Research Article

Ab Initio High-Pressure Study of Semiconductor-Metal Phase Transition of the Chalcogenide Compound KPSe₆

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1. Introduction

In the recent past, research on the effect of pressure on structural phase transformations and characteristics of materials by calculations from first principles have attracted much attention since they give an insight into the nature of solid-state theories [1, 2], and also assist in determining values of essential parameters for industrial applications [3]. For example, the structural, electrical, and optical properties of group III–V semiconducting compounds have been studied extensively [1, 3–5].

Most elements do undergo structural phase transitions as pressure is induced [6–9]. When a material is subjected to compressional forces, its electronic band structure changes [10, 11] which further results in a change in its structural properties [10, 12–14]. This often leads first to the formation of low-symmetry complex structures which at higher pressure then transform into high-symmetry close-packed structures [6, 8, 13]. Besides, the delocalization of bonding electrons under pressure reduces the differences between the chemical properties of the elements and their crystal structures [15]. As a result, numerous new allotropes of the elements have been discovered [16].

Structural studies of chalcogenides under high pressure up to 52 GPa have been carried out experimentally by using X-ray diffraction method [9]. For example, CaS, CaSe, and CaTe alkaline-earth chalcogenides undergo a structural phase transition at a pressure of 40 GPa, 38 GPa, and 33 GPa, respectively [9, 14]. The study of crystalline materials under pressure in material physics gives very important and useful material properties [1, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17]. Subjecting a material to high pressure leads to a reduction of interatomic spacing which in turn affects the crystal structure and electronic orbitals [1, 18–23]. Likewise, high pressure can result in the formation of new material with different features from the initial material [24].

Chalcogenide glasses are based on selenium, tellurium, and the addition of other elements such as arsenic, germanium, antimony, gallium, and potassium [3, 25]. They are well known for their advantages, such as a wide transmittance range (1–12 μm) [3], low intrinsic losses in the mid-IR [26], low phonon energy [27], and the absence of free-carrier...
effects [3, 28–30]. KPSe₆ as a chalcogenide has attracted much interest because of its promising abilities in technological applications such as thin films and optical fibers [3, 25, 27, 30, 31]. KPSe₆ crystallizes in the polar orthorhombic space group Pca2₁ [3, 26, 32]. This compound is a semiconductor at zero pressure with a direct bandgap of 1.883 eV [3, 26, 31, 33]. We aimed at investigating the behavior of KPSe₆ under very high pressure.

We arrange this paper in the following order: we explain the details of the calculation in Section 2, Section 3 discusses the results, and conclusions are in Section 4.

2. Computational Details

The study was done using the density functional theory (DFT) [34] by employing for the exchange-correlation...
functional, the generalized gradient approximation of Perdew–Burke–Ernzerhof [34–36] based on Plane Wave self-consistent field (PWscf) and Ultrasoft pseudopotential (USPP) method. Pressure increase was implemented as follows: starting with the relaxed unit cell, we modified the input file whereby we changed the “calculation” type from “scf” to “vc-relax” and then introduced two new segments; the first segment is called “&ions” while the second one is called “&cell.” Under the first segment, the ion dynamics were set to damp while under the second segment, we entered the target pressure (Kbar) that we wanted to subject our cell to [35]. The new atomic positions obtained were then used to calculate the electronic structure properties of KPSe$_6$ as at that pressure. The ab initio calculations are implemented in the Quantum Espresso simulation package [36], and pseudopotentials were taken from the Quantum Espresso database. For pseudopotentials, the valence electrons are 2s for K, 2p for P, and 2p for Se. The valence wave functions were expanded in a plane wave basis set truncated at a kinetic energy of 25 Ry (340 eV). At ambient conditions, KPSe$_6$ crystallizes in the polar orthorhombic space group Pca2$_1$ [3, 26, 32]. The structure has three species of atoms as potassium K, phosphorous P, and selenium Se. The primitive unit cell of the chalcogenide compound KPSe$_6$ has a total of 32 atoms: 4 potassium atoms, 4 phosphorous atoms, and 24 selenium atoms. Figure 1 shows the optimized crystal structure of KPSe$_6$. 

**Figure 3:** A representative convergence curve for total energy versus kinetic energy cutoff. The optimized energy cutoff at the minima was ~25 Ry as shown.

**Figure 4:** (a) The electronic band structure and the density of states. The band structure and density of states show a very close similarity as seen above. (b) The curves represent the partial density of states and how each atom contributes to either the valence band or conduction band. It can be noted that Se 2(p) states contribute more to the valence band compared potassium and selenium, while P 2(p) states contribute more to the conduction band.
Figure 5: Induced pressure dependence of the Fermi energy. There is a continued increase in Fermi energy with increased pressure, provided the structure has not undergone distortion [6, 41].

Figure 6: Calculated pressure-dependent band structures and density of states for the compound KPSe₆ at (a) 20 GPa, (b) 30 GPa, (c) 40 GPa, and (d) 45 GPa. The bandgaps are $\sim$1.18 eV at 20 GPa (a), $\sim$1.05 eV at 30 GPa (b), $\sim$0.50 eV at 40 GPa (c), and 0.00 eV at 45 GPa (d).
Figure 7: A plot of the calculated band gaps versus the pressure of the chalcogenide compound KPSe$_6$.

