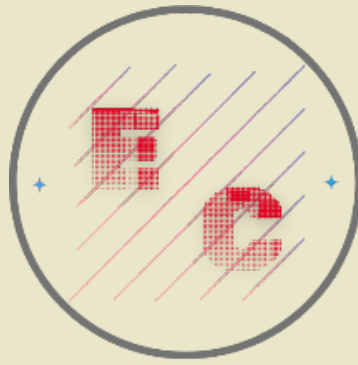




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**ACADEMIC STRESS AND SUICIDAL IDEATION: THE MODERATING ROLE OF
PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN LIMA**

**ESTRÉS ACADÉMICO E IDEACIÓN SUICIDA: EL ROL MODERADOR DE LA
RESILIENCIA PSICOLÓGICA EN ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE LIMA**

Luis Angel Vega Palomino

Perú

Academic stress and suicidal ideation: the moderating role of psychological resilience among university students in Lima

Estrés académico e ideación suicida: el rol moderador de la resiliencia psicológica en estudiantes universitarios de Lima

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to determine the influence of academic stress on suicidal ideation, considering the moderating role of psychological resilience in university students in Lima, Peru. It adopted a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design and an explanatory scope. The sample consisted of 267 university students. The results showed that academic stress had a positive and significant influence on suicidal ideation ($\beta = 0.107$; $p < .001$), while psychological resilience showed a negative and significant influence ($\beta = -0.174$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, the interaction between both variables was significant ($\beta = -0.009$; $p < .001$). The effect of stress was greater in students with low resilience ($\beta = 0.142$) and less in those with high resilience ($\beta = 0.073$). It was concluded that psychological resilience moderates the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation, attenuating its influence.

Keywords: Academic stress; suicidal ideation; psychological resilience; university students; mental health.

RESUMEN

La investigación tuvo como objetivo determinar la influencia del estrés académico en la ideación suicida, considerando el rol moderador de la resiliencia psicológica en estudiantes universitarios de Lima, Perú. Además, adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo, con diseño no experimental, transversal y alcance explicativo. La muestra estuvo conformada por 267 estudiantes universitarios. Los resultados evidenciaron que el estrés académico presentó una influencia positiva y significativa sobre la ideación suicida ($\beta = 0.107$; $p < .001$), mientras que la resiliencia psicológica mostró una influencia negativa y significativa ($\beta = -0.174$; $p < .001$). Asimismo, la interacción entre ambas variables fue significativa ($\beta = -0.009$; $p < .001$). El efecto del estrés fue mayor en estudiantes con baja resiliencia ($\beta = 0.142$) y menor en aquellos con alta resiliencia ($\beta = 0.073$). Se concluyó que la resiliencia psicológica modera la relación entre el estrés académico y la ideación suicida, atenuando su influencia.

Palabras clave: Estrés académico; ideación suicida; resiliencia psicológica; estudiantes universitarios; salud mental.

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INTRODUCTION

The mental health of students is increasingly important, as higher education presents diverse academic, social, and personal demands. One of the most common psychological problems at this level is academic stress, which arises from a set of academic demands perceived by university students as exceeding their personal resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986). Some of the main contributing factors are: excessive workload, pressure for academic performance, uncertainty about the future career, financial difficulties, and interpersonal problems within university life (Pérez et al., 2025). When these conditions persist for an

extended period, they can compromise psychological well-being and contribute to the development of more serious emotional problems (Estrada et al., 2025).

The magnitude of academic stress has been documented in various international contexts. In Germany, Olson et al. (2025) found that 73.2% of university students experienced high levels of academic stress, while Hahn et al. (2025) identified that approximately 60% experienced moderate levels. Similarly, Heumann et al. (2024) found a high frequency of anxiety and depression associated with academic stress. In the Peruvian context, Cassaretto et al. (2021) reported that 83% of university students experienced stress during the academic semester, while Calizaya et al. (2022) reported a prevalence of 96.2% during the period of online education. Additionally, García et al. (2024) indicated that between 47.4% and 87.1% of university students experienced academic stress, with emotional symptoms of anxiety and depression predominating. These findings have indicated that academic stress is a chronic problem, with repercussions on the mental health of university students.

