A Study on Psychological Distress and Self- Harm Ideation Among Students Preparing for The Neet Examination

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I. INTRODUCTION

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is one of the most competitive medical entrance examinations in India, serving as the gateway for admission into undergraduate medical courses. Every year, millions of students aspire to secure a limited number of seats, making the preparation process highly demanding and stressful. The intense academic pressure, high expectations from family and society, and fear of failure contribute significantly to the psychological burden experienced by students preparing for NEET.

Psychological distress is a broad term that encompasses emotional suffering often characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, depression, irritability, and a sense of hopelessness. Among NEET aspirants, this distress is often amplified due to prolonged study hours, social isolation, lack of recreational activities, and constant comparison with peers. Many students enrol in coaching institutes, sometimes relocating away from home, which further disrupts their emotional support systems. Over time, this cumulative stress can negatively impact their mental well-being, academic performance, and overall quality of life.

A particularly concerning outcome of severe psychological distress is the emergence of self-harm ideation. Self-harm ideation refers to thoughts or considerations about intentionally causing harm to oneself, which may or may not lead to actual self-injurious behaviour. Among students preparing for high-stakes examinations like NEET, such thoughts may arise as a coping mechanism for overwhelming stress, perceived failure, or feelings of inadequacy. The stigma surrounding mental health issues in many societies often prevents students from seeking timely help, thereby increasing their vulnerability.

The competitive nature of NEET not only tests students' academic abilities but also places a significant strain on their emotional resilience. Factors such as repeated attempts at the exam, fear of disappointing parents, financial investment in coaching, and uncertainty about the future further intensify psychological distress. In some cases, students may internalize failure, leading to diminished self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness, which are closely associated with self-harm ideation.

Understanding the relationship between psychological distress and self-harm ideation among NEET aspirants is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies. Identifying the key stressors and psychological patterns can help educators, parents, and mental health professionals create supportive environments that promote emotional well-being.

This study aims to explore the extent of psychological distress experienced by students preparing for NEET and examine its association with self-harm ideation. By shedding light on these critical issues, the research seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on student mental health and emphasize the need for integrating psychological support systems within the academic framework.

The Increasing incidence of student suicides in India, particularly among those preparing for competitive examinations like NEET, highlights a critical intersection between mental health and forensic

investigation. In cases of attempted or completed suicide, forensic experts play a vital role in assessing the manner of injury or death, distinguishing between suicidal, accidental, or homicidal causes. This involves examination of injury patterns, scene of occurrence, psychological history, and circumstantial evidence, often supplemented by autopsy findings in fatal cases.

The concept of psychological autopsy becomes highly relevant in such contexts. Psychological autopsy is a forensic investigative tool used to reconstruct the mental state of an individual prior to death by analyzing personal, social, and psychological factors. In cases involving students, this may include academic performance records, history of stress or mental illness, communication patterns (such as suicide notes or digital messages), and testimonies from family, peers, and teachers. Such analyses help in understanding whether psychological distress and self-harm ideation contributed significantly to the act.

In addition, the role of digital forensics has become increasingly significant. With the widespread use of smartphones and social media, students often express their emotional distress through online platforms. Analysis of digital footprints, including messages, search history, and social media activity, can provide valuable insights into the psychological condition and intent of the individual. This information may serve as corroborative evidence in forensic investigations.

Psychological distress among NEET aspirants has emerged as a growing concern, characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and feelings of inadequacy. This distress does not arise in isolation but is influenced by multiple stressors, including rigorous academic schedules, repeated attempts at the examination, fear of failure, financial burdens associated with coaching, and constant comparison with peers. Additionally, relocation for coaching purposes often leads to social isolation and reduced familial support, further aggravating emotional vulnerability.

An important dimension of this issue is the coping mechanisms adopted by students to deal with stress. While some students develop adaptive strategies such as time management, seeking social support, and engaging in relaxation techniques, others may resort to maladaptive coping methods, including withdrawal, denial, or substance use. Ineffective coping increases the risk of worsening psychological distress and may contribute to the development of self-harm ideation.

