

# The Reality of Self-Destruction Levels of Students at Secondary Schools in Vietnam

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## Abstract

The result of the survey on 280 secondary school students based on screenings of 1000 students in several provinces in Vietnam illustrates the fact that 0.4 percent of these students commit self-destruction at very serious level; 0.4 percent at serious level, which occupies 1 percent of the participants showing signs of self-destruction. The result also represents that one fifth of these students ruins themselves at average level and more than half of them at slight level. Moreover, the study determines the differences of self-destruction levels among students in different grades and at various academic capacity in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Self-destruction, self-destructive behaviors, secondary school students

## 1. Introduction

For the past years, emo style has not been a strange issue. Currently, the progression of this behavior is becoming more and more complex. Why plenty of young people commit self-destruction even in their happy home has become an attentive problem. Self-destruction can be anything to harm people's physical and spiritual health. Any of these behaviors can be considered to be self-destructive: self-destruction (cutting, pinching, kicking, scratching, pulling hair), irresistible behavior (gambling, overeating, drug abuse, unprotected sex, overspending), neglect (no attention to needs, health, help refusal), and thoughts/ actions that can harm their psychology (being pessimistic, being too much dependent, denying responsibility, allowing other people to ill treat themselves). Self-destructive behaviors as their short definition are the actions to harm themselves, making themselves hurt, exhausted with specific physical and clinical signs but they cannot recognize or feel these behaviors.

The overview shows that there have been lots of studies on self-destructive behaviors of students at different ages and at secondary schools. Along with findings in causes, reality, characteristics of these behaviors, many researchers suggest solutions to limit these self-destructive behaviors of secondary school students. Nowadays, in Vietnam, there has been an increase in school psychological disorders at secondary schools and this issue has been a growing concern. Psychological illnesses and diseases at secondary school age can result into problems in physical and mental health and especially deviations in emotions and behaviors. There have been therapies for these psychological disorders. However, based on reality evidence, only one fifths of these student patients have been provided with psychological health service while these students are those suffering from more psychological problems than any of other ages. Obviously, the studies on this issue have been paid close attention but the direct studies have not been carried out systematically and officially in Vietnam. Therefore, it is paramount necessary for the evaluation of secondary school students' self-destructive behaviors and levels and their prevention solutions to be studied.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1 Research Design*

Questionnaires and situations are designed for 279 secondary school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in Ho Chi Minh City. These students are screened from 1020 secondary school students altogether. Based on the initial checklist for understanding the self-destructive behavior signs, 279 subjects were screened for in-depth study. The time for the study is from February 2017 to February 2018.

### *2.2 Research Subjects*

The subjects are chosen from 07 secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong city. These 279 students show self-destructive signs. The students taking part in the surveys are as follows in Table 1.

Table 1. The number of students participating in the survey

School/ Elements	Ly Phong	Hoang Le Kha	Bach Dang	Kien Thiet	Tan Quy Tay	Pham Dinh Ho	Nguyen Duc Canh	Total	
Grade	Grade 9	0	0	0	13	0	0	1	14
	Grade 8	0	0	13	1	3	36	10	63
	Grade 7	38	30	16	8	0	20	40	152
	Grade 6	12	9	1	26	0	0	3	51
Academic results	Good	15	16	13	5	3	15	32	99
	Fair	25	12	16	16	0	22	19	110
	Average	10	7	1	19	0	11	3	51
	Below average	0	4	0	7	0	6	0	17
	Weak	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Behavior assessments in the latest semester	Good	34	29	29	25	3	7	41	168
	Fair	9	4	1	9	0	20	7	50
	Average	7	4	0	9	0	5	0	25
	Below average	0	2	0	5	0	12	5	24
	Weak	0	0	0	0	0	12	1	13
Family backgrounds	Intellectual	6	5	17	2	0	4	21	55
	Busniess	14	6	6	10	0	17	9	62
	Small business	10	4	0	4	0	32	7	57
	Laborers'	10	11	4	20	1	2	7	55
	Workers'	10	13	3	12	2	1	10	51
Family finance	Rich	2	1	4	0	0	0	5	12
	Wealthy	18	10	11	3	0	12	15	69
	Average	30	26	14	33	3	33	32	171
	Difficult	0	2	1	10	0	10	2	25
	Poor	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
Gender	Male	29	21	16	29	0	22	27	144
	Female	21	18	14	19	3	33	27	135
Total								279	

### 2.3 Data Collection

Questionnaires designed:

The questionnaires designed for screened secondary school students include:

- a) Information of the subjects participating in the survey
- b) The survey contents containing two main parts:
  - Part 1: Groups of questions to study the reality of self-destructive behaviors of the subjects
  - Part 2: Understanding about awareness, attitude, behaviors of the subjects when they commit self-destruction
  - Part 3: Understanding about the influential factors of secondary school students' self-destructive behaviors.
  - Part 4: Understanding about the living background, evaluation of satisfaction level of secondary school students about several aspects: relationship, learning, behavior assessment, talents and love.

