

## Suicidal Tendencies in the Indian Armed Forces: Analyzing the Effects of Rank and Substance Abuse

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the impact of designation and substance abuse on suicidal tendencies among Indian Army personnel. As per a parliament report, in the last 10 years suicide rate has been high in Indian Army personnel. This research investigates psychological stressors that may be influenced by designation and substance use. A purposive sampling method was used here for sampling. A sample of 40 male Indian Army personnel posted in Gujarat was selected. Data was collected by personal data sheets and the Suicidal Tendency Scale (STS) by D.J. Bhatt and Meghnathi (2004). Data was analysed by using the t-test method. The results revealed a significant difference in suicidal tendencies between commissioned and non-commissioned officers, as well as between addicted and non-addicted personnel. Non-commissioned officers and those with substance abuse problems showed significantly higher levels of suicidal tendencies. While commissioned officers and those who don't use substances show significantly lower levels of suicidal tendencies.

**Keywords:** *Indian Army Personnel, Substance Abuse, Suicidal Tendency*

The Indian Army is a pillar of our nation. The main characteristics of the Indian Army personnel are Discipline, leadership, courage, and sacrifice. All these features affect the Army personnel's mental health. This study aims to evaluate the impact of marital status and designation on suicidal tendencies. Nowadays, suicide cases are increasing day by day. It's essential to assess the suicidal tendencies in Indian Army personnel.

Data tabled in parliament shows that between 2011 and 2018, there were 891 deaths by suicide of members of the Indian armed forces (Army, Air Force, and Navy). Suicides were highest in the Army, which reported that 707 personnel took their own lives between 2011 and 2018. The Air Force reported nearly 5 times fewer suicides at 148 over the eight years. The Navy has the lowest number of suicides, with 36 deaths reported over the same period. India's army, navy, and air force have together lost more than 800 personnel to suicide since 2017, the defense ministry said in July 2022.

It's difficult for personnel to take care of personal and professional life. They have both responsibilities: their duty and family. During Training and duty, they live in a disciplined

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Received: May 03, 2025; Revision Received: June 19, 2025; Accepted: June 23, 2025

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environment and do hard work physically and mentally. Because of these things, sometimes some personnel are victims of stress, depression, insomnia, and Overthinking. That's why it's an important topic nowadays that the suicide rate is increasing in the Indian Army.

### ***What is suicidal Tendency?***

Suicidal tendency refers to a psychological state in which an individual experiences recurring thoughts, urges, or behaviors related to ending their own life. These can be anything from passive thoughts (like wishing one were dead) to active planning and attempts to end one's life.

The APA defines suicidal ideation as "thoughts about or a preoccupation with killing oneself, often as a symptom of a major depressive episode."

Suicide is an indicator of severe distress rather than a mental illness in and of itself. It is frequently connected to some mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, trauma or abuse, Substance abuse, Chronic illness or pain, Social isolation or loneliness, and Financial or relationship problems or depression. Suicidal thoughts and actions can range from actively planning or attempting suicide to passive ones like wanting to disappear or feeling like life has no purpose. These thoughts and actions are affected by many things, such as biological, psychological, social, and environmental stressors.

People who have suicidal thoughts frequently struggle to find purpose or comfort from their suffering and feel helpless, alone, and overpowered by their situation. These emotions can be made harsher by trauma, substance abuse, chronic sickness, financial hardships, and personal losses. Early intervention depends on recognizing warning indicators, which include giving up personal things, extreme mood fluctuations, increased risk-taking behavior, and separation from loved ones. Suicide prevention involves psychological support, therapy, medication (if required), strong social connections, and crisis intervention services. Raising awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting mental health care can play a vital role in addressing suicidal tendencies and saving lives.

### ***What is substance abuse?***

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or excessive use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, prescription medications, and illegal drugs, in a way that leads to physical, psychological, or social problems. It is characterized by the repeated and obsessive use of a substance irrespective of the detrimental effects on one's relationships, job, health, or daily life. Because of the brain's changed reward system, substance abuse can quickly progress from rare or recreational use to dependence or addiction.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines substance abuse as "a pattern of continued substance use despite substance-related problems, distress, and/or impairment."

