

Student Stress and Suicidal Ideation in College students

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ABSTRACT

Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stressors faced by college students are due to transitions in lifestyle, increased responsibilities, higher academic workload and interpersonal relationship concerns. Suicidal ideation often called suicidal thoughts or ideas is an umbrella which covers a broad range of contemplations, wishes, and preoccupations with death and suicide. This study conducted among 100 students of ages 17 and 18, found a strong positive correlation between stress and suicidal ideation, with a correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho) of 0.599. Regression analysis demonstrates that stress levels can effectively predict suicidal ideation. These findings underscore the need to address stress as a risk factor for suicidal ideation, highlight the necessity of interventions targeted towards stress reduction, as well as promotion of mental wellbeing.

Keywords: *Student Stress, Suicidal Ideation, Student Wellness, Academic Stress, Undergraduate Students, India*

Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. College students experience stress related to changes in lifestyle, increased workload, new responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships. Psychological theories of stress offer insights into how individuals perceive, cope with, and respond to stressors.

Stress

A commonly used and recognized term, stress is something each individual experiences at some point in their life. Every individual has a threshold for the intensity of stress they are able to handle. Navigating stress-inducing situations can be mastered through practice and building resilience. However, certain stressors, especially when experienced over a long period of time can lead to negative consequences. This applies to student stress as well. Academic stress is defined as a student's psychological state resulting from continuous social and self-imposed pressure in a school environment that depletes the student's psychological reserves (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

Theories of Stress

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman proposed the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. According to this approach, stress arises from how someone evaluates a situation

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Received: May 16, 2024; Revision Received: July 20, 2024; Accepted: July 24, 2024

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and how capable they believe they are of handling it. Stress develops when someone believes they are unable to adequately handle a circumstance. The two main categories of coping methods are emotion-focused (controlling the emotional reaction to the stressor) and problem-focused (addressing the stressor directly). Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) outlines the three phases of the body's physiological reaction to stress. The body first mobilizes resources (alarm stage) in response to the stressor. If the stress doesn't go away, the body goes through a resistant stage of adaptation in which it tries to deal with the stressor.

Long-term stress can cause tiredness, which depletes the body's resources and makes one more prone to sickness. The combination of biological, psychological, and social components in the experience of stress is taken into account by the Biopsychosocial Model. It highlights that stress results from the interplay between a person's psychological traits, social pressures from their surroundings, and biological predispositions. Lazarus' Cognitive evaluation Theory highlights the part that cognitive evaluation plays in stress. In the process of appraisal, a situation's relevance to one's well-being is determined (primary appraisal), and one's capacity for coping with it is determined (secondary appraisal). People's emotional and physiological reactions are influenced by how they perceive and understand stressors.

Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation, often known as suicidal thoughts or ideas, refers to a variety of thoughts, desires, and obsessions with suicide and death. It's imperative that medical professionals understand that suicidal ideation is a diverse phenomenon. Its type, intensity, and duration vary. The goal of psychological theories of suicidal ideation is to provide an explanation for the social, emotional, and cognitive elements that influence suicidal thoughts.

Theories of Suicide

According to Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, suicidal thought results from a mixture of two things: a sense of being unwelcome and a sense of being burdensome. Feeling like a burden to others is known as perceived burdensomeness, and feelings of isolation and alienation are known as thwarted belongingness. According to the hypothesis, people are most vulnerable to suicide when both conditions are met.

Cognitive Theory of Suicide, based on Aaron Beck's cognitive model of depression, focuses on the role of negative cognitive schemas in suicidal ideation. It suggests that individuals prone to suicidal thoughts have distorted beliefs about themselves, their future, and the world around them. These beliefs contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair, increasing the likelihood of suicidal ideation. Stress-Diathesis Model combines biological and psychological factors to explain suicidal ideation. It suggests that individuals have a predisposition (diathesis) to suicidal thoughts, which may be genetic, neurobiological, or related to early life experiences. Stressful life events or environmental triggers then interact with this predisposition to precipitate suicidal ideation. Drawing from Freudian concepts, psychodynamic theories propose that suicidal ideation may stem from unconscious conflicts and unresolved issues, such as feelings of guilt, anger, or unresolved grief. Suicidal thoughts may be a manifestation of an individual's struggle to cope with internal conflicts or to communicate distress. Cultural and Sociological perspectives emphasize the influence of cultural and societal factors on suicidal ideation. Cultural norms, social support networks, economic factors, and media representations of suicide can all contribute to the prevalence and expression of suicidal thoughts within a given population.

