

The effects of mukbang watching on the mental health of South Korean adolescents



Julia Kaminska¹ | Jiyeon Kim¹ | Bo Ram Yang¹

¹ College of Pharmacy, Chungnam National University, Daejeon, Republic of Korea

Background

- Mukbang and cookbang are internationally popular trends originating from South Korea, involving online food consumption and preparation.
- Increased social media use has raised concerns about adolescent mental health issues, including depression and anxiety.
- Research on the impact of mukbang and cookbang on adolescent mental health is limited; further studies are needed to assess their effects on mental health in adolescents.

Objective

- This study aims to evaluate an association between mukbang watching and mental health outcomes: stress, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), loneliness, depressive symptoms and suicidality in South Korean adolescents.

Methods

- Data source: 18th Korean Youth Risk Behavior Web-based Survey (2022) conducted by Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on South Korean adolescents aged 12–18 years.
- Mukbang/cookbang watching frequency: categorized into never, rare, moderate, and frequent based on the reported frequency over the past 12 months.
- Mental health variables: suicidality (ideation, plan, attempt), depressive symptom, stress, loneliness, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) (assessed using the GAD-7 questionnaire).
- Confounding variables:
 - sociodemographic - location, academic achievement, economic status, education level, and living arrangement;
 - health-related - BMI percentile, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking.
- Statistical analysis: Chi-squared and ANOVA tests were conducted, and data was analysed using multivariate logistic regression analysis with strata, cluster, weight, and finite population correction applied to estimate the crude and adjusted odds ratios (OR).

Results

Table 1. The crude and adjusted odds ratio for the association between mukbang/cookbang watching frequency and psychological symptoms in the total weighted population.

Variable	Mukbang/Cookbang Watching Frequency	Weighted frequency (% with event)	Crude OR (95% CI)	P value	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	P value
Depressive symptom	Never	183857 (24.69)	Reference		Reference	
	Rare	196870 (27.25)	1.14 (1.08, 1.20)	<.0001	1.14 (1.08, 1.20)	<.0001
	Moderate	130313 (29.44)	1.27 (1.20, 1.35)	<.0001	1.24 (1.17, 1.31)	<.0001
	Frequent	210881 (34.35)	1.60 (1.51, 1.68)	<.0001	1.50 (1.42, 1.59)	<.0001
Stress	Never	713001 (95.77)	Reference		Reference	
	Rare	707306 (97.90)	2.06 (1.80, 2.36)	<.0001	2.00 (1.75, 2.29)	<.0001
	Moderate	433091 (97.84)	2.01 (1.68, 2.39)	<.0001	1.93 (1.62, 2.31)	<.0001
	Frequent	599364 (97.62)	1.81 (1.57, 2.09)	<.0001	1.75 (1.52, 2.03)	<.0001
Loneliness	Never	533702 (71.68)	Reference		Reference	
	Rare	584115 (80.85)	1.67 (1.58, 1.76)	<.0001	1.66 (1.57, 1.75)	<.0001
	Moderate	358828 (81.07)	1.69 (1.59, 1.81)	<.0001	1.67 (1.56, 1.78)	<.0001
	Frequent	502732 (81.88)	1.79 (1.68, 1.89)	<.0001	1.74 (1.64, 1.85)	<.0001
GAD	Never	241544 (32.44)	Reference		Reference	
	Rare	255923 (35.42)	1.14 (1.09, 1.20)	<.0001	1.14 (1.08, 1.20)	<.0001
	Moderate	159063 (35.94)	1.17 (1.10, 1.24)	<.0001	1.15 (1.09, 1.22)	<.0001
	Frequent	248629 (40.49)	1.42 (1.34, 1.49)	<.0001	1.37 (1.30, 1.45)	<.0001

*Adjusted for location, academic achievement, economic status, education level, living arrangement, BMI percentile, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking.

