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**MENTAL HEALTH STATUS AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS AS  
PREDICTORS OF SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR: IMPLICATIONS FOR  
FORENSIC NURSING PRACTICE - A NARRATIVE REVIEW**

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**Article Information:**

*Type of Article: Review Article*

*Received On: 24.05.2026*

*Accepted On: 01.06.2026*

*Published On: 08.06.2026*

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**Abstract**

**Background**

Suicide is a major global public health concern, accounting for significant morbidity and mortality across all age groups. Suicidal behaviour is influenced by a complex interaction of psychological, biological, and social factors. Mental health disorders and adverse social determinants have been consistently identified as key contributors to suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and completed suicide. Forensic nurses frequently encounter individuals at risk for suicide in emergency, psychiatric, and medico-legal settings, making early identification and intervention crucial.

**Objective**

To review the evidence regarding mental health status and social determinants as predictors of suicidal behaviour and discuss implications for forensic nursing practice.

### **Methods**

A narrative review of the literature was undertaken to explore the relationship between mental health conditions, social determinants, and suicidal behaviour. Relevant literature from nursing, psychiatric, public health, and forensic healthcare disciplines was examined and synthesized.

### **Results**

Depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, hopelessness, and previous suicide attempts emerged as major psychological predictors of suicidal behavior. Social determinants including poverty, unemployment, social isolation, family conflict, educational disadvantage, and exposure to violence were also strongly associated with increased suicide risk. The interaction between mental health challenges and adverse social circumstances substantially increases vulnerability to suicidal behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

Suicidal behaviour results from the combined influence of mental health conditions and social determinants. Forensic nurses play a vital role in risk identification, assessment, documentation, and multidisciplinary intervention. Strengthening forensic nursing competencies in suicide prevention may contribute to improved patient outcomes and reduced suicide-related mortality.

**Keywords:** Suicidal behaviour, mental health, social determinants, forensic nursing, suicide prevention, risk assessment, social isolation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Suicide is a significant global public health challenge and remains one of the leading causes of preventable death worldwide. It affects individuals across all age groups, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds, resulting in devastating consequences for families, communities, and healthcare systems. Beyond completed suicides, millions of individuals experience suicidal ideation, engage in self-harm, or attempt suicide annually, creating substantial psychological, social, and economic burdens.

Suicidal behaviour encompasses a spectrum ranging from suicidal thoughts and plans to suicide attempts and completed suicide. Contemporary research suggests that suicidal behaviour rarely results from a single cause. Instead, it develops through a complex interaction of psychological, biological, social, environmental, and economic factors. Understanding these determinants is essential for the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Mental health disorders represent some of the strongest predictors of suicidal behaviour. Depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance use disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder have consistently been associated with elevated suicide risk. Individuals experiencing emotional distress, hopelessness, low self-esteem, and impaired coping mechanisms often exhibit greater vulnerability to suicidal ideation and attempts.

While psychological factors are critically important, growing evidence indicates that social determinants of health significantly influence suicide risk. Social determinants refer to the social, economic, and environmental conditions that affect health and well-being. Poverty,

unemployment, social isolation, inadequate housing, limited educational opportunities, discrimination, and exposure to violence have all been linked to increased suicidal behaviour.

Forensic nursing is a specialized field that integrates healthcare with legal and forensic principles. Forensic nurses frequently encounter vulnerable individuals experiencing psychological crises, trauma, violence, substance misuse, and suicidal behaviour. Their role extends beyond clinical assessment to include evidence-based documentation, risk identification, patient advocacy, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Given the increasing burden of suicide and the unique position of forensic nurses within healthcare systems, understanding the predictive role of mental health status and social determinants is essential. This review aims to examine these factors and highlight their implications for forensic nursing practice.

## **METHODS**

### **Design**

This study employed a narrative review approach to synthesize existing literature related to suicidal behaviour, mental health predictors, social determinants, and forensic nursing implications.

### **Literature Sources**

Literature relevant to suicidal behaviour was identified through searches of major healthcare and social science databases, including PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.

### **Search Terms**

Key search terms included:

- Suicidal behaviour
- Suicide attempt
- Suicidal ideation
- Mental health
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social determinants
- Risk factors
- Forensic nursing
- Suicide prevention

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine search results and identify relevant literature.

### **Search Strategy**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search combined keywords related to suicidal behaviour, mental health status, social determinants, and forensic nursing using Boolean operators (AND, OR). Relevant reference lists of selected articles were also manually searched to identify additional studies.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Studies were considered for review if they:

- Examined suicidal behaviour or suicide risk.
- Investigated mental health factors associated with suicide.
- Explored social determinants influencing suicidal behaviour.
- Were published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Were available in English.