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Student suicides

According to the Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI) report from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), more than 13,000 students perished in India in 2021—more than 35 a day. High levels of stress can hinder a student's ability to concentrate and perform well academically. Understanding the stressors students face can help educational institutions create a more conducive learning environment. Research can help identify the factors contributing to stress and suicidal ideation among students. Understanding these factors can lead to the development of effective intervention and prevention strategies. Early identification of students at risk is crucial for providing them with the support they need.

Need for the study

Suicide is a leading cause of death among college-aged individuals, making it a significant public health concern. Research on student stress and suicidal ideation contributes to the broader understanding of mental health issues and informs public health policies aimed at reducing suicide rates. Understanding the factors contributing to stress and suicidal ideation helps raise awareness about mental health issues among college students. It breaks down the stigma associated with seeking help and encourages open discussions about mental well-being. By studying these issues, researchers can identify risk factors and warning signs associated with stress and suicidal ideation. This knowledge enables colleges and universities to develop targeted prevention and interventions. Addressing mental health issues in college can have long-term benefits for individuals and society as a whole. By supporting students during their college years, institutions can help prevent long-term mental health problems and reduce the likelihood of future suicidal behavior.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tao, Wang., Zhiying, Yao., et al. (2023) in their study, *The Mediating Effect of Stress between Extracurricular Activities and Suicidal Ideation in Chinese College Students*, found that student stress mediates the relationship between extracurricular activities and suicidal ideation. Engaging in extracurricular activities can reduce stress levels and subsequently lower suicidal ideation in college students.

Okechukwu, F.O.,Ogba, K.T., Nwifo,J.I. et al. (2022) used a cross sectional design to sample 505 participants. Academic stress was found to be positively associated with suicidal ideation, whereas resilience was found to be negatively associated.

Franca, Obiageli, et al. (2022) in *Academic stress and suicidal ideation: moderating roles of coping style and resilience*, found that academic stress positively correlates with suicidal ideation, but resilience and coping strategies can mitigate this association among students. the authors examined the moderating roles of coping and resilience in the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation and found that academic stress was positively associated with suicide ideation at low or moderate levels of adaptive coping styles.

Dong, Hee, Jeong., Eun-Jung, Shim. (2022) conducted a *Qualitative Study on Experiences of Suicidal Ideation and Behavior among College Students* and explored the factors related to suicidal ideation and behavior in college students and explored students' responses and coping strategies for distress caused by these factors, including repeated frustration and interpersonal distress. College students experience suicidal ideation due to academic and career frustrations, social isolation, and negative emotions. Understanding and managing distress can help prevent suicidal behavior.

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Hirsch, J. K., et al. (2019) studied 913 collegiate housing residents. Depressive symptoms were examined as a mediator of the relation between stress and suicidal behavior, along with the moderating effect of mental health stigma.

You, S., Kwon, M., & Kim, E. K. (2022) used a cross-using a sample of 420 Korean college students. Students with higher self-compassion reporting more negligible adverse impacts of maladaptive perfectionism on suicidal ideation mediated by life stress.

Lester, D. (2014) In a sample of 165 college undergraduates, depression was predicted by both sources of stress (stressors from college related activities and stressors from general life experiences) whereas past and current suicidal ideation were predicted only by general life stress.

Elizabeth, Obianwogo, Uyanne (2022) investigated the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Kwara State and reveal that the causes of academic stress among university undergraduates are academic workloads; difficulty of time between study and social activity; dealing with difficult course; submission deadlines of assignments/projects; feel threatened by Grade Point Average on portal; lack of relevant course materials; difficulty to cover the course outline among others. Academic stress among undergraduates in Kwara State is linked to suicidal ideation, emphasizing the need to balance study and social activities to reduce stress levels.

Lockman, J. D., & Servaty-Seib (2016) examined the degree to which interpersonal and intrapersonal variables contribute to the variance of suicidal ideation in college students (n = 165). Results indicated that students' meaning made of stress was negatively and uniquely associated with suicidal ideation.

