

## Stress and Suicidal Ideation among School Students

**Zaki Akhtar**

Karim City College, Jamshedpur

**Mahfooz Alam**

Kolhan University, Chaibasa

This study focused on stress and suicidal ideation among school students. The sample of the study consisted of 120 students of different boards of secondary examination. Equal number of girls and boys were taken in the sample. The age of the students ranged from 14 to 18 years. Subjects were matched in terms of age, sex and educational qualifications. Student Stress Scale and the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire-R were used. ANOVA, t-test and correlation were used to analyze the data. Study revealed that there is no significant difference in suicidal ideation as far as gender is concerned. The nature of school emerged as a significant factor in the experience of stress. Students belonging to private schools were experiencing more stress. Further, the study reveals that stress and suicidal ideation were significantly and positively related to each other.

**Keywords:** Stress, Suicidal Ideation, School Students.

Studies on stress and suicidal ideation have a great importance in the present era and have become an important topic in academic circles. Such researches have drawn the attention of behavioral scientists to explore the latent factors, which cause increasing tendency of suicidal ideation. Students feel the effects of stress in a harsh and probably negative ways. Some effects include a sudden drop in grades, depression, general fatigue, and aggression. Studies show that stress and anxiety during adolescence may even have a negative effect on health, too. Stress affects the human body physically, it can also harm a person's emotional well being as well. Stress level affects the students academically and changes the way the person thinks and acts during school or while studying.

It is seen from Banerejee's report (2001) that every year about 25,000 students in a large group of 18 to 20 years commit suicide during the examination month (i.e. March to June). Toero, Nagy, Sawaguchi and Sotonyi (2001) argued that there is a strong link between the pressure to excel in school and suicidal behaviors among children and adolescents. In their study, they showed that the number of suicide cases in a year usually peaked during examination periods where children and adolescents experienced a high level of stress in school. Academic stress among students have long been researched

on, Fairbrother and Warn (2003) researched too many assignments, competitions with other students, failures and poor relationship with other students or lecturers create stress. Students also experience stress because of their perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time. Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time. Wilburn and Smith (2005) conducted a study on "Stress, Self Esteem and Suicidal Ideation in Late Adolescents". The sample consisted of 88 students from which 79 were females and nine were males. The life experience survey, the Rosenberg self-esteem scale and the suicidal ideation questionnaire were used for the study. The results revealed that both stress and self-esteem were significantly related to suicidal ideation and low self esteem and stressful life events significantly predict suicidal ideation.

Sulaiman, Hassan, Sopian and Abdullah (2009) found in their study that "female students experience stress differently compared to the male students. This may be because female students tend to be more emotional and sensitive toward what is happening in their surrounding".

Stress studies done in India by Augustine, Shahnaz, Sylvia and Madhavan (2011) were to assess stress appraisal among students and to identify institution-specific differences in stress appraisal and coping. The study was carried out on normal students aged 16-17 years old. . Eighty students were recruited from six schools ensuring equal gender representation and category of schools (Government/ Private). The students of both schools showed similar stress perception. Over the years, students are being bombarded by the stressors in the form of growing pressure, highly competitive environment, undue parental pressure and expectation, and career related worries. These stressors have brought students' life in a very miserable condition, unable to cope with such demands and expectation often lead to suicidal ideation among students.

Jena and Siddharta (2004) reviewed articles on non fatal suicidal attempts of adolescents in both Indian and international literature. They stated that non fatal suicidal behavior among adolescents needs to be evaluated and managed effectively in order to reduce the rates. They concluded that Indian studies in this area are very few and there is a great need to conduct research in this area. National Crime Bureau (2005) has reported majority of suicides (37.8%) in India below the age of 30 years. Whereas Dogra, Basu and Das (2008) found that except stressful life events, other predictor variables, i.e., personality, presence of meaning in life, and reasons for living, contribute significantly to suicidal ideation. It is estimated that over 100,000 people die by suicide in India every year. India alone contributes to more than 10% of suicides in the world. The suicide rate in India has been increasing steadily and has reached 10.5 (per 100,000 of population) in 2009 registering a 67% increase over the past decade. Majority of suicides occur among men and in younger age groups. In 2009, suicide was the third leading cause of death for young people of ages between 15 to 24 years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2009).

In a study carried out in India by Priti and Chavan (2009) a total of 2402 students were included. Ten schools of Chandigarh were

randomly selected for the study including one government school and one private school from each zone. Approval of the District Education Officer was taken and a written informed consent from parents of students was obtained with the help of class teachers. The students in government and private schools differ in their socioeconomic status because of the huge difference in the fee structure. It was found that there was no difference with regard to age, sex, father's occupation, siblings, family type, religion and the aspect of having medical illness between students reporting no suicidal ideation and the students reporting life as a burden, suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts.