**Exclusion Criteria**

Studies were excluded if they:

- Were editorials, commentaries, or opinion papers.
- Did not address suicide-related outcomes.
- Lacked sufficient methodological information.

**Data Synthesis**

Information was reviewed and synthesized according to recurring themes related to mental health predictors, social determinants, and forensic nursing implications.

**3. RESULTS**

**3.1 Overview of the Reviewed Literature**

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrated that suicidal behaviour is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by a complex interaction of psychological, social, economic, and environmental factors. Studies conducted across diverse populations and healthcare settings highlighted the significant role of mental health disorders and adverse social determinants in increasing vulnerability to suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and completed suicide. The literature further emphasized the importance of comprehensive assessment and early intervention strategies to reduce suicide risk among high-risk populations.

**Table 1. Major Themes Identified in the Reviewed Literature**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
Mental Health Disorders	Depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, PTSD, and substance use disorders were frequently associated with suicidal behaviour.
Social Determinants	Poverty, unemployment, social isolation, family conflict, and exposure to violence increased suicide risk.
Combined Effects	Mental health disorders and adverse social circumstances often interacted to increase vulnerability to suicidal behaviour.
Forensic Nursing Implications	Comprehensive assessment, risk identification, documentation, and multidisciplinary interventions were identified as essential components of suicide prevention.

### 3.2 Mental Health Status as a Predictor of Suicidal Behaviour

Mental health disorders emerged as the most frequently reported predictors of suicidal behaviour across the reviewed literature. Depression was consistently identified as the strongest psychological risk factor, with symptoms such as hopelessness, social withdrawal, emotional distress, and low self-esteem contributing significantly to suicide risk. Individuals experiencing depressive symptoms were more likely to report suicidal ideation and engage in self-harming behaviours.

Anxiety disorders were also commonly associated with suicidal behaviour. Persistent anxiety, excessive worry, panic symptoms, and impaired coping mechanisms were found to increase psychological distress and vulnerability to suicide. Furthermore, individuals experiencing both depression and anxiety demonstrated a substantially greater risk of suicidal behaviour compared with those experiencing a single mental health condition.

Substance use disorders were identified as important contributors to suicidal behaviour. Alcohol and drug misuse were associated with increased impulsivity, impaired judgment, emotional instability, and reduced problem-solving abilities. The coexistence of substance abuse and psychiatric disorders further amplified the likelihood of suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Previous suicide attempts emerged as one of the strongest predictors of future suicidal behaviour. Individuals with a history of self-harm or suicide attempts demonstrated an increased risk of recurrent attempts and suicide completion, highlighting the need for ongoing assessment and intervention.

**Table 2. Mental Health Factors Associated with Suicidal Behaviour**

<b>Mental Health Factor</b>	<b>Influence on Suicidal Behaviour</b>
Depression	Strongly associated with suicidal ideation and attempts
Anxiety Disorders	Increased psychological distress and suicide risk
Substance Use Disorders	Increased impulsivity and impaired judgment
PTSD	Associated with emotional distress and self-harm behaviours
Bipolar Disorder	Increased risk during depressive and mixed episodes
Previous Suicide Attempts	Strong predictor of future suicidal behaviour
Hopelessness	Frequently linked to suicidal ideation and planning

### 3.3 Social Determinants Associated with Suicidal Behaviour

The reviewed literature highlighted the significant influence of social determinants on suicidal behaviour. Poverty and financial instability were consistently associated with psychological distress, hopelessness, and reduced access to healthcare services. Individuals experiencing unemployment often reported lower self-esteem, social disengagement, and increased mental health challenges.

Social isolation and inadequate social support emerged as major contributors to suicide risk. Feelings of loneliness, exclusion, and reduced social connectedness were commonly reported among individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Family dysfunction, domestic violence, childhood adversity, and exposure to traumatic experiences were also identified as important determinants of suicidal behaviour. Furthermore, educational disadvantage and housing insecurity contributed to chronic stress and reduced resilience, thereby increasing vulnerability to suicide.

**Table 3. Social Determinants Influencing Suicidal Behaviour**

Social Determinant	Impact on Suicide Risk
Poverty and Financial Hardship	Increased psychological distress and hopelessness
Unemployment	Reduced self-esteem and increased vulnerability
Social Isolation	Increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts
Family Conflict	Associated with emotional distress and self-harm
Domestic Violence	Increased risk of psychological trauma and suicide
Educational Disadvantage	Limited opportunities and increased stress
Housing Insecurity	Associated with chronic stress and poor mental health

### 3.4 Interaction Between Mental Health Status and Social Determinants

The reviewed literature demonstrated that mental health disorders and social determinants rarely operate independently. Instead, they interact in complex ways to influence suicidal behaviour. Adverse social conditions frequently contribute to the onset, progression, or exacerbation of mental health disorders, while psychiatric illnesses may impair social functioning, employment opportunities, and interpersonal relationships.

