

# Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Study between National and International Students of Northwest Normal University, P. R. China

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**Conflicts of Interest**

There are no conflicts to declare.

## ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to compare mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students in Northwest Normal University, P. R. China. It was hypothesized that there would be gender differences between mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students. Mental health and suicidal awareness questionnaire were used to measure the level of mental health and suicidal awareness. Findings revealed that females showed a greater response towards mental health and suicide awareness as compared to males. Gender pre-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for males is (M=25.52, s=2.34) while for females is M=26.98, s=2.91,  $t(98) = .69, p=.00, \alpha=.05$ . Gender post-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for males is M= 22.14, s=2.67 while for females is M=23.28, s=2.51,  $t(98) = .49, p=.03, \alpha=.05$ . Results showed that mental health and suicide awareness have a significant difference between male and females students. Results also showed that mental health and suicide awareness have a significant difference between national and international students.

Moreover, results revealed that national students showed more significant responses towards mental health and suicide awareness than international students. The study has given insight into the importance of mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students. This research study makes aware national and international students help to understand their role, attitude, and change in personality leading towards the symptoms severity and their psychological problems during their lifetime.

**Keywords:** MENTAL HEALTH, SUICIDAL AWARENESS, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, CHINA

## 1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is “a state of well-being in which the

individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community” (WHO, 2011). Besides, with a significant increase in enrollment of mainland Chinese international students in the United States over the past ten years, mental health concerns for this population have increasingly drawn the attention of educators, counselors, and psychologists. Research has shown that this population experiences a high rate of mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety, yet underutilizes professional counseling services (Han X et al, 2013). Although research on mental health and behaviors associated with suicide among college students, a study with the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) students indicated that 15.4% of surveyed students reported depressive symptomatology on a self-assessment scale. (Fernández Rodríguez & Huertas IB, 2013)

Not much is known regarding the causes of mental health issues and suicide to the national and international student of the Northwest Normal University P. R. China. Therefore, we conducted this study to assess, explore, elaborate, and come to know all aspects of life that directly and indirectly contribute to mental health issues and suicide. Thus, this study will broaden our understanding of the causes of mental health and suicidal awareness. Still, it helps many scientist-practitioner and other students gain more knowledge about the details of this critical social issue.

On the other hand, statistics from 2005 to 2009 at the Interdisciplinary Center for Student Development indicate that depressive symptoms were the most frequent problem among students serviced at the center through individual counseling. Thus, mental health research suggests the need to work on suicide prevention and intervention at universities so that strategies can be developed to prevent suicide, fight against the stigma of seeking help, and promote mental health among college students.

### **1.1 Mental Health**

Mental health problems can affect many areas of students’ lives, reducing their quality of life, academic achievement, physical health, satisfaction with the college experience, and negatively impacting relationships with friends and family members. These issues can also have long-term consequences for students, affecting their future employment, earning potential, and overall health (Eisenberg D et al, 2007). In addition, mental health problems can affect a student's energy level, concentration, dependability, cognitive ability, and optimism, hindering performance. Research suggests that depression is associated with lower grade point averages. Co-occurring depression and anxiety can increase this association depression and have also been linked to dropping out of school (Eisenberg D et al, 2009).

Researchers in the united states (Twenge JM et al, 2010) and (Collishaw et al., 2010) have argued that the mental health of adolescents and university students has deteriorated over recent decades, with study participants reporting significantly higher levels of emotional and stress-related problems than those of earlier cohorts. A recent Australian study (Stallman HM & Shochet I, 2009) heads of university counseling services reported a rise in the proportion of students presenting with “serious psychological problems” over the past five years. Other studies have shown that university students are significantly more vulnerable to high levels of distress than non-university students of the same age. These claims are supported by a national survey from

the united states, in which 95% of directors of college counseling services reported a significant increase in “severe psychological problems” in their students (Hunt J & Eisenberg D, 2010).

From a Western perspective, it has long been established that the peak period for the onset of mental ill-health is between 12-25 years of age (McGorry, 2011). However, social scientists and other researchers have argued that economic, social, and cultural change has altered the social parameters of adolescence and youth (Sawyer et al, 2012).

International students often suffer mental health issues in silence. (*Flickr: Ermadz X*)

Coming from a broken family in Indonesia, Sandersan Onie said he had occasionally experienced negative thoughts, but it only got worse when he moved to Australia in 2015 to study.

### **1.1.2 Impact Mental Health**

60-80% of outpatient visits may be related to stress (Avey et al, 2003). Linked to all leading physical causes of death, heart disease, cancer, stroke. Associated with most major mental health problems are stress and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and pathologic aging (Marin MF et al, 2011).

### **1.2 Suicide Awareness**

Suicide, or the act of deliberately ending one’s own life, is considered a public health problem. The statistics show that an average of 3,000 individuals commits suicide daily. For each practical occurrence, 20 or more individuals attempt suicide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the third cause of death in the united states among individuals between 15 and 24 years (Appelbaum PS, 2006). Every year in the United States, approximately 1,100 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 commit suicide, and nearly 24,000 attempts it. A four-year prospective study done in the united states with Freshman College students revealed that 12% had suicidal ideation sometime during their years at college (Wilcox HC et al, 2010).