Munjireen, S., et al. (2023) in the study- An Examination of Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Care, and Their Association with Depression, Stress, Suicidal Ideation, and Wellness in a Bangladeshi University Student Sample conducted a cross-sectional survey on stigma-related, attitudinal, and instrumental barriers to accessing mental healthcare among Bangladeshi university students and examined the association between stigma and non-stigma (i.e., attitudinal and instrumental) barriers with four mental health outcomes. It was found that student stress is associated with suicidal ideation in Bangladeshi university students, with stigma-related barriers significantly predicting suicidal ideation but not depression in this sample.

Franca, Obiageli, et al. (2021) in Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation: Moderated Mediation Study, examined the effect of coping and resilience on suicidal ideation in 505 undergraduate volunteers from three South-Eastern Nigerian Universities, where participants were administered self-report: Lakaev Academic Stress Response Scale (LASRS), Scale for Suicidal Ideation (SSI), Brief COPE (B-COPE), and Resilience Scale (RS-14). It was found that Coping moderates the link between academic stress and suicidal ideation, with resilience fully mediating this relationship among Nigerian undergraduates, highlighting the importance of coping skills and resilience training.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research follows a quantitative correlational design, a method involving the collection and analysis of numerical data.

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Statement of the Problem

Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people worldwide, and students, particularly those in higher education settings, are at increased risk. Transitioning to college or university can exacerbate existing mental health issues or contribute to the onset of suicidal ideation. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the stress levels of college students and their extent of suicidal ideation.

Objectives of the study

- To explore the relationship between student stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students.
- To illuminate the impact of stress on college students.

Hypotheses

- There is a relationship between the stress levels of college students and suicidal ideation.
- Stress does not play a role in the suicidal ideation of undergraduate college students.

Operational definition

- **Stress-** Stress is defined by Richard S Lazarus is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual can mobilize.
- **Suicidal Ideation-** is a broad term used to describe a range of contemplations, wishes, and preoccupations with death and suicide.

Variables

In this study, stress is the independent variable and suicidal ideation is the dependent variable.

Demographic variables

100 college students, 70 females and 30 males from India, took part in this study.

Universe of the study

The population comprised of undergraduate students aged 17 and 18.

Geographical area

The data was collected from students in India, living in an urban city.

Inclusion criteria

- **Age:** Participants must be between the ages of 17 and 18 at the time of recruitment.
- **Student status:** Participants must be currently enrolled in a high school or undergraduate college degree.
- **Consent:** Participants must provide informed consent to participate in the study.
- **Language and Comprehension:** Participants must have the ability to understand the questions and be able to provide reliable responses to ensure accurate communication and data collection.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants should not face any coercion or undue influence to participate.

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Exclusion Criteria

- **Age:** Participants younger than 17 or older than 18 are excluded from the study.
- **Not a student:** Individuals not currently enrolled in an academic course are excluded.
- **Language barrier:** Individuals unable to comprehend English were not a part of this study.
- **Severe Medical Conditions:** Participants with severe medical conditions that may significantly affect their stress levels or ability to participate in the study are excluded.

Sample and Technique

A convenience sample of 100 of the age 17 and 18 of individuals who are currently enrolled in a full time college program will be considered for data collection. Questionnaires will be used to collect the data electronically or through paper-and-pencil test versions.

- Statistical technique- Correlation and Regression
- Data- Non parametric
- Gender- The data has been collected from 70 female and 30 male respondents.

Research ethics followed

Informed consent was obtained from the participants before they began responding to the questionnaires. They were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits and their rights, allowing them to make an informed decision about their participation.

The collected data was treated with sensitivity and confidentiality was ensured. To ensure welfare of participants, they were encouraged to reach out in case of any distress experienced by them during the study.

All participants were treated with equal importance and considered valuable assets in the study regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status. The research was conducted with honesty and transparency while adhering to the professional standards in compliance with relevant regulations and guidelines.

Test tools for the study

1.Student Stress Scale by Dr. Zaki Akhtar (2011)- The scale has a construct validity of .72. Internal consistency or coefficient alpha from 600 students was established to be 0.78 and is significant at .01 level of significance. There are a total of 51 statements. This is a five point rating scale from Always to Never.

Scoring: There are 41 positive and 10 negative items. Starting from Never to Always the scoring goes from 1-5. Therefore, high occurrence is shown by a large sum and vice versa. The range of the Student Stress Scale is 51-255.

2. Suicidal Ideation Scale by Dr Devendra Singh Sisodia and Dr Vibhuti Bhatnagar (2011)- The test-retest reliability was 0.78 and consistency value of the scale was 0.81. The scale was validated against external criteria and coefficient obtained was 0.74. There are a total of 25 statements.

