

The Silent Scream: Understanding Student Suicides in Pakistani Universities and the Preventive Role of Academic Libraries

Shakeel Ahmed^{1*}, Masooma Soomro², Umama³, Shakil Ahmed Jarwar⁴, Ahmed Khan⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} BS (Hons) Library Information Science and Archive Studies University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. Email: *shakeel.ahmeduos@gmail.com, masoomasoomro05@gmail.com, umamaarain229@gmail.com, shakeelahmedjarwar7226@gmail.com, ahmedkhanuosj@gmail.com

Corresponding Author's Email: *shakeel.ahmeduos@gmail.com,

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1898>

Abstract

The increased number of university suicides among students in Pakistan is an indication of hidden mental and emotional turmoil in young people, usually shrouded in cultural stigma and institutional silence. This paper will focus on psychological, academic, financial and institutional aspects related to suicidal ideation in the context of students in the university of Sindh Province and beyond. The qualitative and descriptive research design is employed to examine the cultural premise of suicide, the futility of available counselling systems as well as the lack of effective prevention measures among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The alarming need to reform the system systematically is evidenced by recent events such as the case of a fourth-year MBBS student in Larkana who was allegedly found dead in his hostel room in the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS) in October 2025. Another aspect of the article is the possible stabilising influence of libraries and reading culture to help students in the emotional state. The results indicate that academic stress, parental expectations, financial stress and low mental health literacy are among the major predictors of suicidal tendencies. The paper ends with a strategic implication which focuses on policy changes, better academic counselling and library based wellness programmes to develop emotional resilience and avoid suicides among students in Pakistani hostels and campuses.

Keywords: Student Suicides; Mental Health; Higher Education; Pakistan; Academic Stress and Pressure; Financial Problems; Counselling Services; Role of Libraries; Resilience; Prevention of Student Suicides.

Introduction

Among youths aged between 15 and 29 years, suicide is one of the major causes of death in the world (World Health Organization, 2023). The University life which is often perceived as a period of intellectual development and social adaptation is nowadays related to the psychological distress and emotional instability of Pakistani students. Over the past years suicides among students of colleges and universities in Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been on the increase specially among students studying medical, engineering and social-science programmes. Behind the statistics is a bigger crisis that is influenced by social stigma, institutional negligence and lack of mental-health support. A fourth-year graduate student of MBBS at the Liaquat University of

Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS) was reported dead in his hostel room under suspicious circumstances in October 2025, according to police reports. The event left the academic community shocked and the nationwide discussion was on the pressure students experience due to the high academic demands and expectations imposed on them by their parents on one hand and loneliness and financial stress on the other.

Although a number of studies conducted in Pakistan have focused on suicide with psychological or medical orientation, few have looked at information behavior, academic culture or library culture. Within the context of Library and Information Science (LIS), information access, effective interactions with books and helpful library environments can be used to improve emotional resilience. Libraries are not only information depositories but they act as silent but thought provoking places where mental balance and belonging are encouraged. We as students and prospective scholars in the field of Library and Information Science, would like to foster a culture of reading and library use that would foster emotional stability and mental tranquility. Those who do not lose the connection with libraries tend to find sense, companionship and power in the qualities of knowledge that assist in saving against hopelessness and suicidal thoughts. This paper places the problem into a wider scholarly and societal background, which emphasizes the necessity of institutional change and comprehensive systems of student support.

The aims of this study are threefold:

- To investigate the aetiology (causes) of student suicides in Pakistani universities.
- To explore institutional shortcomings that contribute to students' emotional distress.
- To suggest practical preventive measures that integrate library-based learning and mental health awareness.

Literature Review

Student suicide is a world issue and has emerged as a significant menace among the Pakistani university students. The reasons for this are that suicide is among the most prevalent causes of death among individuals between the age of 15 years to 29 years worldwide (World Health Organization, 2023) and, therefore, there is a necessity to implement comprehensive preventive measures that will be specific to the risks of young adults in the academic environment.

South Asian Context

South Asia is a region where cultural taboos, strict family norms and fear of poverty significantly influence the rates of suicide (Khan, 2022). The same trend of academic load and social ostracism has been observed in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Suicide is usually a religious or moral problem instead of a public-health one, which adds to silence, underreporting and lack of open discussion.

