

Research Paper

Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation among Secondary-Level Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among secondary-level students, highlighting a critical issue in educational contexts. The study emphasizes that academic stress, driven by competitive pressures and societal expectations, can significantly impact students' mental health, leading to concerning rates of suicidal thoughts. A sample of 101 students from government-recognized schools in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, the research reveals no significant gender differences in academic stress levels, while a notable disparity is found in suicidal ideation, with male students exhibiting higher levels. A significant positive correlation ($r=0.386$) between academic stress and suicidal ideation is established, indicating that increased academic pressure is associated with heightened suicidal thoughts. The findings underscore the necessity for educational institutions to develop comprehensive mental health support systems and stress management programs. Recommendations include implementing policies that prioritize student well-being, modifying curricula to alleviate excessive workload, and enhancing teacher training to identify early signs of distress. This study contributes to the understanding of the multifaceted issues surrounding academic stress and mental health, advocating for holistic approaches to support the development of secondary students.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Suicidal Ideation, Secondary-Level Students*

Suicide appears to be a permanent solution for a temporary problem or life event for the individual who commits suicide. The individual believes that their suffering will continue or intensify, and they envision no option but death. (Department of health, New York State, 2011). Students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 are considered secondary-level students aged 13 to 19. The stress of schooling is one of the inevitable effects of the modern lifestyle. The current situation is one of strong competition, where everyone faces challenges one way or another and has great ambition but not enough time to realize it. ultimately leads to the development of stress. Students' stress to perform well on tests, fear of punishment, and spirited exams are all considered forms of academic stress (Li et al., 2023). This study to know student and their emerging thought of suicide due to academic stress and trying to find that what the relation present are. One of the primary concerning signs of severe suicidal conduct is suicidal ideation. It is specifically defined as the area of thoughts and

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contemplations around demise, suicide, and giant self-harming behaviour. It accommodates of thoughts that are intimately linked to the preparation, execution, and result of suicidal ideation, specially the closing one, which is concerned with ideas concerning other humans' reactions. Education is the source of development of all the power employed within the human being but it is a matter of concern that even educated people are committing suicide. Education for holistic development of student but it remains to be seen whether it play any role in suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideations is an umbrella term for contemplations and preoccupations with death and suicide, particularly among adolescent students (Arun et al., 2017). Adolescence brings numerous mental, physical, and emotional changes that students struggle to adapt to, leading to stress and tension (Asari, 2002; Newman, 2005). Academic stress encompasses various stressors that can affect academic progress, including social, intrapersonal, and environmental factors (Adom et al., 2020). The transition to secondary education is a critical phase where students struggle with balancing academic expectations, personal growth, and future aspirations. Common stressors include excessive assignments, poor time management, and peer competition (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). This stress can lead to depression, anxiety, and behavioral problems, highlighting the importance of understanding academic stress at the secondary level to facilitate both academic success and holistic student development (Reddy et al., 2018).

Significance of study

Students at the secondary level are in a critical phase of emotional and psychological growth, with concerning rates of suicide and suicidal ideation (Vijay Kumar, 2007). Suicide is a complex, multifaceted issue that requires deeper understanding, especially within the academic context. A detailed study is necessary to measure the scope of suicidal ideation among secondary students and examine the causes of academic stress that may contribute to this. The findings can inform educational policies that prioritize mental health support in schools. Given the large population of adolescents and young adults in India (NCRBI, 2021), addressing suicidal ideation and its academic drivers is crucial for the holistic development of the nation's future leaders.

Objectives:

1. To know the difference of academic stress w.r.t Gender among students at Secondary level.
2. To know the difference of suicidal ideation w.r.t Gender among students at Secondary level.
3. To investigate the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among secondary-level students.

Hypotheses ($\alpha=0.05$)

- H_{01} : There is no significant difference between level of academic stress of male and female student.
- H_{02} : There is no significant difference on the level of suicidal ideation between male and female student of secondary level.
- H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between suicidal ideation and academic stress among secondary-level students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study population comprises secondary-level students, aged 13-19 years, enrolled in government-recognized schools in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Sample of 101 students randomly drawn from this population using simple random sampling from 10 schools are randomly selected to examine academic stress, suicidal ideation, and the relationship between these factors.

