

## Academic Pressure Behind the Smile: Unveiling Depression and Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents in school

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**Abstract:** This study examines how academic pressure affects depression and suicidal thoughts in school-aged teenagers while focusing on their hidden emotional distress and their methods of coping with distressing situations. The researchers conducted a cross-sectional survey study that involved 300 adolescents as participants who underwent standardized tests to measure their academic pressure levels and depression levels and suicidal thoughts and coping methods. The descriptive analysis showed that students experienced psychological distress, which was demonstrated through their academic pressure levels of 3.719 and their depression levels of 3.757 and their suicidal thoughts at 3.734. The prevalence research indicated that most adolescents encountered mild to moderate depression, however a troubling percentage displayed elevated levels of suicidal thoughts. The correlation analysis demonstrated that depression and suicidal ideation, did not show any relationship, which revealed how complex and intricate suicidal thoughts develop in teenagers. The research found that depression served as a strong predictor for suicidal thoughts, while the coping techniques did not reduce this connection. The research results demonstrate how academic pressure and emotional discomfort affect school students, which creates an urgent need for schools to begin their mental health assessment process through automated detection systems that identify hidden psychological conditions “behind the smile”.

**Keywords:** Academic Pressure, Depression, Suicidal Ideation, Adolescents, Coping strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 2010s, the deterioration of the mental health of adolescents is obvious through the rising instances of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and suicidal deaths. Over the past few years, the phenomenon of rising teenage girls' health issues is worsening with an even greater rate, a cause for significant health and social concern for the larger population (Cosma *et al.*, 2025). The changes in the mental health of adolescents are an important barometer to monitor the rise of larger societal stresses, such as the rising power of competition and individuality, as well as the rising academic stresses. There is an emerging sense that adolescents are stressing too much about fulfilling academic and perfectionistic parental demands, while schools are seen as a stressful and demanding place instead of a dynamic place to learn (Boer *et al.*, 2023).. Adolescence is the period of development through which humans go, constituted by psychological, emotional, and social changes. In adolescence, a developmental phase in the development of a human being, struggles are to be made to find their own individual identity on the road to adulthood. Despite the importance of the developmental phase, various emotional changes take place during these phases. In the development of an individual, various phases are to be experienced, such as learning environments that are to have a great influence on the individual's future (Tsagem, 2022).

Furthermore, school life has been reported to be a critical developmental setting in the lives of adolescents, thus suggesting that the first “Workplace” in the life of an adolescent, as in the life of an adult, may be in the school setting, where, similar to adult life, adolescents may be subjected to a series of situations that involve organized requirements, performance, relations, as well as requirements in terms of time, while anxiety/stress symptoms may thus manifest in a similar way, thus underlining the importance of the role played by adolescents' well-being in such a setting as a predictor of their psychological well-being at present as well as in the future, such as when a positive perspective regarding the school setting, as well as good relations with peers as well as teachers, may predict academic involvement, achievement, as well as life satisfaction, in a positive way (Kiuru, 2020). Adolescent academic stress is greatly influenced by familial and educational contexts. Families function as primary socializing agents because modern educational systems prioritize competition through their focus on preparing students for higher education studies. The educational system generates excessive academic requirements through its high standards for student performance, which results in increased academic pressure that students must handle. The lack of emotional support together with academic pressure develops mental health problems among adolescents (Chai, 2025). Adolescent depression

leads to multiple negative outcomes which include academic failure and difficult learning conditions and school dropout and damaged friendships and home problems and drug addiction and economic difficulties. The symptoms of depression develop through persistent low mood and complete loss of interest and extreme tiredness and difficulty concentrating and changes in appetite and sensations of worthlessness and suicidal thoughts which occur in severe cases. Adolescents experience emotional instability during their transition to adulthood which leads to difficulties in forming their self-identity and self-esteem and makes them more likely to experience depressive episodes (Kamath *et al.*, 2021).

Suicide is often a response to overwhelming psychological distress and is perceived more as a call for help than a desire to die (Online, 2024). The definition of suicidal ideation includes persistent thoughts about ending one's life which lead to suicidal actions. The distinction between these two elements serves as an essential tool for prevention efforts. The mental health disorders and personality traits and life stressors that adolescents experience become more intense through family conflicts and academic pressures and bullying and perfectionism. The combination of depression and anxiety and substance use disorders creates a dangerous combination which leads to hopelessness. The combination of academic pressure and family problems lead to a strong relationship with suicidal thoughts. The situation increases both anxiety and depression which creates a need for complete mental health programs that focus on adolescent needs (Polat, 2024).