Pressure of Academics and Mental Health

Students in state universities have been shown to be stricken by chronic stress because of competitive grading policies, rigorous examination requirements and a lack of emotional support (Malik and Ameen, 2023). Medical students are especially susceptible, because they have to withstand the heavy academic load besides being exposed to sick patients and the worries of failure to succeed professionally. Academic stress over a long period of time predisposes to anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Institutional Neglect and Absence of Counselling

The majority of Pakistani universities do not have proper mental health services. The available counselling centres are usually under-funded, understaffed and highly stigmatised. According to the Express Tribune (2024), seventeen suicides were recorded in Sindh-based universities within

six months, which demonstrates the indifference of institutions and the necessity of proper mental health care systems.

Socioeconomic Factors

Financial hardship increases emotional stress. The fear of high tuition fees, increasing hostel and living expenses and inadequate employment opportunities are the causes of anxiety and hopelessness (The News International, 2024). Students under economic pressure coupled with family pressure are even more strained psychologically.

Libraries as Affective and Intellectual Support

New studies have started to look into libraries as safe and supportive environments. According to the Journal of Academic Librarianship (2022), libraries are described as emotional ecosystems that facilitate self-reflection, empathy and purpose, which are the main factors in combating depression and anxiety. The libraries can therefore offer information and emotional support, which would be useful in strengthening the resilience of students. Nonetheless, no cross-cutting studies in Pakistan have been found to correlate library use, information behaviour and student suicide prevention. This article will fill that gap by discussing the ways in which academic libraries can help university students to improve their emotional well-being and resilience.

Research Objectives

This study aims at discussing the growing problem of student suicides in Pakistani universities and suggesting realistic measures of preventing the issue such as library-based intervention and mental health awareness.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine and analyse the major psychological, academic and socio-economic causes of suicidal thoughts among university students in Pakistan.
2. Assess institutional and cultural factors that prevent the mental health support of students.
3. Determine how the libraries and reading culture influence emotional stability, critical thinking and resilience.
4. Prescribe tangible interventions, e.g., counselling services, awareness programs and library-based well-being programs.
5. Create a conceptual map that would relate the use of academic libraries with emotional wellness in universities.

All these aims will give a total perspective in which social research and psychological insights and Library and Information Science are combined. By placing libraries as learning as well as emotional-supportive environments, the research highlights the role of libraries in fostering resilience and minimizing the chances of suicide.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design to be used in the study is the qualitative and descriptive research design to analyze the trends, causes, and effects of student suicides in Pakistani universities. The qualitative approach gives the opportunity to explore the emotional, social, and institutional factors in a deeper way, which cannot be fully addressed with the help of quantitative methods.

Data Sources

The secondary data were collected by:

- Scholarly journals in psychology, sociology and Library and Information Science (2017–2025).

- National newspapers such as *Dawn*, *The News International* and *The Express Tribune*.
- Reports and publications of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan.
- University-based research on student counselling, stress and suicide prevention across Pakistan.

Sampling and Scope

The research was about universities in Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, namely:

- University of Sindh, Jamshoro (Sindh)
- Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS, Sindh)
- Mehran University of Engineering and Technology (Sindh)
- University of the Punjab (Punjab)
- Khyber Medical University (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)
- University of Balochistan (Balochistan)

The figures of 2017-2025 were utilized to find officially reported suicides or suicide attempts at campus, particularly at university hostels.

Analytical Framework

The identification of thematic patterns was done using content analysis in the context of academic pressure, financial strain, social stigma and mental health isolation. These themes were compared with institutional responses. Descriptive tables were developed to summarize the results and compare them across universities.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical principles that were set by Pakistan Psychological Association and HEC research ethics framework. The information was anonymised to sensitive information, with exceptions being those cases previously covered by the media. The main objective of the study is preventative, as it should increase awareness and introduce scholarly discourse instead of sensationalizing individual cases.

Results and Findings

The research findings align with the available literature and also point to the context-specific obstacles in the Pakistani universities.