### 2.4 Marking/ Rating Way

The five-scale questions/ statements are rated as follows:

Table 2. The rating way of self-destructive behavior level

Rate	Level
81 - 120	Having signs of self-destruction
121 - 202	Slight
203 - 283	Average
284 - 364	Serious
365 - 419	Very serious

This rating way is based on theories of self-destructive behavior evaluation of some authors around the world and links with the results from the pilot study. SPSS 20.0 is also used to process the data collected.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Common Level of Secondary School Students' Self-Destructive Behaviors

Self-destructive behaviors are the actions to harm themselves, making themselves hurt, exhausted with specific physical and clinical signs but they cannot recognize or feel these behaviors. Classification of these behaviors is based on levels of being hurt. It includes slight/ Low, average and high/ serious.

Low level: Self-destructive behaviors are at low/slight level (negative thoughts, stress, pressure,...). At this level, secondary school students do not act but think about the actions that can hurt themselves, specifically they use their mind to restrict their expectations of self-destructive behaviors.

Average level: Self-destructive behaviors are at average level (pulling hair, kicking, hitting, scratching themselves,...). At this level, secondary school students commit self-destruction. However, they can control or limit these behaviors when they are influenced by external factors like encouragement from their family or friends.

High/ serious level: Self-destructive behaviors are at high/serious level (committing suicide, seriously hurting themselves to harm their health, cutting their hands or legs,..). At this level, they suffer from mental disorders, depression, even death.

The classification or breakdown of these levels is general and follows the results of evaluation of five above self-destructive behaviors. At the same time, along with data collected from the screened results and the pilot study, this breakdown into three levels is valid and ensures the format basis. This is an important basis for educational influences exerted from these behaviors or solution for the prevention of these behaviors.

Table 3. Mean of self-destructive behavior level of secondary school students

Mean sum	Lowest mean	Highest mean	Standard Deviation
161	85	391	51

The result from Table 3 illustrates the fact that mean of self-destructive behavior of secondary school students is 161, which falls into Low/ Slight level. At this level, students have negative feelings like boredom, pessimism about life or the tendency of blaming themselves. They begin to lose care for their health and tend to do things sometimes harmful and dangerous to themselves although they are aware of the danger of these actions. They are able to control the actions doing harm to themselves, specifically with the care and sharing of family, teachers and friends. However, at this level, if these students lack care or encouragement or particularly suffer from difficult living conditions, they feel overwhelmed by negative feelings, which makes them hard to face questions and irritation caused. This results into the fact that students tend to commit self-destruction. One notable thing is the highest mean is 391, which means there are students who do self-destructive things at high or very serious level. Consequently, these students need psychological therapy. The reality of self-destructive behavior level of secondary school student subjects of the study is demonstrated in the Table 4.

Table 4. Specific levels of self-destructive behaviors of secondary school students

Order	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Having signs of self-destructive behaviors	74	26.5
2	Low/ Slight level	144	51.6
3	Average	59	21.1
4	High/ Serious	1	0.4
5	Very high/ very serious	1	0.4
TỔNG		279	100

The result in Table 4 shows that among 279 subjects screened, more than a half (51.6%) commit self-destruction at low level. Meanwhile, 26.5% of the students have signs of self-destruction. Specifically, they start to have misconceptions about themselves like disbelief in themselves, boredom with life and dissatisfaction with some relationships. There are some cases in which they experience loss or broken relationship and have feelings and thoughts, which are so negative that they will self-destroy themselves but they do not show any of these hurting actions. For this stage, they need special care for the misconceptions and are provided with ways or measures to cope with stress and pressure. One striking and important feature in table 4 is that 21.1% of these secondary school students commit self-destruction at average level. This figure claims more than one fifth of the subjects have self-destructive behaviors which hurt themselves and leave mental and academic consequences as well as bad effects on relationship. At this level, they exhibit self-destructive behaviors because they do not find ways to express their situations and feelings. These students feel hurt and miserable. According to Morelle (1992) “Nothing is important to us, even their life or their good self. To them, self-destruction, specifically this behavior commitment in front of other people is their response to their hopelessness”. After they show these behavior patterns, they feel less stressed, stay calm and are able to control themselves. However, the risk of their commitment still exists. Secondary school students will be motivated by the pleasant feelings of replacing physical pain with mental pain and they will gradually suffer from more serious symptoms. The result in table 4 also indicates that there is only 0.4 percentage of the subjects at high level and 0.4 percent at very high level. Yet, the behaviors at this level are serious if their exhibitions are studied. At this level, they experience numbness, utter confusion, insecurity and illusion if continuously performed over long periods of time without any intervention. Particularly at very serious level, their bodies are hurt and they start to think of plans to end their life to stop their pain.