In India particularly, adolescents are put under pressure to perform well in school examinations. For some students, the experience of academic stress leads to a sense of distress, which is generally manifested in a variety of psychological and behavioral problems. It is relevant to mention here, in India, in the year 2011, about 2381 children or more than six children per day, committed suicide because of failure in examinations (National Crime Records Bureau, 2011). Obviously learning stress results in depression, which can be a cause for breakdown. We hear and see news of students committing suicide, who are under stress. An article stated, "Despite reforms, 9.6% more students ended lives" (Shreya Bhandary, Times of India, Nov. 3, 2011). Around 5.5% students were accounted of the total suicides in India in 2012. Irrespective of goals, students struggle with a tremendous amount of stress and pressure. We have a range of issues like marks, grades, competition, homework, assignments, projects, parent pressure and competition and so on, which result in stress in students.

According to Skinner and McFaul (2012) in a longitudinal study published by the Canadian Medical Association Journal, which looks at suicides by boys and girls over a thirty year period (1980-2008), there has been a modest decline in suicide for boys aged 10-19 and a slight rise for girls in the same age range. Girls have always attempted suicide more frequently than boys. However, there is reason to believe that girls are increasingly using more lethal means, like hanging, when attempting suicide, which could

account for the increase in suicidal deaths. A study conducted by a mental health organization in 150 educational institutions in New Delhi found that 40% of students feel overwhelmed by exams. Another study conducted by a non-governmental organization with 850 students found that 57% were depressed and 9% had considered committing suicide as a result of academic stress (Maheshananda, Bera, Gore, Bhogale, Kulkarni, Thakur, 2012).

#### **Objectives:**

1. The present study aims to find out the students stress level and suicidal ideation in terms of gender and nature of schools.
2. To examine the relationship between level of stress and suicidal ideation.

#### **Hypotheses:**

1. Stress level of students would not differ significantly in terms of gender.
2. Suicidal ideation would not differ significantly in terms of gender.
3. Stress level of students would not differ significantly in terms of nature of schools.
4. Suicidal ideation would not differ significantly in terms of nature of schools.
5. There would not be any relationship between stress level and suicidal ideation among school students.

#### **Method**

##### **Sample:**

The sample of the study consisted of 120 school students (public and private) of secondary examination board. Equal number of boys (60) and girls (60) participated. The purposive sampling technique was applied in collecting data. The age of the students ranged from 14 to 18 years. The sample has been taken from the same socio-economic status and both the groups were matched in terms of class, age and nature of schools. Researchers visited different schools of Jamshedpur. Students were informed about the purpose of the study. Students who chose to participate were instructed to complete the questionnaires as honestly as possible.

#### **Measures:**

*The Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire-R (SIQ-R):* It was developed and standardized by Osman (1999). The SIQ-R is a self-administered 4-item measure designed to assess an individual's thoughts of suicide. It is a uni-dimensional scale. They measure on 5 or 6 alternative answers from never to very often. The possible scores range from 3 to 18, and higher scores indicate a greater disposition for suicidal ideation. The validity reference (sensitivity and specificity) are 0.80 and 0.91 respectively.

*Student Stress Scale:* This was developed and standardized by Akhtar (2011) and was used to assess the stress level of students. It is a uni-dimensional scale having 51 items. The split half and test retest reliability are 0.64 and 0.61, respectively. The scale has a construct validity of 0.72.

#### **Procedure:**

The subjects were contacted personally in their respective educational institutions for data collection. After getting the consent from management of the schools, rapport was established with the subjects.

#### **Results and Discussion**

**Table 1. Mean, SD and F value of stress level and suicidal ideation scores of students of private schools (n=60) and public schools (n=60)**

Variables	Groups	Mean	SD	F
Stress	Private schools	135.55	64.44	0.078
	Public schools	128.06	61.54	
Suicidal Ideation	Private schools	6.95	3.91	3.5*
	Public schools	2.53	1.15	

\*p<0.05

From the results given in table 1, ANOVA (F=0.078; p>0.05) indicates with regard to nature of schools on stress and suicidal ideation. Hence, the null hypothesis 3 "stress level of students would not differ significantly in terms of nature of schools" is not rejected. The result shows there is no significant difference existing among public and private nature of schools as

far as stress level is concerned. Further, the finding clearly points to the fact that suicidal ideation differs significantly in terms of nature of schools. Thus, the hypothesis "Suicidal ideation would not differ significantly in terms of nature of schools" is not accepted. It is clear from the data of suicidal ideation with respect to nature of schools and the mean scores 6.95 and 2.53, respectively. F value ( $F=3.5^*$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) indicates that private schools and public schools differ significantly. It may be due to the environment a private school creates; a highly competitive edge is seen in students studying there as compared to the public schools.