On the occurrence of behaviors associated with suicide, some studies indicate that one out of every five suicides among college students occurs the same day they have a life crisis. This finding points to the importance of investigating more deeply every aspect of the various behaviors associated with suicide and how individuals think about this phenomenon. Although suicide is a highly crucial topic, its discussion in society, particularly when it has to do with suicide among young persons (Campos RM et al, 2004) indicate that this is because individuals avoid and prefer not to face the fact that some young individuals think life is that painful and are killing themselves consciously and deliberately. This fact has an impact on and partially questions our social and family system.

## **2. Literature review**

A study was conducted to present data from the College Health Intervention Projects on the frequency of depression and suicide ideation among 1,622 college students who accessed primary care services in 4 university clinics in the Midwest, Northwest, and Canada. Students completed the Beck Depression Inventory and other measures related to exercise patterns, alcohol use, sensation seeking, and violence. The frequency of

depression was similar for men (25%) and women (26%). However, the thought of suicide was higher for men (13%) than women (10%). Tobacco use, emotional abuse, and unwanted sexual encounters were all associated with screening positive for depression. “Days of exercise per week” was inversely associated with screening positive for depression. Because most students access campus-based student health centers, medical providers can serve a crucial role in early identification and intervention. With every 4th student reporting symptoms of depression and every 10th student having suicidal thoughts, such interventions are needed (Mackenzie et al., 2011).

Another study attempted to report on in-depth interviews with 16 professionals working with international students at an internationalized university. Researchers collected data from 35 students through semi-structured interviews. Factors identified as critical to international students' mental health derived from three broad dimensions: adjusting to unfamiliar academic practices, developing skills to manage everyday life in a different cultural context, and recognizing and seeking professional help for mental health problems (Mewett & Sawyer, 2016).

Moreover, research was conducted to assess the association between adjustment issues, stress, and wellbeing among new university students. Data was collected from 192 international students in the U.K. Path analyses revealed that optimism mediated the relationship between stress and negative well-being over time. Optimism emerged as a critical factor for new students to adjust to university, helping to buffer the impact of stress on well-being throughout the academic year. However, findings showed stress was negatively correlated with the well-being of international students (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016).

Research has shown that mainland Chinese international students, as the most significant and fastest-growing international student body in the United States, face high rates of mental health concerns but demonstrate low levels of help-seeking behaviors, such as seeking professional counseling services. Three significant areas regarding this phenomenon have been discussed: transcultural adjustment, attachment, and relationship issues, and coping and help-seeking preferences. This research provides an overview of current studies on mainland Chinese international students' mental health issues and, using a resilience lens, offers recommendations for practice and future research (Zheng & Olatunji, 2016).

Another study was conducted to report a systematic review of the studies related to mental health among international students. A total of 18 quantitative studies published in peer-reviewed journals from 2000 to 2011 were reviewed. This review revealed three significant results: (1) a majority of researchers (n=13, 72.2%) tend to choose Chinese international students as a representative of Asian national and international students in their studies; (2) studies on the mental health of international students is closely associated with the following variables: length of stay in the host country, language issue, attitudes toward seeking help, depression, and acculturation; (3) depression was the most frequently reported variable (n=6, 33.3%), followed by acculturation (n=5, 27.8%) (Li, Wang & Xiao, 2014).

In addition, a study was conducted to examine sharing the process of participative action that led to the creation of a Suicide Prevention Program (SPP) for college students. Based on the knowledge that was

generated through a collaborative effort among all sectors of the academic community, we developed a prevention campaign that is culturally sensitive to our university's environment. This campaign is directed towards overcoming the stigma of seeking help and is characterized by holistically promoting a sense of well-being, paying attention to the individual and elements of their sociocultural environment (Rodríguez & Huertas, 2013).

Another study was conducted to examine depression, anxiety and stress, and associated factors among undergraduate nursing students in Sri Lanka. A purposive sample of 92 undergraduate nursing students completed a pretested self-administered questionnaire. Depression, anxiety, and stress were measured by the Sinhala version of the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale. Results showed the majority of the respondents reported mild to extremely severe symptoms of depression (51.1%), anxiety (59.8%), and stress (82.6%). Moreover, findings showed depression, anxiety, and stress are highly prevalent among undergraduate nursing students, and correlations between these variables are positive. However, stress and anxiety are the factors that were most closely predicted to physical and psychological wellbeing. (Rathnayake & Ekanayaka, 2016).

A study was conducted to describe 905 students. An online mental health and well-being platform was used to measure students' mental health while providing real-time individual reports to each student. The data provides evidence of high levels of psychological distress (i.e. anxiety) and low levels of mental wellbeing and resilience in students, relative to population norms, with merely 18.6% of students demonstrating optimal scores on all outcomes. Contrary to predictions, results found no evidence of poorer wellbeing amongst international students when compared to domestic students. The results indicate that complimenting measurement of distress with measurement of positive and adaptive states can more comprehensively capture the precarious mental status of our tertiary students. Moreover, findings showed anxiety significantly predicted international students' well-being (van Agteren J et al, 2019).

## 2.1 Rationale

The main aim of the present study is to provide insight and create awareness that Northwest Normal University, China should establish in partnership with government and non-government sectors and build a mental health and suicide prevention research group which will be leading numerous initiatives aimed at improving the lives of people in mental distress and at risk of suicide. The strategic purpose of the group is to demonstrate through research and practical examples how much people with lived experience, clinicians, policymakers, and academic faculty can achieve working together in partnership.