Rising Student Suicides in Pakistan

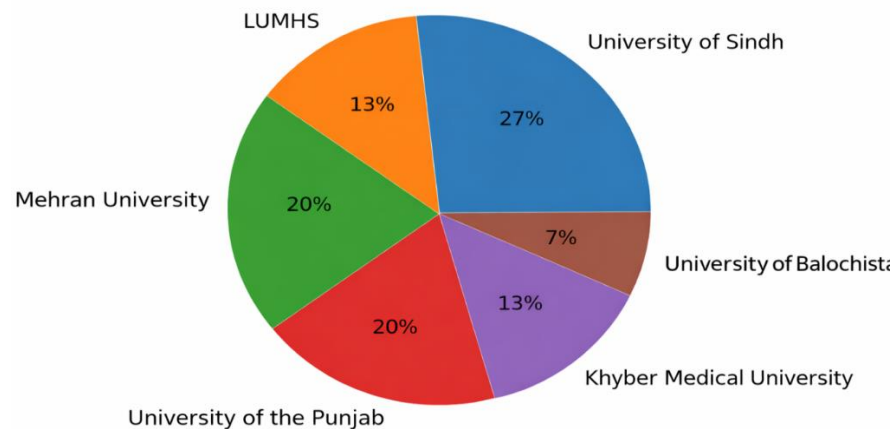
It has been analyzed that student suicides in Pakistani universities are on an alarming rise in the past three years. The real figures will be even more because of underreporting and stigma. Among the reported cases is that of a fourth-year MBBS student of Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS), who was found dead in his hostel room in October 2025. The case, which the authorities reported as a suicide, triggered a discussion across the country about the importance of mental health awareness and institutional responsibility. According to interviews and student commentaries, a significant number of students report feeling socially alone, fearing to fail and feeling extremely desperate, which are the indicators of chronic emotional burnout in a university setting.

Table 1: Reported Student Suicides in Pakistani Universities (2017–2025)

University	Reported Cases	Key Contributing Factors	Source
University of Sindh	4	Academic pressure; lack of counselling	<i>Dawn News</i> (2024)
LUMHS, Jamshoro	2	Hostel isolation; stress; no mental health unit	<i>The Express Tribune</i> (2024)
Mehran University of Engg. & Tech.	3	Financial strain; peer competition	Sindh Mental Health Authority (2024)
University of the Punjab	3	Academic stress; parental expectations	<i>The News International</i> (2024)
Khyber Medical University	2	Examination pressure; lack of counselling	Khyber News Reports (2024)
University of Balochistan	1	Family conflict; economic hardship	<i>The Nation</i> (2024)

Source: Adapted from major Pakistani newspapers and institutional reports (2017–2025).

Figure 1: Distribution of Reported Suicide Cases by University (2017–2025)



Identified Themes

Thematic analysis revealed the following important factors leading to student suicide:

- Academic Pressure and Competitive Systems.
- The stress of continual examination, faculty expectations, ranking systems, is chronic, particularly in medical and engineering programmes.
- Financial and Economic Insecurity.
- Increased tuition costs and hostel activities coupled with lack of scholarships compel most learners to work part-time leading to stress.
- Socio-cultural and Family Pressure.
- The collectivist nature of the Pakistani culture tends to view the failure in academic work as dishonour to the family, which exacerbates shame and psychological pain.
- Lack of Counselling and Support Services.
- Not many universities have well-equipped counselling centres and stigma also diminishes the desire to seek help.
- Social Media Pressure and Cyberbullying.
- Anxiety, low self-esteem and isolation are some of the effects of online harassment, comparisons, and unrealistic expectations.

Observations from University Environments

- **Hostel Life:**
The students who do not live at home tend to feel lonely, unsupervised and socially isolated.
- **Faculty–Student Relations:**
Impersonal styles of teaching that are based on fear and little empathy towards the academic stress do not encourage students to talk about their problems openly.
- **Peer Culture:**
Emotional expression and mutual support can be repressed by highly competitive environments.
- **Library Spaces:**
Universities that have friendly libraries and good reading culture are those which have lower perceived disempowerment of the students.

Discussion

The results are an indication of a multi-layered crisis in the higher education system in Pakistan. Suicidal deaths among students cannot be considered as a single case but a symptom of systemic problems such as academic pressure, peer pressure and institutional carelessness. The cases documented indicate the hidden pain of numerous students whose plight is usually unknown and un-responded.

Institutional Indifference and Academic Pressure

Academic performance is more valued in the Pakistani universities than emotional intelligence and mental health. The system encourages grading and hierarchy and little is done to emotional growth, coping skills and stress management. This is especially urgent in medical and engineering establishments, where the lack of support systems makes mental health more susceptible.

Psychological Factors

The suicidal behaviour usually arises when the emotions are strained and time after time hopelessness and feeling of burdening takes place. Attributed to Cognitive-Behavioural Theory (Beck, 1967) maladaptive beliefs and lacking coping skills increase susceptibility to depression and suicidal thoughts. Repeating the same self-statements such as I am not good enough or I am not failing my family worsen emotional distress. The theory of social integration by Durkheim (1897) also states that the weak ties to social institutions raise the probability of suicide. This is manifested in academic alienation in universities, poor peer networks and poor tutor-student relationship, all of which were evident in the analysed data.

