

Research Paper

## A Cross-Sectional Study on Suicidal Ideation and Depression among School-Going Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

Suicide and suicidal attempts are currently major problems among students in our society. According to the World Health Organization, approximately one million people worldwide die by suicide every year. Sikkim, situated in the Himalayan foothills in the north-eastern part of India, is also known for having the highest suicide rates in the nation, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Depression is under-recognized and under-treated in adolescents, with nearly 75% of depressed adolescents not receiving treatment. Untreated depression in adolescence is related to different outcomes among adults, including lower educational attainment and poorer physical health, and it also sometimes leads adolescents to commit suicide. The present study sets out to investigate the association between suicidal ideation and depression among school-going adolescents. A survey was conducted among 100 adolescents (50 males and 50 females) using stratified random sampling from different schools in East Sikkim. The participants were assessed by using the Beck Suicidal Ideation and Beck Depression Inventory-II scales. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation. The findings indicated that suicidal ideation was positively associated with depression. A significant gender difference was also found in suicidal ideation and depression among adolescents. The findings will facilitate understanding the major problems behind suicide and suicidal attempts, which will further help in developing interventional strategies.

**Keywords:** *Suicidal Ideation, Depression, Adolescents, Gender*

Adolescence is the time between childhood and adulthood. It is a time of great change in all parts of a person's life, including their mind, body, and emotions. Teenagers can be stressed out by a wide range of things, from catastrophic or traumatic events to constant stress and daily hassles. Academic problems are the most important sources of chronic stress for adolescents in both Western and Asian countries and have significant associations with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Study pressure and its links to mental health issues among Indian school children and adolescents are subjects of growing concern. Parental guidance and support during adolescence also reduce the tendency towards self-harm. Parents' obsessive plans towards success and attainment in society can often be irrational and contrary to children's growing needs. This causes a loss of trust and understanding between parent and child, often

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depressing the children; this happens more in developing nations. Unrecognized depression is also a significant factor in adolescent suicide, which is the third-leading cause of mortality. Depression may be a contributing factor in suicidal ideation.

A very significant problem is suicide. Teenagers take their own lives far too frequently. Teenage suicides have increased threefold in the United States since the 1950s, making it the third greatest cause of mortality for this age group, according to Horowitz et al. (2001). In addition, 53% of kids between the ages of 13 and 19 reported having suicide thoughts; as per Horowitz et al., 250,000 teenagers attempt suicide per year, and 8–10% of teenagers in the US make at least one attempt. In 1997, 7.7% of teenagers attempted suicide, 15.7% had suicidal thoughts, and 20.5% of adolescents had suicidal thoughts (Horowitz et al.). Up to 20% of 300 students who participated in another study acknowledged acting suicidality in the previous year (Rubenstein et al., 1989). The subject of suicide is exceedingly complex. The process of identifying those who are at risk of suicide is extremely challenging. Because there are so many reasons why people commit suicide, it can be challenging. Any person who is considering suicide is regarded as being in the at-risk group, regardless of their motivation. A person's adolescence can be a challenging time in their life. There may be a great deal of tension and emotional distress. Teenagers can become stressed out because of problems with peer interactions at school and familial strife at home. All of these could cause depression and suicide in a person (Rubenstein et al., 1989). Children demand intelligent, engaging, and friendly support, which is frequently required from parents. Nevertheless, this relationship frequently fails, so they seek it out from their friends, that frequently leads to meeting negative influences and demeaning people who destroy their impressionable minds. Suicidality among children and teenagers has increased during the previous ten years. Worldwide epidemiological studies reveal that 9%–26% of young people report having suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives (Olsson & Von Knorring, 1997; Martin et al., 1994). Every year, suicide claims roughly a million lives. This indicates that one suicide occurs every forty seconds on the planet. An additional 10 to 20 million non-fatal suicide attempts occur each year. Teenage suicide is the third most common reason for death. The suicide rate in the United States was 10.7 per 100,000 individuals as of the 2001 report. The suicide rate for young adults aged fifteen to twenty-four was 9.9 per 100,000 individuals. The leading cause of death in modern culture is suicide. Teenagers have many challenges in life, and some struggle to cope with the pressure. Several factors can influence a kid to take their own life. Teenage suicide has a number of frequent causes, including depression, but there are also many other things that might make someone depressed. These elements include some that are psychological or physical. Substance misuse, changes at home, domestic violence, and money issues are further causes.

### ***Suicide ideation among adolescents***

Large amounts of suicidal thinking were shown among young people. The reasons include incorporating family issues, social, political, and financial issues, or the absence of practical adapting procedures. It has been said that those teenagers who rely more on broken adapting procedures are more inclined to misery and, in this manner, suicide ideation. (Gould et al., 1996). Children in South Africa commit suicide for various reasons. Some risk factors include large amounts of family issues and violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and the availability of firearms in the home. Poverty is also one of the common reasons for suicidal ideation (Forster & Keen, 1990). Kaplan et al. (1999) found in their study that family interruption, mishandling, and liquor consumption constituted a portion of the hazards associated with suicide activities, while parental clashes, school challenges, and social separation are also considered to be factors that cause suicide. A similar study was conducted

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by Paulszny and Davenport (1991), who found that the suicide ideation group had significantly more psychological problems and came from chaotic or disorganized families. Huff (1999) found that five of the ten highest-ranked stressors for adolescents involved conflict with parents and siblings. Family issues and also developmental issues play a very important role in leading to an adolescent having thoughts about suicide, according to Beautrias.

