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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Impulsivity and Suicidal Ideation among University Students

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**Abstract:** The present study examined the relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation among university students. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed, and data were collected from a sample of 400 students (100 males & 300 females) enrolled at University of Gujrat. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Impulsivity was assessed using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) (Patton et al., 1995), while suicidal ideation was measured through the Suicidal Ideation Attributes Scale (Van Spijker et al., 2014). Statistical analyses included the Pearson product-moment correlation to examine the correlation between impulsivity and suicidal ideation, and an independent samples t-test to explore gender differences in the studied variables. The findings revealed a non-significant relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation. Additionally, no significant gender differences were found in impulsivity and suicidal ideation scores. The findings contribute to the existing literature on impulsivity as potential risk factor for suicidal ideation among university students and highlight the need for further research using diverse samples and longitudinal designs based studies among students.

**Keywords:** Impulsivity, Suicidal Ideation, University Students, Gender Differences, Cross-Sectional Study

### Introduction

University students worldwide are facing number of psychological issues and increasing numbers of level of mental distress, which has become an object of intense scholarly concern. Major concerns of public health are suicidal thoughts, especially in the age group of 15-29 years, suicide is one of the most common causes of deaths in the world, and suicide is a serious mental health problem in the academic setting (Wang et al., 2014). Recent research indicates that suicidal ideation is common among university students and is instigated by an intricate combination of affective, cognitive, and behavioral risk factors. This definition has a number of characteristics that are useful for both treatment and research (Anestis et al., 2014). First of all, impulsivity is considered as a possible risk which may be considered a part of a behavior pattern. Second, impulsivity involves an instant, spontaneous action when there is not enough time to think about the consequences. This is the characteristic that distinguishes impulsivity from compulsive behavior or impaired judgment, in which the planning is done before the action. Thirdly, being impulsive is acting without taking the consequences into account ((Farzamika & Hatami, 2024; Bakhshani, 2014). A predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli without regard to the negative consequences of these reactions to the impulsive individual or to others is the definition of impulsivity (Martin et al., 2009).

In psychology, impulsivity, also known as impulsiveness, is the propensity to act impulsively, exhibiting behavior marked by little to no planning, introspection, or consideration of the repercussions (Tang et al.,

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2024). Impulsive people are incapable of considering the effects of their actions on others or themselves. Thus, the definition which considers the social factors of impulsivity should consider the fact that impulsivity often has impact on not only the impulsive individual but also on other individuals (Frijda et al., 2014). This research is done in the context of a Pakistani university, which is where there has been a gap in local empirical research, since there are few studies on Pakistani students that have focused on these variables. The results of the study should help in enhancing the current knowledge on the role of impulsivity in suicidal thoughts among university students using standardized assessment instruments and quantitative methods. The findings can be used to educate the mental health professionals, counselors and educational institutional management in the development of relevant screening, prevention and intervention programs based on student groups. Hence, the current study was designed to find the relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation among students at University of Gujrat. Further, it also explored the gender differences in impulsivity and suicidal ideation among students at University of Gujrat.

Method

Cross sectional survey research design was used to conduct the study. A simple random sample was employed in this research to select the sample size of 400 students enrolled in University of Gujrat, Hafiz Hayat Campus, Pakistan. Sample consisted predominantly of female students (n=300, 75%), while male students constituted (n=100, 25%) in the sample, indicating greater female representation. In terms of age, the majority of students fell within the 18–20 years’ age group (n=215, 53.8%), followed by those aged 21–23 years (n=157, 39.3%), whereas a relatively small proportion belonged to the 24–26 years’ age group (n=28, 7.0%). This distribution suggests that most participants were in early adulthood. Regarding educational level, an overwhelming majority were enrolled in BS programs (n=386, 96.5%), with only (n=14, 3.5%) pursuing M.Phil., reflecting primarily majority of undergraduate sample. Analysis of semester-wise distribution showed that most students were from the 5<sup>th</sup> semester (n=151, 37.8%), followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester (n=113, 28.3%) and 1<sup>st</sup> semester (n=75, 18.8%), while very few participants were enrolled in the 4<sup>th</sup> (n=1, 0.3%) and 6<sup>th</sup> (n=2, 0.5%) semesters, indicating uneven representation across academic progression. Finally, exploration of the family system revealed that n=265 (66.3%) of students belonged to a nuclear family system, whereas n=135 (33.8%) reported living in a joint family system, suggesting a predominance of nuclear family structures among the participants.