One of the most alarming consequences of deterioration in mental health is suicidal ideation, defined as the presence of ideas, desires or plans aimed at ending one's own life (Shneidman, 1981). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) indicates that suicide is one of the leading causes of death between 15 and 29 years of age, while the Ministry of Health of Peru (2022) establishes that 71.5% of suicide attempts in the country correspond to young people between 15 and 34 years of age. Suicidal ideation in university students is an important risk indicator due to its relationship with future suicidal behaviors and various emotional disorders (Cherian et al., 2025). In Lima, this problem is worrying and may be related to academic demands, psychological vulnerability and even socioeconomic factors.

The following research was then presented: Okechukwu et al. (2022) found that academic stress significantly predicts suicidal ideation in university students, while Bong et al. (2025) demonstrated that psychological resilience reduces the intensity of this relationship. Similarly, Blanco et al. (2025) identified that resilience decreases the effect of academic stress

on the intention to drop out of university, confirming its protective function in situations of high academic pressure. In the Peruvian context, Cassaretto et al. (2024) indicated that resilience reduces general psychological distress, while Serpa et al. (2023) demonstrated that it acts as a protective mechanism against the negative effects of stress. Taken together, this background suggests that psychological resilience constitutes a personal resource capable of reducing the psychological consequences of academic demands.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research is based on Lazarus & Folkman (1986) transactional model of stress, since stress arises from the interaction between environmental demands and the individual's assessment of their resources to cope with them. Therefore, academic stress was understood as the result of the interaction between the demands imposed by the academic environment and the individual's perception of their own capacity to cope. In this sense, academic stress itself was considered to consist of two dimensions: academic stressors, which are understood as the academic requirements that generate pressure, such as workload, evaluations, and institutional demands; and emotional reactions to these stressors, such as anxiety, frustration, exhaustion, and academic hopelessness (Almengor et al., 2025).

This is also based on Shneidman (1981) theory of unbearable psychological pain, according to which suicidal ideation represents a cognitive manifestation of emotional suffering when it is perceived as intolerable. Suicidal ideation was understood as the presence of thoughts, intentions, or plans of suicide as a manifestation of intense psychological suffering.

Finally, the theory of Connor & Davidson (2003) maintains that psychological resilience constitutes a set of personal resources that promote positive adaptation to adversity and mitigate the effects of stress on mental health. Both perspectives enriched the concept of resilience, suggesting that it acts as a moderator between the impact of academic stress and suicidal ideation. Ultimately, based on the analysis of both perspectives, psychological resilience was defined as the capacity for positive adaptation to adverse or stressful situations,

the return to a state of emotional equilibrium, and the continuity of psychological functioning in stressful situations.

The limited evidence suggests that little research has been conducted on Peruvian university students regarding the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation, including psychological resilience as a moderating variable. This reality hinders a full understanding of the protective factors that could mitigate the negative effects of academic stress on mental health and impedes the development of evidence-based preventive intervention programs. In this context, the objective of this study was to determine the influence of academic stress on suicidal ideation, considering the moderating role of psychological resilience in university students in Lima. The hypothesis was that academic stress significantly influences suicidal ideation and that this relationship is moderated by psychological resilience, such that higher levels of resilience attenuate the effect of academic stress on suicidal ideation.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a quantitative approach, analyzing numerical data (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). A non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational-causal design was used, as the variables were observed without manipulation and measured at a single point in time (Ñaupas et al., 2018). The analysis was conducted using a regression-based moderation model with an interaction term, a recommended procedure for evaluating the moderating effect of a third variable on the influence between an independent and a dependent variable (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020).

The population consisted of students enrolled in public and private universities in Lima, totaling an estimated 744,351 students, according to records from the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI, 2023). A simple random probability sampling method was used, resulting in a sample of 267 university students. Regarding the sample characteristics, 53.2%

were male and 46.8% were female. The majority of students were between 18 and 20 years old (46.4%), attended public universities (54.3%), and were simultaneously studying and working (51.3%). Furthermore, the largest proportion were in their third or fourth academic year (46.4%) and were enrolled in face-to-face classes (87.3%).

