

An Empirical Inquiry into Status of Suicidal Ideation among Higher Secondary Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Suicidal ideation is generally considered as Non-fatal Suicidal Behaviour (NFSB) by most researchers. Across different cultures, the prevalence of NFSB has been found to be alarmingly high among adolescents. As there is no published study estimating prevalence rates in India, a study was conducted on adolescents in Varanasi city to find prevalence of NFSB.

Method: Data was collected from 666 higher secondary students through Suicidal Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ) following descriptive survey method.

Results: Three per cent of the participants were found to have higher level of Suicidal Ideation and 4.9 per cent have moderate level of thought. 38.8 per cent students had average level of suicidal ideation and 53.3 per cent were found to have negligible amount of this thought. The item wise analysis showed that 56.27 per cent of students really thought for committing suicide, whereas, 46.94 per cent students accepted to have attempted to kill themselves. Female participants were found to have more suicidal ideation than their male counterparts. Significantly, higher level of suicidal ideation was found among Class XII students in commerce stream and also among the students studying in CBSE Board schools.

Conclusions: There is high prevalence of frequency of suicidal ideation and in communication of suicidal thoughts to others. Attitude and expectation of actually attempting suicide is also high among adolescents who need urgent intervention to remediate this serious problem.

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Background of the Study

Well-being of adolescents is largely the product of interactions among the multiple context in which adolescents are embedded (Resnick et al., 1997). In India there is a heavy academic and social pressure that results in negative emotional states and more internalising problems (Verma; Sharma; Larson, 2002). In many studies of self-harm, academic pressure was found to be associated with suicidal ideas and occurrence of deliberate self-harm (Verma et al., 2002; Krishnakumar et al., 2005; Lai et al., 1992). Suicide is considered to be the second most common cause of death in adolescents in industrialised countries, and high rates are reported from India as well (Aron et al., 2004; Rey et al., 1997).

The suicidal rates are different for each country, but the increase among young people is very prominent everywhere (Lubin et al., 2001; Bilici et al., 2002). The same situation is valid for suicidal thoughts as well (kjoller et al., 2000; Mazza, 2000). In addition to it, one of the most worrying factor is the death of student. According to a survey of National Crime Records Bureau in 2009, among the total suicidal victims reported in 2009, 5.3 per cent (n=1, 27,151) were students. The data discussed so far show that basically students studying in schools and universities are the vulnerable group in context of suicidal ideation. There could be several factors which contribute to this tendency with major share of academic stress and anxiety. Parental pressure to perform well in studies and a competition-oriented environment also creates a serious predicament before students. If we look deeply at this scenario, we all will agree that somehow the family environment and the whole social set-up is responsible for the suicides of the students. A student really gets depressed when he is not able to secure good marks in the examination, along with the feeling of shame that he has to face in front of his classmates. There is a constant pressure from his family also to perform well. When a student is unable to meet these pressures for good performance and for getting a good job, last way out for him becomes 'death' (Bhut, 2010). Therefore, it is high time when studies should be conducted in this area to save our future generation from this catastrophic incident. But, surprisingly such studies are very less to investigate the prevalence of suicidal ideation among adolescents who are usually at higher secondary level of schooling. In Indian context, there is absolute dearth of such studies. Hence, the investigator conducted a study to find out empirical answers of the following questions:

An Empirical Enquiry into Status of Suicidal Ideation...

1. What is the level of suicidal ideation among higher secondary students?
2. If some personal and demographic variables like gender, grade, academic stream and board of study affect suicidal ideation?

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the prevalence of suicidal ideation among higher secondary students.
2. To study suicidal ideation among higher secondary students with respect to their
 - Gender
 - Grade
 - Academic stream
 - Board of school

Assumptions and Hypotheses

In order to achieve first objective of the study, an assumption was made that the higher secondary students hold an identifiable and measurable degree of suicidal ideation and for next objective of the study, following null hypotheses were framed:

- There is no significant difference among higher secondary students in suicidal ideation with respect to their gender.
- There is no significant difference among higher secondary students in suicidal ideation with respect to their grade of study (i.e., Classes XI & XII).
- There is no significant difference among higher secondary students in suicidal ideation with respect to their academic stream (i.e., Science, Arts and Commerce).
- There is no significant difference among higher secondary students in suicidal ideation with respect to their administrative board of school (i.e., UP Board and CBSE Board).

