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SUICIDAL IDEATION, SELF EFFICACY AND GENERAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENTS



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ABSTRACT

The competitive world compels the new generation students' to compete and excel in almost all areas of life. But often, continuous and excess pressure from the social world, academic difficulties, and the discrepancies between personal expectations and the perceived reality reduces the effectiveness of students in utilizing the potentials they have. Intense stress arising out of academics and lack of enough support systems results in a sense of despair, hopelessness and helplessness that may lead to suicidal ideations. Coping skills and life skills helps a lot in overcoming the effects of distress. Self efficacy and general health are among the key factors that help students to achieve their academic goals. The present study assesses the level of suicidal ideations, self efficacy and general health among high school students. It examines the relationship between suicidal ideations, self efficacy and general health. For this purpose, data was collected from a sample of 120 high school students by administering, Suicidal Ideation Scale, Self Efficacy Scale and General Health Questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that 2.5 % of the high school students are having high level of suicidal ideation, 2.5% have very low self efficacy and 9.2% have very low mental health. Correlation analysis indicated that there exist a significant high positive correlation between suicidal ideation and absence of general health and a significant medium negative correlation between suicidal ideation and self efficacy. There exist no statistically significant difference between males and females in suicidal ideation and general health. The reasons for increased suicidal ideations and reduced self efficacy and general health vary among students. Adequate mental health care support including

counseling and life skill training should be provided to students to boost their self efficacy and thereby helping them to confront stress and benefit from it. Parents and teachers should be made aware about the mounting stress in students and they should be trained enough to help students to utilize their skills and potentials beneficially.

KEYWORDS :Suicidal Ideation; Self efficacy; General Health.

INTRODUCTION

Student life is an experience that shapes an individual's future. The rapid advancements in technological and industrial world have made an immense impact on student life too. Every student is required to be competent enough to learn and progress in academics as it determines their future life. Often academic stress mounts and students fail to attain academic success. In a fast moving world, students often get isolated to academics only and thus they lack the fulfillments of social needs like, need for affection, care, approval and recognition from their parents and close ones. The emotional pressure they face often leads to disastrous consequences including suicide. Feeling of distress and lack of ventilation space results in thoughts of worthlessness and emptiness. A sense of hopelessness and helplessness then starts growing and the individual thinks about ending one's own life. Thus the person becomes preoccupied with suicidal ideations. It varies greatly from fleeting thoughts, to extensive thoughts, to detailed planning, role playing, and incomplete attempts, which may be deliberately constructed to not complete or to be discovered, or may be fully intended to result in death, but the individual survives (Gliatto & Rai, 1999). Some symptoms or co-morbid conditions of suicidal ideations may include unintentional weight loss, feeling helpless, feeling alone, excessive fatigue, low self-esteem, presence of consistent mania, excessively talkative, intent on previously dormant goals, feel like one's mind is racing (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The behavioral symptoms of suicidal ideations include giving away valuable possessions, talking about death and dying, using phrases such as "when I'm gone..." or "I'm going to kill myself", getting affairs in order, saying goodbye to loved ones, obtaining items needed for suicide attempt, decreased social contact, increasing drug and alcohol usage, withdrawing from once-pleasurable activities, and increased risky behaviors. The cognitive symptoms include preoccupation with death and dying, and the belief that dying by suicide is the only way to end emotional pain. The psychosocial symptoms includes feeling helpless; trapped by intense emotional pain, psychosis, self-loathing, hopelessness, paranoia, mood swings, sudden changes in personality, severe anxiety and agitation. Lack of social support from family and friends is an important correlate of suicide ideation for adolescents, adults, and college students (Marion & Range, 2003). In college students, higher levels of social support appear to exert a protective effect against suicidal behaviors by increasing self-efficacy (Thompson, Eggert, & Herting, 2000) or by reducing stress (Clum & Febbraro, 1994).

Coping strategies and life skills helps an individual to overcome the intense effect of stress. Adaptive cognitive characteristics, such as self-efficacy and optimism, are considered as important factors in the protection from suicide ideation (Hirsch, Wolford, LaLonde, Brunk, & Parker-Morris (2009) (Hirsch & Conner 2006). Self-efficacy is the extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. It refers to the confidence and belief that an individual can act in a certain way for the purpose of meeting a goal or coping effectively in stressful situations (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy in a person is shaped through observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in the development of personality. According to Bandura (1977), self efficacy is a part of the self system that comprise of a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills. People with

a strong sense of self-efficacy view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered, develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate, form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities, and recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments. Whereas, people with a weak sense of self-efficacy avoid challenging tasks, believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities, focus on personal failures and negative outcomes, and quickly lose confidence in personal abilities. Research confirmed that self-efficacy has a significant effect on the behavioral style, effort, and persistence of an individual (Bandura, 1986). Studies also show that individuals with high self-efficacy show better health, achievement, and social integration (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen & DeLongis, 1986). Individuals having low self-efficacy usually feel powerlessness, less controlled, and more threatened in stressful situations.