**Table 2. Mean, SD and t value of stress level and suicidal ideation scores of boys (n=60) and girls (n=60)**

Variables	Groups	Mean	SD	t value
Stress	Boys	162.66	23.97	1.99
	Girls	153.84	24.63	
Suicidal Ideation	Boys	3.76	1.72	1.67
	Girls	3.04	0.2	

\* $p>0.05$

Table 2 shows significant difference among students in terms of stress level ( $t=1.99$ ). Here, hypothesis (1) "stress level of students would not differ significantly in terms of gender" is not rejected. Boys are experiencing more stress as compared to girls, which is indicated from the mean scores 162.66 and 153.68, respectively. Further, it also indicates that there is no significant difference among boys and girls in connection to suicidal ideation ( $t=1.67$ ). Therefore, hypothesis (2) "suicidal ideation would not differ significantly in terms of gender" is also not rejected.

**Table 3. Correlation between stress level and suicidal ideation scores for the students of two types of schools.**

Variables	Correlation Coefficient
Stress level	0.13*
Suicidal Ideation	0.13*

It is evident from table 3 that there is a positive correlation between stress and suicidal ideation. It shows that as the level of stress increases

the rate of suicide and suicidal ideation would also increase. Similarly, when the level of stress decreases the suicidal ideation decreases, too. Stressful life events often cause suicidal ideation among adolescence. Stress and suicidal ideation often go together. Academic pressure, parental expectations and competitive environment during school bring a lot of stress among adolescents. Those students who are unable to cope with these stressors often indulge in suicidal ideation.

The present findings conclude that students belonging to private schools are experiencing more stress due to the academic demands, adjusting to the new course and medium of instructions. Therefore, they could commit suicide. Like the private school students suffering from higher level of academic stress even their public school counterparts do, but private school students level of adjustment is much poor than the public school students. In India, a very small study reported that suicidal ideation was significantly higher among adolescent girls than boys (Upadhyay & Singh, 2006). Sharma, Vijay and Chaturvedi (2008) in their study on adolescent students found the prevalence of suicide risk behavior quite high with almost 16% having suicide ideation and 5% having attempted suicide. Females were seen as being more vulnerable.

Hussain and Kumar (2008) found that the magnitude of academic stress was significantly higher among the public schools students where as Government School students were significantly better in terms of their levels of adjustment. Thus, it can be said that academic load and school environment of public school might be contributing towards enhancement of stress among students. Similar results were also obtained by Bohannon (2000). He investigated the impact of school related stressors on public school students and found significant correlations among them. Hence, public school students suffer from higher level of stress related to their academics. Akhtar (2011) studied that private school students experience lots of stress as compared to government school students. This may be attributed to high parental pressure, parental expectations from their children and competition with their classmates. Parents invest

a lot of money and effort to make their wards competent enough to cope with environmental demands. Students who are experiencing high stress are very much conscious about their future. Since, private school students are more of careerists as compared to their counterparts.

Bhosale (2014) conducted a study on secondary school students in 10th standard. It was found that there is a significant difference between boys and girls in terms of their academic frustration, academic pressure and academic anxiety level. However, there is no significant difference between boys and girls on academic stress and academic conflict. As far as suicidal ideation is concerned with regards to private schools, the American Psychiatric Association's (2014) Annual Meeting report says that private school students are much likely to report suicidal plans, thoughts and attempts compared with their public school counterparts, according to the results of what is believed to be the first ever such survey of private school students. Released results showed that of the total sample of 8407 private school children, 10.1% said they entertained thoughts of suicide; about half of those (5.2%) reported suicidal plans and 2.8% reported suicide attempts. Dhar and Basu (2006) observed that stressful life events differentiate between high and low suicidal college students, but the findings are moderated by personality characteristics like ego function. Stress has been found to be a significant factor for suicidal thought.

Further, findings of Masih and Gulrez (2004) say that there is no significant difference in terms of gender as far as students' stress is concerned. Mathew and Jayan (2006) also support this study that both the boys and the girls are experiencing same kind of academic stress, but there is no significant difference between them.

As far as relationship between the academic stress and suicidal ideation is concerned Rebecca and Vivien (2006) in their study supported that Adolescents' self-report of academic stress was significantly correlated with suicidal ideation in the expected direction: academic stress was positively correlated with suicidal ideation. This indicates that academic stress impedes academic performance, and also

affects life of a person to a greater extent. This study also indicated that there is an urgent need to identify those students who need support and further studies may be conducted in different populations and out of school adolescents, too.