The sociodemographic data sheet was developed by the author to collect information related to the participants' sex, age, type of university, employment status, academic year, faculty, and study modality. The Academic Stress Scale was developed by Almengor et al. (2025), comprised of 17 items distributed across two dimensions: stressors (8 items) and emotional responses (9 items), with a five-point Likert-type response format. In its original validation, it showed adequate fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.26$; CFI = .951; TLI = .944; RMSEA = .063; SRMR = .054) and adequate internal consistency ($\omega = .934$). In the present study, the instruments were submitted to expert review, yielding an Aiken's V of 1.00, and in the pilot test, it achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .970.

Likewise, the Suicidal Ideation Frequency Inventory, validated by Baños et al. (2021), consists of five items with a Likert-type response format. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.86$; CFI = .988; SRMR = .047) and internal consistency ($\omega = .800$). In the present study, it obtained an Aiken's V of 1.00 and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .935 during the pilot test. The Connor-Davidson Brief Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10), adapted and validated in a Peruvian population by Bernaola et al. (2022), consists of 10 items with a five-point Likert-type response format. In the validation study, it showed good fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.43$; CFI = .915; TLI = .934; RMSEA = .070; SRMR = .047) and internal consistency ($\omega = .827$). In this study, an Aiken's V of 1.00 and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .972 were achieved in the pilot test.

Data processing was performed using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics version 26, the latter being used for descriptive and moderation analysis of the variables. A significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted for hypothesis testing (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). Additionally,

moderation models were estimated using Jamovi software version 2.7.7. Finally, the interpretation of regression coefficients was based on the beta (β) coefficient, which expresses the magnitude and direction of the predictor effect (Keith, 2019). Multiple linear regression with an interaction term was used to evaluate the moderating effect (Roustaei, 2024). The results are reported using β coefficients, standard errors (SE), Z-statistics, and significance (p) values. When the interaction term proved significant, a simple slope analysis was performed and the corresponding interaction graphs were presented.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution of the levels of the study variables. Academic stress was concentrated primarily at the moderate and high levels, both at 41.9%. Similarly, the dimensions of stressors (42.7%) and emotional responses (47.2%) were most frequent at the moderate level. Regarding suicidal ideation, the minimal level predominated (56.6%), while psychological resilience was mainly concentrated at the functional level (91.4%).

Table 1.

Distribution of the levels of the study variables (n = 267)

Variable	Level	n	%
Academic stress	Mild	43	16.1%
	Moderate	112	41.9%
	High	112	41.9%
	Total	267	100%
Stressors	Mild	41	15.4%
	Moderate	114	42.7%
	High	112	41.9%

	Total	267	100%
Emotional responses	Mild	42	15.7%
	Moderate	126	47.2%
	High	99	37.1%
	Total	267	100%
Suicidal ideation	Minimal	151	56.6%
	Moderate	98	36.7%
	Severe	18	6.7%
	Total	267	100%
Psychological resilience	Limited	5	1.9%
	Functional	244	91.4%
	Strengthened	18	6.7%
	Total	267	100%

Note: Original work

Table 2 shows the results of the moderation model between academic stress, psychological resilience, and suicidal ideation. Academic stress had a positive and statistically significant influence on suicidal ideation ($\beta = 0.107$, $p < .001$). Psychological resilience also showed a negative and significant influence ($\beta = -0.174$, $p < .001$). The interaction term between academic stress and psychological resilience was also negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.009$, $p < .001$), demonstrating a moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between these two variables.

Table 2.

Model of the moderation of academic stress on suicidal ideation with psychological resilience as a moderating variable

Predictor	β	SE	Z	p
Academic stress	0.107	0.011	9.71	< .001
Psychological resilience	-0.174	0.050	-3.44	< .001
Academic stress $\times$ Psychological resilience	-0.009	0.002	-3.72	< .001

Note: β = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z statistic; p = significance level.