### ***Gender difference in suicide ideation and depression***

It has just been recommended that suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour are different for males and females. Vannatta (1996) reported that males are four times more inclined to commit suicide than females. Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (1998) reported that the suicide rate for males in 1992 was 21.9 per 100,000, compared to a female rate of 3.7 per 100,000. This might be because women are more likely to report suicide attempts. According to Canetto (1997), who investigated the rate of suicide among males and females in 1970–1980, the rate of suicide was higher among females than among males. However, females are three times as likely to engage in nonfatal suicidal behaviour. Gender differences have likewise been noted for the connections between depression and suicidality. Mazza & Reynolds (1998) reported that males advanced from depression to substance abuse and after that to suicide risk, while females progressed directly from depression to suicide risk. The research was done by Klomek et al. (2007) to assess the association between bullying behaviour, depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts among adolescents in 9th–12th grade in New York. Class bullying is more inclined to increase the risk of depression and suicide, particularly among girls. Singh & Hardeep (2005) examined the relationship of depression, life stress, and personality with suicidal ideation among students. Results revealed that suicidal ideation was positively associated with depression and stressful life events. A similar study was conducted by Ang and Huan (2006) on the relations among academic stress, depression, and suicidal ideation among Asian young people between 12 and 18 years of age from a secondary school in Singapore. The result demonstrates that there is a significant positive correlation between depression and suicidal ideation. Differences between the genders were also found.

### ***Objectives***

- To assess the level of suicidal ideation and depression among school-going adolescents.
- To find out the relationship between suicidal ideation and depression among school-going adolescents.
- To study the gender difference in suicidal ideation and depression among school-going adolescents.

### ***Hypotheses***

- There would be a positive association between depression and thoughts of suicide in teenagers who go to school.
- Female school-going adolescents will have more depression than male school-going adolescents.
- Female school-going adolescents will have more suicidal ideation than male school-going adolescents.

## METHODS AND PROCEDURE

### Sample

A total of 100 students (50 males and 50 females) from government schools of east district Sikkim were chosen for the study as a sample through stratified random sampling method. The respondents were between the age of 15 and 20 years.

### Psychological Tools used

- **The Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996):**-The Beck Depression Inventory is a widely used 21-item self-report scale in both clinical and research studies. The Beck Depression Inventory-II is a depression rating scale that can be used in individuals that are aged 13 years and older and rates symptoms of depression in terms of severity on a scale from 0 to 3 based on the 21 specific items. The test-retest reliability for BDI-II was 0.93. Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation (Beck & Steer, 1991): The Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation (SSI) is a 21-item self-report questionnaire that can be used to measure the severity of suicidal ideation in adults and adolescents.
- **The Beck scale for suicidal ideation (BSS), developed by Aaron T. Beck (1991),** consists of 21 items scored 0-2, allowing scores between 0-38. The things could be put into three groups: active suicidal desire, preparation, and passive suicidal desire. It has four points on the Likert scale.

### Statistical Analysis

The psychometric properties of each of the scales of the psychological measures were ascertained. The data analyses also included descriptive statistics and correlation.

### Ethical considerations

- All participants were asked if they wanted to participate, and only those who voluntarily participated were chosen for the collection, taking into consideration the participants' rights to withdraw at any point in time.
- Seek permissions and inform consent is taken from the colleges and the participants.
- Maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the collected data.
- The participants were informed about why the research is being conducted and it will be used only for academic purposes.
- Acknowledging the participants' contributions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

**Table-1: Showing the Reliability (Alpha), Homogeneity (Levene test), and Normal probability (Kurtosis and Skewness) for the test scale/subscales.**

Statistics		Dependent variables	
		Depression	Suicidal ideation
Reliability	Alpha	.84	.71
NPC	Kurtosis	-0.16	.31
	Skewness	.41	.36

Table -1 shows the Cronbach's Alpha of the scales such as depression ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and suicidal ideation ( $\alpha = .71$ ). In the domain of social science, it is common practice to consider a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 as an acceptable measure of reliability or internal consistency of an instrument (Taber, 2017). The skewness value of depression and suicidal ideation are between -1 and +1 point value.

