

## A Critical Review of Research Studies on Impact of Mental Health on Suicidal Ideation among Postgraduate Students

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### ABSTRACT

This review aimed to analyze the different research studies available previously on Impact of mental health on suicidal ideation among postgraduate students. This review helps in identifying risk behaviours associated with suicidal ideation among students, causes for suicidal ideation, need for identifying depressive disorders, importance of providing psychological support services, and suggest the need to reduce associated stigma and improve access to mental health services.

**Keywords:** *Mental Health, Suicidal Ideation*

**M**ental health refers to emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how one think, feel, and act, influencing how one handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Just as physical health is crucial for overall wellbeing, mental health is equally important. It encompasses a range of factors including emotional resilience, coping mechanisms, and the ability to maintain balance in life. Taking care of mental health involves recognizing emotions, seeking support when needed, and engaging in activities that promote mental well-being, such as mindfulness, exercise, and healthy impersonal relationship.

Suicidal ideation is when someone has thoughts of ending their own life. These thoughts can range from fleeting considerations to detailed plans. It's crucial to understand that having suicidal thoughts does not necessarily mean someone will act on them, but they should always be taken seriously. Suicidal ideation can stem from various factors, including mental illness, overwhelming stress, trauma, or feeling hopeless and alone. It's important for individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts to reach out for help, whether it's talking to a trusted person, seeking therapy, or contacting a crisis helpline. Early intervention and support can help individuals cope with these thoughts and find healthier ways to manage their emotions.

The mental health of postgraduate students has emerged as a significant concern in recent years, with growing evidence suggesting a high prevalence of psychological distress within this population. Postgraduate students often face unique challenges, including intense

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academic pressure, financial strain, and the transition to more independent, self-directed work. These stressors can contribute to the development or exacerbation of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Suicidal ideation, defined as thinking about, considering, or planning suicide, is a particularly alarming consequence of poor mental health. Research indicates that postgraduate students may be at an elevated risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviours compared to their undergraduate peers and the general population. This heightened risk can be attributed to several factors, including the rigorous demands of post graduate-level education, isolation, and the competitive nature of academia.

Understanding the impact of mental health on suicidal ideation among postgraduate students is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. By identifying the key risk factors and addressing the underlying causes of psychological distress, educational institutions and mental health professionals can better support students in navigating the challenges of postgraduate education and ultimately reduce the incidence of suicide in this vulnerable population.

### ***Critical Analysis of Research Studies***

Kisch et al. (2005) - Through a national survey, he examined mental health problems and suicidal behaviour among college students. The results showed a high prevalence of mental health issues and suicidal behavior, underscoring the critical need for comprehensive mental health programs in higher education institutions. The review calls for more proactive measures to support student mental health and prevent suicide.

Garlow et al. (2008) assessed depression, desperation, and suicidal ideation among college students using standardized questionnaires. The review reported a high prevalence of depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts, with many students feeling hopeless and desperate. The findings emphasize the need for early screening and intervention programs to identify and support students at risk for depression and suicide.

Mikolajczyk et al. (2008) - conducted a case study across three European countries, he examined depressive symptoms and perceived burdens among students. High levels of depressive symptoms were associated with significant academic and financial stress. The research suggests the importance of providing comprehensive mental health support services and addressing financial stressors to improve student well-being.

Arria et al. (2009) examined the prevalence and predictors of suicidal ideation among college students through a large-scale survey. The researchers found that depression, substance use, and lack of social support were significant predictors of suicidal thoughts. The findings underscore the importance of providing mental health resources and support networks to students, particularly those at risk of depression and substance abuse, to mitigate the risk of suicide.

Brownson et al. (2009) explored the nature of suicidal crises in college students, revealing that relationship problems, academic pressure, and feelings of isolation were key triggers. The review highlights the critical need for counselling services that address both personal and academic issues, offering holistic support to students experiencing mental health crises.

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Schwartz et al. (2009) explored the relationship between mental health issues and academic performance among college students. The research found that mental health problems, particularly depression, had a negative impact on academic performance. The findings support the integration of academic and mental health support services to help students manage their mental health and academic responsibilities effectively.

Hunt et al. (2010) analyzed mental health service utilization among college students across multiple universities. It found that despite high levels of need, many students did not use mental health services, often due to perceived stigma and a lack of knowledge about available resources. The findings highlight the necessity of improving outreach and education about mental health services to encourage more students to seek help.

Mackenzie et al. (2011) assessed the impact of perceived social support on suicidal ideation among postgraduate students. The findings indicated that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with lower levels of suicidal thoughts. This review underscores the importance of fostering strong social support networks to help mitigate the risk of suicidal ideation among students.

Downs & Eisenberg (2012) investigated help-seeking behaviors and treatment utilization among college students experiencing suicidal ideation. The research identified significant barriers to seeking help, such as stigma and lack of awareness about available resources. These findings suggest that reducing stigma and improving the accessibility and visibility of mental health services are crucial steps in encouraging students to seek the help they need.