Strong interlinkages between the set of variables, that is, academic pressure, mental health problems, and suicidal ideation, indicate that early detection, preventive measures, and school-based mental health interventions may be immensely important. Psychotherapeutic interventions, specifically cognitive-behavioral therapy, along with supportive school environments, may help adolescents cope better with their emotional distress emanating from educational, familial, and social contexts. Screening, counselling, and psychosocial support in school-based mental health units could help reduce stress and prevent severe mental health outcomes. Evidence from various contexts has been shown to provide proof that addressing adolescent mental health may reduce suicidal ideation and suicide rates; thus,

this issue should also be of concern globally (Windarwati *et al.*, 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

(Santhakumar, 2023) The current research was to look at how teenage school students' home environments affect their academic stress levels and how those levels interact with one another. Random selection was used to select one hundred twenty (120) students from four separate schools located in the Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu, India. Among these establishments were three private schools and one public school. Some students were chosen at random to fill out the survey. In order to gauge the level of academic stress experienced by adolescents, researchers have developed two instruments: the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents and the Home Environment Inventory. According to the findings, students' levels of academic stress were not significantly different. Irrespective of educational background or gender (public and private) Academic stress was associated with home environment dimensions like control, punishment, and deprivation of privileges.

(Shafi, 2020) investigated the purpose of the research was to assess the impact of academic pressures among adolescents. The current research adopted the quantitative research approach. A total of 125 research respondents from diverse schools within the district's South area of Karachi, ranging from the age group of "13-19 years," was selected. The researcher adopted the Chi square approach to assess the research. In the current research studies, the findings revealed that the major factors contributing to depression, anxiety, and stress are parents' expectations and competition among youth.

(Ellen *et al.*, 2023) This study investigated the correlation between parental support and adverse interactions and adolescents' coping methods regarding academic tasks, while accounting for academic stress, achievement levels, and age. Data from 839 Australian students (grades 5 to 10) confirmed the prediction, indicating that increased parental support correlated with enhanced engagement coping. Longitudinal findings indicated that parental support facilitates engagement coping and inhibits disengagement coping, whereas negative interactions enhance disengagement coping. Overall, the findings point to the continued importance of parent-adolescent dynamics throughout the teenage years in the

development of strategies for managing academic stress. (Zhou *et al.*, 2023)

This study was on the stress experience of high school students. By conducting focus group interviews with 20 students and 9 teachers, the results revealed a range of stress sources, stress impacts, coping skills, as well as recommendations for a stress management course. The sources of stress were heavy academic demands, peer relations, as well as family relations, which affected their emotional, sleeping, studying, as well as psychological well-being. Avoidance was a coping skill observed among the student population. This coping skill was deemed inefficient, according to the students as well as the teachers. It also pointed out an important role for the promotion of coping skills for this particular demographic. (Jiang & Gao, 2022) shown that teenagers' problematic behavior impacts their physical and social development in a negative way. The correlation between academic pressure and disruptive conduct was the focus of this study. Academic pressure is positively correlated with deviant behavior, according to an analysis of 2,465 youths (aged 10-15) from the China Family Panel Studies (2017-2018) conducted using the LISREL8.8 program. Teens' bad conduct is mediated by academic pressure, according to research, which in turn is mediated by parent-child conflict and self-control. To address these issues, it is essential to enhance self-control, cultivate character strengths, promote a harmonious family environment, reduce conflicts, and improve teenagers' subjective well-being. (Caño *et al.*, 2024)