### References

- Akhtar, Z. (2011). A comparative study of stress among private and government students of Jamshedpur. *Journal for Social Development*, 3, 4-15.
- Akhtar, Z. (2011). *Student Stress Scale*. Bhargava Book House, Agra.
- American Psychiatric Association (2014). *Private Schools: Protective against Suicidal Behaviors*. Medscape Medical News. Pauline Anderson. May 06, 2014.
- Augustine, L. F., Shahnaz, V., Sylvia, F. R., & Madhavan, K. N. (2011). Perceived stress, life events and coping among higher secondary students of Hyderabad, India: A pilot study. *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 134, 61-68.
- Banerejee, S. (2001). Youth and Exam Stress, *Social Welfare*, 48:17.
- Bhosale U. V. (2014). A study of academic stress and gender difference. *Indian Streams Research Journal*, 4(6), 1-4.
- Bohannon, A. P. (2000). The relationship of School related stressors to discipline Academic Stress and adjustment referrals, attendance, grade point average and under achievement among high school students. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57, 1482.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS): [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars)
- Dhar, S., & Basu, S. (2006). A comparative study of life events presumptive stress and different ego functioning of students with "low" and "high" suicidal risks. *Indian Journal of Council Psychology*, 33, 1569-1649.
- Dogra, A. K., Basu, S., & Das, S. (2008). The Roles of Personality, Stressful Life Events, Meaning in Life, Reason for Suicidal Ideation: A study in college students. *SIS Journal of Project for Psychological and Mental Health*, 15, 52-57.
- Fairbrother, K., & Warn, J. (2003). Workplace Dimensions, Stress and Job Satisfaction, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 18, 8-21.
- Hussain, A., Kumar, A., & Hussain, A. (2008). Academic stress and adjustment among high

- school students. *Journal of Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 34, (Special issue), 70-73.
- Kumar, S., & Singh, A.P. (2004). Stress state and its relationship with academic performance among students. *Recent Trends in Human Stress Management*, 8, 55-66.
- Maheshananda, S., Bera, T. K., Gore, M. M., Bhogal, R. S., Kulkarni, & Thakur, G. (2012). Management of suicidal tendency through yoga amongst adolescent students. *Yoga-Mimamsa*, 44(3), 162-179.
- Masih, P. P., & Gulrez, N. K. (2004). Age and gender difference on stress. *Recent Trends in Human Stress Management*, 30, 97-104.
- Mathew, B., & Jayan, C. (2006). Academic Stress and Coping Styles among Plus Two Students. *Indian Psychological Review*, 66, 41-48.
- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2011): Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Available from: URL: <http://www.ncrb.nic.in>.
- Osman, A., Bagge, C. L., & Guitierrez P. M. (2001). The suicidal Behaviour Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R): Validation with Clinical and Nonclinical Samples, *Assessment*, 5, 443-454.
- Priti, A., & Chavan, S. (2009). Stress and suicidal ideas in adolescent students in Chandigarh, *Indian Journal of Medical Science*, 63, 232-245.
- Rebecca, P. A., & Vivien, S.H. (2006). Relationship between Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation: *Testing for Depression as a Mediator Using. Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, (37)133-143.
- Sharma, R., Vijay, L., & Chaturvedi, S. (2008). Suicidal behavior amongst adolescent students in South Delhi. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 50, 30-33.
- Shreya, Bhandary, *Times of India*, Mumbai, Nov. 3, 2011
- Skinner, R., & McFaul, S. (2012). Suicide among children and adolescents in Canada: trends and sex differences, 1980-2008. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, doi: 10.1503/cmaj.111867.
- Sulaiman, T., Hassan, A., Sopian, V. M., & Abdullah, S. K. (2009). The Level of Stress among Students in Urban and Rural Secondary Schools in Malaysia. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(2), 179-184.
- Toero, K. Nagy, A. Sawaguchi, T., & Sotonyi, P. (2001). Characteristics of suicide among children and adolescents in Budapest. *Pediatric Intelligence*, 43, 368-371.
- Upadhayay, B. K., & Singh, R. (2006). Suicide ideation and psychopathology among adolescents. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 2, 34-45
- Wilburn, V. R., & Smith, D. E. (2005). Stress, self esteem and suicidal ideation in late adolescents. *Adolescence*, 40(157), 33-43.

**Zaki Akhtar**, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Karim City College, Jamshedpur. Email: [drzakiakhtar@gmail.com](mailto:drzakiakhtar@gmail.com)

**Mahfooz Alam**, Research Scholar, Kolhan University, Chaibasa

## Disabilities and Impairments

(An Interdisciplinary Research Journal)

Bi-annual

Editor in Chief : **Arun K. Sen**, PhD

Editor : **Roopa Vohra**, PhD

**Akshat Publications**

T-6, Usha Chambers, Ashok Vihar, Central Market,  
Delhi - 110 052