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ACADEMIC STRESS TO SUICIDAL IDEATION: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES AT UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

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The study's main goal was to determine the relationship between stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students at universities in Punjab, Pakistan. To achieve the research objectives, a correlational research design was used. A total of 11,763 undergraduate students comprised the study population from three public sector universities in Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. The study's sample was composed of a total of one hundred and eleven participants covering (42) male and (69) female students chosen through a simple random sampling procedure. The data was analyzed by applying inferential statistics, Pearson coefficient correlation, and a t-test. The results revealed that there is a strong relationship between academic stress and an increased level of negativity, which implies that students have a tendency towards suicide ideation. The study recommended that administrators should pay more attention to this potential problem and focus on managing stress-coping strategies and support services for university students.

Keywords Stress, Suicidal, Ideation, Students, Universities.

Introduction

Suicidal ideation frequently manifests itself as a well-made plan to commit suicide. Suicide is symbolized by some harm to oneself. This is a serious issue worldwide and over 700,000 individuals take their own lives each year (Rehman & Haque, 2019). According to Klonsky et al. (2016) the term Suicidal behavior represents an umbrella term for any suicidal ideation or act, without taking regular ideas and plans, nonfatal attempts, and those resulting in death. In such a situation. Additionally, Suicide is a major factor in causing damage on a global scale, accounting for around 2.4% of the overall mortality rate among the young generation in the world (Shovon, 2018). In addition to this, Sami et al. (2020) argued that suicide is a common prevailing issue in our society, and the single act of attempting or planning to commit suicide is preceded by the existence of some degree of suicidal ideation or thoughts. Unfortunately, a significant number of students in Pakistan, particularly those with poorer academic performance, frequently experience feelings of inadequacy because of societal norms that demand perfection. For example, a student who tragically ended their own life left a written message stating that despite their diligent efforts, they were unable to attain optimal academic performance, which ultimately influenced their choice to take their own life (Rehan, 2019). In this regard, Shekhani et al. (2018) stated that suicide behavior in Pakistan is one area that has been little researched and explored. However, as Shakil (2019) asserts, the suicide rate of students in this country has recently become significantly high, and unfortunately, the official statistics on this issue are not published. Student populations in educational institutions throughout Pakistan present an increased amount of worry and stress. Particularly, the rates of depression and stress among students exceed 50%, while anxiety rates are considerably higher. Furthermore, the

common triggers of severe stress and anxiety are the fear of failing examinations, and at times the fear of failing them leads some students to contemplate suicide. Suicidal ideation in students from developing countries is also an under-researched issue. Moreover, Naseem et al. (2017) indicated that Stress and psychological pressure are the main source of suicide ideation. Stress often brings individuals into unfavorable psychological conditions, leading directly to thoughts of suicide. It is also imperative to mention that the issue of suicidal ideation has increased among students in Pakistan (Bilal & Riaz, 2020). Many factors such as a very competitive environment, academic stress and pressure, exam anxiety (the fear of failing), as well as poor academic performance, are the main factors leading to stress among students in educational institutions. The second leading cause of death for adolescents in Pakistan is suicide. Suicide continues to be a problem for today's students at all levels of higher education. To effectively combat these needs, ongoing exploration and solutions making sure successful measures avoiding suicide ideation and activities are taken depend on discovering the basic factors and conditions that underlie them. Investigation and response in tackling this public health crisis are still called for and Two years ago we sought information from a group of male and female pupils in prerequisite. Nevertheless, the scarcity of research and data on the fundamental factors that contribute to suicidal thoughts or actions among students in educational institutions is a significant issue, as evidenced by the rising suicide rates among students (Arafat & Al Mamun, 2019). Additionally, Bhatti et al. (2022) cautioned that the suicide rate among Pakistani youth is increasing and is now a cause for concern. In addition, the suicide rate in Pakistan has reached an alarming 8%, with one out of every 200 attempts being suicidal. The purpose of the study was to investigate the correlation between the stress levels students experience

in the pursuit of their academic goals and their increased thought processes regarding suicide.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the present investigation were as follows:

1. To investigate the relationship between stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students at universities.
2. To ascertain the variations in stress levels and suicidal thoughts among students based on their gender at universities.