This study set out to develop a model that might predict the suicide behavior of college students by applying Predictive Analytics techniques. A total of 2,436 undergraduates participated in the International College Students Research Initiative: Building the Future: World Mental Health Surveys, from which this study pulled its data. Sexual abuse history (13.21), family history of suicide behavior (11.68), medication use (8.39), student type (7.4), not being from Manizales (5.86), cannabis (4.27), alcohol (4.42), physical abuse (3.53), religiosity (2.9), and having a family member who boosts one's self-esteem (2.9) were all determined to be significant predictors (3.09). We can take the necessary steps to recognize and prevent suicide conduct after we identify the variables with the highest predictive value. (Achterbergh *et al.*, 2020) This research looked at the link by combining findings from several

qualitative investigations. A total of fourteen studies were reviewed, all pertaining to the experiences of depressed youth. Some of the themes that have been found include: the need to connect with others, the paradoxes of loneliness and sadness, the social disengagement caused by mental health issues, and the non-disclosure of depression, which can lead to social estrangement. These findings implied that behaviors identified with depression, such as withdrawal and reluctance to share feelings, could exacerbate loneliness in a manner that fuels a cycle wherein depression keeps worsening. The study concluded that perhaps the interventions address the issues, encouraging youth to communicate their struggles to close friends, educating said friend networks on the way to provide support-as cognitive interventions could reframe negative perceptions of social interactions. (Slot *et al.*, 2020)

The study's overarching goals are to (1) determine whether there is a correlation between bullying in school and mental health issues like sadness and suicidal thoughts among students who have never been bullied, (2) identify the characteristics of bullies and their victims, and (3) examine the impact of vulnerability on these outcomes in students who are 17 years old and have been bullied at school. The SPSS version 12.0 was used for data analysis. Victimized adolescents were more likely to experience depression (29.0% versus 8.8%) and suicide thoughts (16.1% versus 3.5%) compared to non-victimized adolescents as a whole. Adolescents who had been bullied also had higher rates of depression (17.5% compared 8.8%) and suicide thoughts (15.8.1% versus 3.5%) in relationships with respondents who were not involved in the bullying. (Mr. Pranaya Rai, 2023)

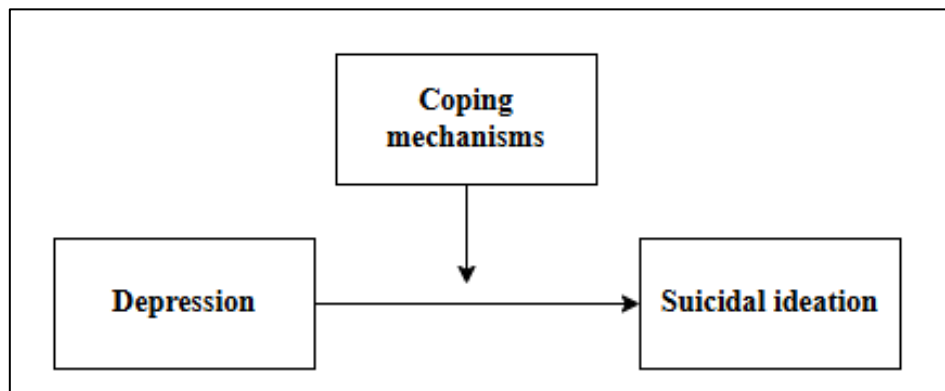
This study aimed to examine high school students for any associations between suicidal ideation and depressive symptoms. One hundred students, fifty male and fifty female, from different schools in East Sikkim were surveyed using stratified random sampling. Beck Depression Inventory-II and Beck Suicidal Ideation Scales were used to evaluate the participants. An analysis was conducted on the data set by means of descriptive statistics and correlation. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between depression and suicide thoughts. Adolescents' rates of sadness and suicidal thoughts varied significantly by gender. Findings facilitated in understanding major problems lying behind suicide and suicidal attempts, which will further help in developing interventional strategies. (Gonsalves *et al.*, 2023)

This systematic review compiled data on therapies that encourage self-disclosure as a means of helping depressed and anxious youths (14–24 years old) cope. There are a total of six studies—five quantitative and one qualitative—that combine systematic review methodologies with insights from a lived-experience panel. Though it doesn't work for preventing sadness in the first place and has no effect on anxiety, the results showed that self-disclosure can alleviate symptoms of clinical depression. Concerns about negative outcomes such as bullying were noted. Limitations include a small sample size, low representation from low- or middle-income countries, and diverse intervention formats.