Eisenberg et al. (2013) - by surveying a diverse sample of college students, identified significant variations in mental health issues and helpseeking behaviours across different subgroups. He found that international and minority students were particularly vulnerable to mental health problems and less likely to seek help. These findings advocate for the development of tailored mental health resources that cater to the diverse needs of the student population.

Ibrahim et al. (2013)- through a systematic review of studies on depression prevalence among university students, revealed high and variable rates of depression. The research indicated that depression significantly impacts students' academic performance and overall quality of life, calling for consistent screening practices and preventive measures within university settings to address this pervasive issue.

Li et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between major depressive disorder and suicide risk in Chinese outpatients. The findings demonstrated a strong correlation between severe depression and increased suicide risk, highlighting the necessity for effective treatment and targeted suicide prevention strategies in clinical settings.

Berger et al. (2015) explored the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among postgraduate students. The findings revealed a strong association between high levels of academic stress and the prevalence of suicidal thoughts. The review emphasizes the importance of managing academic workloads and providing support systems to help students cope with the pressures of postgraduate education.

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Naghavi & Shabani (2015) examined the prevalence of suicidal ideation and its predictors among postgraduate students. The researchers found that mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety, along with academic stress, were significant predictors of suicidal thoughts. The review suggests the need for targeted interventions that address both mental health and academic stressors to reduce the risk of suicide.

Eskin et al. (2016) investigated suicidal behaviour and psychological distress among university students from 12 different countries. The research identified significant cultural differences in the prevalence of suicidal behaviour and levels of psychological distress. The findings advocate for culturally sensitive approaches to mental health interventions and suicide prevention strategies that take into account the diverse backgrounds of students.

Vilhjalmsson et al. (2016) examined the impact of stress and coping mechanisms on suicidal ideation among postgraduate students. The findings indicated that effective coping mechanisms were associated with lower levels of suicidal thoughts, while poor coping strategies increased the risk of suicidal ideation. The review suggests the need for programs that teach effective coping strategies to help students manage stress and reduce suicide risk.

Xiao et al. (2017)- examining trends in mental health and treatment at college counselling centers highlighted an increase in mental health issues and treatment-seeking behaviours among students over time. The review underscores the urgent need for more resources and support in college counselling centers to meet the growing demand for mental health services.

Rosenthal et al. (2017) investigated the role of sleep quality in suicidal ideation among postgraduate students. The findings revealed a strong association between poor sleep quality and higher levels of suicidal thoughts. The review highlights the need for interventions that address sleep issues as part of comprehensive mental health strategies to reduce suicidal ideation.

Mortier et al. (2018)- utilizing data from the World Mental Health Surveys, compared suicidal thoughts and behaviours between college students and their non-student peers. The results indicated that college students experienced higher rates of suicidal ideation, emphasizing the need for enhanced mental health resources and suicide prevention programs on college campuses.

Tang et al. (2018) assessed psychological distress and suicide risk among Chinese university students. The review found high levels of psychological distress, which were strongly associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation. The findings advocate for comprehensive mental health strategies within universities to address and reduce psychological distress among students.

The importance of mental health services for postgraduate students has been highlighted in various research studies due to the unique pressures and challenges faced by this particular group of students. Here are some key studies and findings:

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### *Research Studies on Levels of Stress Anxiety and Depression Among Post Graduate Students*

Research consistently shows that postgraduate students experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

1. **Evans et al. (2018)** carried out a prevalence of mental health issues among post graduate students and found that are six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety compared to the general population. This review surveyed over 2,200 post graduate students from 26 countries, highlighting the global nature of the issue.
2. **Levecque et al. (2017)** conducted a review with 3,659 professional students from Belgium and found that 51% of them experienced at least two symptoms of poor mental health, with 32% at risk of having or developing a psychiatric disorder, especially depression.
3. **Stubb et al. (2011)** carried out a study on impact on Academic Performance and demonstrated attrition Rates among post graduate students. Mental health issues can significantly impact academic performance and lead to higher attrition rates among postgraduate students. For instance:
4. **Stubb et al. (2011)** demonstrated that psychological distress can negatively affect students' academic engagement and performance. Their review, conducted with students in Finland, found that well-being is crucial for maintaining motivation and productivity.
5. **Barry et al. (2018)** showed that mental health problems are a key factor in doctoral attrition. This review revealed that students experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety were more likely to consider leaving their programs.
6. **Hyun et al. (2006)** carried out a study on benefit's of Mental Health Services among post graduate students. Providing mental health services has been shown to improve outcomes for postgraduate students. Key studies include:
7. **Hyun et al. (2006)** evaluated the effectiveness of mental health services among post graduate students and found that those who utilized counselling services reported significant reductions in stress and improved academic performance.
8. **Corner et al. (2017)** studied the impact of a structured mental health program for students, finding that participants experienced lower levels of stress and higher satisfaction with their studies.
9. **Eisenberg et al. (2007)** carried out a study on barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services among post graduate students. Despite the benefit's, there are significant barriers that prevent postgraduate students from seeking help:
10. **Eisenberg et al. (2007)** identified stigma, lack of awareness, and time constraints as major barriers. Their survey of 1617 professional students indicated that many students do not seek help due to concerns about privacy and the perception of weakness.

