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SOME SPECIFICS OF MENTAL HEALTH STATUS OF INDIAN STUDENTS IN GEORGIA

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რუსუდან ვადაჭკორია, ქეთევან დევაძე, ელიზაბეტ გრეის მეთუ, ანახა სურეშ
ინდოელი სტუდენტების ფსიქიკური ჯანმრთელობის თავისებურებანი
საქართველოში სწავლის პერიოდში

ბათუმის შოთა რუსთაველის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, საბუნებისმეტყველო მეცნიერებათა და
ჯანდაცვის ფაკულტეტი, საქართველო

რეზიუმე

წარდგენილი კვლევის იდეა წამოიჭრა საქართველოში საერთაშორისო (კერძოდ, ინდოელი) სტუდენტების ფსიქიკური ჯანმრთელობის პრობლემების მზარდი გავრცელების ფონზე. ჰიპოთეზის თანახმად, საერთაშორისო სტუდენტებს შორის ხშირია დეპრესიის სხვადასხვა ფორმის გამოვლინებები და სუიციდური აზრები, რაც განსაკუთრებით მწვავედ კულტურული ადაპტაციის სირთულეებისა და აკადემიური ზეწოლის შედეგად გამოწვეული სტრესის ფონზე. კვლევის მიზანია საქართველოში მცხოვრები ინდოელი სტუდენტების ფსიქოლოგიური სიმპტომების, მათ შორის დეპრესიისა და სუიციდური აზრების გავრცელების შესწავლა და შეფასება.

კვლევის შედეგებმა გამოავლინა პრობლემების მთელი რიგი, რაც მიანიშნებს საქართველოში მცხოვრები ინდოელი სტუდენტების ფსიქიკურ ჯანმრთელობასთან დაკავშირებულ გამოწვევებზე. აღნიშნული პრობლემების იდენტიფიკაცია ხაზს უსვამს ამ სტუდენტების ფსიქოლოგიური კეთილდღეობის მხარდასაჭერი ღონისძიებების სისტემის შემუშავებისა და დანერგვის გადაუდებელ აუცილებლობას.

Introduction. In India, one-fourth of medical students are reported to experience depression and/or anxiety disorders [1]. With the growing number of Indian students pursuing education in Georgia, it is crucial to understand their psychological well-being. Cultural adaptation, academic pressures, and social isolation are key factors that can profoundly affect their mental health. This study aims to investigate the prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation among Indian students in Georgia. The findings can inform the development of targeted mental health programs tailored to the needs of this specific student population.

Literature review. This literature review explores the mental health status of Indian students in Georgia, with a particular focus on depression and suicidal ideation. It examines variations in prevalence and associated risk factors across gender, age groups, and regional contexts. Despite the growing number of Indian students pursuing higher education abroad, there is a notable lack of research addressing their mental well-being in Georgia. This review specifically highlights depression and suicide risk factors among this population.

Depression: His versus Hers. Depression can be added to the list of notable differences between men and women. According to researchers, it is the leading cause of disease burden among women. While men also experience depression, they are less likely to acknowledge, discuss, or seek help for their emotions or mental health challenges. This reluctance increases the risk of their depression symptoms being undiagnosed or overlooked [7].

Gender differences in self-reporting symptoms of depression. Females are more likely to report mild to moderate depression, whereas males tend to report severe depression and higher rates of suicide.

Three factors may explain this difference: the covariation between estrogen levels and the peak incidence of depression in females, gender differences in coping styles, and the tendency of males to exhibit emotional inexpressiveness and avoid seeking help [9].

Masculinity and help-seeking among men with depression. Research suggests that men's help-seeking behavior regarding depression is influenced by traditional masculine values, such as strength, success, independence, control, and self-sufficiency, along with a strong emphasis on emotional restraint. Depression, often linked to emotional vulnerability, is seen as "incompatible" with traditional masculinity. Some men view depression as a sign of powerlessness and lack of control, while others describe recovery as a heroic struggle that ultimately leaves them stronger [10].

Depression and Suicidal Ideation of International Students. International students may be at a higher risk of suicide compared to the general population. Research suggests that suicidal behavior and immigration are linked, due to factors such as acculturation stress, changes in social roles and socioeconomic status, discrimination, social marginalization in the host country, and feelings of isolation and loneliness [2]. However, a comprehensive review identifying effective suicide prevention strategies for international students has yet to be conducted.

Suicidal ideation of medical students. The factors most frequently associated with suicidal ideation in medical students include depression and depressive symptoms, lower socioeconomic status, a history of drug use, and dissatisfaction with academic performance. One study found that male medical students had a significantly higher prevalence of suicidal ideation compared to female medical students [3]. In a study conducted in New Delhi, India, the distribution of suicidal thinking varied across different stages of medical training, with 64.4% of first-year students reporting suicidal thoughts, followed by 56.7% of second-year students, 54.5% of fourth-year students, and 44.4% of interns. Third-year students had the lowest prevalence of suicidal ideation at 40.4%. The varying academic stress and examination pressures at different stages of training may explain these differences. Additionally, medical students who believed in God reported a significantly higher rate of suicidal ideation compared to nonbelieving students [4].

Methodology

Study Design. The study employs a nonexperimental, analytical observational design with a cross-sectional approach. Data collection was conducted from March to May 2024.

