

## Peer Pressure, Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to understand the relationship between Peer pressure, Hopelessness and Suicide ideation among college students. The study also helped to understand the impact of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicide ideation and also to see the difference between the variables among post graduate and under graduate students. A total of 150 college students under the age of 18-25 were a part of the study and the data was collected using Google forms including the questionnaire for peer pressure by Sandeep Singh and Sunil Saini (2007), Hopelessness questionnaire, and a suicide ideation scale by Augustine Osman, Beverly A. Kopper, Francisco X. Barrios, and Peter M. Guterrez. The results of the study showed that there was a relationship between peer pressure and suicide ideation and hopelessness and suicide ideation among college students. There a relationship between peer pressure and hopelessness among college students. It was found that peer pressure negatively predicts suicide ideation and hopelessness positively predicts suicide ideation. The study also wanted to see the difference in peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation between under graduate and post graduate students and it was found that there was no difference between the two groups. The study can be helpful as it will help one to understand the peer group the students have and how it can impact their thought process in both positive as well as negative way. And also, if suicide ideation is seen in students, the college and the staff can take the required steps to counsel the student as well as to make them aware of their thoughts and actions.

**Keywords:** *Peer Pressure, Hopelessness, Suicide Ideation*

College is the phase of one's life where individuals meet and interact with new people, learn new things and also at this age people try to fit into some groups which they might feel is similar to his/her choices and interests. Students in college or higher institutions are more involved in such groups as they are the more direct support they can get. And people in social groups come from different cultures and there can be diversity within the members. Sometimes a person might behave in one way but might be expected to behave in other way and it might create a pressure on the individual. Many times, students do actions based on what others in the group expect them to do rather than what they actually want to do. People in a group don't always influence to do negative actions, it can be positive also. Individual when comes in contact with many people from different background, they tend to

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get influenced by them and act in ways which others does. A survey shows that India has a significant position in the global education sector. It is also found that India has the world's largest networks of institutions of higher learning. The number of colleges in India stood at 42,343 in FY20.

According to the survey of November 25, 2022, the number of universities in India stood at 1,072 and has 38.5 million students enrolled in higher education in 2019-20, with 19.6 million male (26.9%) and 18.9 million female students (27.3%). In FY20, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Indian higher education was 27.1% (*Education Industry Analysis - Indian Education Sector*, 2019). According to AISHE 2019-20 reports, there are a total of 78.6% of private colleges in India, accounting for about a third of total college enrollment (*India's Higher Education Landscape*, n.d.). The studies have shown that the ratio of female students are more when compared with male students in higher education and this helps us to understand that the more amount of female students are encouraged to continue their higher studies.

Peer influence refers to the practice of adopting a particular type of behavior, dress or attitude in order to be accepted as the part of a group of ones equals or peers. When the influence is severe enough that youth find it hard to resist or is compelled to follow a particular uncomfortable behavior it is termed as peer pressure (Khan et al., 2015). In college, the behavior and actions of an individual changes suddenly as they interact with different and new people they meet. Their social interaction increases drastically as they spend more time with their peers attending college functions and exploring the college life. Peer pressure is the influence exerted by a peer group on its individual members to fit in with or conform to the group's norms and expectations. As a person enters a college life, there is a shift from influence from parents to influence from peers and this shift and change in the environment and the people around might put a person into pressure to do tasks which they might have not done before or not even thought about.

In college life, the individual spends most of the time with the peer groups and wants conformity from the peers for most of the things they do and peers might pressurize the person so much for a task or activity and if he/she is unable to reach the expectations or fails to do the task, they might start feeling they are not worth of anything and might start feeling hopeless. A person's sense of hopelessness can be defined in terms of a system of negative expectations concerning self and future life. Hopelessness is something when a person feel that their life has no value and whatever they do will not be useful in their future.