In summary, the mean of self-destructive behaviors of secondary school students is not high. However, the fact that 21 percent of subjects commit self-destruction at average and 0.8 percent at serious and very serious level illustrates a psychological phenomenon caused by distinctive difficulties that this age overcomes in their puberty crisis. These challenges cause secondary school students to easily fall into psychological stress, anxiety, depression,

specifically in combination with a number of traumatic events, which make students commit self-destruction as a way to cope with stress. Consequently, solutions for self-destructive behaviors should aim at improving their adaptive capacity to difficulties during their puberty. Secondary school students should be supplied with ways to support themselves, spare their feelings, know how to control and transform emotions, express themselves and communicate positively to lead a healthy mental life. Obviously, these measures should be simultaneously carried out to be appropriate for their teen age.

### *3.2 Comparison of Self-Destructive Behavior Levels of Secondary School Students in Various Aspects*

#### *3.2.1 Comparison of Self-Destructive Behaviors in Terms of Gender*

Table 5. Comparison of self-destructive behaviors in terms of gender

<b>Order</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>(F)</b>
1	Male	144	131	0.221	1.082
2	Female	135	140		

T-Test results with the reliability of 95% for Sig =0.221>0.05 indicate that there are no significant differences in self-destructive behaviors in terms of gender.

The mean between male's and female's behaviors is slightly different, specifically male at 144 and female at 135. The study results represent there are no relations between self-destructive behaviors and gender. Both male and their female counterparts commit self-destruction at similar slight level. Although the mean of female students' tends to higher than male's since their psychological traits are stronger and their emotional control is weaker than their counterparts are. Male are assumed to be rational and more able to control their emotions. The results are as follows:

Table 6. Self-destructive behavior levels of secondary school students in terms of gender

Order	Levels	Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Having signs of self-destructive behaviors	37	25.7	37	27.4
2	Low/ Slight level	69	47.9	74	54.8
3	Average	36	25.0	23	17.0
4	High/ Serious	0	0	1	0.7
5	Very high/ very serious	2	1.4	0	0
	Total	144	100	135	100

The percentage of secondary school male students who commit serious self-destruction is 1.4 while that of their counterparts is zero. Meanwhile, 0.7 percent of female display self-destructive behaviors at serious level while none of male students do. Therefore, it is perceived that the number of male secondary school students commit dysregulated behaviors at serious and very serious levels is twice as that of female's. The interview results demonstrate male secondary school students tend to do more serious self-destructive behaviors like burning their skin, hitting against the wall and using drugs. For female students, they tend not to take care of their health like pulling hair or cutting something. Thus, the seriousness level of dysregulated behaviors is different among male and female students in terms of gender. However, the differences among the level are not significant. For the lowest level, 25.7 percent of male students is noted with female of 27.4%. When it comes to the slight level, 47.9 percent of male students commit self-destruction while 54.8 percent of female counterparts do. At average level, a quarter of male participants have dysregulated behaviors while nearly a third of female students do.



### 3.2.2 Comparison of Self-Destructive Behavior Levels of Secondary School Students in Term of Grades

Table 7. Comparison of self-destructive behavior levels of secondary school students in term of grades

Order	Academic results	Frequency	Mean	ANOVA results	
				Results of the variance tests	ANOVA
1	Grade 6	50	180		
2	Grade 7	152	159		
3	Grade 8	63	139	14.036	0.000
4	Grade 9	14	219		

The variance test results with the sig. of 14.036 and ANOVA results with Sig.=0.000 determine the significant differences in self-destructive behavior exhibitions in terms of grades. Based on the mean, the distribution of the level is fairly obvious. Students in grades 6, 7 and 8 display dysregulated behaviors at the slight level while students of grade 9 commit self-destruction at high mean of 219. Students in grade 9 seem to be under more learning pressure than their counterparts in other grades do since they must prepare for entrance examinations for high schools. T.L.M, a student in this grade claimed on being interviewed that “There are numerous assignments, which makes me tired and stressed. If I cannot do them well as required, I will be punished. Moreover, my parents expect me to pass the examinations into specialized schools, which is beyond my ability”. Similarly, T.K.B said, “I have to take so many extra classes. I feel miserable about this. I have been a good student for many years. If I cannot pass the high school entrance examinations, I will feel ashamed”. Generally, students in the highest grade of senior high schools suffered from learning pressure, parental expectations and their own expectations. X, an expert in the field of psychological analysis, stated, “There have been some students who cannot accept failure in their entrance examination since they think that they are able to do it. This makes them pull their hair for many months. Consequently, parents have to take them to hospitals”. In X’s opinion, “The student patients’ imperfect development of their personalities are to blame for these student patients’ stress and their psychological shocks. The signs of self-destructive behaviors are considerably different from other psychological disorders. To take an example, if the patients are depressed and silently commit suicide or even feel ashamed of their self-harm. However, for self-destruction, they want to show to other people that they are destroying themselves”. This is also the reason for the fact that students in grade 6 exhibit more self-destructive behaviors than their counterparts in grades 7 and 8 do since they cope with difficulties caused by the transition from elementary schools to secondary schools. The beginning phase of puberty, confusion about their bodies and adaption to the new learning environment and friendship make them face more challenges. The statistical figures are

