

A study of Academic Stress Influencing Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to study influence of academic stress on suicidal ideation among adolescents. The sample of this study included 200 students (100 male and 100 female) of K. V. schools from Delhi. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires of Academic stress, developed by Dr. Uday Kumar Sinha and suicidal ideation measured using the suicidal ideation scale developed by Sisodia and Bhatnagar. The two-way analysis of variance was used to analyse the data. Result of this study showed a significant effect of academic stress on suicidal ideation while effect of gender was not found significant at any level of confidence among adolescent students. However, a highly significant interaction effect was found. It can be concluded that academic stress significantly affecting the level of suicidal ideation independently and interacting with the gender as well among adolescents.

Keywords: Academic stress, Suicidal ideation, Adolescents, Gender.

At least seven lakh individuals worldwide commit suicide each year, according to WHO (2021). With a suicide rate of 9.2 per 100,000 people, "suicide" is unquestionably a public health concern (World Bank Open Data, 2024). One important risk factor for suicide is suicidal thoughts (Franklin et al., 2017). According to Klonsky et al. (2016), it encompasses both tangible plans to end one's own life and fleeting thoughts that life is not worth living. According to Snowdon and Choi (2020), suicide is uncommon among children under the age of ten, but in the industrialized world, the occurrence starts to rise among young people between the ages of 10 and 14 and between the ages of 15 and 24.

Suicide is often associated with stressful and sad situations, such as loneliness, and is caused by a complex interaction of psychological and physiological elements (Chesney et al., 2014). Two categories are also commonly used to categorize suicidal ideation: 1. Persistent ruminations and active ideation, which includes particular suicide plans, ideas, and fleeting thoughts 2. Passive

ideation, which encompasses broad reflections about mortality (Liu et al., 2020; Hyland et al., 2022).

In today's competitive environment, every adolescent encounters some form of stress at some time in their lives. Some teenagers experience higher amounts of stress than others, and some teens manage stress better than others. As they transition from infancy to adulthood, teenagers experience stress and strain (Byrne et al. 2007). During this stage of life, adolescents endure stress, which can lead to serious issues (Howard & Medway 2004). Anxiety in kids and teens varies according to their age. Teenagers may suffer anxiety at this period due to their own confused state, according to Gursory et al. (2005). This stress may occur in behavioral issues, anxiety, and depression, underscoring the need of comprehending academic stress at the secondary level to support both academic performance and all-around student development (Reddy et al., 2018).

Academic stress is described as psychological pain brought on by perceived academic failure or simply the failure to recognize the possibility of academic failure. Depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, impatience, etc. are just a few of the many problems associated with children experiencing high levels of academic stress (Deb et al. 2015). Academic stress encompasses various stressors that can affect academic progress, including social, intrapersonal, and environmental factors (Adom et al., 2020). External stresses, students' evaluations of them, and their reactions to them all contribute to this stress, according to Lee and Larson (2000). Suicidal thoughts were more common among students who had academic stress, scholastic difficulties, and an unsupportive home situation (Arun & Chavan, 2009).

The researcher attempted to investigate these variables in the Indian setting in the current study with the following objectives:

- To study how academic stress influence suicidal ideation among adolescents.
- To study the influence of gender on suicidal ideation among adolescents.
- To study the interaction effect of academic stress and gender on suicidal ideation among adolescents.

Hypotheses

- Academic stress would significantly influence suicidal ideation in adolescent students.
- Gender would significantly influence suicidal ideation in adolescents.
- Interaction effect of gender and academic stress would significantly influence suicidal ideation in adolescent students.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A sample of 200 male and female students from various K.V. schools in Delhi was selected for this study. The age range of the group was between 14 to 17 years. Based on their assessed score on the academic stress scale, groups with high and low levels of academic stress were created.

Tools used

Scale for Assessing Academic Stress – (SAAS) was developed by Dr. Uday Kumar Sinha (2014). There were 30 items in this full inventory. This test measures the academic stress of adolescence students. There were five components of academic stress indicating expression of academic stress through different channels: cognitive, affective, physical, social/interpersonal and motivational. The test-retest reliability was 0.88 and split half reliability was 0.75. The correlation coefficient of SAAS with AASC was found to be 0.54 which was statistically significant at .05 levels.

Suicidal Ideation Scale –Developed by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Dr. Vibhuti Bhatnagar (2011) was applied. Likert technique was used in this scale with an aim to measure suicidal ideation. There were 25 statements in this scale. The internal consistency method and the test-retest method were used to assess the scale's reliability. The scale's consistency rating was 0.81, and its test-retest reliability was 0.78. The content validity of the scale was found high with coefficient 0.74 after it was verified using external standards.

