

Press Release

Date: 8 October 2022

Subject: "Impact of Academic Pressure and Suicide Risk Among University Students Post-COVID"

Today, Saturday, October 8, 2022, we welcome all distinguished journalists, respected guests, and others to this press conference organized by the Aachol Foundation. We are here today to share the findings of a recent survey conducted by the Aachol Foundation on the topic of "The Impact of Academic Pressure on Mental Health and Suicidal Tendencies of University Students."

This virtual press conference is attended by Dr. Md. Mahmudur Rahman, President of the Bangladesh Psychological Association and retired Professor of the Department of Clinical Psychology at Dhaka University; Md. Shahnewaz Khan Chandan, Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Education and Research at Jagannath University; and Tan Sen Rose, Founder and President of Aachol Foundation.

I will present the key findings from our survey today, followed by an opportunity for you to ask any questions. The Aachol Foundation began its journey on April 25, 2019, with the aim of promoting mental health awareness, development, and helping the youth of the country adapt to various life challenges. We believe that improving mental health requires not only individual effort but also a collective approach from family, society, and the environment. Aachol Foundation has been working tirelessly to create an informed and aware generation about mental health.

To address any problem effectively, one must first have a comprehensive understanding of it. In line with this approach, the members of Aachol Foundation's Research and Analysis Unit regularly conduct surveys and research on various issues. Over the past nine months, the trend of student suicides has increased alarmingly. Between January and September of this year, 404 students took their lives. Among them, 57 were university students, 219 were school students, 44 were madrasa students, and 84 were college students. Among the victims, 242 were female students, and 162 were male students.

In response to the post-COVID surge in suicides, Aachol Foundation has conducted this survey to investigate the role of academic pressure in student suicides and to identify other contributing factors. I am Abdul Wahab, Assistant Professor at North South University and a researcher with Aachol Foundation, and I will share the significant results from our survey.

Survey Demographics

The survey included participants from 38 public universities, 47 private universities, madrasas, and national university-affiliated educational institutions, totaling 1,640 students. Of the participants, 43.9% were male and 56.1% were female. Regarding marital status, 92.74% were unmarried, 6.77% were married, and 0.49% were widowed, divorced, or separated.

In terms of university type, 67.68% were from public universities, 23.41% from private universities, 2.26% from medical colleges, 6.04% from national universities, 0.43% from technical institutes, and 0.18% from madrasas. Among the participants, 29.82% were in their first year, 23.84% were in their second year, 23.23% were in their third year, and 16.34% were in their fourth year. Additionally, 6.34% of students pursuing their master's degrees also participated in the survey.

Key Findings

Two-Thirds of Students Face Academic Pressure

According to the survey, 75.85% of students reported facing various mental and emotional issues due to academic pressure post-COVID, which affects about two-thirds of the student population. Common reasons behind these problems include session backlog due to long breaks, lack of interest in studies, disappointment with exam results, and difficulties in understanding course content.

Types of Academic Pressure

When asked about the nature of academic pressure, 46.65% of students indicated that their attention towards studies has decreased compared to before COVID. 10.30% of university students reported frequent exams, leading to difficulty in coping with the workload. 12.44% mentioned that the excess syllabus was a source of stress, and 20.73% noted that completing large courses within a short time frame was hindering their understanding of the material. Additionally, 6.71% said that academic pressure was affecting their ability to spend time with their families, contributing to mental distress.

Increased Anxiety and Fear Post-COVID

Mental health is deeply intertwined with a student's life. When asked about various mental health factors, 57.99% of students said that excessive fear and anxiety related to their own physical and mental health have impacted their lives. Furthermore, 80.79% reported changes in daily behavior, such as feeling depressed or suddenly becoming tired, which have also affected their academic lives.

Increased Digital Device Addiction

While digital devices like smartphones, laptops, and desktops have made life easier, 70.73% of students reported that excessive dependence on these devices is negatively affecting their academic life. Additionally, 71.71% of students have experienced changes in their sleep habits due to mental health issues, such as excessive sleep or insomnia, which also impact their studies.