The group's work is inspired by the real-world problems of people living with mental distress, the needs of their careers, and the next generation of health professionals willing and able to support recovery with dignity. The mental health and suicide prevention research group have a national and international reputation for undertaking profound scholarship in mental health and suicide prevention, leading to deep connectivity and diffusion of the insights through publication, public policy, and clinical practice as key outcomes.

Moreover, staff from the mental health and suicide prevention research group will contribute directly to teaching undergraduate and postgraduate programs, equipping students and health professionals with the skills and knowledge required to effectively help people experiencing mental illness and at risk of suicide.

## **2.2 Aims and Objectives**

- To examine the difference between pre and post-assessment of suicide awareness and mental health among national and international students.
- To examine the difference between gender and suicide awareness and mental health among national and international students.

## **2.3 Hypotheses**

- There is likely to be a difference between pre and post-assessment of suicide awareness and mental health among national and international students.
- There is likely to be a difference between gender and suicide awareness and mental health among national and international students.

## **3. Methods and materials**

The research design used was comparison-based as it investigated the difference between pre and post-assessment of suicide and mental health awareness among national and international students. To examine the difference between gender, suicide, and mental health awareness among national and international students. The sampling strategy was purposive as the sample chosen had specific characteristics based on prior literature searches. The sample consisted of 100 national and international students. The sample size was determined by G-Power analysis. Both males and females students were taken from Northwest Normal University, P. R. China. National and international students were included in the present study. Participants' ages were between 17 to 35 years in the current research. Both male and female students have equally participated in the study. The exclusion criteria were adopted, and students diagnosed with psychological disorders were excluded from the study. Drug Addicts were not included in the research. Students with a diagnosis of epilepsy or other neurological diseases were also excluded from the study, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) were not included in the study.

The researcher and the supervisor formulated a list of different questions to collect information about the participants. The items include name information, age, sex, nationality, current status, scholarships, etc. scale is designed by the authors of the present research. This questionnaire is designed to assess the level of awareness regarding world mental health day and suicidal awareness among students and teachers of Northwest Normal University and get access to their mental health issues while seeking and spreading knowledge through their lifespan and making them aware of them. This questionnaire is a baseline survey checklist. The scale consists of 28 items. Almost every item was scored on a Yes/No method (Yes=1, No=0).

### **3.1 Procedure**

Approval from the institute was taken. Permission of the measuring instrument used in the study was taken from the original author, given an informational letter in which the purpose of data collection and that the information regarding the study about the impact of suicidal awareness and mental health was briefly explained. Each participant was provided with the information sheet for detailed information regarding the research and a consent form to make sure that the participants were willingly participating in the survey. They were informed about the ethical consideration of the study after that pre and post-assessment were conducted.

### **3.2 Pre-Assessment**

Pre-assessment was conducted with a sample of 100 participants 50% were national, and 50% were international students, including both males and females participants. The study was conducted to make sure that the participants easily understand the questionnaires. The participants were briefed about the purpose and nature of the research. The participants were asked to communicate any difficulty they face regarding the questionnaires. And before the mental health day celebration session, pre-assessment was conducted and collect data from the participants.

### **3.3 Post-Assessment**

Following the pre-assessment, the post-assessment was conducted, and data were collected from both national and international students of Northwest Normal University P. R. China. The same sample of 100, 50% national, and 50% international students with an age range between 17-35 years were included in the post-assessment study. After the world mental health day celebration, the information sheet was given to the participants, and they responded accordingly to the questionnaire. After the collection of information, data were analyzed for results.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

- After obtaining permission from the authors for using the measurement used in the study, the study was carried out.
- Permission was obtained from Northwest Normal University P. R. China administration.
- Informed consent was signed from the participants, and they were assured that the information given by them would be kept confidential.
- Data were collected according to the feasibility of the participants.
- The anonymity of the participants was maintained.
- The participants were provided with the information sheets that include all the information about the nature, purpose, procedure, duration of the research, and their role as research participants.
- They were assured that they would be provided with free psychological services from a trained psychologist to get any stress due to the research.

- The participants were assured that they are allowed to leave the research at any time if they want, and it would not affect their rights.
- The data was protected and entered into the computer program with codes and nobody other than the researcher and the supervisor had access to the collected data.

#### 4. Results

The study aimed to investigate the comparison between mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students in Northwest Normal University, P. R. China. First, the data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 21 (SPSS-21). The table showing descriptive statistics reports the frequency and percentages of demographic variables. Then the results of inferential statistics were written, which includes results based on the aims and hypotheses of the study. Firstly, Independent Sample T-Test was used to examine the difference between gender, mental health, and suicide awareness. Secondly, Independent Sample T-Test was used to assess the difference between mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students.