To interpret the interaction effect, a simple slope analysis was performed. Table 3 shows that the influence of academic stress on suicidal ideation was significant at all three levels of psychological resilience ($p < .001$). However, the magnitude of the effect was greatest in students with low psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.142$), decreased in those with an average level ($\beta = 0.107$), and was smallest in those with high psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.073$), indicating that psychological resilience attenuates the influence of academic stress on suicidal ideation.

Table 3.

Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect of psychological resilience

Level of psychological resilience	β	SE	Z	p
Low (-1 SD)	0.142	0.015	8.99	< .001
Average	0.107	0.011	9.54	< .001

High (+1 SD)	0.073	0.013	5.43	<
				.001

Note: β = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z statistic; p = significance level.

Table 4 shows the results of the moderation model between stressors, psychological resilience, and suicidal ideation. Stressors showed a positive and statistically significant influence on suicidal ideation ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < .001$). Similarly, psychological resilience showed a negative and significant influence ($\beta = -0.170$, $p < .001$). The interaction term between stressors and psychological resilience was also negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.017$, $p < .001$), demonstrating a moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between these two variables.

Table 4.

Moderating model of stressors on suicidal ideation with psychological resilience as a moderating variable

Predictor	β	SE	Z	p
Stressors	0.218	0.023	9.23	< .001
Psychological resilience	-0.170	0.051	-3.32	< .001
Stressors $\times$ Psychological resilience	-0.017	0.005	-3.35	< .001

Note: β = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z statistic; p = significance level.

Table 5 presents the simple slope analysis. It shows that the influence of stressors on suicidal ideation was significant at all three levels of psychological resilience ($p < .001$). However, the magnitude of the effect was greatest in students with low psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.284$), decreased in those with an average level ($\beta = 0.219$), and was smallest in those

with high psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.153$), demonstrating that psychological resilience attenuates the influence of stressors on suicidal ideation.

Table 5.

Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between stressors and suicidal ideation

Level of psychological resilience	β	SE	Z	p
Low (-1 SD)	0.284	0.033	8.56	< .001
Average	0.219	0.024	9.10	< .001
High (+1 SD)	0.153	0.028	5.27	< .001

Note: β = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z statistic; p = significance level.

Table 6 shows the results of the moderation model between emotional responses, psychological resilience, and suicidal ideation. Emotional responses showed a positive and statistically significant influence on suicidal ideation ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < .001$). Similarly, psychological resilience showed a negative and significant influence ($\beta = -0.176$, $p < .001$). The interaction term between emotional responses and psychological resilience was also negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.017$, $p < .001$), demonstrating a moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between these two variables.

Table 6.

Moderation model of emotional responses to suicidal ideation with psychological resilience as a moderating variable

Predictor	β	SE	Z	p
Emotional Responses	0.199	0.020	9.71	< .001
Psychological Resilience	-0.176	0.050	-3.47	< .001
Emotional Responses $\times$ Psychological Resilience	-0.017	0.004	-3.66	< .001

Note: β = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z statistic; p = significance level.

Table 7 presents the simple slope analysis. It shows that the influence of emotional responses on suicidal ideation was significant at all three levels of psychological resilience ($p < .001$). However, the magnitude of the effect was greatest in students with low psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.263$), decreased in those with an average level ($\beta = 0.200$), and was smallest in those with high psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.137$), demonstrating that psychological resilience attenuates the influence of emotional responses on suicidal ideation.

Table 7.

Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between emotional responses and suicidal ideation

Level of psychological resilience	β	SE	Z	p
Low (–1 SD)	0.263	0.029	8.98	< .001
Average	0.200	0.021	9.54	< .001
High (+1 SD)	0.137	0.025	5.45	< .001

Note: β = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z statistic; p = significance level.

DISCUSSION

The results allowed the research to achieve its objective, demonstrating that academic stress significantly influences suicidal ideation and that this relationship is moderated by psychological resilience. Consequently, the hypothesis was supported, as the effect of academic stress on suicidal ideation decreased as levels of psychological resilience increased. These results indicate that resilience is a moderating psychological resource that influences the relationship between academic demands and the mental health of university students.