Suicide is among the top leading cause of death globally. It is very commonly seen in adolescents and young adults. Suicidal ideation is the thought and ideas one has towards self-harming behavior. An individual who feels hopeless because of the experience he/she had might sometimes lead to them having suicidal thoughts because of the lack of motivation to do things. Suicidal ideation refers to thinking about ending "one's life; it ranges from infrequent feelings and wishes to be dead or thought that life is not worth living (Ajibola & Agunbiade, 2021).

There are many studies done on hopelessness and suicidal ideation and peer pressure and suicidal ideation. But this study will help in understanding all the three i.e., peer pressure, hopelessness and suicidal ideation. And will help us see how all the three variables have an impact on each other. The study will help us to understand if peer pressure can have any relationship with hopelessness and to see if both peer pressure and hopelessness can have an impact on suicidal ideation. When a person tends to do actions just because he/she was asked

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to do so by the other members in the group and not by self-choice, and if by any chance they are unable to do so, they might feel hopeless about themselves and also can be pressurized by the group.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Research design*

The study uses correlational research design. This design will look at the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating the variables.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The present study is conducted in order to understand the relationship between peer pressure, hopelessness and suicidal ideation among college students. The study will also help us to see if there is any impact of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicide ideation and also the study will be helpful in understanding if there lies a difference in peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation among under graduate and post graduate students.

#### *Objectives*

1. To study the relationship between peer pressure and suicidal ideation among college students.
2. To study the relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideation among college students.
3. To study the relationship between peer pressure and hopelessness among college students.
4. To study the influence of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicidal ideation among college students.
5. To study the difference in peer pressure between undergraduate and postgraduate college students.
6. To study the difference in hopelessness between undergraduate and postgraduate college students.
7. To study the difference in suicidal ideation between undergraduate and postgraduate college students.

#### *Hypothesis*

- Ho1: There is no significant relationship between peer pressure and suicidal ideation among college students.
- Ho2: There is no significant relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideation among college students.
- Ho3: There is no significant relationship between peer pressure and hopelessness among college students.
- Ho4: There is no significant influence of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicidal ideation among college students.
- Ho5: There is no significant difference in peer pressure between undergraduate and postgraduate college students.
- Ho6: There is no significant difference in hopelessness between undergraduate and post graduate college students.
- Ho7: There is no significant difference in suicidal ideation between undergraduate and postgraduate college students.

*Operational definition*

- **Peer Pressure-** When an individual starts doing things because of the pressure of people they are around or to be a part of a group. It can be positive as well as negative. Sometimes a person does good and productive acts because they are being pressurized by their friends and on the other side, they fall for unaccepted acts and that also is because they are forced by their peers and to make their identity in the group, people do acts without thinking much about the consequences.
- **Hopelessness-** It is when an individual loses hope towards every aspect of life and gives up even without trying. A person starts having a belief that whatever they will do, they will not achieve what they want and start becoming hopeless about their everyday actions and behaviors and start to put very little or no effort for work after a point of time.
- **Suicide ideation-** Negative thoughts, plans and wishes to commit suicide in an individual who has not made any recent actual suicide attempts. Individuals start thinking about suicide in a way that they start getting negative thoughts about everything happening in their life, and if anything goes wrong, they wish to end their life and also have ideas about action to take towards it.