### Research gap

There exists a research gap in the available literature on aspects of academic stress and other related aspects like the connection between academic stress and parent factors, mental health, etc. Although existing research is basically focused on individual parameters, there has been a complete failure to address and focus on home-related parameters like those concerning academic stress, mental health, etc. In particular and quite importantly, there has been an absolute lack of

### Conceptual framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework

### Research Objectives

- To determine how often depression and suicidal thoughts are among high school students.
- To investigate whether there is a connection between students' feelings of academic pressure, depression, and thoughts of suicide.
- To understand how adolescents mask their emotional distress (“behind the smile”).
- To identify coping mechanisms and support systems available or lacking.

research among semi-urban and rural Indian youth of the secondary school level. Depression has been the common concern, whereas the interrelation between academic stress and other parameters like home-related parameters, mental health, etc. has yet to be addressed. Most importantly and quite notably, there is an imperative need for conducting a research study that bridges the gap.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The parents and teenagers who are enrolled in school are the subjects of this research. The main objective of this study is to determine how common depression and thoughts of suicide are among school-aged teenagers. This research touches on a variety of topics, including depression, thoughts of suicide, academic pressure, and ways to cope. An organized strategy is used to methodically gather and analyze data from a representative sample of 300 respondents, ensuring statistical reliability and validity. The data in this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and factor loadings in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for data analysis.

### Sample selection and data collection

For this study, the data can be gathered from adolescents aged studying in schools. Students can be selected from various classes and schools to ensure representation of both boys and girls. The questionnaires to determine the feelings of sadness and thinking of committing suicide can be designed in such a way that they are simple and standardized. The questionnaires can be answered in schools after prior permission from the schools and from the children themselves, and the process can ensure privacy and confidentiality.

**Psychological Tools used**

**Patient Health Questionnaire-Adolescents (PHQ-A):**

The Patient Health Questionnaire-Adolescents (PHQ-A) is a self-administered screening instrument designed to evaluate the existence and intensity of depression, anxiety, eating, and substance use problems in individuals aged 11 to 17. It is an adapted form of the adult PHQ-9, extensively utilised in primary care and therapeutic environments (*PHQ-9 Modified for Adolescents*, 2002).

**Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ):**

Two popular Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) created for use in clinical studies involving teenage samples are the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ) and its junior version, the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire-Jr.11, both of which aim to catch SI at baseline and any changes in SI over time. The SIQ measures the frequency of SI in teenagers with a self-

administered questionnaire consisting of 30 items. The SIQ-Jr is a 15-item self-report measure of SI frequency in the past month, consisting of a subset of items from the original SIQ (*SUICIDAL IDEATION QUESTIONNAIRE*, n.d.).

**Measures**

The information has been collected by means of a predetermined survey. There are both open-ended and closed-ended questions on the questionnaire. The questions have been thoughtfully designed to elicit relevant data related to the research variables that have been selected. This uses a standardised scales with the items like Patient Health Questionnaire-Adolescents (PHQ-A) of 9 items and Suicidal ideation (SI) of 19 item to estimate the Unveiling Depression and Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents in school. The below mention table show variables and no. items considered for the study.

**Table 1:** variables and no. items considered for the study

S. No	Variable Name	No. Items
1	Depression	9
2	Suicidal ideation	19

- **Depression:** Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide; over 300 million people today suffer from this common disorder. Despite multiple treatment modalities available for major depressive disorder (MDD), less than 40% of patients achieve remission following the initial course of treatment (Thapar *et al.*, 2022).
- **Suicidal ideation:** Suicidal ideation is the act of contemplating suicide. These thoughts might range from fleeting notions like wanting to die to more serious ones like contemplating or plotting suicide. Though it is a significant indicator of mental suffering that calls for assistance, care, and attention, suicidal ideation does not always indicate that a person will try suicide (Ji *et al.*, 2020).

pressure affects adolescent depression and suicide ideation while examining how coping methods function. The researchers present their findings in an organized manner which satisfies their research objectives. The researchers used descriptive statistics to assess adolescent academic pressure and depression levels and their suicidal thoughts. The severity distributions of depression and suicidal thoughts were determined by the researchers using frequency and percentage analyses. Findings from Pearson's correlation analysis examined the link between depression and thoughts of suicide. A moderation study was carried out by the researchers to determine the impact of coping mechanisms on the correlation between depression and suicidal thoughts. The research findings present statistical data which enables a complete understanding of mental health challenges that teenagers face in educational environments.