Regarding the overall model, academic stress positively predicted suicidal ideation, while psychological resilience showed a protective effect. The interaction effect was significant, demonstrating that the relationship between both variables depends on the student's level of resilience. These results are consistent with Okechukwu et al. (2022), who found that academic stress is a significant predictor of suicidal ideation in university students, and also with Bong et al. (2025), who found that resilience attenuated the relationship between stress and

psychological distress variables. Blanco et al. (2025) also mentioned that resilience attenuated the perceived negative effects of academic demands, thus supporting the findings of this research.

Regarding the stressors dimension, it was found that the demands of the university context have a significant impact on suicide risk, but this effect is attenuated as psychological resilience increases. It could be inferred that students with greater personal resources respond more adaptively to academic demands, decreasing the risk of suicidal thoughts. This is consistent with the findings of Cassaretto et al. (2024), who concluded that resilience acts as a protective factor against psychological distress, and also with the findings of Serpa et al. (2023), who indicated its positive relationship with the use of functional coping strategies in the face of stressors.

Regarding the emotional responses dimension, it was observed that the affective reactions generated by academic stress also significantly influence suicidal ideation, with this effect being less intense in students with higher levels of resilience. This finding emphasizes that emotional regulation and resilience have a lesser impact on psychological vulnerability to academic stress. In this sense, the findings are consistent with Heumann et al. (2024), who identified a high co-occurrence of stress, anxiety, and depression in university students, as well as with García et al. (2024), who reported that emotional manifestations represent one of the main consequences of academic stress.

Theoretically, the results support Lazarus & Folkman's (1986) transactional model of stress, which posits that the impact of stress depends on an individual's appraisal of environmental demands and their coping resources. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Shneidman (1981) theory of psychological pain, demonstrating that increased academic stress contributes to suicidal thoughts when emotional suffering exceeds coping capacity.

Finally, the findings confirm Connor & Davidson's (2003) assertion that resilience represents a set of psychological resources that promote positive adaptation to adversity and mitigate the negative effects of stress on mental health.

The results obtained should be discussed considering some limitations. The first and most relevant is that, given the cross-sectional design, it is not possible to establish definitive causal relationships between the variables studied. Therefore, future longitudinal studies would be necessary to describe the effect of one variable on another over time. Second, although the sample size was sufficient for the analyses performed, the research was conducted on a sample of university students from Lima, meaning that the results cannot be generalized to other areas of the country. Finally, the application of self-report instruments is subject to the influence of social desirability bias or over- or under-reporting by the participants. This last limitation was partially mitigated by the use of instruments with evidence of validity and adequate reliability for the population context.

The findings have practical implications that underscore the importance of including institutional programs to foster psychological resilience as a preventative strategy against the effects of academic stress and suicidal ideation. In this regard, universities could implement socio-educational programs focused on developing coping skills, emotional regulation, and timely psychological support. It is proposed that future research include other potential moderators and mediators (such as social support, emotional intelligence, or coping strategies), expand the university context studied, or incorporate longitudinal designs to explore the dynamics of these relationships in greater depth.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been established that academic stress significantly influences suicidal ideation in university students, moderated by psychological resilience. This means that greater psychological resilience correlates with a lesser influence of academic stress on suicidal

ideation, supporting the protective role of this factor in the face of academic demands.

The dimensions of stressors and emotional responses also have a significant effect on suicidal ideation, which is less pronounced in students with higher levels of psychological resilience. This leads to the conclusion that it is crucial for institutions to promote strategies aimed at strengthening resilience as a central theme in mental health promotion and suicide prevention programs within the university context.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this research.

Declaration of authorship contribution

Luis Angel Vega Palomino was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, the methodological design, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and the drafting, review, and approval of the final version of the manuscript.

Artificial Intelligence Usage Statement

The author declares that artificial intelligence tools were used solely to support the manuscript preparation process. Their use was limited to assistance tasks and did not replace the analysis, interpretation, argumentation, or scientific writing of the work. Responsibility for the content, originality, and conclusions of the article rests exclusively with the author.

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