illustrated in Table 7.

Table 8. Self-destructive behaviors of secondary school students in terms of grades

Orders	Levels	Grades							
		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9	
		F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)
1	Having signs of self-destructive behaviors	14	27.5	35	23.0	23	36.5	2	14.3
2	Low/ Slight level	9	17.6	98	64.5	36	57.1	1	7.1
3	Average	27	52.9	18	11.8	4	6.3	10	71.4
4	High/ Serious	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
5	Very high/ very serious	1	2.0	0	0	0	0	1	7.1
	Total	51	100	152	100	63	100	14	100

The statistical figures illustrate the fact that there are students in grade 6 and 9 display dysregulated behaviors at very serious level. Grade 9 students committing self-destruction occupy 71.4 percent, i.e. the number of students in this grade is substantial. This data plays an important part in the implementation of self-destructive behavior prevention measures for these students.

### 3.2.3 Comparison of Self-Destructive Behaviors of Secondary School Students in Terms of Academic Results

Table 9. Comparison of self-destructive behaviors of secondary school students in terms of academic results

Order	Academic results	Frequency	Mean	ANOVA	
				Results of the variance tests	ANOVA
1	Good	98	149		
2	Fair	110	159		
3	Average	51	185	4.639	0.001
4	Below average	17	172		
5	Weak	3	155		

The variance test results with the sig. of 4.369 and ANOVA results with Sig.=0.001 determine the differences between secondary school students' dysregulated behaviors and academic results. Specifically, students with average and weak academic results have more

dysregulated behaviors than those with fair and good results.

There is a difference in the mean of dysregulated behaviors among secondary schools students. Those at average and weak level exhibit more self-destructive behaviors than those at fair and good level. Good students have the lowest mean of 149 and average ones at the highest mean of 185. For secondary school students, academic results are one of the features to show their value to other people. Those students who are better at learning tend to be more confident than those are not good. Students at low academic level have the tendency to show express themselves by negative trends or movements. To take an example, Emo originated from the word “Emotion” is a trend in which students live based on their emotions. Those follow this trend worship the emotions of depression, sadness and vulnerability. Another trend is Blue Whale Challenge, a communication game for two years originating in Russia. This game requires the players to do successive actions in 50 days starting from 4:20 a.m. per day. On the last day of the game, the players commit suicide to be recognized as the winner. This is the meaning of the game. This is similar to the image of a blue whale which voluntarily strands on the seaside to commit suicide.

However, from the figures in the tables, even good students commit self-destruction at serious and very serious level. There are two manifesting this behavior, which should be a concerning issue. The levels of dysregulated behaviors in terms of academic result levels are illustrated in the following table.

Table 10. The levels of dysregulated behaviors in terms of academic result levels

Order	Levels	Academic results									
		Good		Fair		Average		Below Average		Weak	
		F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)	F	(%)
1		30	30.3	32	29.1	8	15.7	3	17.6	1	33.3
2	Having signs of self-destructive behaviors	60	60.6	53	48.2	22	43.1	8	47.1	1	33.3
3	Low/ Slight level	7	7.1	25	22.7	20	39.2	6	35.3	1	33.3
4	Average	1	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	High/ Serious	1	1.0	0	0	1	2.0	0	0	0	0
	Total	99	100	110	100	51	100	17	100	3	100

#### 4. Conclusion

Secondary school student participants in the study exhibit self-destructive behaviors from sign manifestations to very serious level. Those who display dysregulated behaviors at serious and very serious level take up 0.8 percent. The difference in self-destructive behaviors in terms of grades and academic levels has the statistical significance. The issue

arisen here is to study the influential measures to individual students at particular behavior levels in order for them to stop their self-destruction for appropriate behaviors. This is not only the schools' responsibility but also the family's and authorities' to ensure students' full psychological development. The data collected from the study is important to school counselling at general education schools in general and secondary schools in particular.

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