**RESULTS**

**Introduction**

The research study finds its conclusion through this section which examines how academic

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics-Mean and SD

	Academic Pressure	Depression	Suicidal Ideation
<b>Mean</b>	3.719	3.757	3.734
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	0.763	0.754	0.734
<b>Total</b>	300	300	300

The data shows that academic pressure and depression and suicide ideation among 300 school teenagers show high levels of correlation with each other. The average academic pressure score of students (M = 3.719, SD = 0.763) shows that students experience high academic stress levels. The study sample displayed widespread depressive symptoms through their slightly higher average depression score (M = 3.757, SD = 0.754). The study showed that suicidal ideation among teenagers occurred at a high rate because the mean value (M = 3.734, SD = 0.734) demonstrated a

serious problem with suicidal thoughts. The three variables all displayed identical standard deviation results which demonstrate that students share these psychological experiences as common among their peer group. The research findings demonstrate how academic pressure and depression and suicide thoughts create a persistent relationship which affects students throughout their time at school, thus showing the need for complete mental health solutions that should exist within educational environments.

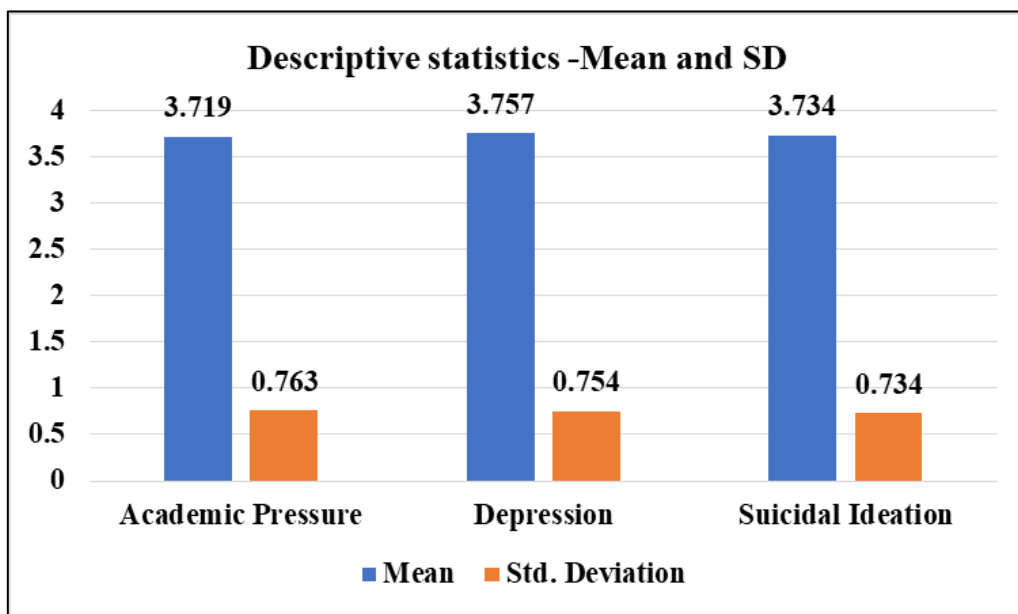


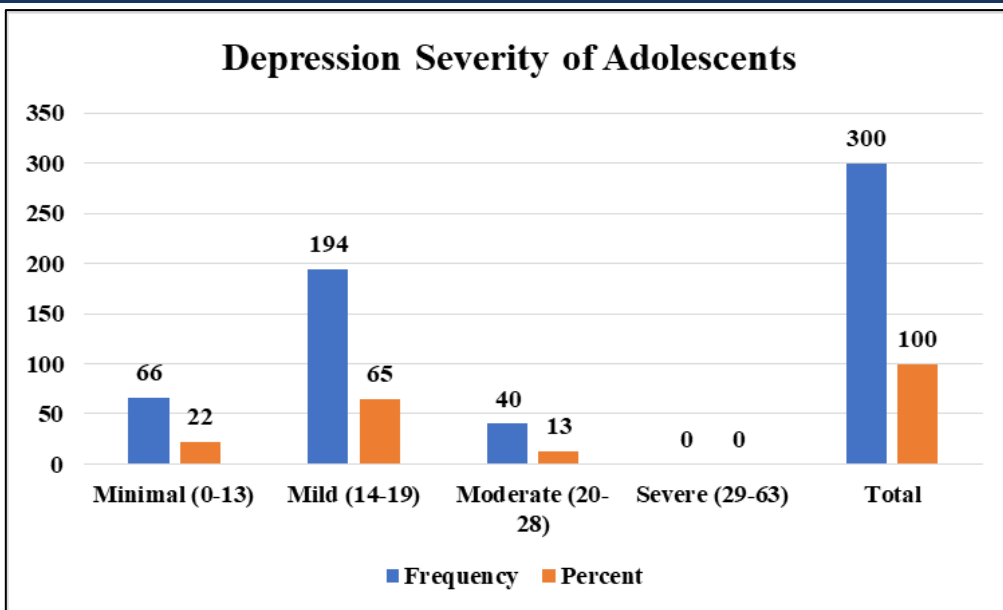
Figure 2: Descriptive statistics -Mean and SD