The overall general health or psychological well being also plays a major role in helping students to overcome distress. It refers to how much a person is free from neurotic tendencies like anxiety, depression, and mood shifts (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Student life is a period during which an individual is vulnerable to temptations, expectations, and unfulfilled frustrations. It is the time during which academic activities govern a major part of life. Stress caused by school activities may sometimes reduce the personal effectiveness of the individual due to the draining of psychological well being (Pramod, Raju & Seena, 2014).

A student who is undergoing distress may skip classes more frequently, academic grade decline, become more aggressive or more emotional than normal, become more isolated by choice, and even miss assignments. Many times such students are knowingly or unknowingly criticized, or avoided by teachers and parents. Lack of perceived support often results in higher level of emotional breakdown that may later result in suicidal ideation.

A clear understanding about the level suicidal ideation, self efficacy, and overall mental health is highly essential for helping students to cope with their current stressors. The present study is intended to find out whether high school students are having suicidal ideation, and to measure the level of self efficacy and general health they have. The study also analyzes the relationship between suicidal ideation, self efficacy and general health.

METHOD

The plan and procedure for the investigation is presented under various headings:

Sample

The sample consisted of 120 high school students comprising of 63 males and 57 females selected from the district of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India. The age of the respondents ranged from 13 to 15 years.

Tools

Suicidal Ideation Scale, General Self Efficacy Scale, and General Health Questionnaire -12, and a personal information sheet, were administered to gather information from students and the details are given below.

1. Suicidal Ideation Scale (SIS)

The Suicidal Ideation Scale was developed by Pramod and Seena (2013) to measure the level of suicidal ideation among the general population. It's a 10 item scale that helps in understanding to what extent a person is vulnerable to commit suicide. Higher scores indicate intense level of suicidal ideation

the person undergoes. The reliability coefficient of the whole test was estimated using spearman – brown formulae for correction and was found to be 0.82 which is significant at 1% level. The scale is having adequate face validity and content validity as an assessment tool for measuring suicidal ideation.

2.The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

The scale in German Language was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) and later was revised and adapted to 26 other languages including English and Persian. This scale is made for people aged 12 and older. The scale has 10 items with 4 point scale, ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = not at all true), (2 = hardly true), (3 = moderately true), to (4 = exactly true). Responses to all 10 items have to be summed up to yield the final composite score with a range from 10 to 40. In studies over 23 nations, Cronbach's alpha values were between 0.76 and 0.90. The scale is one-dimensional. Criterion validity of this scale has been noted to be appropriate.

3.General Health Questionnaire – 12

The 12-Item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) provides a general measure of psychological well being. It is the most extensively used screening instrument for common mental disorders. The scale asks whether the respondent has experienced a particular symptom or behavior recently. Each item is rated on a four-point scale (less than usual, no more than usual, rather more than usual, or much more than usual). The General Health Questionnaire is a reliable and valid tool to measure psychological well-being and mental health. Validity and reliability were studied in patients with lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) and patients without LUTS. Reliability was evaluated using the test-retest method and internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A high degree of internal consistency was observed for each of the 12 items with Cronbach's alpha value of 0.37-0.79, while total score was 0.79 in the population study (Kia, Wah, Azad, & Chit, 2001) (Goldberg & Williams, 1988).

Personal Information Sheet

The personal information sheet was used to gather demographic details of the high school students and their personal experiences related to academics and social life leading to distress.

Procedure of Data Collection

The data was collected conveniently by the researchers. The students were met individually and the tools were given to them with their consent; doubts were cleared. To avoid any measurement related error, standardization of procedure was insured by giving uniform instruction to students, each time the data was collected. The privacy of information collected and other ethical sureties were provided to the participants.