Social Withdrawal

47.50% of students reported changes in their personalities, such as becoming quiet or introverted, which negatively impacts their academic lives. Personality changes are often considered an early sign of mental health issues, and it is essential to stay alert to students who suddenly become withdrawn.

Pressure from Parents

55.43% of students stated that excessive pressure from their parents regarding their academic performance has negatively affected their education and mental health. They feel that this undue pressure disturbs their normal lives.

77.01% of Students Overwhelmed by Academic Pressure

The survey found that 77.01% of students are deeply affected by academic pressure in the current post-COVID situation, particularly due to excessive studying during exams and finishing the syllabus in a limited time. The lack of mental relaxation between exams and academic pressure has led to various mental health issues for 67.13% of students. After long breaks, 73.84% of students reported a significant drop in their self-confidence.

Career Concerns and Uncertainty

76.6% of students expressed anxiety and uncertainty about their future careers, contributing to mental stress. Interestingly, female students (722) expressed more concern about their careers compared to male students (535).

Fear of Poor Exam Results

77.68% of students reported a fear of not performing well in exams, with many attributing this fear to a lack of focus during their studies due to a long break and decreased self-confidence.

Impact of Session Delays

63.41% of students reported experiencing session delays, with 42.56% saying they were delayed by at least one year. This has led to increased family and social pressure for 61.71% of students.

Difficulty Sharing Mental Health Issues with Teachers

74.51% of students said they do not have teachers with whom they can share their mental health problems. Only 25.49% felt comfortable sharing their problems with teachers. Those who could not share their problems with teachers experienced negative impacts on their personality and self-confidence.

Dissatisfaction with Academic Environment

53.60% of students expressed dissatisfaction with the current academic environment in their institutions, saying it was not conducive to their studies and was harming their mental well-being.

Students' Career Aspirations

38.84% of students aspire to work in government jobs, while 31.10% are interested in building a career abroad. Only 8.90% are interested in private sector jobs, and 10.06% want to create their own employment through business or freelancing.

Post-COVID Student Problems

The most significant issues faced by students post-COVID are the inability to cope with academic pressure (31.28%) and financial constraints (21.04%). Additionally, 17.44% of students are stressed about not finding a good job, and 18.42% are dealing with family-related pressures.

Suicidal Thoughts

Among the students surveyed, 2.44% (40 students) had attempted suicide, while 4.76% had tried to gather materials for suicide but backed out at the last moment. 34.15% of students had considered suicide post-COVID.

Statements and Recommendations

Tan Sen Rose, Founder and President of Aachol Foundation, emphasized, "The students of today are the future of our nation. The rise in mental health problems and suicidal tendencies among university students is undoubtedly concerning. Many of the issues they face can be resolved. We must ensure a proper academic environment, build friendly relationships with teachers, and create a supportive social atmosphere for students."

Dr. Md. Mahmudur Rahman, President of the Bangladesh Psychological Association and retired professor at Dhaka University, highlighted the rise in suicidal tendencies among students during and after COVID, citing economic insecurity, lack of mental support, and academic pressure as key factors. He stressed the need for a national suicide prevention strategy and adequate budgeting to address these issues.

Farahbi Ishrak, Team Leader of Team Awaj, stated, "Mental health is crucial for students. If we focus on practical education and career planning, it can reduce depression and suicidal tendencies among students. Families and teachers must also prioritize mental health and support students in taking care of their well-being."

Proposals for Mental Health Improvement:

1. Develop informal, friendly relationships between students and teachers.
2. Reduce excessive syllabi, complete exams on time, and eliminate session backlogs.
3. Make learning enjoyable and practical.
4. Create job-market relevant curricula instead of traditional ones.
5. Implement career counseling and alumni engagement programs.
6. Provide part-time job opportunities on campus.
7. Appoint psychologists at universities urgently.
8. Organize awareness seminars and training for

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