*Tools used for the study*

1. **Peer Pressure Scale** – The scale was developed by Sandeep Singh and Sunil Saini (2007). It is a uni-dimensional scale which gives the estimates of peer pressure in adolescents. It includes 25 items and is scored in a 5-point likert scale measured on five categories, i.e. strongly disagree (5), disagree (4), Can't say (3), agree (2), and strongly agree (1). Positive items are scored from 1 to 5 and negative or reverse items scored from 5 to 1. The minimum and maximum score range in 25-125. High score is interpreted as high peer pressure and low score indicates less peer pressure. The peer pressure scale is a reliable scale. There are two basic concerns with respect to reliability, consistency of items within a measure and stability of the measure over time. The internal consistency of the scale was established by using Crobach's alpha coefficient and a reliability of 0.79 was obtained for final 25 items.
2. **Beck's Hopelessness Scale** – The 20 item scale was designed to measure of hopelessness among individuals. The respondent is asked to evaluate each of the 20 statements and decide whether the statements decide his or her attitude in the previous week including the day of assessment. The BHS moderately correlates with the Beck Depression Inventory, although research shows that the BDI is better suited for predicting suicidal ideation behavior.[3] The internal reliability coefficients are reasonably high (Pearson  $r = 0.82$  to  $0.93$  in seven norm groups), but the BHS test-retest reliability coefficients are modest ( $0.69$  after one week and  $0.66$  after six weeks). Dowd and Owen both positively reviewed the effectiveness of the instrument, with Dowd concluding that the BHS was "a well-constructed and validated instrument, with adequate reliability".
3. **Positive and Negative Suicide Ideation Inventory (PANSI)** – The scale was designed by Augustine Osman, Beverly A. Kopper, Francisco X. Barrios, and Peter M. Guitierrez. It is a 14-item questionnaire. The reliability of the NI is very good, with internal consistency coefficients of  $.91$  and  $.93$  from samples of college students. The PI has good test-retest reliability, with coefficients of consistency of  $.80$  and  $.81$ . The validity of the PANSI is very good. Concurrent validity is evidenced by scores on the PI correlating negatively with other measures of suicide and scores on the NI correlating positively. Additionally, scores on both subscales were associated with

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measures of hopelessness, depression, and general psychological distress. The final 14-item version of the PANSI was supported with factor analysis, and scores on the NI and PI are negatively correlated ( $r = -.51$ ).

### *Statistical Analysis*

To study the relationship between peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation, the correlational analysis was used. And to see the impact of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicide ideation, Multiple regression analysis was used in SPSS. Independent sample T test was used to see the difference between under graduate and post graduate students for all the three variables.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The data collected will only be used for the research purpose with the consent of the participants and will not be shared or used for any other purpose. The consent of the participants were taken to fill the questionnaire.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Results*

The aim of the study was to understand the relationship between Peer Pressure, Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation among college students. The study was conducted on 150 college students including both under-graduation and post-graduation students. The data was collected using a questionnaire. The analysis of the data is shown below.

**Table 1 Relationship between Peer Pressure and Suicide Ideation.**

Variables	M	SD	r	sig
Peer Pressure	45.307	8.54	1	.005
Suicide Ideation	56.587	7.19	-.227**	.005

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows the relationship between Peer Pressure and Suicide Ideation among college students. From the table it is seen that the mean score for peer pressure and suicide ideation is 45.307 and 56.587 respectively with SD score of 8.54 and 7.19 respectively. The r value was -0.227. The p value obtained was 0.005. Thus, as the p value is less than 0.01 the null hypothesis is rejected which says that "There is no significant relationship between Peer Pressure and Suicide Ideation among college students". As the r value obtained is -0.227, it can be interpreted that there is a negative correlation between Peer pressure and Suicide ideation.

**Table 2 Relationship between Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation.**

Variables	M	SD	r	sig
Hopelessness	28.83	2.85	1	.002
Suicide Ideation	56.58	7.19	0.255**	.002

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the relationship between Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation among college students. In the table the mean and SD score for Hopelessness is 28.83 and 2.85 respectively and for Suicide Ideation it is 56.58 and 7.19 respectively. The r value obtained is 0.225. The significance value is 0.002 which is less than 0.01 thus the hypothesis "There is no significant relationship between Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation among college students" is rejected.

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**Table 3 Relationship between Peer Pressure and Hopelessness.**

Variables	M	SD	r	sig
Peer Pressure	45.30	8.54	1	.001
Hopelessness	28.83	2.85	-.271**	.001

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 3 shows the relationship between Peer Pressure and Hopelessness. The mean value obtained for peer pressure and hopelessness is 45.30 and 28.83 respectively with SD of 8.54 for peer pressure and 2.85 for hopelessness. The r value obtained is -0.271. The p value for the variables is 0.001 which is less than 0.01 thus rejecting the null hypothesis “There is no significant relationship between Peer Pressure and Hopelessness among college students”.