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11. **Lindsey et al. (2013)** highlighted the importance of addressing these barriers by promoting mental health awareness and integrating services more effectively into the academic environment.
12. **Auerbach et al. (2016)** carried out a study on institutional Initiatives and Recommendations among post graduate students. Many institutions are recognizing the need for enhanced mental health services for postgraduate students. Research suggests several effective strategies:
13. **Auerbach et al. (2016)** recommended that universities implement comprehensive mental health programs that include preventive measures, early intervention, and easy access to counseling services.
14. **Brown et al. (2020)** emphasized the importance of peer support networks and training faculty to recognize signs of mental distress among students.
15. **Turner et al. (2017)** carried out a study on predictors of Anxiety among post graduate students.

**They administer** surveys assessing anxiety, depression, academic stress, and coping mechanisms on 500 post graduate students from various discipline at a large Canadian university.

**Predictors of Mental Health Issues:** High academic stress, poor coping strategies, and low social support were significant predictors of anxiety and depression.

Students who engaged in positive coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support and using mental health services, reported lower levels of anxiety and depression.

Universities should provide training on effective coping strategies and ensure that students have access to robust social support networks and mental health services.

### **16. Oswalt and Riddock (2007) carried out a study on mental Health and Academic Success among Post Graduate Students.**

**They administer standadised questioners measuring mental health status** academic performance, and use of mental health services on 500 post graduate students from a mid-sized American university.

Students with poor mental health were more likely to have lower GPAs and consider dropping out. Only 20% of students with significant mental health issues sought professional help, primarily due to stigma and time constraints.

Those who utilized mental health services reported improvements in both their well-being and academic performance. Addressing stigma and increasing the accessibility of mental health services are crucial steps in supporting graduate students' academic success and overall well-being.

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### **17. Schmidt and Hansson (2018) carried out a study on stress Psychological Well-being of University Students: An Exploratory study among post graduate students.**

**They administer** Online surveys measuring stress levels, psychological well-being, and institutional support on 800 students from three major universities in Germany.

The majority of students reported experiencing high levels of stress, primarily due to academic pressure and uncertainty about their future careers.

**Well-being:** Students with access to mental health services and supportive institutional policies reported higher levels of psychological well-being.

Proactive mental health programs and regular stress management workshops were found to be effective in reducing stress.

Universities should implement preventive mental health programs and ensure continuous support to help students manage stress and improve their well-being.

### **18. Hyun et al. (2006) carried out a study on the Relationship Between PostGraduate Student Stress and Health Outcomes**

**They administer** a comprehensive survey assessing perceived stress, physical health symptoms, mental health symptoms, and use of health services on 3,121 post graduate students from a large public university in the United States.

A significant proportion of post graduate students reported experiencing high levels of stress, primarily due to academic workload and financial concerns.

High stress levels were strongly correlated with both physical health problems (e.g., headaches, gastrointestinal issues) and mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety). Despite the availability of health services, only 30% of students sought mental health support, often due to stigma and lack of time.

Universities need to destigmatize mental health issues and make mental health services more accessible, integrating these services into the daily life of post graduate students.

## **CONCLUSION**

A critique of the afore said studies collectively emphasize the critical need for accessible, effective mental health services tailored to the unique challenges faced by postgraduate students. Implementing comprehensive mental health programs, promoting work-life balance, and addressing barriers to service utilization are essential steps for fostering a supportive academic environment that enhances both mental health and academic outcomes.

Research underscores the critical need for robust mental health services for postgraduate students to support their academic success and overall wellbeing. Institutions that prioritize mental health can help mitigate the risks of stress, anxiety, and depression, ultimately fostering a healthier, more productive academic community.

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The importance of mental health services for postgraduate students has been highlighted in various research studies due to the unique pressures and challenges faced by this group.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the critical analysis of review of research study recommendations can be made through government and private colleges and universities for prevention of mental health issues and suicide among students.

- Designing early screening and intervention programs to identify students at risk for depression and suicide.
- Providing mental health resources and support networks to students, particularly those at risk of depression and substance abuse, to mitigate the risk of suicide.
- Opening counselling Centres that address both personal and academic issues, offering holistic support to students experiencing mental health crises.
- Improving outreach and education about mental health services to encourage more students to seek help.
- Implementing plans to reduce stigma and improving the accessibility and visibility of Mental health services.
- Teaching effective coping strategies and developing resilience to help students manage stress and reduce suicide risk.
- TO ensure peer support networks and training faculty to recognize signs of mental distress among students.
- Universities need to destigmatize mental health issues and make mental health services more accessible, integrating these services into the daily life of postgraduates.

### ***Suggestions for further Research***

1. Identifying Predictors of Mental Health
2. Identifying specific factors that increase and reduce mental health problems of students at family, college and society level.
3. Developing and disseminating coping strategies that reduce Mental health issues through publishing research works and resilience to reduce mental health issues among post graduate students.
4. Designing innovative Comprehensive Mental health programmes to be implemented at college and University levels.

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