Self-harm ideation, defined as thoughts or intentions to deliberately harm oneself, represents a serious mental health concern and a potential precursor to suicidal behaviour. Among NEET aspirants, such ideation may stem from persistent academic pressure, perceived failure, low self-esteem, and lack of emotional support. The presence of warning signs such as behavioural changes, social withdrawal, expressions of hopelessness, and declining academic performance requires timely identification and intervention. However, due to stigma and lack of awareness, many students do not seek professional help, thereby increasing the risk of severe outcomes.

Awareness and accessibility of mental health support services play a crucial role in mitigating psychological distress. Despite the availability of counselling services in some coaching institutes and educational settings, their utilization remains limited due to stigma, lack of awareness, or fear of judgment. Strengthening these support systems and encouraging help seeking behaviour are essential steps in promoting student well-being.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Review of Literature is a systematic summary and analysis of previously published research studies, books and scholarly articles related to a specific topic. It is a critical evaluation and synthesis of existing research work relevant to the research problem.

The study by Kumar Kar Sujitha, Rai Sagar, and Singh Amit (2020) on titled “Student Suicide

Linked to NEET Examination in India: A Media Report Analysis Study” takes a closer look at a deeply concerning issue affecting many students in India. By examining media reports of suicide cases among NEET aspirants, the authors bring out the emotional struggles that often remain hidden behind academic preparation. The study shows that many students face overwhelming pressure due to the highly competitive nature of the exam, where success is often seen as the only acceptable outcome. This pressure is not just academic but also comes from parents, society, and the students’ own expectations, making failure feel unbearable for some. The fear of not succeeding, especially after repeated attempts, can lead to feelings of hopelessness, low self-worth, and severe

psychological distress. What makes the situation more difficult is the lack of proper emotional support and the hesitation many students feel in seeking help due to stigma around mental health. The study ultimately highlights that these tragic incidents are not just about exams, but about the emotional burden students carry, pointing to the urgent need for a more supportive and understanding environment that prioritizes students' mental wellbeing alongside academic success.

The study by et al. Deb (2015) on titled "Academic Stress, Parental Pressure, Anxiety and Mental Health among Indian High School Students" provides a detailed examination of how academic demands affect students' psychological well-being in the Indian context. The researchers conducted the study among high school students to assess the levels of stress they experience and how it relates to their mental health. The findings revealed that a large proportion of students reported moderate to high levels of academic stress, mainly due to heavy workloads, frequent examinations, and the pressure to achieve high grades. One of the key aspects highlighted in the study is the significant role of parental pressure, where students felt a strong obligation to meet their parents' expectations, often leading to increased anxiety and emotional strain. The study further found a clear association between academic stress and mental health problems such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced psychological wellbeing. Students who reported higher stress levels were more likely to experience feelings of nervousness, sadness, and lack of concentration. Additionally, the research pointed out that many students lacked effective coping strategies and emotional support systems, which made it difficult for them to manage stress in a healthy way. The authors also emphasized that prolonged exposure to such stress can harm students' self-esteem, academic performance, and overall development. Overall, the study underscores the need for interventions such as stress management programs, parental awareness, and school-based counselling services to support students' mental health and reduce the negative impact of academic pressure.

The study by et al. Verma (2021) on titled "Academic Stress and Mental Wellbeing among NEET and JEE Aspirants" explains that students preparing for competitive exams like NEET and JEE go through very high levels of stress because of intense competition and constant pressure to perform well. The study shows that many aspirants spend long hours studying, often with very little rest, which leads to both physical and emotional exhaustion. This continuous pressure makes students feel tired, frustrated, and mentally drained over time. The research also highlights that the fear of failure and the need to secure a good rank create a constant sense of anxiety among students. As the competition increases, students begin to doubt their abilities, and their confidence starts to decrease. This affects their coping skills, meaning they find it harder to handle stress in a healthy way. Instead of managing pressure effectively, many students feel overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted. Another important point discussed in the study is that many aspirants stay away from social activities and isolate themselves to focus on studies, which reduces their emotional support system. Without proper breaks, relaxation, or someone to talk to, their stress keeps building up. Over time, this can lead to serious mental health issues like anxiety, burnout, and emotional distress. Overall, the study emphasizes that while academic success is important, students' mental health should not be ignored. It suggests the need for better time management, regular breaks, emotional support, and counselling services to help students cope with stress and maintain a healthy balance between studies and well-being.