Many other factors cause substance abuse, including genetic predisposition; mental health conditions like PTSD, depression, or anxiety; contextual factors like peer pressure or family history; and socioeconomic stressors. Many individuals turn to substance use as a coping mechanism for emotional pain, trauma, or stress, but over time, it can result in addiction. This chronic brain disorder affects decision-making, behavior, and impulse control.

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### ***Designations of Indian Army Personnel:***

In the Indian Army, personnel are broadly classified into Commissioned Officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs), and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) based on rank, authority, and responsibilities.

### **Commissioned Officers:**

Commissioned Officers are leaders trained to command units and hold executive positions. They receive their commission from the President of India and are responsible for strategic planning, administration, and operational execution. Their ranks, from highest to lowest, include:

- Field Marshal (honorary, five-star rank)
- General
- Lieutenant General
- Major General
- Brigadier
- Colonel
- Lieutenant Colonel
- Major
- Captain
- Lieutenant

These officers are typically recruited through institutions like the National Defence Academy (NDA), Indian Military Academy (IMA), and Officers Training Academy (OTA) or direct entry schemes.

### **Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs):**

JCOs serve as the bridge between Commissioned Officers and noncommissioned officers. They are promoted from NCO ranks based on experience and leadership qualities. They are respected for their expertise and leadership in field operations. The ranks under this category include:

- Subedar Major
- Subedar
- Naib Subedar

### **Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs):**

NCOs are the backbone of the Army, responsible for discipline, training, and operational effectiveness at the ground level. They are promoted from regular soldiers based on merit and performance. Their ranks include:

- Havildar
- Naik
- Lance Naik
- Sepoy (or Rifleman in some regiments, the lowest rank)

NCOs play a vital role in executing orders from JCOs and Commissioned Officers, ensuring discipline and operational efficiency within their respective units.

**Research Problem:** Evaluate the impact of marital status and designation on suicidal tendencies.

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### *Research Objective:*

1. To study the difference between the types of designation and suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel.
2. To study the difference between substance abuse and suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel.

### *Hypotheses:*

- Ho1. There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of the type of designation about suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel.
- Ho2. There will be no significant difference in the mean score of substance abuse about suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design:*

The objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of marital status and designation on suicidal tendencies. In this research, quantitative methods are used for evaluation. To achieve this aim, one survey and a short-structured interview were organized together for Indian Army personnel to gather data. The study's quantitative analysis was executed using the paired T-test statistical approach. The results will then be analyzed to determine the impact of marital status and designation on suicidal tendencies, leading to a well-informed conclusion.

### *Sample:*

In this study, data will be collected using purposive sampling methods. Data was collected from the Army Battalion of Gujarat. The total sample of the study consisted of 40 Indian Army personnel.

### *Tools:*

- **Personal data sheet:** In the personal data sheet, include details like the age and designation of Indian Army personnel. Also, include questions about whether they have a substance addiction. These personal details are taken from a personal data sheet.
- **Suicidal Tendency Scale:** The Suicidal Tendency Scale (STS) is a psychological assessment tool developed in 2004 by Dr. D.J. Bhatt and Dr. R.G. Meghnathi. The STS has shown great consistency in terms of reliability, with a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.92 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.83. The scale's validity was established by differentiating between normal and clinical populations, with significant differences observed between the groups. The scale comprises 40 items, with each dimension containing 10 statements. Respondents indicate their agreement using a four-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Higher scores suggest a greater level of suicidal tendency.