Cultural and Societal Pressures

Academic success of a student is highly associated with family honour in Pakistan. Failure, as a shame, may make students conceal their problems and reject counselling due to embarrassment. This is especially powerful in the conservative or countryside regions. Although the harm is not planned by the members of the family, the expectation can add to the mental stress.

Libraries and Their Neglect

When it comes to discussing student welfare, libraries are usually overlooked. Besides aiding academic activity, libraries may also serve as psychological refuge where students may get a chance of silence, reflection and rest of feelings. Higher student resilience is likely to be promoted in universities that have deliberately embraced libraries as a reading therapy, mindfulness and creative programmes.

The research on bibliotherapy (Shechtman, 2022) supports the idea that reading helps self-understand, develop empathy, and control emotions. Libraries may be protective measures against depression and suicidal thoughts that affect a lost or isolated student.

Libraries and Information Literacy for Emotional Wellness

The academic library has the opportunity to be a psychological ecosystem with emotional healing and intellectual development within it. The combination of LIS and psychological attitudes can be used to develop new horizons of student well-being. This makes academic libraries not only a place of learning, but also an important place of emotional and psychological help.

Libraries as Healing Spaces

Libraries have a peaceful environment that can calm the troubled minds. To a considerable number of students, the library of the campus is a haven of non-judgmental escape against academic and personal stress. Arranging reading therapy sessions, mindfulness corners, bibliotherapy programmes, librarians will be able to help students to work out their feelings, to focus and find a new meaning.

Information Literacy as a Coping Mechanism

Emotional resilience can be enhanced by information literacy the capacity to find, analyze and utilize information adequately. With access to reliable mental health resources and knowledge of how to access these sources, students who know how to access and utilize the resources have a better chance in dealing with stress.

Libraries can host Mental Health Literacy Workshops to teach students how to:

- Find credible information on mental health.
- Use digital mental health tools and online counselling platforms.
- Recognise early signs of burnout or emotional distress and seek timely help.

Librarians as Emotional Gatekeepers

In modern times, librarians are not just curators of knowledge, they are also curators of human relationship. Having basic counselling/psychology training, they can become emotional gatekeepers who monitor the behaviour change of regular users and refer at-risk students to professional assistance discreetly. This is in line with the library as community hub model in certain Scandinavian universities, where librarians and campus psychologists work together to hold mental health exhibitions, storytelling circles and resilience-building events.

Preventive Strategies

To curb the number of student suicides, there should be institutional, community, and individual-level interventions.

Institutional Strategies

- Establish counselling departments and therapy departments in all campuses.
- Hire trained psychologists and counsellors within universities in the state and privately.
- Conduct regular stress management workshops, especially when the exams are on.

Integrate Mental Health into the Curriculum

- Provide mandatory courses or classes on emotional intelligence, stress management and mindfulness.
- Promote coordination between psychology departments, education faculties and LIS schools.

Enhance Faculty Training

- Train academic staff to recognise early warning signs such as chronic absenteeism, withdrawal and sudden changes in performance.
- Promote mentorship programmes rooted in empathy and student-centred support.

Strengthen Library Engagement

- Reimagine library spaces with reading lounges, creative-writing corners and bibliotherapy collections.
- Create “Books That Heal” sections featuring literature on hope, self-compassion and resilience.

Community and Family Interventions

- Raise awareness to reduce stigma surrounding mental illness in both urban and rural communities.
- Educate parents on supportive communication, avoiding harmful comparisons.
- Use social media campaigns to promote student-led mental-wellness initiatives and storytelling.

Technological and Digital Interventions

- Develop university helpline apps with 24/7 chat and emergency response features.
- Explore AI-supported systems to flag potential distress signals in learning platforms or social media (with strong privacy safeguards).
- Promote responsible digital literacy to reduce the impact of cyberbullying and online stress.