**Table 1**

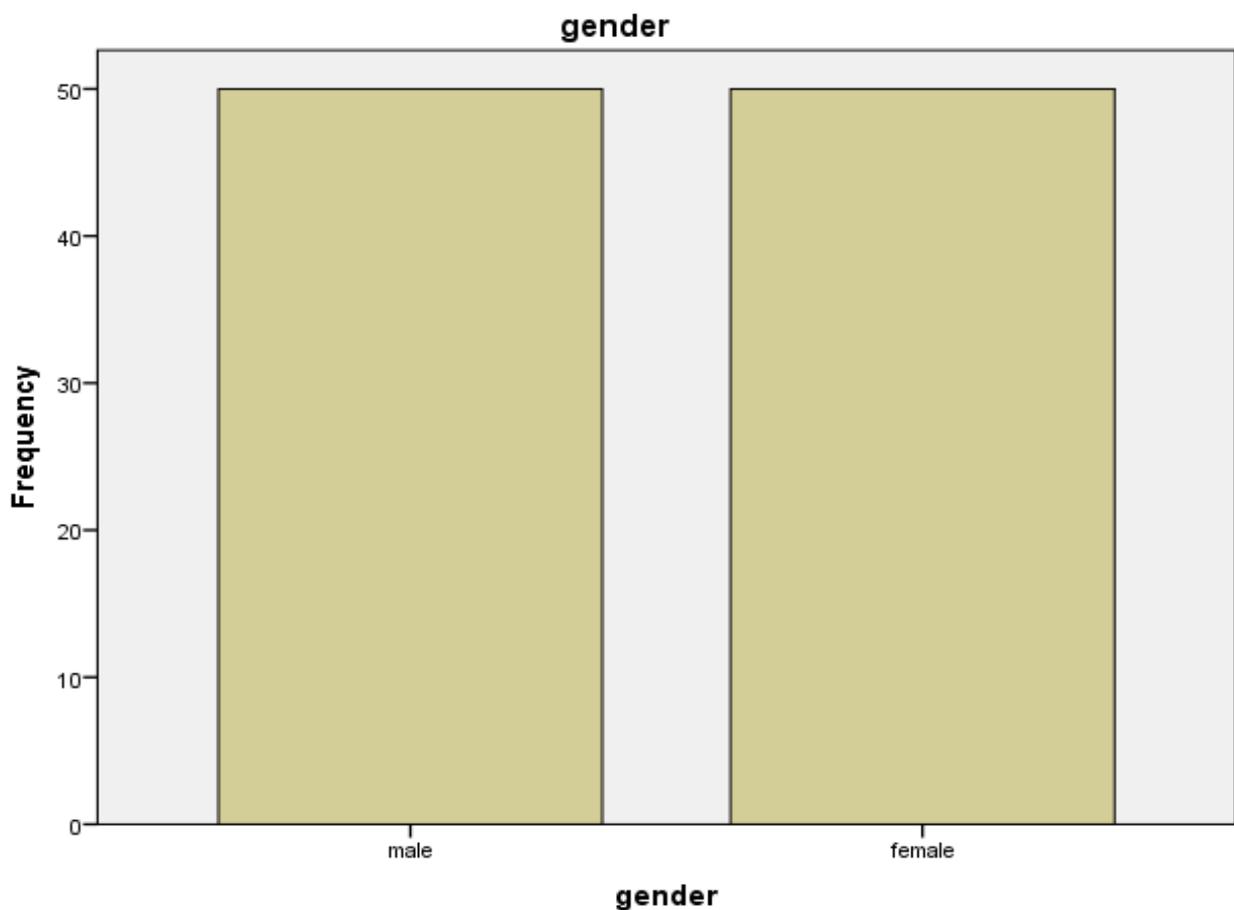
*Descriptive Statistics for Demographics and Other Characteristics of the Participants (n=100)*