Methodology

Descriptive survey method has been applied to achieve the objectives of the study.

Population and Sample

The target population of the present study consisted of higher secondary students of different CBSE and UP Board students of urban area of Varanasi. Ten schools were selected randomly and all the students of Classes XI and XII of selected schools were taken as sample

for data collection. In this way the sample of the study was composed of 666 higher secondary students comprising 226 boys and 440 girls. The sample was stratified across stream and board of study.

Measuring Instrument

Suicidal Behaviour Questionnaire as developed and standardised by Linehan (1981) was used for this investigation. A written approval was taken by the developer through E-mail to adapt and modify the tool according to Indian socio-cultural set-up. The tool consisted of four items and it uses the Rating Scale to measure the thought of suicide or suicidal attempt. The tool also measures its frequency, and the communication of suicidal thoughts to others, and the attitude and expectation of actually attempting suicide. The items were translated into Hindi and necessary expert consultation was done to establish its validity in Indian setting. There were four items in scale i.e., "Have you ever thought about or attempted to kill yourself?"; "How often have you thought about killing yourself in the past year?"; "Have you ever told someone that you were going to commit suicide, or that you might do it?" and "How likely is it that you will attempt suicide someday?" The responses were to be given in a rating scale of 1-5. The face validity and content validity of the scale were established from the expert of psychology, education and sociology.

The Split half reliability of the tool was found to be 0.82 and test-retest reliability was 0.88, which is sufficiently high to be used as reliable scale.

Data Collection

The researchers would like to mention here that a high degree of fear was exposed among school principals to tackle such a sensitive issue among students. Many of the principals denied administering such tool as they did not want to raise this issue before students. Such experience itself shows that the issue of suicide among students is not being addressed properly in our schools. Instead of having a healthy dialogue with students on this issue, administrators are overlooking and trying to turn face from this bitter reality. During the data collection of the study, need of serious counseling was felt on the part of principals and teachers. The researchers somehow succeeded to convince some principals of the schools and got permission for data collection.

Results

Status of Suicidal Ideation

The analysis of the study shows that out of 666 students, 355 (53.3 per cent) students had zero or negligible suicidal ideation, whereas 258 (38.8 per cent) had average level of suicidal ideation, 33 (4.9 per cent) students had moderate level of suicidal ideation, and 20 (3 per cent) students had higher level of this thought.

Although the status of suicidal ideation was clear with the overall score in scale but in order to get comprehensive status of suicidal thought, item wise analysis was also done. The itemwise analysis revealed that 175 (26.28 per cent) participants responded positively for item no. 1 i.e., 'they have thought about or attempted to kill themselves'. Item no. 2 was positively responded by 146 (21.92 per cent) students which asks students that 'How often they thought about killing themselves in the past year'. About 88 students (13.21 per cent) responded that they have shared their feelings with others about their planning of committing suicide as revealed by the responses of item no. 3. The expectation of actually committing suicide in future was positively responded by 232 (34.83 per cent) participants.

Gender difference in Suicidal Ideation

One of the objectives of the study was to study if gender difference exists in suicidal ideation. The related null hypothesis was formulated that 'there is no significant difference among higher secondary students in suicidal ideation with regard to gender' and was tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test. The table-1 below provides the statistical details:

Table 1
Gender Difference in Suicidal Ideation

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Standard error of difference	t-value
Male	226	1.65	2.98	0.26	1.48
Female	440	2.03	3.29		

As it is evident from Table 1 that t-value obtained was not significant at 0.05 level, it is concluded that male and female students do not differ significantly in terms of suicidal ideation and the related null hypothesis was accepted.