The study by Singh and Jha (2013) on titled "Anxiety, Optimism and Academic Stress among Students" explains that adolescents who experience high levels of academic stress often struggle with their self-esteem and overall mental health. The study found that when students are constantly under pressure to perform well in exams, complete assignments, and meet expectations, they start doubting their own abilities. This leads to low self-confidence and a negative self-image, where students feel they are not "good enough." The research also shows that increased academic stress is closely linked to higher levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, sadness, and emotional instability. Students who are unable to cope with this stress may begin to feel overwhelmed and mentally exhausted. Over time, these negative feelings can turn into persistent negative thoughts, such as hopelessness or feeling like a burden. Another important point highlighted in the study is that students with lower self-esteem and poor coping skills are more vulnerable to harmful thoughts, including self-harm ideation. When they do not receive proper

emotional support from family, teachers, or peers, their situation can worsen. The study emphasizes that a lack of encouragement and understanding can make students feel isolated and unsupported. Overall, the study suggests that reducing academic pressure, building students' confidence, and providing emotional support are very important. It highlights the need for schools and families to create a positive and supportive environment where students feel valued, which can help reduce psychological distress and prevent negative thoughts.

The study by Kumar and Akoijam (2017) on titled "Suicidal Ideation among Students: The Role of Academic Stress and Coping Strategies" focuses on how academic pressure can influence students' mental health, especially in terms of developing self-harm thoughts. The study explains that students who face constant stress due to exams, high expectations, and the need to perform well often feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained. When this stress continues for a long time, it can lead to anxiety, frustration, and a sense of hopelessness. The researchers found that one of the most important factors is how students deal with stress. Students who do not have healthy coping strategies such as talking to someone, taking breaks, or managing their time are more likely to struggle mentally. Instead of handling stress in a positive way, they may start overthinking, feeling helpless, or blaming themselves for not meeting expectations. This increases the chances of developing negative thoughts, including suicidal ideation. The study also highlights the importance of emotional and social support. Students who have supportive parents, friends, or teachers are better able to manage stress and feel less alone. On the other hand, students who feel isolated or unsupported are more vulnerable to psychological distress and self-harm thoughts. The research clearly shows that academic stress alone is not the only problem—it becomes more dangerous when combined with poor coping skills and lack of support. Overall, the study emphasizes that helping students learn healthy coping mechanisms and providing them with proper emotional support can play a major role in reducing psychological distress and preventing self-harm ideation, especially among those preparing for competitive examinations.

The study by Yadav and Srivastava (2020) on titled "Correlational Study of Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation among Students" focuses directly on students preparing for competitive exams like NEET and IIT in Kota, which is known for its intense coaching environment. The researchers conducted the study on 200 students, including both NEET and IIT aspirants, to understand how academic stress is connected to suicidal thoughts. The study found that almost all students experience high levels of academic stress, mainly due to constant studying, competition, and the pressure to secure a good rank. Interestingly, the study showed that stress levels were almost the same for both NEET and IIT aspirants, which means that no matter the exam, the pressure is equally intense. However, when it comes to suicidal ideation (self-harm thoughts), there was a noticeable difference among students, showing that stress does not affect everyone in the same way. Some students are able to handle pressure better, while others become more emotionally vulnerable. The study also explains the main reasons behind this stress. These include parental pressure, competitive atmosphere, personal relationship issues, and even lifestyle problems like lack of rest or unhealthy habits. All these factors together increase emotional burden on students. The most important finding of the study is that there is a strong relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation. This means that as stress increases, the chances of students developing negative or self-harm thoughts also increase. The study clearly shows that competitive exam environments can become mentally exhausting and even dangerous if students do not get proper support.

The study by Khan and Qasim (2025) on titled "An Exploration of Academic Stress among NEET & JEE Aspirants" focuses on understanding how much stress students go through while preparing for highly competitive exams like NEET and JEE. The study shows that most students preparing for these exams experience very high levels of stress on a daily basis, mainly because of the intense competition and constant pressure to perform well. According to the study, students spend long hours studying, often with very little rest, which slowly leads to both physical tiredness and mental exhaustion. Over time, this continuous pressure makes students feel overwhelmed, anxious, and emotionally drained. Many students also start worrying constantly about their future, rank, and whether they will succeed or not. This fear of failure becomes one of the biggest sources of stress. The study also explains that even

though students come from different backgrounds, the level of stress is quite similar for most of them. This means that the stress is not mainly because of personal differences, but because of the nature of the competitive exam system itself. The pressure to score high marks, secure a seat, and meet expectations from parents and society creates a stressful environment for almost everyone. Another important point highlighted in the study is that many students start comparing themselves with others, especially in coaching centres or test series. This comparison lowers their confidence and increases self-doubt. As a result, students may feel like they are not good enough, even if they are working hard. This can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and emotional distress. The study also points out that many students reduce social interaction, hobbies, and relaxation time to focus only on studies. Because of this, they lose emotional support and healthy ways to relieve stress. Without proper breaks or someone to talk to, their stress keeps building up, which can become harmful for their mental health.