Research Design

The current study used a 2*2 factorial design to examine the effects of two independent factors, gender (male and female) and academic stress (high and low), both of which had two levels, on suicidal thoughts.

RESULTS

The data were analysed using two-way analysis of variance, and the results are shown in Table No. 1.

Table 1: Summary table of ANOVA for the Effect of Gender and Academic Stress on Suicidal Ideation. (N = 200)

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F- Value	Significance Level
Academic stress (A)	6967.301	1	6967.301	26.363	.01
Gender(B)	261.284	1	261.284	.989	NS*
A X B	2954.283	1	2954.283	11.179	.01
SSW	51799.029	196	264.281		
SST	61981.897	199			

NS non-significant*

It is evident from the table no 1 that academic stress was significantly affecting suicidal ideation (F= 26.363, df= 1, p <.01). while, the effect of gender was not found significant with regard to suicidal ideation at any level of confidence. Whereas, the interaction was also found significant with regard to suicidal ideation (F=11.179, df= 1, p<.01). Findings suggest that the academic stress emerged as a significant variable to affect the level of suicidal ideation in adolescent school students.

Table 2: Mean scores of Suicidal Ideation based on Factor A (Academic stress)

A1 High Academic stress			A2 Low Academic stress		
N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
100	66.56	17.05	100	54.45	16.28

Table 3: Mean scores of Suicidal Ideation Based on Factor B (Gender)

B1 Male			B2 Female		
N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
100	58.71	16.97	100	61.69	18.33

Table No. 4: Mean Scores of Suicidal Ideation Based on Interaction (A x B)

A1 High Academic stress				A2 Low Academic stress		
B1 (Male)	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
	50	61.07	16.73	50	56.93	17.088
B2 (Female)	50	71.10	16.107	50	51.50	14.918

Results indicated that academic stress has a significant effect on the level of suicidal ideation of adolescents. Students who had high academic stress significantly scored higher on suicidal ideation in comparison of the students who had low academic stress (M= 66.56 and M=54.45 respectively). A significant main effect supported the hypothesis formulated in this regard. Further, Gender did not significantly impact the level of suicidal ideation among adolescents in the current study, according to the mean scores of suicidal ideations depending on gender. This shows that there are no noticeable differences between male and female students in the study based on their gender. The Mean scores of suicidal ideations based on interaction (AxB) clearly indicate that the female students who had high academic stress scored high on suicidal ideation in comparison of female students who had low academic stress that was a significant difference (M=71.10 and M=51.50 respectively). Similarly, male students who have high academic stress showed more suicidal ideation than the males who have low academic stress (Mean scores 61.07 and 56.93 respectively). Result also suggested that when academic stress is high female students were experiencing more suicidal ideation while in low academic stress condition male students were experiencing more suicidal ideation.

DISCUSSION

The obtained scores suggest that academic stress can increase suicidal ideation among adolescents. According to the research, teenage suicide thoughts may rise in response to academic stress. Parents, teachers, and other important people may put pressure on pupils to perform well academically. Teenagers frequently experience confusion, sadness, and anxiety because they are unable to let go of their bad feelings over the events in their life. They are more prone to engage in dangerous behaviors like smoking, using drugs, and occasionally having pessimistic thoughts about themselves, other people, and life in general while they are in this mental state. They feel pressured to engage in other risky behaviors, such as missing classes or school or misusing drugs or alcohol, which lead to numerous health problems. Additionally, studies indicate a strong correlation between suicide thoughts and mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, drug use disorders, eating disorders, etc. (Brådvik, 2018).

Stress and suicidal thoughts among adolescents were studied by Akhtar and Alam (2015). They also revealed a strong and positive correlation between stress and suicide thoughts among adolescents. Yadav and Srivastava (2020) found a significant positive correlation in his study related to Academic stress and Suicidal ideation. Abimbola et al. (2024) also found a significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation. Yadav and Singh (2025) also reported a significant positive correlation between academic stress and suicidal ideation.

The current findings were supported by similar findings in other investigations. Male and female did not significantly vary in their suicide ideas (Sridharan, 2017). Furthermore, Prakruthi and Suman (2021) reported no differences in suicidal thoughts or resistance between age groups based on gender or age. Some researchers have found the reverse, though. Ibrahim et al. (2017) found that male participants had greater suicidal ideation than female teenagers, however Suvarchala and Manjuvani (2023) observed that females scored higher than boys on suicidal ideation. Therefore, further research on this variable is needed in future studies.

CONCLUSION

Findings of the present study suggest that academic stress significantly affects the level of suicidal ideation among adolescent students, as students with high academic stress were experiencing high suicidal ideation in comparison to students with low academic stress. Gender of the respondents did not significantly affect suicidal ideation independently.

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