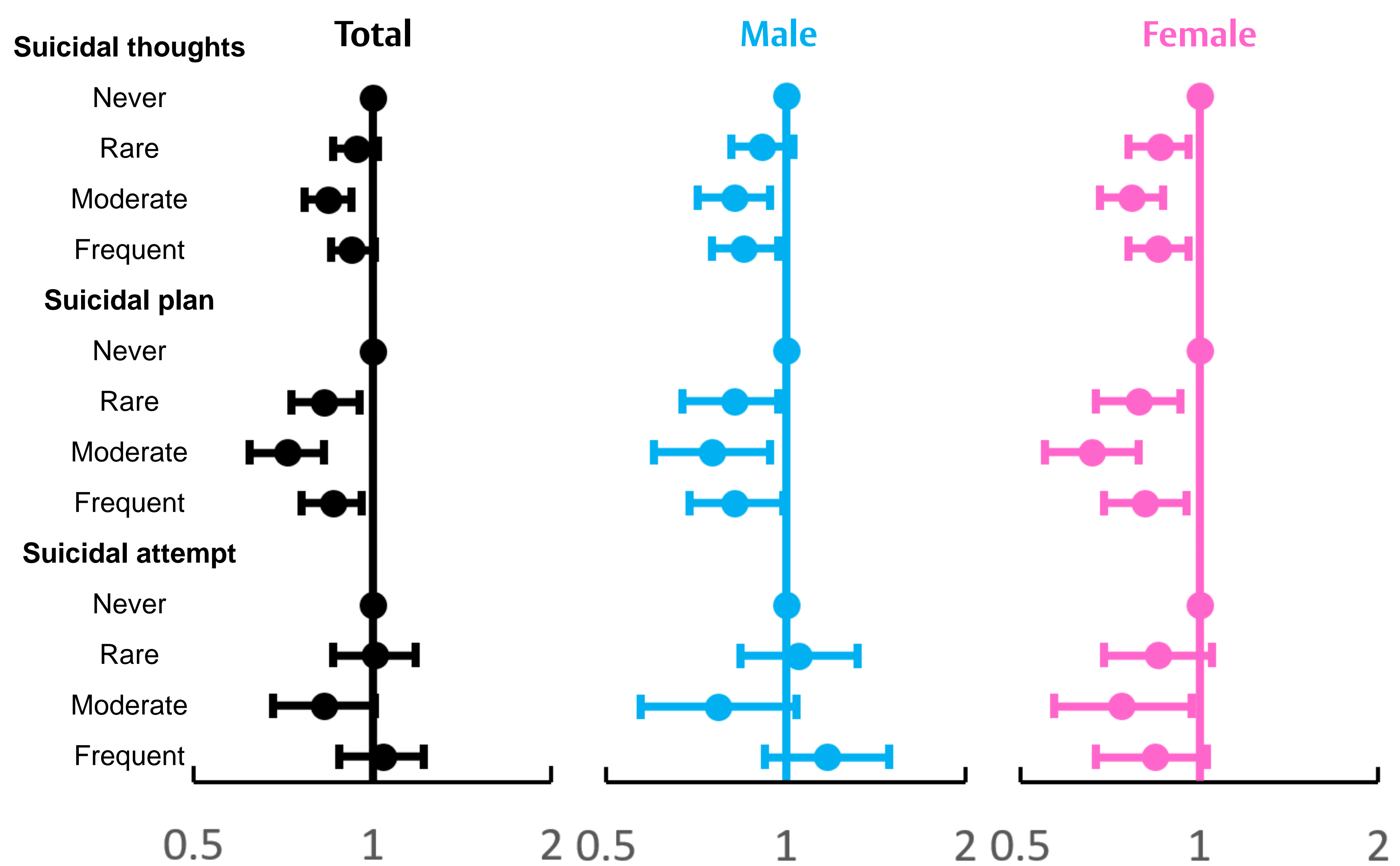


Figure 1. Forest plot showing the adjusted odds ratio for the association between mukbang/cookbang watching frequency and suicidality in the total, male and female weighted population.

*Adjusted for location, academic achievement, economic status, education level, living arrangement, BMI percentile, alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, depressive symptoms, stress, loneliness and GAD.

Declarations

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Conclusions

After adjusting for confounders, including psychological symptoms, neither male nor female adolescents show statistically significant risks of experiencing suicidal behaviours.

The findings suggest a potential association between mukbang and negative mental health in adolescents, pointing to the value of considering these trends in adolescent mental health screening.

Adolescents who frequently watch mukbang videos show higher risk of experiencing depressive symptoms and GAD, with female frequent watchers also at risk of experiencing stress and loneliness.