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Students (N=400)*

Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	300	75.0%
Male	100	25.0%
<b>Age in Years</b>		
18-20	215	53.8%
21-23	157	39.3%
24-26	28	7.0%
<b>Degree</b>		
BS	386	96.5%
M.Phil.	14	3.5%
<b>Semester</b>		
1st	75	18.8%
3rd	113	28.3%
4th	1	0.3%
5th	151	37.8%
6th	2	0.5%
7 <sup>th</sup>	58	14.5%
<b>Family System</b>		
Joint	135	33.8%
Nuclear	265	66.3%

Instruments

Participants were asked to fill out a demographic sheet for all the necessary and relevant information. Age, degree, semester, gender, and family system details were included in the form. The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) was developed by Patton et al. (1995) in the English language. Participants are asked to score their endorsement on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from rarely/never, occasionally, often, to almost always/always, for a total of thirty items. Three second-order constructs cover the main components of impulsiveness. The first construct is attentional impulsiveness or making quick decisions. The second construct addresses the motor impulsiveness and third construct addresses the non-planning impulsiveness or lack of forethought. The internal consistency of BIS-11 is strong 0.89. Suicidal Ideation Attributes Scale was developed by Van Spijker et al. (2014). It consists of five items, each describing a different aspect of suicidal thoughts: frequency, controllability, closeness to an attempt, level of suffering associated with the thoughts and influence on everyday functioning. Responses are scored on a ten-point basis. Items are categorized to have more intense suicidal ideation at the higher end of the total scores. The SIDAS showed great internal consistency and acceptable convergent validity.

Procedure

Firstly, the research study's topic was chosen by mutual discussion with the supervisor. The University of Gujrat's male and female students made up the study's sample. Male and female students were chosen at random from each department in the Faculty of Social Sciences once the sample size and participant proportion were determined. The aforementioned scales and demographics sheet were distributed both in person and in writing. Before the tools were administered, the students were given basic instructions and their signatures were obtained on the self-developed informed consent form. Students were asked to rate each statement on the scale that directly connects to their interests and emotions. On average, students took 10 to 15 minutes to finish the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, data were analyzed using the latest version of SPSS 29. Frequencies of demographic variables were calculated and independent sample t-test was used to analyze gender differences in impulsivity and suicidal ideation. Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyze the correlation between impulsiveness and suicidal ideation.

Results

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alpha for Studied Variables (N=400)

Variables	n	M	SD	α
Impulsivity	400	76.93	11.18	.080
Suicidal Ideation	400	13.97	8.02	.093

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates of scales of the study. Mean score of impulsivity M = 76.93 (SD = 11.18) and acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach, .080). The mean of suicidal ideation was M = 13.97 (SD = 8.02) and the internal consistency was good (Cronbach's α =.093). These results suggest that the two measures were valid to be used in the current sample.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation among Impulsivity and Suicidal Ideation among University Students (N=400)

Variables	1	2
Impulsivity	-	
Suicidal Ideation	.06	-

The correlation analysis was done through Pearson product-moment correlation to assess the relationship that exists between impulsivity and suicidal ideation (see Table 3). The analysis showed that there was weak positive non-significant relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation,  $r(398) = .06$ ,  $p = .05$ , and therefore, there was no significant relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation among university students.