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*Variables of the study:*

**Name, Nature and Level of Variable**

| No. | Name of variable                          | Nature of Variable    | Number of Levels | Name of Level            |
|-----|---|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| 1   | Designation of personnel                  | Independent Variables | 2                | Commissioned Officer     |
|     |   |                       |                  | Non-Commissioned Officer |
| 2   | Substance Abuse                           | Independent Variables | 2                | Addicted                 |
|     |   |                       |                  | Non-addicted             |
| 3   | Suicidal tendency                         | Dependent Variable    | 2                | High Suicidal Tendency   |
|     |   |                       |                  | Low Suicidal Tendency    |
| 4   | Only Male Personnel                       | Control Variable      | -                | -                        |
| 5   | Only Army personnel Who Posted in Gujarat | Control Variable      | -                | -                        |

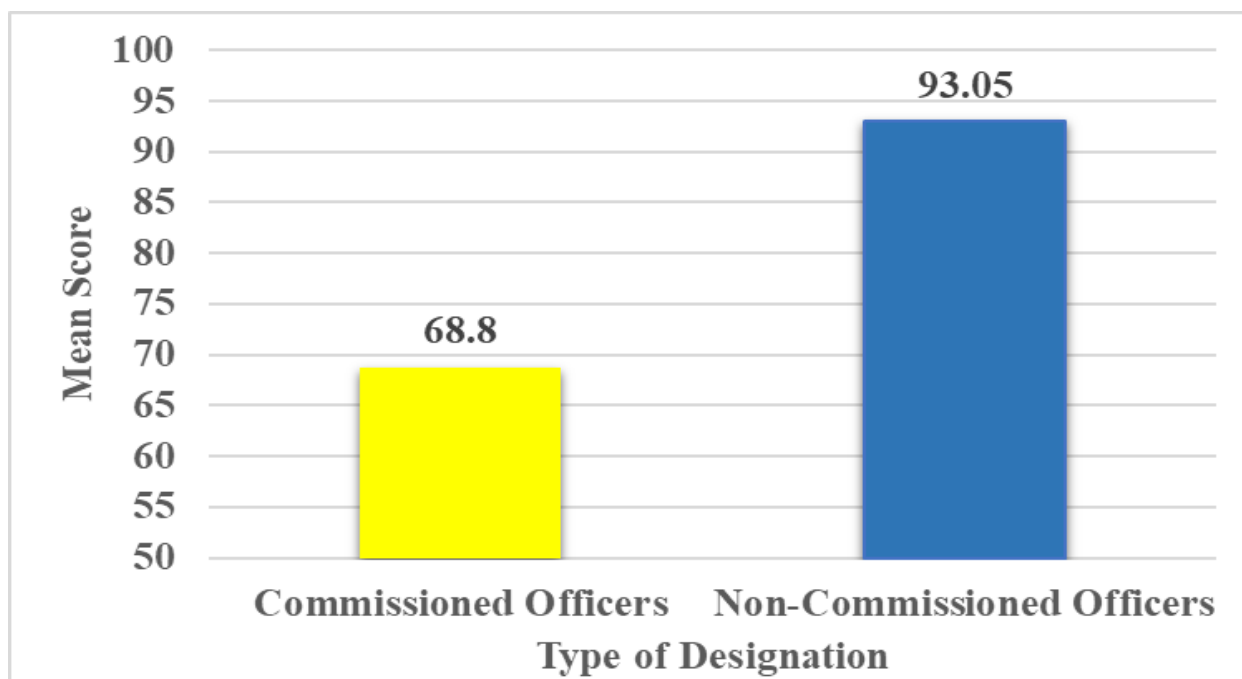
**RESULT AND OBSERVATION**

*Table-1 Mean, SD, and t-value of Army Personnel*

| Designation of Army Personnel | N  | Mean  | SD    | 't' Value | Level of Sig. |
|-------------------------------|----|-------|-------|-----------|---------------|
| Commissioned Officers         | 20 | 68.8  | 17.49 | 4.57      | 0.01          |
| Non-Commissioned Officers     | 20 | 93.05 | 16.04 |           |               |

[Tabulated 't' value at 0.05 level = 2.02 & 0.01 level = 2.71, NS = Not Significant]

**Graph - 1**



Ho1. There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of the type of designation about suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel.