The study by Shah and Vaidya (2025) on titled "Suicide Ideation, Achievement Motivation and Academic Procrastination among JEE and NEET Aspirants" looks at how students' study habits, motivation, and stress levels are connected to their mental health, especially suicidal thoughts. The study focuses on students preparing for highly competitive exams like NEET and JEE, where the pressure to succeed is very high. The study found that many students experience stress not just because of exams, but also because of their own behaviour, especially procrastination, which means delaying or avoiding studies. When students keep postponing their work, they start feeling guilty and anxious as exams come closer. This creates a cycle students delay work, then feel stressed, then become more anxious, and again find it hard to focus. Over time, this cycle increases emotional pressure and mental exhaustion. Another important finding is about achievement motivation, which means how strongly a student wants to succeed. The study shows that students with low motivation or those who feel they are not capable of achieving success often develop more negative thoughts. They may start comparing themselves with others and feel like they are falling behind, which lowers their confidence and increases stress. The study also highlights that the long preparation period for exams like NEET and JEE can make students feel mentally tired and emotionally drained. Many students feel constant pressure to perform well, and when they think they are not doing enough, it creates feelings of guilt, self-doubt, and frustration. These emotions, when they build up over time, can lead to negative thinking patterns and even suicidal ideation. Another key point is that students often isolate themselves during preparation, focusing only on studies and cutting off from friends, hobbies, and relaxation. This lack of balance and emotional support makes it harder for them to deal with stress in a healthy way. Overall, the study shows that it is not just academic pressure, but also factors like low motivation, procrastination, and negative thinking that increase the risk of psychological distress and self-harm ideation among NEET and JEE aspirants. It suggests that students need better time management, motivation support, and emotional guidance to handle stress and avoid harmful thoughts.

The study by Das and Mathew (2024) on titled "Student Stress and Suicidal Ideation in College Students" explains how stress in students' lives is closely connected to the development of suicidal thoughts. The study found that many students experience high levels of stress due to academic workload, exams, and personal life challenges. As this stress increases, students often begin to feel mentally exhausted, emotionally unstable, and overwhelmed. The research clearly shows that there is a strong positive relationship between stress and suicidal ideation, meaning that higher stress levels can increase the chances of students developing self-harm thoughts. The study also highlights that stress does not come from just one source but from multiple areas such as studies, family expectations, and life pressures. When all these factors combine, students may feel helpless, lose confidence, and struggle to cope with their emotions. Another important point is that students who do not have proper support systems or healthy coping strategies are more vulnerable to negative thinking and emotional breakdowns. The study emphasizes that without timely support and stress management, these feelings can become serious and lead to harmful thoughts. Overall, the study shows the importance of reducing stress, improving coping skills, and providing emotional support to protect students' mental health and prevent self-harm ideation.

The study by et al. Reddy (2018) on titled "Academic Stress and Mental Health among Students Preparing for Competitive Examinations" looks closely at how students preparing for exams like NEET and JEE are affected mentally and emotionally by the pressure of competition. The study explains that these students usually follow very tight and demanding study schedules, often studying for long hours with very little time for rest, hobbies, or social interaction. Because of this, they slowly start feeling physically tired and mentally exhausted. The study found that one of the biggest causes of stress is the fear of failure. Students constantly worry about whether they will get a good rank or even clear the exam, and this continuous thinking creates anxiety. Along with this, there is also pressure from parents, teachers, and society, which makes students feel that their entire future depends on this one exam. This kind of thinking increases emotional burden and makes even small setbacks feel very serious. Another important point highlighted in the study is comparison with others. In coaching centres and test series, students often compare their marks and performance with peers. When they see others doing better, they may feel inferior or start doubting their own abilities. This leads to low self-confidence, negative self-image, and increased stress. The study also explains that many students stop taking care of their basic needs like proper sleep, healthy food, and relaxation because they are fully focused on studies. Over time, this imbalance affects both their physical and mental health. Students may experience symptoms like irritability, lack of concentration, mood swings, and emotional breakdowns. Most importantly, the study shows that when this stress continues for a long time without proper support, it can turn into serious psychological distress, including anxiety and depression. In some cases, students may start feeling hopeless or think that they are not capable, which can lead to negative thoughts and even self-harm ideation. Overall, the study clearly highlights that competitive exam preparation is not just academically challenging but also mentally exhausting. It suggests that students need proper time management, regular breaks, emotional support, and access to counselling services to manage stress in a healthy way and protect their mental well-being.