**Table 4**  
*Mean Comparison of Male and Female Students on Impulsivity and Suicidal Ideation (N=400)*

Variable	Female		Male		T	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Impulsivity	77.49	11.25	75.25	10.85	1.74	.083	0.20
Suicidal Ideation	13.76	7.88	14.60	8.44	-0.90	.367	0.10

To determine the gender differences in impulsivity and suicidal ideation, independent-samples t tests were used. The findings showed that there were no significant gender differences in impulsivity ( $t(398) = 1.74$ ,  $p = .083$ ) with females ( $M = 77.49$ ,  $SD = 11.25$ ) reporting a little higher impulsivity score than males ( $M = 75.25$ ,  $SD = 10.85$ ). The difference was insignificant (Cohen  $d = 0.20$ ). Likewise, there was no significant gender difference in suicidal ideation,  $t(398) = -0.90$ ,  $p = .367$  with males having slightly higher scores of suicidal ideation ( $M = 14.60$ ,  $SD = 8.44$ ), than females ( $M = 13.76$ ,  $SD = 7.88$ ). The difference between these two effects was also not large (Cohen  $d = 0.10$ ).

**Discussion**

The current study aimed to examine the relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation in students at University of Gujrat. Moreover, the study aimed to explore the gender differences in impulsivity and suicidal ideation. Overall findings depict that the study variables have non- significant relationship with each other.

The first objective was to measure the relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation among students at the University of Gujrat. Results in the Table 3 revealed a non-significant weak positive relationship. The findings are not consistent with the previous studies. This result indicates that there is no correlation between impulsivity and suicidal ideation in a non-clinical university sample. Although previous studies have often identified impulsivity as a risk factor of suicidal ideation and behavior (Brokke et al, 2022; Jensen, 2024), the low level of correlation between the two factors in the current investigation may be due to the fact that impulsivity does not correlate with suicidal ideation, but rather is a factor that enhances this correlation. In addition, impulsivity is a multidimensional variable, and the global scores of impulsivities can mask the aspects of impulsivity that are more closely associated with suicidal risk e.g. motor or attentional impulsivity (Zhang et al., 2022; Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2020).

The second objective was to measure the difference in impulsivity across male and female students at University of Gujrat. Table 3 revealed that there is no significant difference in impulsivity among male and female students. The mean scores for females were higher than the males, but it has no statistical significance. These findings are different from the previous studies. According to Weinstein and Dannon (2015) impulsivity is becoming of great clinical interest due to its association with numerous clinical issues like delinquency, antisocial behavior, suicide attempts, aggression, and criminal behavior. The evolutionary viewpoint stated that impulsiveness is connected with self-regulation and it has been foreseen that women persons ought to have developed a higher aptitude to control pre-potent reactions. There has been supportive evidence that females have superior performance in cognitive tasks that are used to measure impulsivity including delay in gratification and delayed discounting primarily during childhood. Whereas the difference between the female and male impulsivity scores were not statistically significant and had low effect sizes, whereas the difference between the female and male suicidal ideation scores was slightly statistically

significant and had a low effect size. The result is in line with other studies, which present the little or inconsistent gender difference in impulsivity and suicidal ideation in university students (Zhou et al., 2024; Grote et al., 2024; Steinmetz et al., 2020). The lack of substantial gender differences could also indicate the decreasing gender roles and the reduction in the differences in the academic stressors between the male and female students in the tertiary level education. Additionally, the educational demand, the indecision about the future job, and the psychosocial stress may be subjected to both sexes, and this aspect may be reduced to narrow the gender differences in psychological aspects (Adasi et al., 2020). According to the previous research, gender differences in suicidal ideation are situational and influenced by sociocultural norms of expressing emotions and seeking help (Tickell, 2022; Dempsey et al., 2023).

In conclusion, there was no significant relationship between impulsivity and suicidal ideation, and no gender difference was found. The findings indicated that impulsivity might not be a potential force of suicidal ideation in this sample. More studies on various samples and longitudinal designs are advised to gain a better insight into the determinants of suicidal ideation in university students. On the whole, the research contributes to the literature covering the topic due to the complexity of suicidal ideation and the need to investigate various risk and protective variables in student samples.

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