Scoring: For positive statements, 5 marks to strongly agree, 4 marks to agree, 3 marks to undecided, 2 marks to disagree and 1 mark to strongly disagree responses are assigned. For

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negative statements, 1 mark for strongly agree, 2 to agree, 3 marks to undecided, 4 marks for disagree and 5 marks to strongly disagree responses are assigned. The higher the score, more is the suicidal ideation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlational Analysis

Table 1 showing results of correlation between Stress Total and Suicidal Ideation Total

			Stress Total	Suicidal Ideation Total
Spearman's rho	Stress Total	Correlation	1.000	.599**
		Coefficient Sig.	.	.000
		(2-tailed) N	100	100
	Suicidal Ideation Total	Correlation	.599**	1.000
		Coefficient Sig.	.000	.
		(2-tailed) N	100	100

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)*

The correlation analysis provided indicates a significant positive relationship between stress and suicidal ideation among the sample of individuals studied. The correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho) between stress total and suicidal ideation total is 0.599, with a p-value of less than 0.01. This suggests a moderately strong positive correlation between the two variables, indicating that as stress levels increase, so does the likelihood of experiencing suicidal ideation.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of addressing stress as a potential risk factor for suicidal ideation and emphasize the need for interventions aimed at reducing stress levels to mitigate the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Regression

Table 2 showing Variables Entered/Removed

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Stress Total**		Enter

**Dependent variable: Suicidal Ideation Total*

***All requested variables entered.*

Table 3: Model Summary for Regression Analysis

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.633	.400	.394	11.8748

R, the correlation coefficient, which measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. In this case, R is 0.633, indicating a moderately strong positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables.

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R square, also known as the coefficient of determination, R square represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable(s). In this model, R square is 0.400, indicating that 40% of the variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variable(s).

Adjusted R square takes into account the number of independent variables in the model and adjusts R square accordingly. It penalizes the addition of unnecessary variables that do not significantly improve the model's explanatory power. In this case, the adjusted R square is 0.394.

Std. Error of the Estimate represents the standard deviation of the residuals, or the differences between the observed values of the dependent variable and the values predicted by the model. In this model, the standard error of the estimate is 11.8748, indicating the average amount of error in predicting the dependent variable's values.

Therefore, student stress has a 39.4% impact on suicidal ideation in college students. The results from both tables highlight the critical role of stress in influencing suicidal ideation among the sample population. This underscores the importance of implementing interventions aimed at reducing stress levels and promoting mental well-being. Strategies may include providing access to mental health services, offering stress management programs, promoting healthy coping mechanisms, and fostering supportive environments.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide compelling evidence of a significant association between stress and suicidal ideation among 17- and 18-year-old students. The strong positive correlation coefficient (Spearman's $\rho = 0.599$) indicates a robust relationship between these variables, suggesting that higher levels of stress are associated with increased suicidal ideation among this demographic group. Furthermore, the regression analysis indicates that stress levels can effectively predict the occurrence of suicidal ideation, highlighting the predictive utility of stress as a risk factor for such thoughts.

Particularly in the context of college contexts, where students frequently confront various stressors related to lifestyle changes, academic pressures, and interpersonal connections, these findings have significant implications for student wellness and mental health interventions. This study makes it abundantly evident that stress management is essential for reducing young adults' risk of suicidal thoughts. Thus, it is crucial to implement focused treatments that lower stress levels and enhance mental health to protect students' health and welfare.

These results should be noted by educational institutions, legislators, and mental health providers, who should give evidence-based tactics for promoting students' mental health top priority. This could involve offering complete mental health services, stress reduction plans, and activities to create a caring and supportive campus community.

This may include the provision of comprehensive mental health services, stress management programs, and initiatives to foster a supportive and nurturing campus environment. By addressing the root causes of stress and implementing preventive measures, we can work towards creating healthier and more resilient student populations.

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In conclusion, this study underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to address student stress and its detrimental effects on mental health. By recognizing the link between stress and suicidal ideation, we can take meaningful steps towards promoting student well-being and preventing adverse outcomes. Ultimately, investing in mental health support for young adults is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic investment in the future health and prosperity of our society.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Das, S. & Mathew, A.M. (2024). Student Stress and Suicidal Ideation in College students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(3), 360-369. DIP:18.01.032.20241203, DOI:10.25215/1203.032