## **Suicidal Tendencies in the Indian Armed Forces: Analyzing the Effects of Rank and Substance Abuse**

The objective of the research is to study the difference between the type of designation in suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel. The result is presented and tested by Table No:1, which indicates that the Mean score of commissioned officers is 68.8 and non-commissioned officers is 93.05. The Mean difference based on the designation of Army Personnel is 24.25. t-value was found to be 4.57, which is significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result is that there is a significant difference between commissioned and non-commissioned Army personnel in suicidal tendency. This indicates that non-commissioned personnel exhibit higher levels of suicidal tendencies compared to their commissioned personnel.

### ***Discussion and Observation***

The objective of the research is to study the difference between the type of designation in suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel. The result shows that there is a significant difference between commissioned and non-commissioned Indian Army personnel. Finding indicates that non-commissioned personnel exhibit higher levels of suicidal tendencies compared to their commissioned counterparts. According to observation, the causes might be workload and job stress, socio-economic status, and Limited Access to Resources and Support.

Commissioned officers might come from a good socioeconomic status, and they have a bit less workload than non-commissioned officers. Commissioned officers generally have better access to mental health resources, counseling services, and support networks because of their rank. Meanwhile, non-commissioned officers often come from more modest socio-economic backgrounds. Financial stressors, family responsibilities, and lack of alternative career opportunities might contribute to high psychological distress. Non-commissioned personnel are usually involved in physically demanding tasks, long working hours, and more direct combat or field duties, which sometimes lead to higher stress and less autonomy, and feelings of helplessness. They have fewer resources and support than commissioned officers for mental health because of their rank. Overall, the findings indicate that commissioned officers are less inclined than non-commissioned officers to have suicide tendencies.

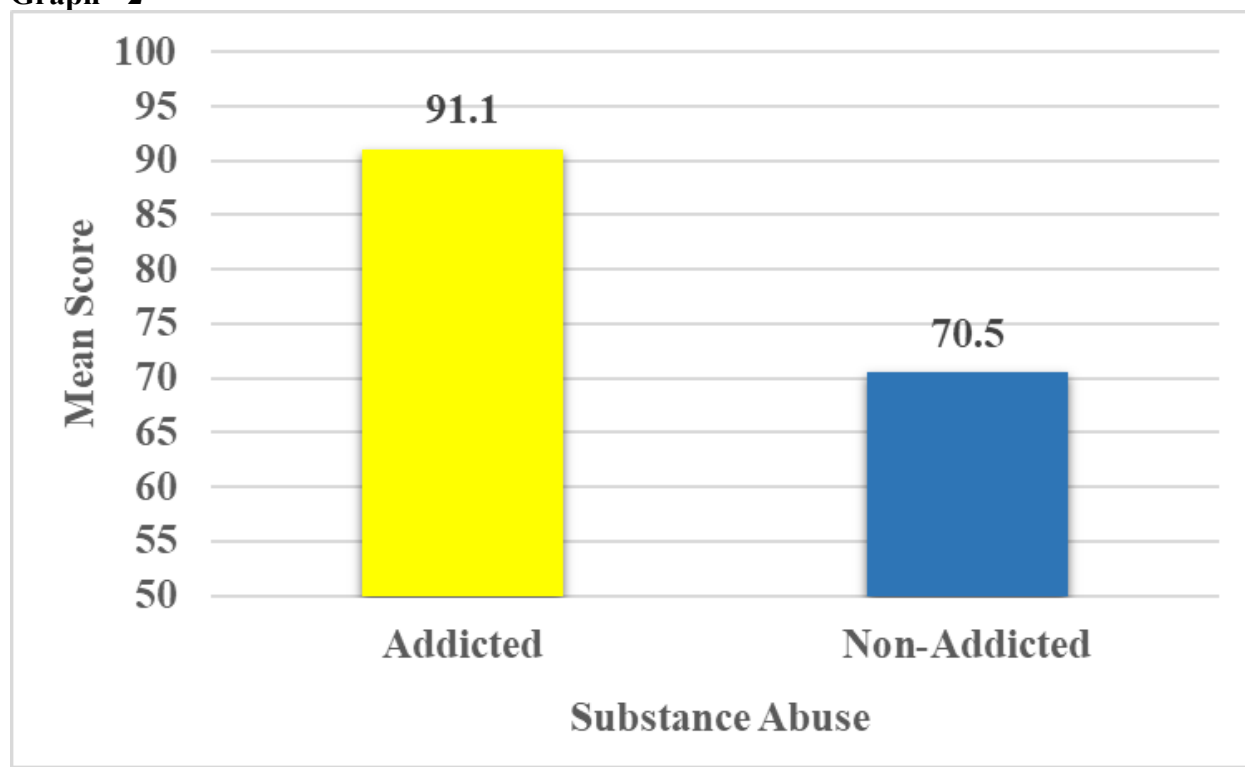
***Table-2 Mean, SD, and t-value of Army Personnel***