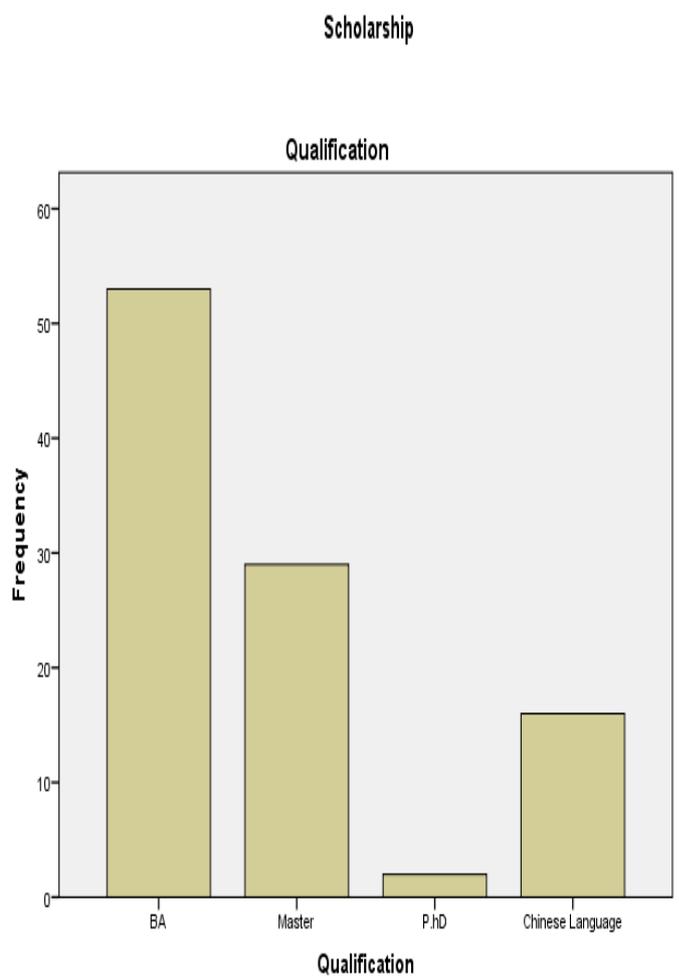
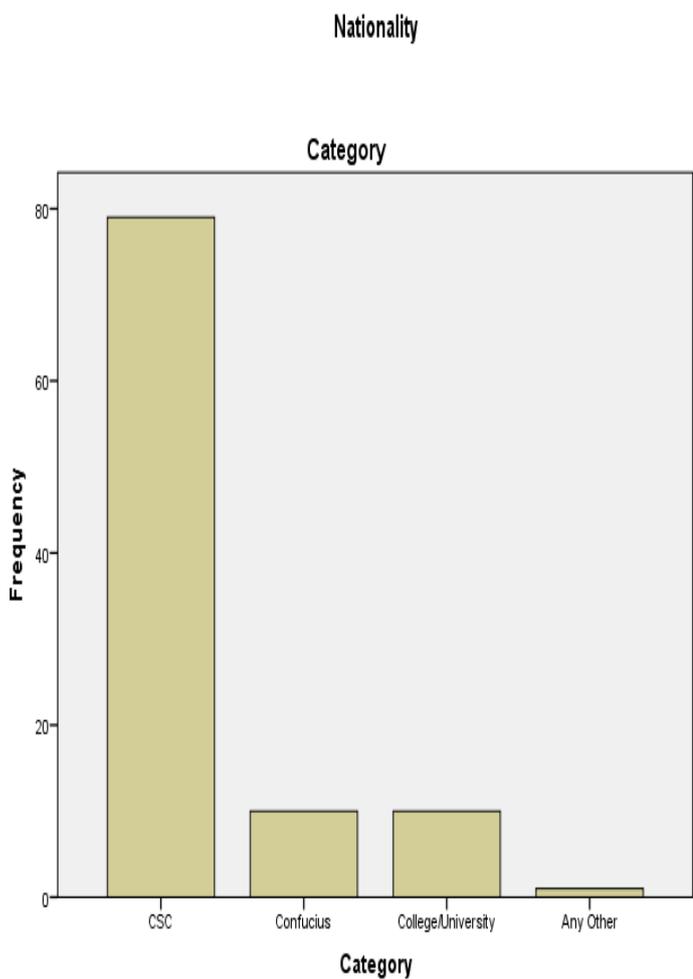
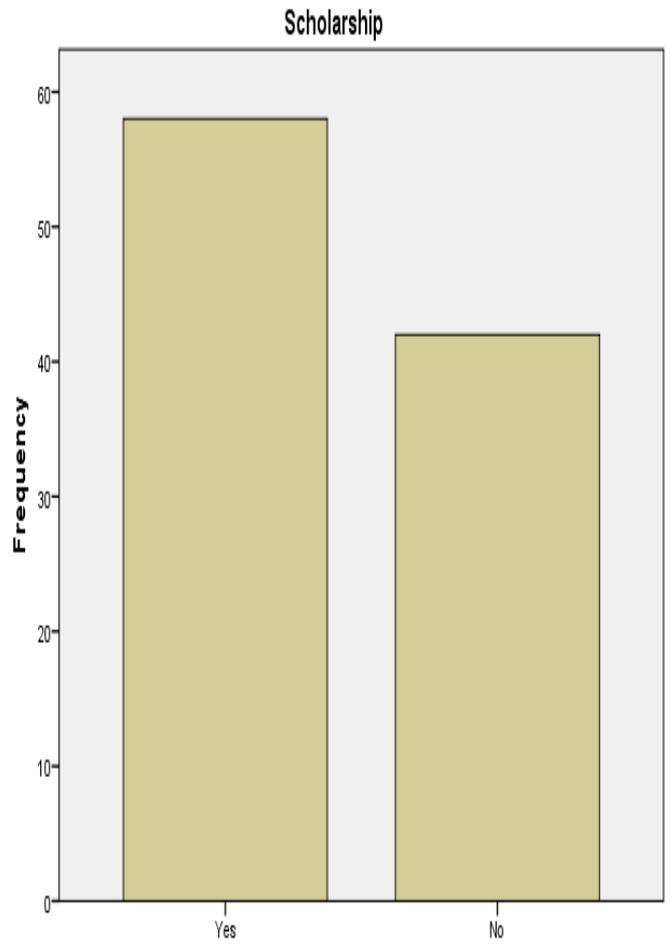
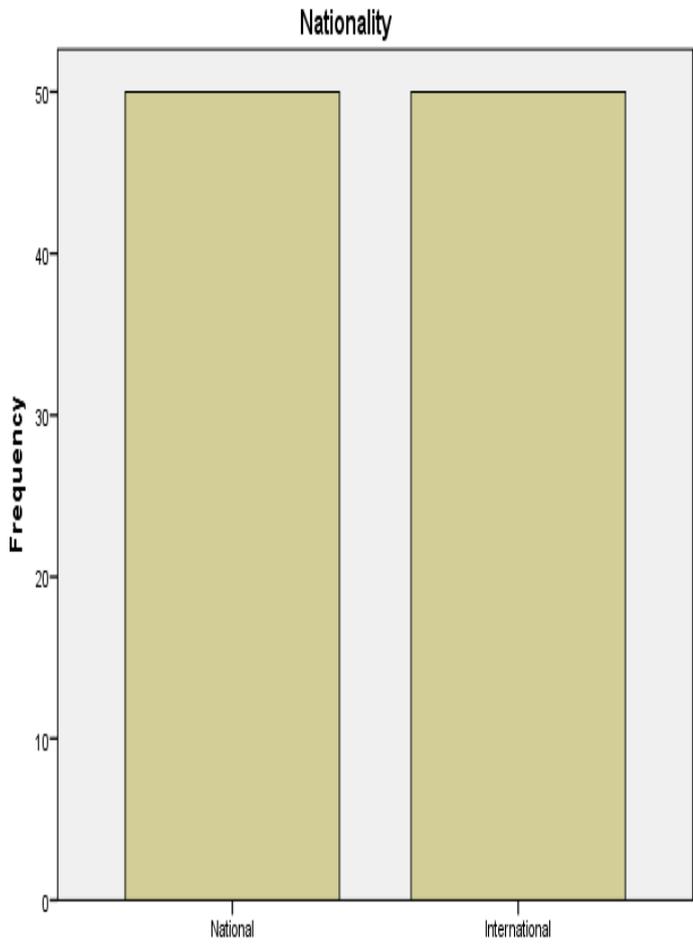
<b>Variables</b>	<b>M (SD)</b>	<b>f (%)</b>
Age	21.61 (4.07)	
Gender		
Male		50 (50)
Female		50 (50)
Nationality		
National		50 (50)
International		50 (50)
Scholarships		
Yes		58 (58)
No		42 (42)
Category		
CSC		79 (79)
Confucius		10 (10)
College/University		10 (10)
Another		1 (1)
Qualification		
Undergraduate		53 (53)
Master		29 (2)
PhD		2 (2)
Chinese Language		16 (16)
Learn Chinese Language Duration		
Less than 2 months		36 (36)
3 to 6 months		21 (21)
From 7 month to one year		14 (14)
2 to 4 years		18 (18)
More than 4 years		11 (11)
Session		