**Table- 2: Showing the Descriptive statistics- Mean and SD for the gender comparison groups on dependent variables.**

Independent Variables (Gender)	Statistics	Dependent variables	
		Depression	Suicidal ideation
Total Male	Mean	16.56	19.16
	SD	10.08	4.02
Total Female	Mean	18.46	25.00
	SD	10.45	5.09

Table showing the gender difference in depression among school-going adolescents Results revealed that the mean score of the male on depression is 16.56 (SD, 10.08), and the mean score of the female is 18.46 (SD, 10.45). It suggests that the mean score of depression for female is higher than the mean score of depression for male. These results are also consistent with prior studies conducted in the domain. Females are found to be more depressed than males (Ghaedi& Mohd Kosnin, 2014). Sharma & Kirmani (2015) found that girls reported more symptoms of depression and anxiety than boys. Also, the results are consistent with extant research (Nerdrum et al., 2006; Herrero & Meneses, 2006; Khawaja & Duncanson, 2008).

Adolescent’s boys and girls approach suicide in different ways, as shown in the same table. Results revealed that the mean male score on suicidal ideation is 19.16 (SD, 4.02) and the mean female score is 25.00 (SD, 5.09). Suvarchala & Manjuvani (2023) did similar research and found that there were significant differences between boys and girls with respect to suicidal ideation. This indicates that adolescent girls may have experienced interpersonal disputes, family members' attitudes of inequity, academic stress, and loss of loved ones, sleep disorders, and financial problem, all of which can lead to suicidal ideation. The findings are consistent with the findings of Yi-Yang Zhang.Y.Y et.al (2019) which shows that suicidal ideation was significantly higher for girls (13.3%) than boys (10.7%).

**Table 3: Showing the significant relationship between Dependent Variables**

Pearson’s Correlations between Dependent Variables		
Dependent Variables	Suicidal ideation	Depression
Suicidal ideation	1	.36**
Depression		1
<i>**Correlation significant at 0.01 level</i>		

The relationship between suicidal ideation and depression among the participants was analyzed by Karl Pearson’s coefficient of correlation. The correlation analysis revealed a correlation of .36. From the data, it is evident that there is a significant positive correlation between suicidal ideation and depression in the level of significance is 0.01. Since the coefficient of correlation has a positive value, it implies that depression and suicidal ideation share a positive correlation. This means that as the participant's depression increases, so will their suicide ideation, and vice versa. This was supportive of our assumption that suicidal ideations could be reduced if we could control depression among the individuals. In adolescents, depression is frequently linked to suicide thoughts and actions (Brand et al., 1996; Brent et al., 1999). Asian adolescent research studies have also revealed a connection between depression and suicidal ideation. Juon et al. (1994) found that depression is one of the strongest and most reliable predictors of suicidal behaviours in a sample of more than 9,000 Korean high school students. Students with high depression scores were 5.31 times

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more likely to report suicidal thoughts and 3.19 times more likely to attempt suicide than students with low scores. Similar findings with regard to stressors among students (particularly academic stress) and depression were made by Stewart et al. (1999) using a sample of adolescents from Hong Kong. They also say that when depression and stress are found among students, there is a high chance of seeing suicidal thoughts. It can be assumed that adolescents may develop depressed feelings when they receive negative feedback regarding their academic performance. Moreover, depression in adolescents is linked to suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Brand et al., 1996; Brent et al., 1999). Adolescent depression partially mediates the relationship with suicidal ideation. The results suggested that suicidal ideation increases with depressed mood in adolescents in this sample. This is similar to De Man, Stewart, et al.'s (1999) findings, which indicated that depression significantly accounted for the relationship between suicidal ideation and depression in adolescents. The present findings may have practical applications for intervention and prevention work with children and adolescents in schools.

### CONCLUSION

Suicide is a severe problem that has to be addressed with priority. Suicidal attempts occur every three seconds, whereas suicide deaths occur every forty seconds, according to the World Health Organization (2010). This accounts for over a million suicide-related deaths annually. Suicidal ideation is not at a critical level among school kids, but there is still a tendency to worry about it based on the respondents' responses, despite the fact that we can claim that depression and suicidal tendency are concerns strongly tied to a person's mental health. Furthermore, it can be inferred that suicide ideation and depression have a close connection. Hence, when trying to implement any kind of intervention, depression needs to be properly addressed and stopped before it worsens and eventually manifests as suicidal thoughts or behaviour. To foster improved communication and relationships with parents, counseling should be done. An alternative for bringing about change, fostering stability, and lowering the risks of people who have suicidal or self-harming thoughts is counseling that focuses on conversation and crisis management (Pelling, Bowers, & Armstrong, 2007). All parties involved in dealing with suicide issues—including parents, teachers, the government, the media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—must work together to find a solution.

### *Limitations and Directions for the Future*

In keeping with the current study's boundaries and taking into consideration its future directions, the following recommendations have been suggested:

- This study looked at how suicidal thoughts and depression affect school-aged kids. Similar research can be done to look at how suicidal thoughts and depression affect people with different levels of education.
- For more trustworthy results, the current investigation can be carried out on a larger sample.
- The study can be expanded to look at the association between depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, socioeconomic status, academic anxiety, stress, family conditions, etc.
- Also, future studies could use more in-depth ways to measure and assess suicide, especially to look at more complex links between different aspects of suicidality.
- Lastly, future interventions could help reduce suicidal thoughts and attempts by focusing on the symptoms of anxiety and depression that happened simultaneously.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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