There are many studies on academic stress among students and NEET aspirants, but very few have focused on the relationship between psychological distress and self-harm ideation. Also, limited research has been conducted in Mangaluru city on this topic. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out, including the methods used to collect data, the tools used, and the steps followed to analyze the information. It is necessary because it makes the research clear, organized, and reliable, helping others understand how the results were obtained and ensuring that the findings are based on proper and systematic methods.

3.1 Need for the study

The need for this study arises because students preparing for competitive exams like NEET face high levels of academic pressure, which can seriously affect their mental health. Many students experience stress, anxiety, and emotional distress due to fear of failure, parental expectations, and intense competition. In some cases, this distress can lead to harmful thoughts such as self-harm ideation. However, these issues are often ignored or not properly addressed. Therefore, this study is important to understand the level of psychological distress among NEET aspirants and its connection with self-harm thoughts, so that proper support, awareness, and interventions can be developed to improve students' mental wellbeing.

3.2 Aim

The aim of the study is to understand the level of psychological distress among students preparing for the NEET examination and to examine its relationship with self-harm ideation.

3.3 Objectives

- To assess the level of psychological distress among students preparing for the NEET examination.
- To evaluate the prevalence of self-harm ideation among NEET aspirants and identify associated psychological factors.
- To examine the relationship between psychological distress and self-harm ideation among students preparing for NEET.

3.4 Research question

1)what is the prevalence of self-harm ideation among NEET aspirants?

2)what psychological factors are associated with self-harm ideation among students preparing for NEET?

3.5 Research design

Research design is the overall plan or structure of a study that explains how the research will be conducted. It includes the methods used to collect data, the way the study is organized, and how the information will be analyzed. In simple words, it is like a blueprint that guides the researcher on what to do, how to do it, and how to get accurate results.

This study will adopt empirical and quantitative research design. A structured questionnaire is used as the tool for data collection, which includes close-ended questions to obtain measurable responses. This method allows the researcher to gather data from a large number of participants in a systematic way. The collected data is then analyzed using statistical methods.

3.6 Universe, Sample and Sampling technique

The universe of the study will consist of students preparing for the NEET examination in Mangaluru city, Karnataka. The sample for the study includes 100 students who are eligible and are currently preparing for the NEET examination will be selected using purposive sampling technique, based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

3.7 Tool of Data collection and Procedure

The study titled “A Study on Psychological Distress and Self-Harm Ideation Among Students Preparing for the NEET Examination” will involve 100 students from colleges in Mangaluru city. The tool used for data collection in this study will be questionnaire. The purpose of the study will be explained to the participants, and their consent will be taken before collecting the data. The participants will be asked to respond honestly, and confidentiality will be maintained. After collecting the responses, the data will be organized and prepared for analysis.

3.8 Inclusive and Exclusive Criteria

Inclusion criteria: Includes students who are preparing for NEET exam within Mangaluru city and who are willing to participate. Students who fall within the age group of approximately 16 to 25 years are included. Only those who are actively enrolled in coaching institutes or self-preparing for NEET are considered.

Exclusion criteria: Excludes students who are not preparing for the NEET examination and those who are unwilling or unable to participate.

3.9 Procedure

The procedure of the study involved collecting data from 100 students who are preparing for the NEET examination in Mangaluru city. First, the researcher will identify and will approach the students through colleges and coaching centres.