Literature Review

Several research investigations established the relationship between the level of stress and the suicidal thoughts among the students across different educational landscapes. Within this context, [Urme et al. \(2022\)](#) found in their research investigation that many students in public universities who committed suicide were recorded to be depressed, hopeless, perfectionists, suffering family conflict, relationship break up, low social support, financial stress, and academic pressure before the suicidal acts. In another study conducted by [Kaggwa et al. \(2022\)](#) on suicide attempts and resources and environment features associated with these behaviors. The study was conducted among 540 students in southern Uganda and revealed that the drivers toward suicidal behavior included general physical ill-being, financial constraints, and stress among the students. Moreover, in another research endeavor by [Lindsey et al. \(2019\)](#) identified a high prevalence rate of suicide among students in the United States. It is a sign that many suicides by undergraduates and postgraduates emanate from the factors such as psychological well-being, stress, and academic performance. Furthermore, [Desai et al \(2021\)](#) conducted a cross-sectional study to estimate the occurrence of suicide ideation and its determinants among 506 medical students in a medical college in India. The study showed that among students, 69.2% reported being under academic pressure, which was listed as a risk factor/predictor of suicidal ideation. In the

Chinese university student sample. In addition to this, [Wu et al. \(2021\)](#) established a high prevalence of suicidal ideation, with a risk of 14.5 % with the symptoms of depression and anxiety as the main variables for suicide risk among the students at universities.

Material and Methods

A correlational research design was employed to carry out the investigation. The study population consisted of total 11763 the students from three public universities in Multan, south Punjab Pakistan: Emerson University Multan, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, and The Women University Multan. Moreover, a representative sample of 111 one hundred and eleven undergraduate students, male (42) and female (69), were selected through simple random sampling techniques from various university departments, including political science, mass communication, psychology, and education. The research tools were utilized and finalized after consultation with educational experts and reviewing the relevant research. For this purpose, two separate research tools were used for data collection. In this regard, information on students' suicidal thoughts was gathered using the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS), which was first developed by [Posner et al. \(2011\)](#). With its easy and comprehensive structure, the C-SSRS is a self-report instrument that aids in suicide risk assessment. Five dimensions of suicidal ideation were examined in the C-SSRS: wishing one wish to die, active thoughts of suicide, considering suicide as an option, considering suicide as an option with some intention to act, and planning or executing a suicide attempt. There is a five-point ordinal scale for the severity of the thoughts. To quantify the seriousness of suicidal thoughts, the scale employs two groups of elements. To achieve its aims, the present research, however, relied only on items belonging to the first subset of the scale for data collection. The "ideation severity scale" measures the intensity of

suicidal thoughts during the last month in the first group. Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) Lovibond (1995) were used in this research. Further, DASS-21 is a self-reported, validated tool for identifying, describing, and quantifying relevant emotional states; it consists of 21 items. Once the pilot testing was complete, the researchers verified the instrument's reliability by importing the data into SPSS. Both scales were validated through consultation with experts in the field of psychology. Although the scales were standardized, their reliability was ensured in the new cultural context. For this, the Cronbach Alpha for (C-SSRS) was found to be higher than 0.77, and for (DASS-21) was recorded at 0.88. Throughout the investigation, the researchers were very careful to follow all regulations about research ethics.

Analysis of Data

The researcher utilized descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the provided data using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The researcher computed frequencies and percentages in the realm of descriptive statistics. The researchers employed inferential statistics such as t-test and Pearson coefficient correlation to examine the relationship between variables in the study.