Effect of Grade on Suicidal Ideation

In order to study the effect of grade on SI, another null hypothesis was framed that 'there is no significant difference among higher secondary students in terms of suicidal ideation with respect to grade'. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test. The Table 2 given below provides the statistical details:

Table 2
Effect of Grade on Suicidal Ideation

Grade	N	Mean	SD	Standard error of difference	t-value
XI	382	1.86	3.38	0.25	0.48
XII	284	1.98	2.92		

The finding of Table 2 indicated that Class XII grade students had higher suicidal ideation (Mean = 1.975) than that of Class XI grade students (Mean = 1.856) but this difference was not significant and the related null hypothesis was accepted.

Effect of Academic Stream on Suicidal Ideation

At higher secondary level, students are divided into different study streams, but the major popular stream which is mostly available in all the schools are science, arts and commerce. The highest number of students is also found in these streams. Therefore, in present study three basic streams i.e., science, arts and commerce were chosen for the analysis.

The related null hypothesis 'there is no significant difference among higher secondary students in terms of suicidal ideation with respect to academic stream' was tested using F-test at 0.05 level of significance. Table 3 given below provides the result of statistical analysis.

Table 3
Effect of Academic Stream on Suicidal Ideation

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value
Between Group	64.08	2	32.04	3.17*
Within Group	6712.15	663	10.12	
Total	6776.23	665		

* Significant at 0.05 level.

The obtained F-value shows that all the three groups differ significantly in terms of suicidal ideation. Hence, the related null hypothesis was rejected. Further, in order to study mean difference between academic streams, consequent t-test was applied. The results are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4
Mean Differences in Suicidal Ideation among Academic Streams

Stream	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Arts	271	1.54	2.90	2.13* (df=383)
Commerce	114	2.24	3.08	
Science	281	2.13	3.47	0.28 (df=393)
Commerce	114	2.24	3.08	
Science	281	2.13	3.47	2.19* (df=550)
Arts	271	1.54	2.90	

*Significant at 0.05 level

The Table 4 shows that arts and commerce students differ significantly in terms of suicidal ideation. The mean score of commerce students shows that level of suicidal ideation was highest among the other two academic streams. Arts students had lowest suicidal ideation, whereas, science students were slightly lower than commerce students in terms of suicidal ideation. Further, the mean difference between science and commerce students was not found significant at 0.05 level as there was a slight mean difference between the groups. Lastly, the mean difference between Arts and Science students was also found significant at 0.05 level. Thus, it is concluded that among the academic streams, commerce and science stream students had significantly higher suicidal ideation than arts students in which highest suicidal ideation exists among commerce stream students.

Effect of Board of Study on Suicidal Ideation

The suicidal ideation among higher secondary students was also analysed according to their administrative board of study i.e., CBSE board and UP Board. The related null hypothesis 'there is no significant difference among higher secondary students in terms of suicidal ideation with respect to board of school' was tested using t-test at 0.05 level. The Table 5 given below provides the result.

Table 5
Effect of Administrative Board of Study on Suicidal Ideation

Board of School	N	Mean	SD	Standard error of difference	t-value
CBSE	250	2.26	3.42	0.25	2.22*
UP Board	416	1.69	3.03		

* Significant at 0.05 level (df = 664).

It is clear from Table 5 that CBSE Board students (Mean = 2.260) have higher suicidal ideation than UP Board students (Mean = 1.694) and this difference was also found significant. Therefore, it is concluded that the students studying in CBSE schools have higher suicidal ideation than their peers in UP Board schools.

Discussion

The findings of the present study suggest that out of 666 participants, 311 (46.7 per cent) could be diagnosed as having suicidal ideation, either in varying intensity. Rest of the 355 participants had 0 score in the test. Out of 311 participants who were diagnosed as having suicidal ideation, only 88 had shared their feelings with others. It means rest of the students who hadn't shared their feeling of suicidal attempt, feared of disclosure of their feelings or they did trust anybody. The situation is not good as they are suppressing their feelings and not getting any companion in form of friends, parents, siblings or teachers. The situation is also a threat to their psychological well-being. It is also revealed that 175 participants had thought about killing themselves and 146 had attempted to commit suicide by various means. In addition to it, out of 311 students, 232 had accepted that they can attempt suicide in future. The findings expose a serious picture of poor mental health among our adolescents today. Somehow our societal set-up or educational environment has failed to develop courage and ability of adjustment in our adolescent to face the adverse situation confidently, that they feel in future they may commit suicide. In context of gender difference in suicidal ideation, girls were found to have higher suicidal ideation than boys, but this difference was not significant. Differences between genders observed in the present study are in agreement with previous findings (Rubies & Hollenstein, 2009; Friedrich, Reams & Jacobs, 1982) who also found higher suicidal ideation among female. Girls in our society are under