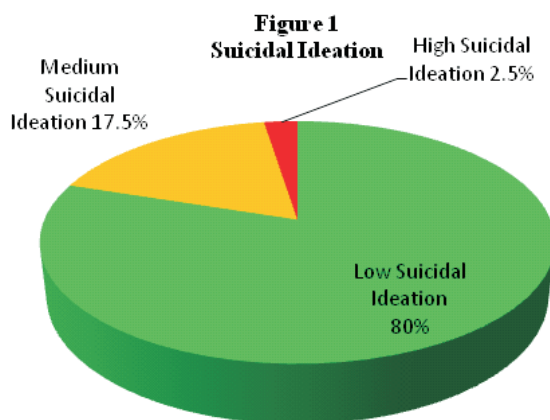
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected were subjected to different statistical analyses and the results obtained are discussed here.

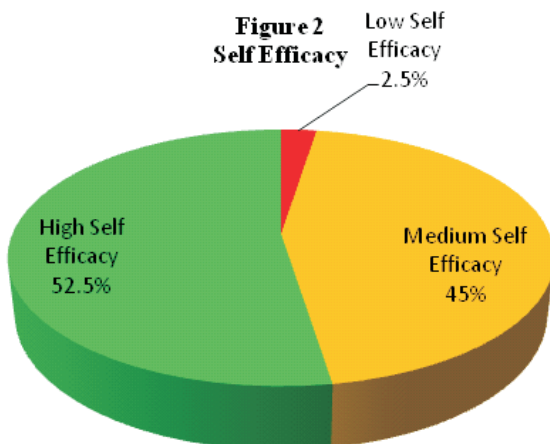
80% (n = 96) of the students do have very low suicidal ideation (Figure 1). To be clear they are free from suicidal thoughts and their lives are not affected by the thoughts to end life. 17.5% (n = 21) of them have a medium level of suicidal ideation. They are sometimes disrupted by the thoughts of hopelessness and helplessness leading to suicidal thoughts. But they are also able to get back to their

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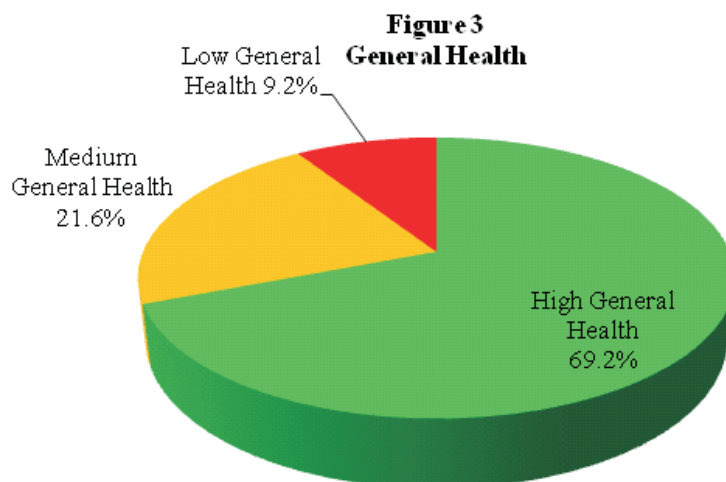
daily routines without much harm. 2.5% (n = 3) of the high school students who participated in the study experience high suicidal ideations. They are highly vulnerable to commit suicide. Usually academic stress and situational factors act as triggering agents leading to suicide. Genetic, physical, environmental, and social factors can result in suicide. The data gathered through personal information data sheet indicates that the academic overload, school bullying, criticisms from teachers and school authority, academic comparisons with peers, fear of exam, failure in exams, lack of time or inability to utilize time properly, lack of confidence, lack of support from parents and family, family problems, relationship problems, and love failures are some of the common problems faced by students. Some of the students are capable of overcoming these stressors without much damage, but some of them become more thoughtful, and criticize and blame themselves for their fate and think about suicide as an escape measure to overcome their distress.



52.5% (n = 63) of the sample have high self efficacy (Figure 2). 45% (n = 54) have average level of self efficacy, where as 2.5% (n = 3) have very low self efficacy. Self efficacy is highly essential for an individual to have confidence in oneself. Low self efficacy can lead to procrastination behavior, inability to initiate tasks, failure to fulfill tasks on time, emotional problems, and even depression that may be boosted with suicidal ideations.



There are increasing concerns globally about the mental health of students (Kadison, & Digeronimo, 2004). Psychological well being is highly crucial for success in life. 69.2% (n = 83) and 21.6% (n = 26) of the sample have high and medium general health respectively (Figure 3). 9.2% (n = 11) have very low general health. Mental health is very important for a student to function well in academics and to be in a successful position in future life. Low mental health leads to emotional disturbances, neurosis, and even psychosomatic difficulties that disrupts the day today functioning of a student.