Table 2: Depression Severity of Adolescents

	Frequency	Percent
Minimal (0-13)	66	22
Mild (14-19)	194	65
Moderate (20-28)	40	13
Severe (29-63)	0	0
Total	300	100

The 300 school adolescents showed three different levels of depression which they displayed through their depressive symptoms. Approximately two-thirds of the participants, which represents 65% of the total sample size 194, showed mild depression symptoms that resulted in emotional distress which required professional help. The minimal depression group included 22% of the adolescents who displayed very few depressive symptoms according to their assessment results. The study recorded that 40 participants which represents 13%

of the total sample showed moderate depression symptoms which caused them to experience psychological distress that could disrupt their daily activities. The study found that all respondents 0% positioned themselves outside of the severe depression range. The study results show that most school adolescents display mild to moderate depressive symptoms which require schools to identify them early and provide preventive mental health support.



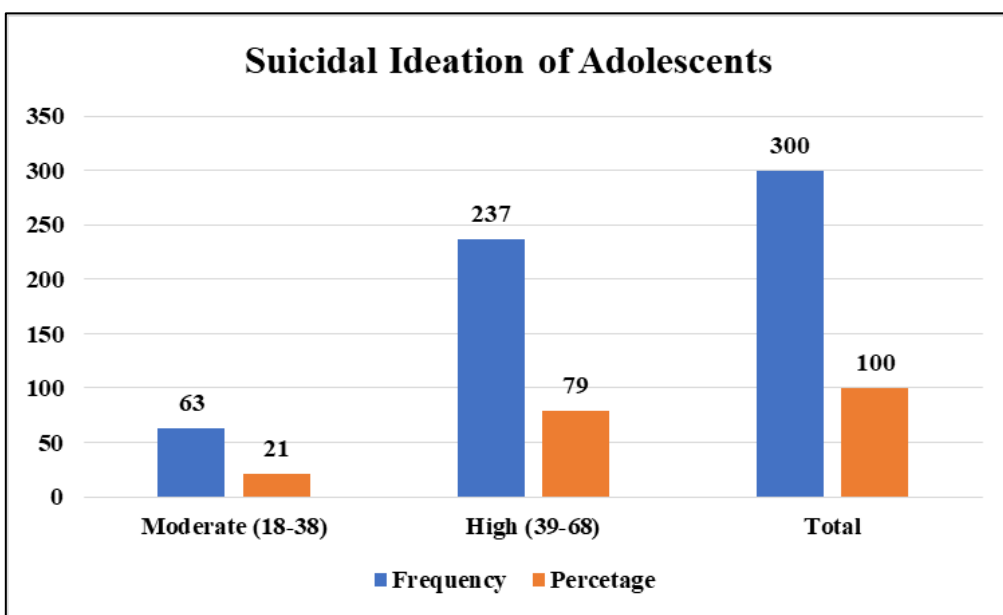
**Figure 3:** Depression Severity of Adolescents

**Table 3:** Suicidal Ideation of Adolescents

	Frequency	Percentage
Moderate (18-38)	63	21
High (39-68)	237	79
Total	300	100

The distribution of suicidal ideation levels among the 300 adolescents in school indicates a troubling trend. A predominant 79% (n = 237) of respondents showed high levels of suicidal ideation which indicated that many students experienced frequent and intense suicidal thoughts. The teenagers showed moderate levels of suicidal ideation because 21% (n = 63) exhibited substantial but less severe suicidal thoughts. The

study results showed that all study participants had suicide ideation which demonstrates that the condition is widespread among the research group. The data show that school adolescents experience suicide thoughts at high rates which demonstrates the urgent need for early detection and psychological support and school mental health programs.



