors among suicidal population. We hypothesized that older age groups would have more favorable attitudes toward suicide than would younger groups.

**Methods:** We conducted a survey of attitudes toward suicide in a nationally representative sample. Attitudes toward suicide were measured with the Korean version of the Suicide Opinion Questionnaire (SOQ). Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the influence of age on attitudes toward suicide after adjusting for other sociodemographic and clinical variables.

**Results:** A total of 1200 people in the general public responded to the survey. Older people expressed less favorable attitudes toward suicide than did younger people. According the multiple linear regression analysis, age was the most influential factor with regard to attitudes toward suicide.

**Conclusion:** Contrary to our *a priori* hypothesis, people in the older age groups had more negative attitudes toward suicide than did those in the younger age groups. The results suggest that negative attitudes toward suicide in the general population may interfere with the help-seeking behavior of people at high risk for suicide. Future studies should directly investigate the relationship between attitudes toward suicide and suicide rates.

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## Introduction

One of the possible risk factors for high suicide rates is mental illness. A substantial proportion of suicide victims reportedly suffered from psychiatric illnesses.<sup>1</sup> However, suicide is a consequence of complex interactions among various factors, such as sociodemographic characteristics, physical status, religion, and personality traits.<sup>2,3</sup> We recently revealed that the influence of the non-mental disorder for suicide is particularly strong in the East Asia countries.<sup>4</sup>

Attitudes toward suicide might also be one of possible contributing factors for committing suicide.<sup>5</sup> 'Attitude' means the way one think and feel about it. Attitudes toward suicide can be influenced by various factors such as religious commitment and stigma.<sup>6</sup> People may think that individuals who commit suicide as mentally ill, which could be similar context with the stigma for mental disorders. Those differences in attitudes toward suicide have been investigated in various groups. Recent studies suggested that psychiatrists were more likely than general population to believe that suicide can be prevented.<sup>7</sup> Individuals who previously had attempted suicide or suicidal ideation may be more favorable of suicide than those who had no such experience.<sup>8,9</sup> These suggest that individuals with favorable attitudes toward suicide more easily think that suicide could be a sort of methods for problem solving than those with unfavorable attitudes toward suicide. It has been also suggested that people with permissive attitudes toward suicide are more likely to harbor suicidal intent.<sup>10</sup> According to Jeon et al., permissive attitude toward suicide encompasses thought that one has the right to commit suicide and there would be situations in which one might commit suicide as an alternative.<sup>10</sup> One with favorable attitudes toward may allow that committing suicide can be possible in several perspectives, such as a way of problem solving, self-immolating, and communicating with others, whereas one unfavorable attitude suicide may oppose committing suicide. Thus, it is

possible that individual members of a group with favorable attitudes toward suicide would be more likely than others to attempt suicide.

The suicide rates in Korea increase as a function of age. The prevalence of suicide per 100,000 persons is 19.25 among those in their 20s, 26.94 among those in their 30s, 30.41 among those in their 40s, 35.52 among those in their 50s, 42.45 among those in their 60s, and 83.19 among those in their 70s.<sup>11</sup> The age-specific pattern of suicide in Korea differs from that in other countries such as the United States, Japan, and European countries.<sup>12</sup> (summarized in Fig. 1) On the other hand, the discrepancies in the suicide among elderly could not be explained by the prevalence of mental disorders such as major depressive disorder (MDD). Indeed, the prevalence of major depression in Korea is approximately 5.6%, which is lower than that in the United States and European countries.<sup>13,14</sup> The prevalence of MDD in the elderly is resemblance to that in the whole population.

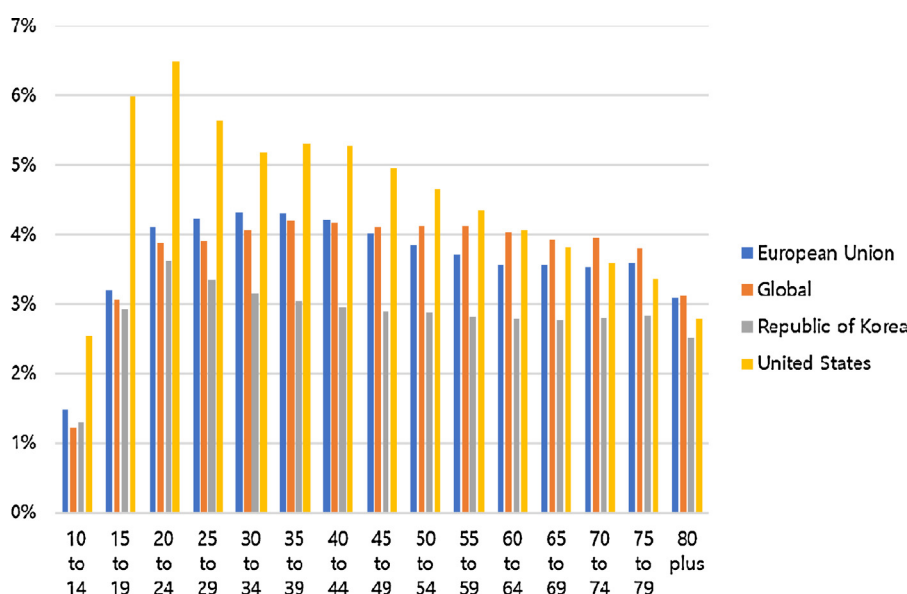
Given the aforementioned significantly high suicide rates in Korea,<sup>11,15</sup> the low prevalence of major depression suggests that factors other than psychiatric illnesses play a role in suicide and that these factors should be identified.

In this study, we hypothesized that older members of the general populations have more favorable attitudes toward suicide than do members of younger groups.

## Methods

### Participants and procedures

This survey was planned and designed by the Korean Association for Suicide Prevention, and it was conducted by Gallup Korea. The sample consisted of people older than 13 years of age and was conducted between Dec. 2 and Dec. 22, 2011. The survey was conducted in person by trained interviewers in the 16 areas in Korea, except Jeju Island. The first stage of sampling employed a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling



**Figure 1** Age group-stratified suicide rate in the European Union, Republic of Korea, United States, and the global estimates.

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