2015-2020	1 (1)
2016-2020	1 (1)
2017-2020	2 (2)
2017-2021	2 (2)
2018-2020	12 (12)
2018-2021	1 (1)
2018-2022	4 (4)
2018-2023	16 (16)
2019-2020	2 (2)
2019-2021	14 (14)
2019-2022	8 (8)
2019-2023	37 (37)

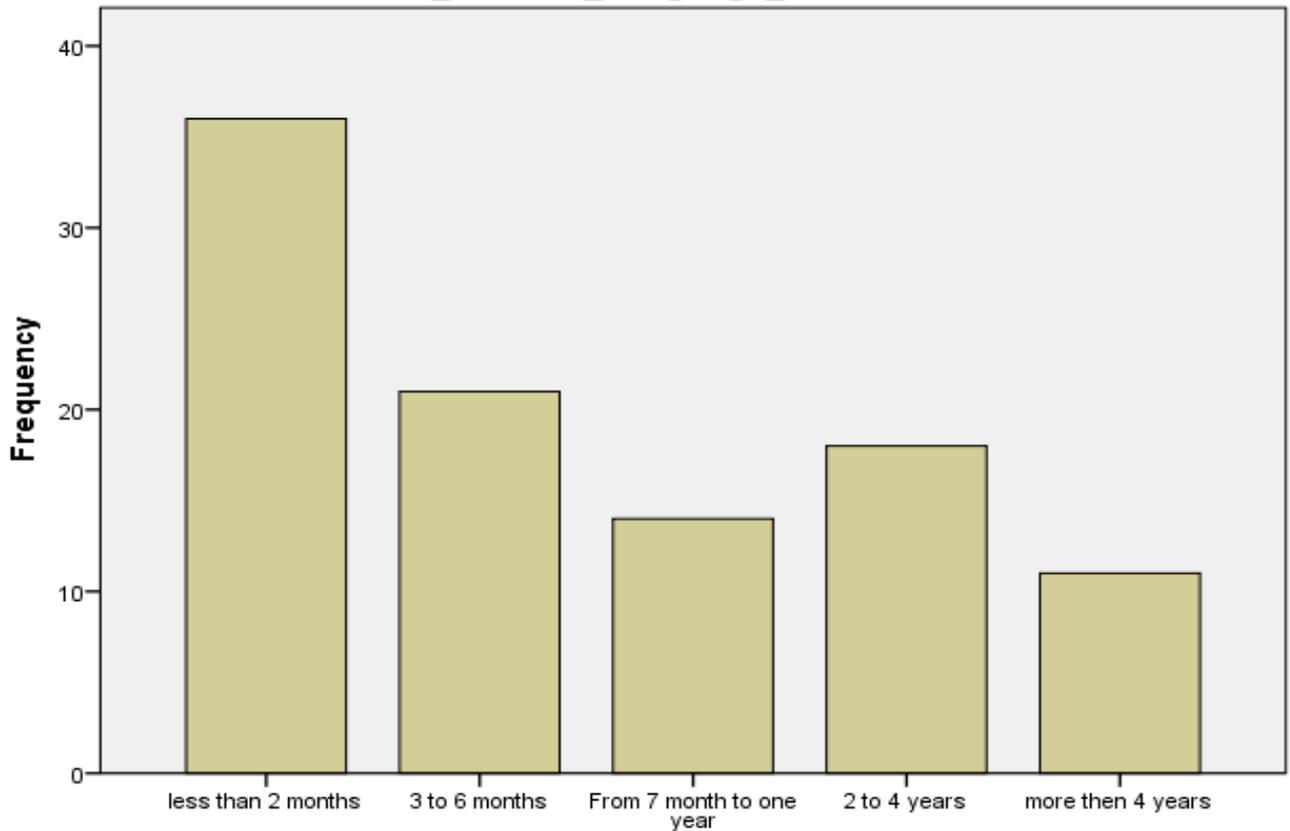
Note: *f*= frequency, %= percentage.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics were examined for the appropriate interpretation of the sample characteristics. Participants in the current study were 100 national and international students, and most of the students (58%) have a scholarship. The majority of the student’s educational level (53%) were undergraduate. In addition, most students (36%) learn the Chinese language in less than 2 months period. See Table 1 for additional demographic information.