Demographic Analysis

Table 1

Gender Wise Analysis

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	42	37.8
Female	69	62.2
Total	111	100.0

Table no. 1 indicates that within the sampled population of 111 individuals, there is a higher representation of females compared to males. Specifically, 69 individuals, or 62.2% of the sample, are female (F), whereas 42 individuals, or 37.8%, are male (M). This distribution shows a notable gender imbalance favoring females, suggesting either a naturally higher female presence in the sampled group or potential sampling bias. This information could be crucial for understanding demographic trends or

planning gender-specific interventions within this population.

Table 2

Independent Sample T-test for Gender-wise Analysis of Stress and Suicide Ideation

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
					Mean	T		
Stress	Male	42	56.9286	9.16886	1.41479	-.375	0.001	-.60766
	Female	69	57.5362	7.70137	.92714			
Suicide Ideation	Male	42	21.0000	3.94474	.60869	1.798	0.001	1.23188
	Female	69	19.7681	3.20452	.38578			

Table 2 analysis shows the gender-based data on academic stress and suicide ideation presented in these statistical results. Male student's mean stress score is 56.93 with a standard deviation of 9.17, while women's stress score is (M=57.54) with a (SD = 7.700). $T = -0.375$, $p = 0.709$ indicates difference in both genders. Males have an MS of 21.00 with a SD of 3.94 for suicide ideation, while females have a mean score of 19.77 (SD 3.20). This implies a higher tendency of suicide ideation among male students as compared to female students in universities. as indicated by the difference in means in this case ($t = 1.798$, $p = 0.075$).

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Stress and Suicide Ideation

Factors		Stress	Suicide Ideation
Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	0.68
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.002
	N	111	111
Suicide Ideation	Pearson Correlation	0.68	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	111	111

Table 3 represents the correlation analysis between "academic stress" and suicide ideation among 111 participants revealing a moderate to strong positive correlation ($r = -0.68$) between the variables with a significant p-value, (0.002) indicating that generally stress levels significantly impact suicide ideation.

Discussion

The study sought to find the relationship between stress and suicidal thoughts. The findings indicated that in the current study, stress has a strong connection with suicidal thoughts. The findings of the research are consistent with the observations of [Sehzad et al., \(2021\)](#), in which it was noted that stress and

anxiety are found as the main causes of despair and thus of suicide ideas among students. Furthermore, tension and worry are found as the main causes of sometimes despair and isolation that follow, which helps to explain suicide situations among Pakistani students. Similarly, according to study results, male participants had a relatively a higher tendency of suicidal thoughts as compared to female students. However, the results are in contradiction to those presented by Sami et al. (2020) in which it was found that female students are inclined towards more suicidal ideation relative to their male class fellows. Consequently, suicidal thoughts arise from stress brought on by elements including physiological, psychological, educational, social, and environmental ones. Teachers should be aware that a pupil showing poor self-esteem, sad mood, and views of failure would be more likely to have suicidal thoughts and actions and might therefore need a referral for proper guidance and counseling sessions.

Conclusion

The present study's results indicate that stress and suicidal ideation are significant mental health issues. Therefore, educational institutions should initiate supportive interventions to counsel students experiencing these mental health problems, including stress and suicidal ideation. This approach can foster positive thoughts among students by teaching them stress management coping techniques, which can effectively combat challenges in their academic path. Suicidal thoughts are more common among male and female students in universities. Research findings revealed a significant beneficial link between suicide ideas and perceived stress. Consequently, it can be concluded that there is a need to address the factors causing stress among the students. In addition to this, more focus should be paid on the overall mental well-being of the students at universities.

Recommendations

To better manage academic stress, educational institutions should incorporate courses that improve coping skills and resilience, especially for new undergraduates.

1. The seminars and workshops should be conducted to teach positive coping styles to enhance students' ability to handle stress positively.
2. The focus should be placed on incorporating resilience techniques to help students manage academic stress, thereby reducing the likelihood of suicidal ideation at educational institutions.

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