**Figure 4:** Suicidal Ideation of Adolescents

**Correlation**

**Table 5:** Correlation

		<b>Suicidal scores</b>	<b>Depression</b>
<b>Suicidal scores</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	0.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.650
	N	300	300
<b>Depression</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.026	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.650	
	N	300	300

The Pearson correlation analysis investigated the association between suicidal ratings and depression in a sample of 300 school teenagers. The findings show a slight positive relationship between suicidal ratings and depression ( $r = 0.026$ ). The connection showed no statistical significance because depression levels did not show significant differences from suicidal ideation scores in the current sample ( $p = 0.650$ ). The study results show that depression alone cannot predict

suicide ideation in this population because other factors, including academic pressure and emotional masking and coping strategies and support systems, have a stronger impact on this outcome. The findings show that teenage suicide ideation consists of complex factors which require evaluation beyond simple depression measurement to understand their complete psychosocial environment.

**Moderation of Coping mechanisms**

**Table 4:** Impact of Depression on Suicidal Ideation with moderation effect of Coping mechanisms

<b>Model Summary</b>			<b>Coefficients</b>			
<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Dependent Variables</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>Depression</b>	0.673	0.452	<b>Suicidal ideation</b>	0.468	8.881	0
			<b>Coping mechanisms (Moderation Effect)</b>	0.039	1.264	0.207

The moderation analysis demonstrated that depression affects suicide thoughts among adolescent students while their coping methods operate as a moderating factor. The model showed strong explanatory capacity because it explained 45.2 percent of the variation in suicidal thoughts ( $R = 0.673$ ;  $R^2 = 0.452$ ). The study found that depression functions as a major factor which predicts suicidal thoughts among teenagers because high depression levels lead to increased suicidal thoughts ( $B = 0.468$ ,  $t = 8.881$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The study found that coping methods did not effectively reduce the relationship between depression and suicidal thoughts because the interaction between depression and coping methods showed no significant interaction ( $B = 0.039$ ,  $t = 1.264$ ,  $p = 0.207$ ). The research shows that coping methods should be considered but they fail to decrease the relationship between depression and suicide thoughts in the participants who were studied.

the adolescent student population. The descriptive analysis showed that all three categories had their average values at moderate levels which demonstrated that students experienced both academic stress and psychological discomfort as common occurrences. The distribution of depression severity showed that most adolescents displayed mild to moderate depressed symptoms which indicated early psychological vulnerability that could develop into severe mental health conditions if untreated. The educational environment contains a serious problem because many students show high levels of suicide ideation according to research findings.

The correlation analysis, contrary to prevalent beliefs, revealed no major connection between depression and suicidal thoughts which showed that teenagers experience suicidal thoughts through complex and multiple pathways. The research found that suicidal thoughts in individuals were affected by factors which extended beyond their depression condition. The moderation study showed that depression actually predicted suicidal thoughts but the coping methods did not change

**DISCUSSION**

The study results show that academic pressure and depression and suicidal thoughts exist throughout

this relationship. The study shows that teenagers use coping methods but these methods do not help them reduce suicidal thoughts which result from depression. The findings demonstrate that adolescents tend to hide their emotional distress behind a cheerful exterior and their current coping strategies do not help them handle the mental stress which comes from academic requirements.

## CONCLUSION

The current study suggests that academic pressure, depression, and suicidal ideation are prevalent and interconnected issues among school teenagers. The study found that depression functions as the main risk factor which leads to suicide ideation yet researchers discovered that teenagers who show suicidal behavior demonstrate complex patterns which need different explanations. The results show that adolescents need more than coping skills to deal with their depression because educational institutions must implement better mental health systems to protect students. The solution to these problems requires educational institutions to implement detection systems which enable timely identification of students who need counselling services and stress management programs and academic support systems. The study demonstrates that schools need to implement mental health programs which support students through systemic methods instead of teaching them individual coping skills.

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