Individuals experiencing both mental health disorders and unfavourable social circumstances consistently demonstrated the highest risk of suicidal behaviour. The findings suggest that suicide prevention strategies should address not only psychiatric symptoms but also the broader social and environmental conditions affecting individuals' lives.

**Table 4. Summary of Key Findings**

Domain	Key Findings
Depression	Most frequently reported psychological predictor
Anxiety Disorders	Significant contributor to suicide risk
Substance Use Disorders	Increased impulsivity and vulnerability
Previous Suicide Attempts	Strongest predictor of future suicidal behaviour

Poverty and Unemployment	Major social determinants of suicide risk
Social Isolation	Consistently associated with suicidal ideation
Family Dysfunction	Significant contributor to psychological distress
Combined Effects	Highest suicide risk observed when mental health disorders and adverse social determinants coexist

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this review highlight the multifactorial nature of suicidal behaviour. While mental health disorders remain central predictors, social determinants significantly influence both the development and progression of suicide risk.

Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and prior suicide attempts continue to represent major psychological indicators of vulnerability. These findings align with contemporary models of suicide prevention, which emphasize the importance of early recognition and treatment of mental health conditions.

The review also demonstrates that social determinants play a critical role in shaping mental health outcomes and suicide risk. Poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and family instability contribute to chronic stress and reduced resilience, thereby increasing vulnerability to suicidal behaviour.

The interaction between psychological and social factors underscores the need for comprehensive approaches to suicide prevention. Healthcare professionals should avoid focusing exclusively on psychiatric symptoms and instead consider broader social and environmental influences.

Forensic nurses are uniquely positioned to identify these risk factors during patient encounters. Their role in conducting comprehensive assessments, documenting findings, coordinating referrals, and collaborating with multidisciplinary teams is essential for effective suicide prevention.

#### Implications for Forensic Nursing Practice

Table 5. Implications for Forensic Nursing Practice

Practice Area	Implications
Risk Assessment	Routine suicide screening
Mental Health Evaluation	Early identification of depression and anxiety
Social Assessment	Evaluation of socioeconomic and environmental stressors
Documentation	Accurate medico-legal documentation



Referral Services	Timely referral to psychiatric care
Multidisciplinary Collaboration	Coordination with mental health and social services
Patient Education	Suicide prevention counselling and safety planning

The findings underscore the importance of adopting a biopsychosocial approach to suicide prevention. Forensic nurses play a critical role in identifying vulnerable individuals, documenting risk factors, and facilitating multidisciplinary interventions aimed at reducing suicide-related morbidity and mortality.

Forensic nurses should integrate both psychological and social factors into routine patient assessments to ensure holistic and effective care.

The findings emphasize that suicide risk assessment in forensic nursing should extend beyond psychiatric symptom evaluation to include socioeconomic circumstances, interpersonal relationships, trauma exposure, and environmental stressors. Such comprehensive assessment may facilitate early identification of vulnerable individuals and support timely intervention strategies.

#### **Clinical Implications**

Healthcare professionals should adopt comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment approaches when evaluating individuals at risk of suicide. Early identification of mental health disorders, social adversity, and environmental stressors may facilitate timely intervention and improve patient outcomes. Integrating forensic nursing expertise into suicide prevention programs may further strengthen risk assessment and management strategies.

#### **Strengths of the Review**

This review provides a comprehensive overview of the complex relationship between mental health status, social determinants, and suicidal behaviour. By integrating evidence from nursing, mental health, public health, and forensic healthcare literature, the review offers a holistic understanding of suicide risk factors. Furthermore, the focus on forensic nursing practice highlights the important role of forensic nurses in suicide prevention, risk assessment, and multidisciplinary care.

#### **Limitations**

This review has several limitations. The narrative review methodology does not provide the same level of methodological rigor as a systematic review. Variability among studies may limit comparability of findings. Additionally, many studies examining suicidal behaviour are observational in nature, limiting causal interpretations.

#### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies should focus on longitudinal investigations examining the causal pathways between mental health conditions, social determinants, and suicidal behaviour. Additional research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of forensic nursing interventions in reducing suicide risk among vulnerable populations. Moreover, culturally sensitive suicide prevention strategies should be developed and tested in diverse healthcare settings.

#### **Conclusion**

Suicidal behaviour is influenced by a complex interaction of mental health conditions and social

determinants. Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, previous suicide attempts, poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and family dysfunction are among the most significant predictors. Effective suicide prevention requires comprehensive assessment approaches that address both psychological and social dimensions of risk. Forensic nurses play a critical role in identifying vulnerable individuals, facilitating early intervention, and promoting evidence-based prevention strategies. Strengthening forensic nursing practice in suicide prevention may contribute significantly to improved patient outcomes and reduced suicide-related mortality.

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