In order to find out whether there exist a significant correlation between suicidal ideation, self efficacy and general health, the technique of Pearson’s product moment correlation was used. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of Correlation Analysis

Sl. No.	Variable	1	2	3
1	Suicidal Ideation	[]	-.55**	.87**
2	Self Efficacy	..	[]	-.58**
3	General Health (absence)	[]

Note: ** indicates significance at 0.01 level.

There exists a significant medium negative correlation between suicidal ideation and self efficacy. As self efficacy lowers suicidal ideation increases. A strong positive correlation exists between suicidal ideation and absence of general health. Lower the mental health, greater the chance of having suicidal thoughts. Mental health is highly essential for overcoming distress. A person having low mental health is vulnerable to lose hope in life, get easily frustrated and to end up with suicide. Self efficacy and absence of general health and are negatively related. As self efficacy increases general health also increases. High level of general health and self efficacy will act as protective factors that enable students to overcome distress and utilize the experience from it for achieving their goals.

Comparison of male and female high school students for the variables suicidal ideation and general health using the t- test yielded the following results that are shown in table 2 and 3.

Table 2: Results of t- test between male and female students on suicidal ideation

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	S.D	t-value
Suicidal ideation	Male	63	20.33333	6.485716	.727#
	Female	57	19.05263	7.271326	

Note: # indicates that the t-value is not statistically significant.

Table 3: Results of t- test between male and female students on General health

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	S.D	t-value
General health	Male	63	22.7937	7.92944	.285 #
	Female	57	21.0351	7.37749	

Note: # indicates that the t-value is not statistically significant.

There exist no gender difference in both suicidal ideation and general health. Almost all the high school students are experiencing similar and equal amount of stress. Most of them reported the same type of experiences related to academic difficulties. Many students are able to deal with stress, as they perceive it as a part of academic success. But students who are who are lacking life skills and coping mechanisms gets affected by distress. Another reason is that most of them are of the same age in which developmental tasks and the related experiences are almost similar.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study:

- 1.2.5% of the high school students who participated in the study have high level of suicidal ideation.
- 2.2.5% of the high school students have very low self efficacy.
- 3.9.2% of the students have distress or low mental health.
4. There exists a significant high positive correlation between suicidal ideation and absence of general health.
5. There exists a significant negative correlation between suicidal ideation and self efficacy.
6. There exists a significant negative correlation between self efficacy and absence of general health.
7. There exist no gender difference in suicidal ideation, and general health among the sample.

Day by day, stress among the students mount as they have to cope with, and compete with the rapid changes happening, all around the world. The technological developments have made students life more technical than humane. Most of the parents are busy with their works and thus are not able to consider their children’s emotional and social needs. Deprived of such necessary needs when students go to school, they struggle to fulfill expectations of themselves, parents, and teachers. Lack of

emotional support, academic overload, personality difficulties, lack of enough peer group support, or inadequate peer group influence, ignorance by teachers, and unnoticed or unrecognized learning difficulties results in the breaking of the psychological balance of the student. Gradually the student develops feeling of worthlessness, and helplessness. Initially they try their level best to cope with the stressors and seek help from the external world. But continuous distress results in thinking about escape mechanisms from stress. When hopelessness develops the person thinks about ending one's own life.

Mental health is highly essential to confront stress and benefit from it. Many of the highly protected students do not know how to deal with life's problems as they were not allowed to experience difficulties in life. So at times when they have to deal with their problems by themselves they end up with psychological breakdown. Parents and teachers should be made aware about this and children should be given opportunities to experience difficult life situations in which they can develop their coping mechanisms and self efficacy. The more stress the person face the more resilient the individual becomes.

Students having suicidal ideations should be identified and remedial measures should be given as early as possible. Parents, teachers and mental health professionals should be aware and active enough to help such students who show the signs of distress. Awareness programs should be conducted for students and their care takers at appropriate times. Adequate mental health care support including counselling and life skill training should be provided to students to boost their self efficacy and thereby helping them to confront stress and benefit from it. Parents and teachers should be made aware about the mounting stress in students and they should be trained enough to help students to utilize their skills and potentials beneficially. Psychotherapeutic and counselling facilities should be made available for all school children in their respective schools. Timely guidance and counselling will help the students to deal with their stress. Strategies should be implemented to enhance self efficacy of students. Educational systems should incorporate mental health care programs that will help students to gain insight about the importance of mental health and to gain familiarity with the ways of dealing with stress.

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