Table 2: Predominant Psychological and Social Risk Factors in University Students

Category	Specific Causes	% of Studies Reporting Factor	Key References
Academic Pressure	Grading anxiety; excessive workload	72%	Malik & Ameen (2023); LNH Journal (2024)
Financial Hardship	Tuition burden; part-time work stress	54%	The News (2024); PJIA (2023)
Family/Social Pressure	Parental expectations; social shame	48%	<i>Dawn</i> (2024); Indus JBR (2023)
Mental Health Neglect	Lack of counselling centres	63%	<i>The Express Tribune</i> (2024); LNH (2024)
Cyberbullying & Isolation	Online harassment; body shaming	39%	Indus JBR (2023)

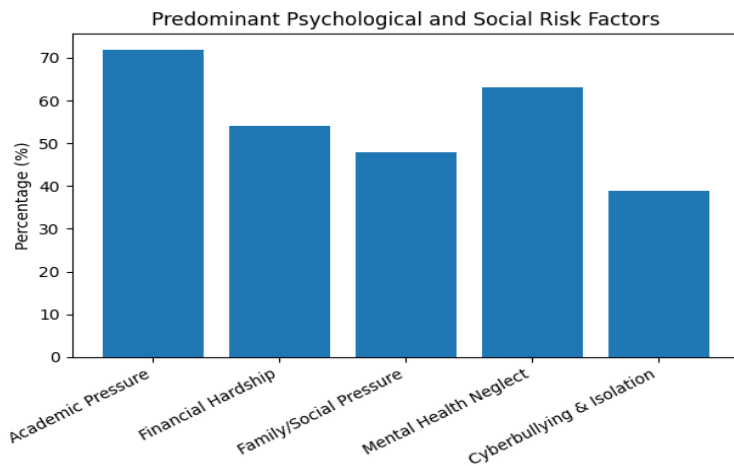
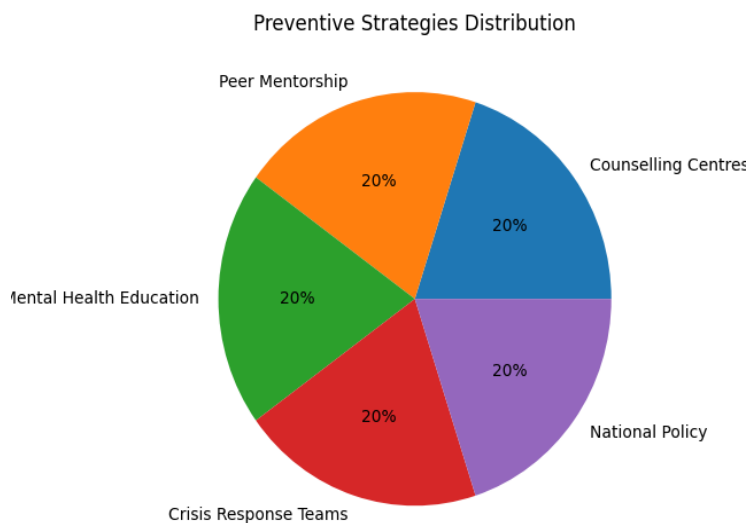


Table 3: Suggested Preventive Strategies and Institutional Interventions

Proposed Intervention	Responsible Authority	Intended Outcome
Establish university counselling centres	HEC & University Administration	Immediate mental health support
Introduce peer-mentorship programmes	Student Affairs Department	Early detection of distress
Integrate mental health education	Academic Council	Build emotional resilience
Create crisis-response teams	Vice Chancellor's Office	Rapid support for at-risk students
Launch national suicide-prevention policy	Ministry of Education	Institutional accountability



Recommendations for Future Research

Student suicidality in Pakistani universities requires sustained, interdisciplinary investigation. Future research should focus on:

Prospective Studies on Academic Well-being

- Conduct longitudinal, multi-campus studies tracking students' mental health from admission to graduation.
- Identify which institutional supports and coping strategies most effectively prevent crises.

Linking Library Science and Psychology

- Examine the therapeutic value of libraries, reading, bibliotherapy and digital information literacy.
- Measure relationships between library use and mental health outcomes to guide policy and programme design.

Comparison of Counselling Modalities

- Benchmark Pakistani university counselling systems against international models.
- Adapt successful interventions, such as Scandinavian campus well-being programmes or Japanese resilience initiatives.

Gender-Based and Regional Disparities

- Investigate differences in suicide risk by gender, socioeconomic status and region using intersectional methods.
- Pay particular attention to vulnerable groups such as female students, rural Sindh/Balochistan students and marginalised ethnic communities.

Digital and AI-Supported Systems

- Explore the responsible use of AI and big data to detect early signs of mental health problems.
- Address ethical, technical and privacy concerns linked to AI-driven monitoring.

Impact of Librarian-Led Mental Health Programming

- Assess the effectiveness of wellness corners, bibliotherapy clubs and information literacy workshops.
- Investigate how librarians can collaborate with psychologists to build student resilience.