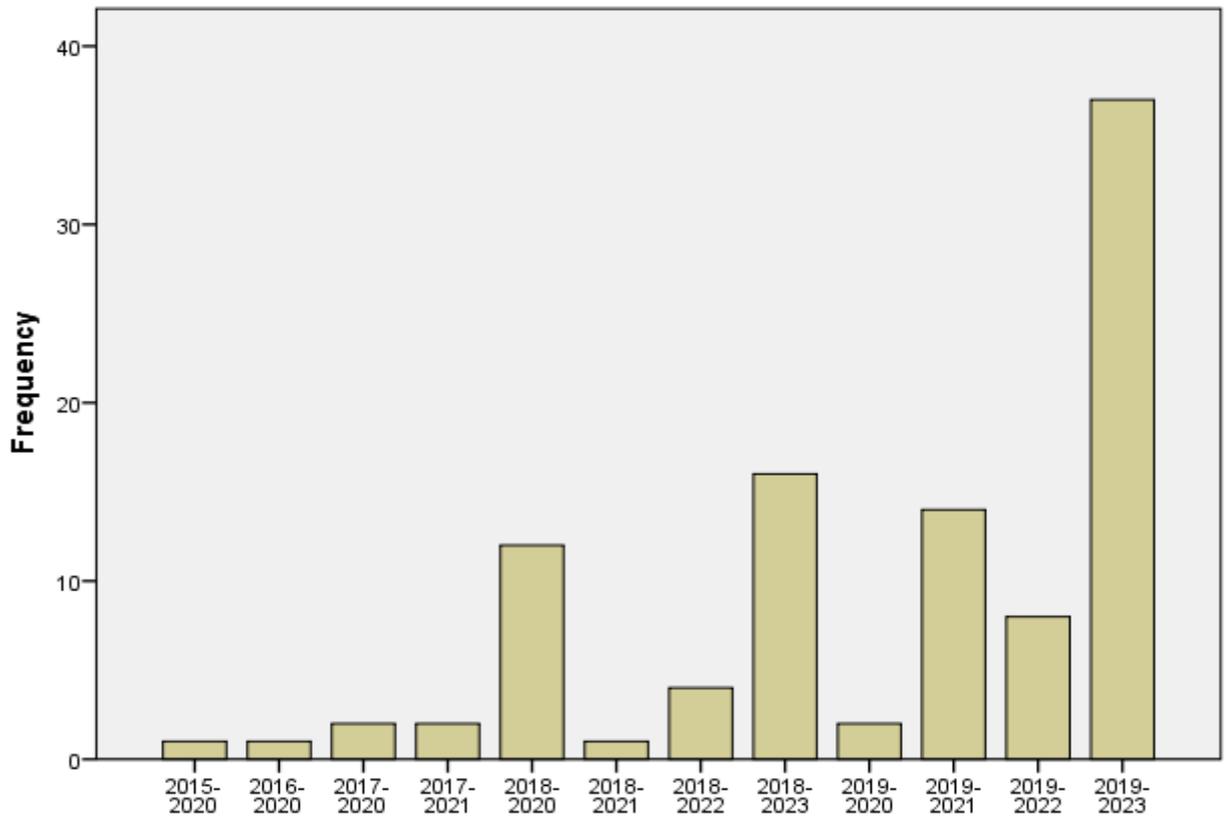


**Lean\_Chinese\_Language\_Duration**



**Lean\_Chinese\_Language\_Duration**

**Session**



**Session**

**Table 2**  
*Independent Sample t-test between Gender and Study Variables (n=100)*

Gender	t	df	p	Confidence Internal	
				LL	UL
Pre-Assessment	-2.76	98	.00	-2.50	-.41
Post-Assessment	-2.19	98	.03	-2.17	-.10

*Note:* t= Statistical Difference, df= Degree of Freedom, p= Significance Value, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit.

Results showed an equal variances t-test reveals a statistically reliable difference between the mean of gender pre-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for males (M=25.52, s=2.34) and mean of pre-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for females (M=26.98, s=2.91),  $t(98) = .69, p=.00, \alpha=.05$ .