**Table 4 Influence of Peer Pressure and Hopelessness on Suicide Ideation.**

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	AR <sup>2</sup>	S	SE	β	t	P
Peer Pressure	.092	.080	.069		-.171	-2.09	.038
Hopelessness			.206		.209	2.55	.012

Table 4 shows the impact of Peer Pressure and Hopelessness on Suicide Ideation. The table shows the R<sup>2</sup> value for the constants as 0.092 revealed that the predictor value explained 8% variance in the outcome variable with F=7.459. The p value is 0.001 which is less than 0.05 indicating that the model is good for data. The findings show that (β= peer pressure negatively predicts suicide ideation (β= -0.171) and hopelessness positively predicts suicide ideation 0.209). Increase in one unit of peer pressure there is a decrease in -0.144 units in suicide ideation and increase in one unit of hopelessness there is a decrease in 0.526 units in suicide ideation. As the p value obtained is less than 0.05 the null hypothesis “There is no significant impact of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicidal ideation among college students” is rejected.

**Table 5 Difference between Under graduation and Post graduation students on Peer Pressure**

Variables	Under graduation			Post graduation			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Peer Pressure	67	45.10	8.06	83	45.47	8.95	-0.260	0.796

Table 5 shows the difference between under graduation and post-graduation students on peer pressure. The number of under graduation students in the study was 67 and the post-graduation students were 83. The mean and SD for under graduation students is 45.10 and 8.06 respectively. For post-graduation students, the mean and SD score is 45.47 and 8.95 respectively. The t score obtained from Levene’s Test for Equality of variance is -0.260 and thus the significance value taken will be 0.796. As the p value is more than 0.05 it can be interpreted that there is a difference in peer pressure among under graduation and post-graduation students. Thus, the hypothesis “There is no significant difference in peer pressure between undergraduate and postgraduate college students” is rejected.

**Table 6 Difference between Under graduation and Post graduation students on Hopelessness**

Variables	Under graduation			Post graduation			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Hopelessness	67	29.21	2.75	83	28.52	2.91	1.477	0.142

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Table 6 shows the difference between under graduation and post-graduation students on Hopelessness. The mean and SD for under graduation students is 29.21 and 2.75 and the mean and D for post-graduation students is 28,52 and 2.91 respectively. Based on the significance value obtained in Levene's Test for Equality of variance, the t score is 1.47 and thus the significance value (p) obtained is 0.142. The obtained p value is more than 0.05 thus the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in Hopelessness between undergraduate and postgraduate college students" is rejected. Therefore, it can be said that there is a difference in hopelessness between under graduation and post-graduation students.

**Table 7 Difference between Under graduation and Post graduation students on Suicide Ideation**

Variables	Under graduation			Post graduation			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Suicide Ideation	67	57.37	6.72	83	55.95	7.53	1.204	0.231

Table 7 shows the difference in suicide ideation among under graduation and post-graduation students. The mean and SD for under graduation students is 57.37 and 6.72 and for post-graduation students it is 55.95 and 7.53 respectively. The t score obtained is 1.204 and the obtained significance value (p) is 0.231 which is more than 0.05, thus the hypothesis "There is no significant difference in Suicide Ideation between undergraduate and postgraduate college students" is rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The present study explores the relationship between Peer Pressure, Hopelessness and Suicide Ideation among college students and the role of Peer Pressure and Hopelessness on Suicide Ideation. The study also helped in understanding the difference between post-graduation and under graduation students with regard to peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation. The findings showed that peer pressure and suicide ideation have a negative correlation.

The correlation can be because if people have frequent and stable interaction peer group, the thoughts of suicide might be low. The individual might have social support and a good network of relationships (Ajibola & Agunbiade, 2021).