The purpose of the study will be clearly explained to them, and their consent will be taken before participation. The researcher assured the participants that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. A structured questionnaire will be distributed to the students, and they will be given clear instructions on how to fill it. They will be asked to respond honestly based on their feelings and experiences. Sufficient time will be provided to complete the questionnaire without any pressure. After completion, the questionnaires will be collected, checked for completeness, and organized properly.

3.10 Data coding, presentation and analysis

Data coding is the process of converting the responses collected from the questionnaire into numerical form so that it becomes easy to analyze.

The submitted questionnaires by the respondents were checked for discrepancies and the data from completely filled questionnaire was used for analysis. The obtained data was classified in code book in Microsoft Excel software.

Data presentation is the process of organizing and displaying the collected data in a clear and understandable form. In this study, the data can be presented using Bi-variate tables.

Data analysis is the process of examining and interpreting the collected data to find meaningful results.

In this study, the responses obtained from the questionnaire are coded and analyzed using simple statistical methods.

3.11 Report Design

A report design is the structure of written record of research describing various aspects of the project.

The research report will include the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter includes the background of the study, need for the study, aim, objectives, and significance of the research.

The introduction section of this report presents an overview of the research topic, focusing on psychological distress and self-harm ideation among students preparing for the NEET examination. It explains the background and significance of the study, highlighting the increasing academic pressure faced by students and its impact on their mental health. This section also outlines the purpose of the study, key concepts, and the need to examine these issues in order to promote awareness and support for students' well-being.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter provides the previous researches, theories and concept related to the study.

The review of literature section presents an overview of existing studies and research related to psychological distress and self-harm ideation among students, particularly those preparing for competitive examinations like NEET. It highlights key findings on factors such as academic pressure, parental expectations, anxiety, and coping mechanisms. This section helps in understanding what has already been studied, identifies gaps in the existing research, and provides a theoretical foundation for the present study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains the research design, universe, sample, sampling method, tools of data collection, procedure, inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The methodology section describes the systematic approach used to conduct the study. It includes the research design, which is quantitative and survey-based, along with details about the sample of students preparing for the NEET examination. It also explains the sampling technique, tools used for data collection such as standardized questionnaires, and the procedure followed to gather data. This section ensures that the study is conducted in a structured, reliable, and ethical manner.

Chapter 4: Data coding, Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents the collected data using tables, charts, and graphs, along with interpretation of the results.

The data coding, analysis, and interpretation section explains how the collected data is organized, processed, and examined. Responses from participants are coded into numerical form to make analysis easier. Statistical methods are then used to analyze the data and identify patterns, relationships, and levels of psychological distress and self-harm ideation among students. The findings are interpreted in a meaningful way to draw conclusions and understand the overall impact of academic pressure on students' mental well-being.

Chapter 5: Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the major findings of the study and concludes the study.

The findings, suggestions, and conclusion section presents the key results of the study based on data analysis. It highlights the major patterns and insights related to psychological distress and self-harm ideation among students preparing for the NEET examination. Based on these findings, practical suggestions are provided to help reduce stress and improve students' mental well-being. The section concludes by summarizing the overall outcomes of the study and emphasizing the importance of timely support and effective interventions.

3.12 Limitations

- The study is limited to a specific group of students (students who are in Mangaluru city), so the findings may not represent all NEET aspirants.
- It relies on self-reported data, which may be affected by honesty, fear of judgment, or misunderstanding of questions.
- Since the topic is psychological distress so some participants may hesitate to share accurate responses.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis and interpretation refer to the process of examining and understanding the data collected in a study. Data analysis involves organizing, coding, and applying statistical techniques such as percentages,

averages, and charts to identify patterns and relationships. Data interpretation involves explaining the meaning of these results in relation to the research objectives. Together, they help in drawing meaningful conclusions and understanding what the findings reveal about the problem being studied

4.1 Data Coding

Table 4.1.1 The responses obtained through the Linkert scale:

Response	Score
Strongly Agree	1
Agree	2
Neutral	3
Disagree	4
Strongly Disagree	5

Table 4.1.2: Level of psychological distress among students preparing for the NEET examination with regard to their age

Respondents based on age group	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
15-20	6.7%	13.3%	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%	60.0%
21-25	3.3%	16.7%	16.7%	10.3%	3.3%	40.0%
Total	10.0%	30.0%	36.7%	20.0%	13.3%	100%

The data shown in the table no.4.1.2 is with regard to the level of psychological distress among students preparing for the NEET examination. With regard to the age of the respondents ,7 students fall under the category of 15-20 years of age and 3 students falls under the category of 21-25 years of age.