more pressure than boys. Family's attitude towards continuing their education is found comparatively unfavourable than boys and girls also found themselves in a state of confusion if they fail to perform better in their academics. Pressure of getting married early may also be one of the causes. All these factors must have contributed towards higher suicidal ideation in girls.

In case of stream of study, commerce students had highest suicidal ideation followed by science and arts students. In the age of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation there is sudden upsurge of job opportunities in corporate sector and students' attention shifted to commerce stream from science. Although, this created more job opportunities but at the same time it raised the level of aspiration of job aspirants as well as the intensity of competition. Today students have intense feeling of getting entry into any multinational company in managerial position, fear of being failure at the same time paves way for suicidal ideation. At the same time, science students are also under stress to qualify medical, engineering and other professional entrance test which they perceive to be the only golden opportunity for them. In case of Arts students, their job profile starts basically after graduation where they have more job opportunities based on Arts stream. Thus, looking at the extent of studies in adolescent period and job opportunities according to nature of study stream the finding is quite specific and implies urgent intervention strategies. Higher suicidal ideation in Class XII students was found as compared to Class XI students, although it was not significant. It seems that higher expectation leads to higher suicidal ideation as Class XII students have specific expectations related to studies and career as compared to Class XI students. Students studying in CBSE schools were found to have higher suicidal ideation as compared to students of UP board. This might be due to higher socio-economic status of students of CBSE schools. The CBSE schools of the sample were mostly of elite nature catering to educational needs of central government employee's ward whereas students of UP board were from poor socio-economic status thus, leading to different and might be lower expectations related to studies and job opportunities.

Suggestions

On the basis of suicidal ideation status exposed during the study, following suggestions in the form of educational implications are made.

1. The sample of the study showed 47 per cent of the students have suicidal ideation. This needs urgent remediation with due care

from policy makers to practitioners. There is need to design early intervention and remedial programmes to minimise suicidal ideation.

2. The global economy has created manyfold job opportunities, but it seems that it has also become a threat to mental health of its aspirants particularly in case of commerce students. Thus, commerce students need to be given special attention in such remedial programmes.
3. Special care needs to be given during terminal stages of schooling as Class XII students were found to have higher suicidal ideation than their younger counterparts. During this phase, the pressure of studies is paramount in which job insecurity makes it more unmanageable in some cases.
4. The findings suggest that students of CBSE schools have higher suicidal ideation. Thus, parents, teachers and other school personnel need to keep a student-friendly environment in these schools so that students may share their problems and do not think of taking adverse step.
5. During data collection, students expressed that they are under pressure due to higher parental expectations. Such pressure was found to be high among parents with higher socio-economic status. Thus, parents, teachers and others should assist the child in developing the courageous attitude of accepting all situations in their life and should discuss numerous job opportunities one can get even after poor performance in one of the exams.
6. Girls were also found to be among the vulnerable group. Therefore parents, teachers and other stakeholders should try to take girls' education as seriously as of boys so that girls may feel confident for their future opportunities and come out from the stress of their early marriage.
7. A regular counsellor should compulsorily be appointed in all schools so that he may assist all students to resolve mental conflict and rescue them from stress situation.
8. To sum up, it is the responsibility of all educational stakeholders to tackle this problem sensibly and efficiently. Some programmes have already been started to minimise academic stress but more dedicated efforts are needed to resolve today's youth from such predicament so that our future generation may stand with firm footage and face the hardship of life courageously.

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