| <b>Substance Abuse</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>'t' Value</b> | <b>Level of Sig.</b> |
|------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|------------------|----------------------|
| Addicted               | 20       | 91.1        | 15.91     | 3.6              | 0.01                 |
| Non-Addicted           | 20       | 70.5        | 20.02     |                  |                      |

[Tabulated 't' value at 0.05 level = 2.02 & 0.01 level = 2.71, NS = Not Significant]

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Graph - 2



$H_{02}$ : There will be no significant difference in the mean score of substance abuse about suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel.

The objective of the research is to study the difference between substance abuse and suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel. The result is presented and tested by Table No:2, which indicates that the Mean score of addicted Army personnel is 91.1 and non-addicted Army personnel is 70.05. The Mean difference based on types of addiction in Army Personnel is 21.05. t-value was found to be 3.6, which is significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result is that there is a significant difference between addicted and non-addicted Indian Army personnel in suicidal tendency.

### ***Discussion and Observation***

The objective of the research is to study the difference between substance abuse and suicidal tendencies in Indian Army Personnel. The result shows that there is a significant difference between addicted and non-addicted Indian Army personnel. Findings indicate that addicted personnel have more suicidal tendencies than non-addicted Army personnel. Alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or any type of substance abuse reduces emotional regulation and increases impulsivity.

Army personnel have many responsibilities, like their duty and family members, and sometimes it leads to anxiety, stress, insomnia, and depression. That's why personnel take substances as a coping mechanism for stress, trauma, loneliness, or depression, especially in isolated or high-pressure postings. All of these factors may contribute to the findings that indicate low suicidal tendencies in non-addicted personnel and high suicidal tendencies in addicted personnel.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present research concludes that both designation and substance abuse have a significant effect on Indian Army personnel's suicidal tendencies. Non-commissioned officers showed high suicidal tendencies, while commissioned officers showed low suicidal tendencies. Due to their workload, access to mental health resources, and socioeconomic conditions. Similarly, Personnel who have substance addiction showed more suicidal tendencies than non-addicted personnel. This suggests that substance use may be a maladaptive coping mechanism in response to stress, isolation, or trauma. These results highlight the critical need for strong substance abuse prevention plans, regular psychological evaluations, and mental health awareness campaigns. The implementation of this intervention might be helpful in the future for the Indian Army Personnel and military psychology.

### ***Limitations of Research:***

1. The study only included 40 Indian Army personnel in its sample, which limits how broadly the results can be generalized.
2. There have been geographical limitations in this research, The sample was collected only from Army personnel posted in Gujarat, which may not reflect the experiences and psychological states of personnel posted in other regions.
3. This study only male personnel, the study's application to the entirely armed services is restricted, because number of woman personnel is also increase in Indian Army.

### ***Implementation of Research:***

1. Starting a mental health awareness program and conducting regular mental health screenings for all army personnel to identify early signs of suicidal tendencies, particularly in those who struggle with substance abuse.
2. Develop substance abuse prevention and rehabilitation programs specifically designed for army personnel.
3. Establish dedicated counseling and mental health support units within Army battalions.
4. Organize awareness workshops to educate soldiers about the effects of stress, addiction, and mental health.

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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:*** Parmar, K. & Vaishnav, S. (2025). Suicidal Tendencies in the Indian Armed Forces: Analyzing the Effects of Rank and Substance Abuse. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 4130-4138. DIP:18.01.365.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.365