The data with regard to the stress level of the NEET aspirants indicates that 36.7% of the respondents expressed that they have Neutral level of stress followed by

30.0%of the respondents stated they agree that they have stress followed by 20.0% of the respondents disagrees that they have that high level of stress followed by 13.3% of the respondents strongly disagree that they have stress and

10.0% of the respondent strongly agree that they have stress.

The cross related data with regard to the age of the respondents and their stress level indicates that out of 60.0% of the students who falls under the age group of 15-20 ,20.0% of them stated that they have neutral level of stress followed by 13.3% of the respondents stated that they agree that they have stress. Followed by 10.0% of each respondent stated that they disagree as well as strongly disagree that they have stress respectively and 6.7% of them stated that they strongly agree that they have stress.

The cross related data with regard to the age of the respondents and their stress level indicates that out of 40.0% of the students who falls under the age group of 21-25 ,16.7% of each respondents stated that they have neutral as well as agree that they have a level of stress followed by 10.3% of the respondents stated that they disagree that they have stress and 3.3% of each respondent stated that they agree as well as strongly disagree that they have stress respectively.

The present study signifies that 36.7% of the respondents neutrally agree that they have stress and 10.0% strongly agree that they have stress.

Table 4.1.3 Age group and psychological factors

Respondents based on age group	Psychological factors					
	Anxiety	Depression	Stress	Sleep disturbance	Self-esteem	Total
15-20	10.3%	13.3%	16.7%	10.0%	10.0%	60.0%
21-25	10.0%	16.7%	20.0%	3.3%	0.0%	40.0%
Total	20.0%	30.0%	36.7%	13.3%	10.0%	100%

The data shown in the table no.4.1.3 is with regard to the psychological factors among students preparing for the NEET examination. With regard to the age of the respondents 7 students falls under the category of

15-20 years of age and 3 students falls under the category of 21-25 years of age.

The data with regard to the psychological factors of the NEET aspirants indicates that 36.7% of the respondents expressed that they have stress related problems followed by 30.0% of the respondents stated that they have depression followed by 20.0% of the respondents stated they have anxiety followed by 13.3% of the respondents stated that they have sleep disturbance and 10.0% of the respondents have low self-esteem.

The cross related data with regard to the age of the respondents and their psychological factors indicates that out of 60.0% of the students who falls under the age group of 15-20 ,16.7% of them stated that they have stress followed by 13.3% of the respondents stated that they have depression. Followed by 10.3% of respondent stated that they have anxiety and 10.0% of each respondents stated have sleep disturbance as well as self-esteem respectively.

The cross related data with regard to the age of the respondents and their psychological factor indicates that out of 40.0% of the students who falls under the age group of 21-25 ,20.0% of respondents stated that they have stress followed by 16.7% of the respondents stated that they have depression and 10.0% have anxiety followed by 3.3% have sleep disturbance.

The present study signifies that 36.7% of the respondents agree that they have stress and 10.0% agree that they have self-esteem.

Table 4.1.4: Age group and emotional well-being

Respondents based on age group	Emotional well-being					
	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Total
15-20	10.3%	16.7%	16.7%	10.0%	6.7%	60.0%
21-25	6.7%	13.3%	13.3%	3.3%	3.4%	40.0%
Total	16.7%	30.0%	30.0%	13.3%	10.0%	100%

The data shown in the table no.4.1.4 is with regard to the age group and emotional well-being among students preparing for the NEET examination. With regard to the age of the respondents 7 students falls under the category of 15-20 years of age and 3 students falls under the category of 21-25 years of age.

The data with regard to the emotional well-being of the NEET aspirants indicates that 30.0% of each respondents stated that their emotional well-being is average as well as good. followed by 16.7% of the respondents stated that their emotional well-being is good. followed by1 3.3% of the respondents stated they their emotional well-being is poor and 10.0% of the respondents stated that they have very poor emotional well-being.