Moreover, findings showed an equal variances t-test reveals a statistically reliable difference between the mean of gender post-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for males (M= 22.14, s=2.67) and mean of post-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for females (M=23.28, s=2.51),  $t(98) = .49, p=.03, \alpha=.05$ .

**Table 3**  
*Independent Sample t-test between Gender and Study Variables (n=100)*

Nationality	t	df	p	Confidence Internal	
				LL	UL
Pre-Assessment	2.76	98	.00	.41	2.50
Post-Assessment	2.19	98	.03	.10	2.17

*Note:* t= Statistical Difference, df= Degree of Freedom, p= Significance Value, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit.

Results showed an equal variances t-test reveals a statistically reliable difference between the mean of nationality pre-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for national students (M= 26.98, s= 2.91) and mean of pre-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for international students (M=25.52, s= 2.34),  $t(98) = .69, p=.00, \alpha=.05$ .

Moreover, findings showed an equal variances t-test reveals a statistically reliable difference between the mean of nationality post-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for national students (M= 23.38, s= 2.51) and mean of post-assessment about mental health and suicidal awareness for international students (M= 22.14, s= 2.67),  $t(98) = .49, p=.03, \alpha=.05$ .

#### 4.1 Summary of Findings

- Results showed mental health and suicide awareness have a significant difference between male and females students.
- Results showed mental health and suicide awareness have a significant difference between national and international students.

## 5 Discussion

The present study examines the comparison between mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students in Northwest Normal University, P. R. China. One hundred national and international students were part of the study in which 50% male and 50% females participated. Participants were given self-report questionnaires measuring the demographic characteristics of the participants and the study variables.

### 5.1 Suicide, Mental Health, and Gender

The current study's findings showed that suicide and mental health have a highly significant difference between male and female students in China. Therefore, another study was conducted to examine the relationship between to present data from the College Health Intervention Projects on the frequency of depression and suicide ideation among 1,622 college students who accessed primary care services in 4 university clinics in the Midwest and Northwest. Results showed the frequency of depression was similar for men (25%) and women (26%). However, the thought of suicide was higher for men (13%) than women (10%). Therefore, with every 4th student reporting symptoms of depression and every 10th student having suicidal thoughts, such interventions are needed (Mackenzie et al., 2011).

### 5.2 Suicide, Mental Health, National and International Students

The current study's findings showed that suicide and mental health have a highly significant difference between national and international students in China. Another research was conducted to assess the association between adjustment issues, stress, and mental health among new university students. However, findings showed that stress was negatively correlated with the mental health of international students (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016).

Research has shown that mainland Chinese international students, as the largest and fastest-growing international student body in the united states, face high rates of mental health concerns but demonstrate low levels of help-seeking behaviors, such as seeking professional counseling services. Three significant areas regarding this phenomenon have been discussed: transcultural adjustment, attachment and relationship issues, and coping and help-seeking preferences. This research provides an overview of current studies on mainland Chinese international students' mental health issues and, using a resilience lens, offers recommendations for practice and future research (Zheng & Olatunji, 2016).

Another study was conducted to reports a systematic review of the studies related to mental health among international students. This review revealed three significant results: (1) a majority of researchers (n=13, 72.2%) tend to choose Chinese international students as a representative of East Asian and Asian international students in their studies; (2) studies on the mental health of international students is closely associated with the following variables: length of stay in the host country, language issue, attitudes toward seeking help, depression, and acculturation; (3) depression was the most frequently reported variable (n=6, 33.3%), followed by acculturation (n=5, 27.8%) (Li, Wang & Xiao, 2014).

A study was conducted to describe 905 students. An online mental health and well-being platform was used to measure students' mental health while providing real-time individual reports to each student. The data provides evidence of high levels of psychological distress (i.e. anxiety) and low levels of mental health and resilience in students, relative to population norms, with merely 18.6% of students demonstrating optimal scores on all outcomes. Moreover, findings showed anxiety was significantly predicted the mental health of international students (van Agteren J et al, 2019).

## 6. Conclusion

Hence, it is concluded that mental health and suicidal awareness are more likely to be seen amongst national and international students. These two domains have distinctive and separate relations with national and international student's health, both physically and mentally. It is evident from the current research and previous researches that individuals with good mental health have no suicidal thoughts in their life. Moreover, findings revealed a significant difference between gender, mental health, and suicidal awareness. Therefore, it is essential to understand how these individuals can adapt to various changes in their lives and how environmental, physiological, and psychological factors may affect their mental health. I hope that this research will offer valuable information for future generations of researchers and health care providers.

### 6.1 Strength of the Study

- Data were collected by using the pre and post-assessment methods in the present study.
- There was no research done on mental health and suicidal awareness among national and international students in P. R. China.
- Data was collected from the Northwest Normal University, P. R. China, to ensure the participant fulfill the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

### 6.2 Limitations of Study

- The sample size of the present research was 100 participants, 50% national and 50% were international students. And the sample of the present study was short for better understanding.
- Larger sample size would allow researchers to have more data to analyze, providing a better understanding of the topic. It will also enhance the validity and reliability of research.

### 6.3 Implications of Study

- This study will give insight into the importance of mental health and suicide awareness among national and international students.
- Mental health professionals can counsel national and international students about suicide.
- It will also make national and international students help to understand their role and attitude and change in personality, leading to symptom severity and psychological problems.

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