The present study shows that there is a significant relationship between hopelessness and suicide ideation which was seen in prior studies. In one of the studies, it was seen that hopelessness predicted suicide ideation but not able to differentiate between people who went on to make attempts and those who experienced ideation without attempts (Qiu et al., 2017). This shows that students who feel hopelessness and believe that there is no hope in whatever they do, tend to have suicide ideation. When people become hopelessness, they start to take most of the incidents in a negative manner and that might lead it on start having suicidal thoughts (Wetzel, 1976, Minkoff et al., 1973, McGee et al., 2001, Heisel et al., 2003).

The reason behind the relationship between peer pressure and hopelessness might be because if the person is pressurized to do a particular task or indulge in a particular behavior and the individual does not meet the expectations of the peer and do not do the actions being expected, they might start having a feel that they are worthless and that might lead to them having a feel of hopelessness.

The study also tried to see the influence of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicide ideation among college students and the results shows that there is a significant impact of peer pressure

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and hopelessness on suicide ideation. This can be understood that when a person is pressurized by the peers and they are not able to meet the peers expectations, their hope towards many things in life might go down and thus the two will influence suicide ideation in them (Zeyrek et al., 2009, Yang & Clum, 1994).

The present study wanted to see if there is a significant difference in peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation among under graduate and post graduate students. And the results showed that there is a significant difference seen among under graduate and post graduate students on peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation. In the past there are very few studies which try to see the difference in undergraduate and post graduate students. There was a study to see suicide ideation among medical students in Delhi and the results of the study showed that suicide ideation was high in first professional year medical students and low in third professional year medical students (Goyal et al., 2012).

There are very few studies which support the present study and the study can be helpful in the future as it will give the overall about peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation among college students. The above results show that peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation are interconnected and the change in one can bring a change in the others. The results might help the researchers to go further into the reasons behind college students feeling peer pressure and how it can lead to hopelessness and due to all these factors, they might have suicidal thoughts.

### *Summary*

The study aims to study peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation among college students. The problem statement of the present study was “To understand the relationship between peer pressure, hopelessness and suicidal ideation among college students”. A total of 150 college students including post graduate and under graduate students were the sample for the study. The hypothesis of the study were as follows: Ho1: There is a significant relationship between peer pressure and suicidal ideation among college students. Ho2: There is a significant relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideation among college students. Ho3: There is no significant relationship between peer pressure and hopelessness among college students. Ho4: There is no significant impact of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicidal ideation among college students. Ho5: There is no significant difference in peer pressure between undergraduate and postgraduate college students. Ho6: There is no significant difference in hopelessness between undergraduate and post graduate college students. Ho7: There is no significant difference in suicidal ideation between undergraduate and postgraduate college students. The data was collected using the questionnaire and was scored and interpreted using the manual and norms for each scale. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was then used for the data analysis. For finding the correlation, Pearson Correlation was used and for finding the impact of one variable on the other, Regression analysis was done. Then to see the difference between post graduate and under graduate students in the three variables, Independent Sample t- test was used.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study was done to see the relationship between peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation among college students. The results of the study showed a negative correlation between peer pressure and suicide ideation and a positive correlation between hopelessness and suicide ideation. It was found that there is a significant relationship between peer pressure and hopelessness. It was found that there was a significant impact of peer pressure and hopelessness on suicide ideation among college students.



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Analysis was also done to see if there is difference in the variables among under graduate and post graduate college students and the results showed that there was a significant difference in peer pressure, hopelessness and suicide ideation among under graduate and post graduate students.

### ***Limitations of the study***

There were certain limitations which were found during the study and those limitations can be fulfilled in the future studies. The first limitation is that there were very few studies related to the present study and thus the studies were less to support the present study. Also because of the limitation of the time, the sample was restricted to limited number which should be increased in further studies.

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