The cross related data with regard to the age of the respondents and their emotional well-being indicates that out of 60.0% of the students who falls under the age group of 15-20 ,16.7% of each respondents stated that their emotional well-being is average as well as good. Followed by 10.3% of respondent stated that their emotional well -being is very good. Followed by 10.0% of each respondents stated that they have poor emotional well-being and 6.7% stated that they have very poor emotional well-being

The cross related data with regard to the age of the respondents and their emotional indicates that out of 40.0% of the students who falls under the age group of 21-25 ,13.3% of each respondents stated that their emotional well-being is average as well as good followed by 6.7% of the respondents stated that they have very good emotional well-being. Followed by 3.4% have stated that they have very poor emotional wellbeing and 3.3% of the respondents expressed that they have poor emotional wellbeing.

The present study signifies that 30.0% of each of the respondents good and average score towards emotional well-being respectively.

V. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Major findings in research refer to the main results or key outcomes that are obtained after analyzing the collected data. They represent the most important information discovered through the study and help in understanding what the research has revealed. In simple terms, major findings answer the question of what the study has found, including patterns, relationships, and significant observations related to the research topic. These findings form the basis for drawing conclusions and making suggestions.

This study has few findings which are given below:

- A large number of NEET aspirants were found to experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress, mainly due to continuous academic pressure and competitive environment.
- Fear of failure and high expectations from parents and society were identified as major factors contributing to stress and emotional strain among students.
- Students who spent long hours studying with less rest and relaxation reported higher levels of anxiety, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion.
- It was observed that some students experience negative thoughts, especially when they feel overwhelmed or unable to meet expectations.
- A positive relationship was found between psychological distress and self-harm ideation, indicating that higher stress levels are associated with increased risk of harmful thoughts.
- Students with low self-confidence and poor coping skills were more vulnerable to psychological distress and negative thinking patterns.
- Lack of emotional support from family, friends, or teachers made it difficult for students to manage stress effectively.
- Continuous stress and pressure were found to affect students' mental well-being, concentration, and overall emotional stability.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

- Students should be encouraged to maintain a balanced routine, including proper study time, rest, and relaxation to reduce stress.
- Counselling services and mental health support should be made available in schools and coaching centres for NEET aspirants.
- Parents should provide emotional support and understanding, instead of putting excessive pressure on students.
- Students should be taught healthy coping strategies like time management, mindfulness, and stress management techniques.
- Regular breaks, physical activity, and hobbies should be encouraged to improve mental well-being.
- Awareness programs should be conducted to reduce stigma around mental health and encourage students to seek help when needed.
- Teachers and coaching institutes should create a supportive and less stressful learning environment.
- Early identification of students showing signs of high stress or emotional distress should be done to provide timely help.
- students should be encouraged to set realistic goals instead of putting too much pressure on themselves to achieve perfection.
- Coaching centres can include regular stress management sessions or workshops to help students handle exam pressure.
- Peer support groups can be created so students can share their feelings and support each other.
- Students should be guided to limit unhealthy comparisons with others, which can reduce self-doubt and anxiety.
- Proper sleep and healthy lifestyle habits should be promoted to maintain both physical and mental health.
- Parents and teachers should be trained to recognize early signs of distress, such as withdrawal, sadness, or loss of interest.
- Students should be encouraged to seek help without fear or hesitation when they feel emotionally overwhelmed.
- Educational institutions can introduce mental health awareness programs as a regular part of student development.
- Use of technology and social media should be balanced, as excessive use can increase stress and distraction.

VII. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that students preparing for the NEET examination experience significant levels of psychological distress due to intense competition, academic pressure, and high expectations. The findings show that when this stress is not managed properly, it can negatively affect students' mental health and may lead to harmful thoughts, including self-harm ideation. The study also reveals that factors such as lack of emotional support,

poor coping skills, and continuous pressure increase students' vulnerability to distress.

The study also highlights that when psychological distress continues for a long time without proper support, it can lead to serious negative outcomes, including self-harm ideation. A clear relationship was found between higher levels of stress and increased chances of harmful thoughts, showing the importance of addressing students' mental health at an early stage. Furthermore, the findings indicate that lack of proper coping strategies, limited emotional support, and unhealthy study patterns make students more vulnerable to stress and negative thinking. On the other hand, students who receive support from family, friends, and teachers, and who follow healthy coping methods, are better able to manage stress.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive environment for NEET aspirants by promoting mental health awareness, providing counselling services, and encouraging healthy coping strategies. Addressing these issues can help improve students' well-being and enable them to handle academic challenges in a more positive and balanced way.

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