Setting and Sample. In this study, the sample consisted of Indian medical students from a public University in Batumi, Georgia. A total of 125 students were selected through purposive sampling. Participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) Indian medical students currently enrolled or graduated from the university, and (2) students who consented to participate. Fifth-year medical students were excluded from the study due to a high non-participation rate.

Data Collection. Data were collected using questionnaires completed by students via Google Forms, with an estimated completion time of approximately 15 minutes per form. The questionnaires were provided in English. Following data collection, the researcher verified the completeness of the responses. Students were approached using one of the following methods, depending on logistical considerations:

1. A subset of students was approached during working hours, where they were briefed on the purpose and nature of the study. After addressing any questions, they were invited to participate and asked to complete two self-administered questionnaires: the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and the Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R).

2. Another subset of students was contacted through electronic means. Individual messages were sent to potential participants, inviting them to take part in the study. The participant information sheet, study pro forma, and questionnaires were sent electronically.

Anonymity was maintained throughout the study to encourage accurate reporting by the students. Further details regarding the tools used are provided in the following sections.

The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) [5] was used to assess the severity of depressive symptoms among participants. This validated 9-item questionnaire measures the frequency of depressive symptoms over the past two weeks. It is a self-administered version of the PRIME-MD diagnostic instrument for common mental disorders, and while it is not a screening tool for depression, it is useful for monitoring the severity of depressive symptoms.

The Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R) [8] is a brief self-report measure assessing past suicidal behavior. It is a revision of the original 34-item SBQ developed by [6]. The SBQ-R consists of four items that allow individuals to self-report their suicidal attitudes, ideation, and history of suicide attempts, as well as the possibility of future attempts. The total score ranges from 3 to 18, with a cut-off score of 7 suggested to identify at-risk individuals, demonstrating 93% sensitivity and 95% specificity.

Result

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants. A total of 125 Indian medical students participated in the study. The sociodemographic details of the participants were included in the final analysis. The study observed a higher participation rate among female students. The majority of participants (77.6%) were in the age group of 19-22 years. First-year medical students comprised 32.8% of the sample, followed by second-year students, who contributed 31.2%.

Severity of Depression Among Students. Among the participants, 32.8% scored ≥ 15 on the PHQ-9, indicating moderately severe or severe depression. Of these, 73.1% were females and 26.8% were males, suggesting that depression is more prevalent among female students. Additionally, 16.8% of students scored ≥ 20 on the PHQ-9, indicating severe depression. A notable proportion (61.9%) of these students were first-year students.

Severity of Suicidal Behavior Among Students – Based on SBQ-R. Based on responses to the first question on the SBQ-R, 16% of students reported having planned to commit suicide at least once, with 65% of them being males. Furthermore, 16.8% of respondents had attempted suicide at some point. In terms of future risk, 58.4% of students reported that they had never experienced suicidal thoughts. However, 15.2% of students were identified as having a potential risk for future suicide attempts, with 63.1% of them being males and 47.3% being second-year students.

Discussion

Findings. Our study revealed a prevalence of approximately 32.8% depression among Indian medical students at the university, based on a cut-off score of 15 on the PHQ-9. While females exhibited higher rates of depression, males may be at greater risk for suicide, possibly due to underdiagnosed or untreated depression. The use of validated tools, such as the PHQ-9 and SBQ-R, to assess depression and suicidal ideation represents a major strength of our study.

Limitations and Future Research Directions. This study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to determine the lifetime prevalence of depression among medical students. We did not assess details regarding the duration of the illness, past episodes, or the treatment received. Additionally, no interviews were conducted to confirm the diagnosis of depressive disorders. Future longitudinal studies

that track the mental health of Indian students from the first to the final years of their medical education would offer valuable insights for planning targeted interventions.

Implications and Recommendations. This study contributes to a better understanding of the mental health challenges faced by Indian students in Georgia, a population that remains understudied. Future research could expand the sample size and further investigate the factors contributing to depression and suicidal ideation among Indian students in Georgia. Such studies would help in developing tailored mental health support programs for this group.

Conclusions. This study investigated the mental health well-being of Indian students in Georgia, with a specific focus on depression and suicidal ideation. The findings highlight a concerning prevalence of both conditions among the students. The high rates of depression emphasize the urgent need for greater awareness of mental health issues and the destigmatization of seeking help. Universities should consider developing culturally sensitive support systems tailored to the unique needs of Indian students. These systems could include access to counselors familiar with Indian cultural backgrounds and mental health perspectives. It is essential to create a supportive environment that prioritizes students' mental well-being and provides them with effective coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges of studying abroad.

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SUMMARY

Background: With the rising prevalence of mental health challenges among international students, exacerbated by cultural adaptation and academic pressures, this study examines the psychological well-being of Indian students in Georgia, with a particular focus on depression and suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis: Indian students studying in Georgia are expected to exhibit a significant prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation.

Aim: This research aims to assess the prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation among Indian students in Georgia.

Method: A total of 125 Indian students in Georgia participated in the study, completing self-administered questionnaires, including the PHQ-9 and SBQ-R, to evaluate depression severity and suicidal risk.

Results: The findings revealed that 32.8% of participants experienced moderate to severe depression, with a higher prevalence among females (73.1%). Additionally, 15.2% of participants demonstrated indications of potential future suicidal attempts, with a notably higher prevalence among males (63.1%).

Conclusion: These results highlight the concerning prevalence of mental health challenges among Indian students in Georgia. The identification of these issues underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to promote the mental well-being of this student population.

Keywords: Indian students in Georgia, Depression, Suicidal thoughts.