Conclusion

Recent incidents, such as the case of a fourth-year MBBS student in Larkana who was allegedly found dead in his hostel room in the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS) in October 2025, have brought out the imperative of systemic changes in mental health awareness and institutional support of higher education institutions. Research, media reports and psychological theories have shown that suicides among students are precipitated by a combination of factors, which include academic stress, family demands and expectations, economic difficulties and absence of counselling and emotional-supporting systems within the college. Simultaneously, this paper indicates significant avenues towards hope and transformation. Reconceptualizing libraries as repositories of the psyche will enable them to go beyond their usual academic purpose to become spaces of psychological healing and recovery. Peace, purpose and strong minds can be encouraged among students by motivating them to read books emotionally and intellectually.

To be successful in preventing the issue, HEC, university administrations, librarians and mental health professionals will need to work together. Key actions include:

- Establishing on-campus counselling centres.
- Integrating emotional-intelligence and mental health education into curricula.
- Embedding bibliotherapy and library-based wellness programmes into student life.

After all, it is not merely life that needs to be saved to prevent student suicide, but dignity, meaning and hope of the educational process as well. Despair can be turned to resilience when students are listened to and supported and valued, and knowledge will be a source of light instead of a burden.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank everyone and everyone who played their part in this study. We are grateful to the Pakistani universities that opened their reports, news archives and institutional data to us. This research is owed to scholars and researchers in psychology, sociology, education and Library and Information Science whose work formed the basis of this research. We also recognize the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan that released guidelines that made access to academic and counselling resources easy. Lastly, to the colleagues and friends within the LIS community, we would like to thank them as they offered constructive feedback and continued support to the analysis and the recommendations that were put forward in this paper.

References

- Beck, A. T. (1967). *Depression: Clinical, experimental, and theoretical aspects*. Harper & Row.
- Dawn News. (2024, March 17). Poverty, illiteracy and myths fuel suicides in Tharparkar. Dawn Media Group. <https://www.dawn.com>
- Indus Journal of Behavioral Research. (2023). Cyberbullying and suicidal ideation among university students: An exploratory analysis. *Indus Journal of Behavioral Research*, 7(2), 45–60.
- LNH Journal of Psychiatry. (2024). Prevalence of suicidal ideation among medical students in Pakistan. *LNH Journal of Psychiatry*, 6(1), 21–34.
- Malik, F., & Ameen, K. (2023). Academic stress and emotional well-being among Pakistani university students. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Behavioral Studies*, 5(3), 112–126.
- Pakistan Journal of Interdisciplinary Analysis. (2023). Suicidal tendencies among university students: An exploratory study. *Pakistan Journal of Interdisciplinary Analysis*, 9(1), 66–80.
- Shechtman, Z. (2022). Bibliotherapy: A tool for emotional regulation and resilience. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(3), 455–468.
- The Express Tribune. (2024, April 5). Rising student suicides raise alarm across Sindh. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk>
- The News International. (2024, May 2). Genetic study launched to uncover suicide causes in Sindh. The News International. <https://www.thenews.com.pk>
- Tribune, The. (2024, October 10). Medical student's suicide reignites debate over mental health negligence. The Express Tribune.
- University Grants Commission. (2025). Policy guidelines for mental health and counseling centers in higher education institutions of Pakistan. HEC Publication Series.
- World Health Organization. (2023). Suicide prevention: Global imperative for higher education institutions. WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Yousafzai, S., & Rind, N. (2022). Mental health literacy and stigma among undergraduate students in Sindh. *Asian Journal of Psychological Research*, 11(4), 97–110.
- Shaheen, N., Soomro, M., Ali, S., Ghaffar, A., Ahmed, S., & Soomro, J. M. (2025). *Perception of LIS Faculty Members and Students Regarding the LIS Curriculum in Sindh, Pakistan*. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(4), 997–1001. <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i4.1190>
- Inam Magsi, Nusrat Shaheen, Waqas Ahmed Channar, Mubarak Ali, Zubair Lakho, & Adeel Ahmed. (2025). Cyber-Security Challenges in Digital Libraries. *Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works*, 3(1), 344–350. <https://doi.org/10.71145/rjsp.v3i1.102>

Ahmed, S., Akhtar, F., Saharan, K., Soomro, M., Ahmed, A., Memon, A., & Ghaffar, A. (2025). Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Libraries. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 3(1), 1462–1468. <https://doi.org/10.59075/cvpvx989>