Psychological Tools

1. Suicidal ideation scale (SIS) (Visvanathan & Mariyammal, 2017)
2. (LPASS) Lovely professional academic stress scale (Amin et al., 2023)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Level of academic stress among secondary level student with respect to their gender

S. No	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p value	α
1.	Male	49	44.8	15	-0.148	0.883	Accepted H ₀
2.	Female	52	44.4	11.5			

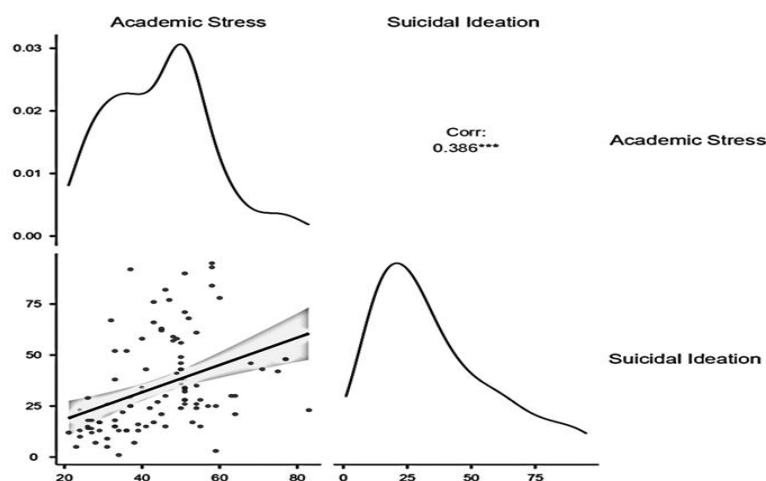
Table 1 shows that There is no significant difference in academic stress levels between male and female students. Based on the t-test results with a t-statistic of -0.148 at 99 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.883, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference in the level of academic stress between male and female secondary level students it indicates no statistically significant difference in academic stress levels between male and female secondary level students.

Table 2: Level of suicidal ideation among secondary level student with respect to their gender

S. No	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p value	α
1.	Male	49	44.33	17	4.70	0.01	Reject H ₀
2.	Female	52	24.8	24			

From table 2 analysis of Data reveals a significant gender disparity in suicidal ideation among secondary level students, supported by statistical evidence (t=4.70, df=99, p<0.01). Male students demonstrated notably higher levels of suicidal ideation (M=44.43, SD=17) compared to female students (M=24.8, SD=24). This finding aligns with previous research by Nock et al. (2008) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2020), which consistently reported higher rates of suicidal ideation among males in adolescent populations. Moller-Leimkuhler (2003) attributes this to male socialization patterns that discourage emotional expression, while Pirkis et al. (2017) emphasizes how stigma and masculinity concerns often prevent males from seeking help. The research by Brent et al. (1999) and Nock et al. (2013) further suggests that male students' higher susceptibility to risk-taking behaviors and substance abuse contributes to increased suicidal tendencies. Additionally, Eisenberg et al. (2011) notes that societal pressures regarding academic success and traditional gender roles may exacerbate stress levels among male students, potentially contributing to their elevated suicidal ideation rates.

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Graph 1: Plot of Correlation matrix with respect to density of variable and statistics

Graph 1 demonstrate a significant positive correlation between academic stress and suicidal ideation among secondary students ($r=0.386$, $df=99$, $p<0.01$), indicating that increased academic stress is associated with higher levels of suicidal ideation. This relationship, supported by previous research from Ang & Huan (2006) and Khawaja & Duncanson (2008), underscores academic stress as a crucial risk factor for suicidal thoughts in adolescents. Eisenberg et al. (2009) and Wilburn & Smith (2005) emphasize that this correlation can lead to detrimental effects on students' academic performance, social functioning, and overall well-being. The moderate correlation coefficient suggests that while academic stress significantly influences suicidal ideation, it is one of several contributing factors. This highlights the complexity of the relationship between academic pressures and mental health outcomes among secondary students. These findings emphasize the critical need for educational institutions to implement comprehensive stress management programs and mental health support systems to address this concerning relationship between academic stress and suicidal thoughts.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals significant insights into the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among secondary level students. There is no significant gender difference in academic stress levels, suggesting that both male and female students face similar academic pressures. The study uncovered concerning patterns in suicidal ideation, with 87.12% of students reporting mild levels and 12.87% experiencing moderate levels. A significant gender disparity emerged, with male students showing higher levels of suicidal ideation compared to their female counterparts. This finding aligns with existing research on male vulnerability to suicidal thoughts, potentially influenced by societal expectations and mental health stigma. The research established a significant positive correlation ($r=0.386$) between academic stress and suicidal ideation, indicating that increased academic stress is associated with higher levels of suicidal thoughts. This correlation underscores the critical need for comprehensive intervention strategies within educational institutions. These findings emphasize the importance of implementing multi-dimensional support systems in schools, including stress management programs, counseling services, and gender-specific interventions. The role of teachers in identifying early signs of academic stress and suicidal ideation is crucial, highlighting the need for proper training and awareness programs. The study recommends developing policies that prioritize student well-being alongside academic

achievement. This includes evaluating and modifying curricula to reduce excessive workload, establishing collaborative relationships with mental health professionals, and creating supportive academic environments. While the research provides valuable insights, future studies should consider larger sample sizes, diverse geographical regions, and qualitative approaches to better understand the complex relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among secondary level students.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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