Figure 8: Crystal structures for KPSe$_6$ at pressure (a) 0 GPa, (b) 20 GPa, (c) 30 GPa, (d) 40 GPa, (e) 45 GPa, and (f) 50 GPa, respectively, as viewed using crystalline and molecular structure visualization program (Xcrysden). The crystal structure remained undistorted as pressure was increased. This implies that the structure remained stable and that there was no structural phase transition.

Table 1: Shows a structural analysis of KPSe6 in terms of bond lengths and bond angles at various pressure intervals.

| Pressure (GPa) | K-Se (Å) | P-Se (Å) | Se-Se (Å) | K-Se-P ($) |
|---------------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 0             | 2.8002   | 1.9284   | 1.9703    | 83.030     |
| 20            | 2.8460   | 2.1322   | 2.2821    | 85.293     |
| 30            | 2.7130   | 2.0643   | 2.2234    | 84.275     |
| 40            | 2.6131   | 2.0090   | 2.1729    | 83.822     |
| 45            | 2.5707   | 1.9858   | 2.1526    | 84.094     |
| 50            | 2.5317   | 1.9627   | 2.1290    | 84.285     |
3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Structural Optimization. In this section, we report the graphical representation of the optimized lattice parameters and kinetic energy cutoff (ecut) for our chalcogenide compound KPSe_6. The following graphs of Figure 2 represent how the optimized lattice parameters were obtained. The minima in the graphs represent the ground-state energy which corresponds to the accurate parameter to be used for the calculations.

The ground-state calculation for the optimized kinetic energy cutoff (ecut) was performed, and the graph is plotted as shown in Figure 3. The kinetic energy cutoff optimized value was \( \sim 25 \text{Ry} \). This was the value used for the rest of the calculations.

3.2. Electronic Structure Properties. Calculations of the band structure, partial density of states, and density of states of the compound KPSe_6 are here reported. In order to determine the band structure properties, we used the following high symmetry points of \( \Gamma(0,0,0), X(1/2,0,0), Y(0,1/2,0), Z(0,0,1/2), T(0,1/2,1/2), U(1/2,0,1/2), S(1/2,1/2,0), \) and \( R(1/2,1/2,1/2) \) [16,37,38]. A direct bandgap of \( \sim 1.7 \text{eV} \) was obtained at zero pressure and the gap formed around the T-symmetry. This result is in agreement with the experimental value of 1.883 eV [3, 26, 37, 39] and is within the error bar range [37]. The underestimation is caused by the occupied states being lower in energy as compared to the unoccupied states [39, 40]. The bands and curves for the density of states for this compound are as presented in Figure 4.

3.3. Pressure-Induced Phase Transition. It is established that the bandgap of a material depends on the magnetic field, temperature, and pressure [39]. We examined how pressure affects the bandgap. According to Gulyamov [17, 23, 39], the pressure band gap relation is given by

\[
E_g(P) = E_g(0) - \beta P, \quad (1)
\]

where \( \beta \) represents the pressure coefficient which defines the shift in the position of the valence and conduction bands with variation in pressure [1, 18]. The Fermi level pressure dependence is given by [39]

\[
E_F(P, T) = E_g(P) + \frac{3}{4} KT \ln \frac{m^*_e}{m_e}, \quad (2)
\]

where \( E_F \) represents the Fermi energy, \( T \) is the absolute temperature, \( E_g \) gives the energy gap, \( m^*_e \) is the mass of an electron, and \( m^*_h \) is the mass of the hole. A graph showing the relationship between Fermi energy and pressure is as shown in Figure 5.

On inducing pressure, the number of charge carriers with respect to the density of state increased which in turn enhanced the availability of more electrons responsible for electrical conductivity [17, 42, 43]. As we introduced more pressure, there was an overlap between the valence band and the conduction band which was attributed to the broadening of the bandwidth of the 2s and 2p atomic orbital [20]. This was because of their strong interaction with neighboring atoms that created wider bands than the energy gap, thus allowing electrons to the conduction band [41]. The phase transition from the semiconductor to metal was found to occur at \( \sim 45 \text{GPa} \). Therefore, it was an indication that pressure can lead to the semiconductor-metal transition [42]. The changes in the band structure and density of state at different pressure in relation to Fermi energy are described using Figure 6. The variation of bandgaps for pressure calculations was also plotted as shown in Figure 7.

The crystal structure was stable and not distorted at high pressure; this showed that the material can withstand high compressional forces and thus can be used for various high-pressure industrial applications. The crystal structures at various pressures are as shown in Figure 8.

The bond lengths and bond angles were investigated as well at various pressure intervals using crystalline and molecular structure visualization program (XCrySDen). It
was observed that the bond lengths reduced as more pressure was induced while the bond angles decreased and then increased as from 40 GPa as shown in Table 1 and Figure 9.

The stability of the material is supported by the pressure-dependent study of band structures of KPSe$_6$ with respect to its enthalpy, volume, and density as calculated and analyzed in Figures 10(a)–10(c).

4. Conclusion

We have performed an ab initio theoretical and computational study of the chalcogenide compound KPSe$_6$. The structural and electronic properties of the chalcogenide compound were investigated under high pressure. Results show that the volume and energy gap for this material decrease while the enthalpy, Fermi energy, and density increase as we increase pressure. This shows the conductivity of this material increases with increasing pressure. From these calculations, the bands of the chalcogenide KPSe$_6$ overlap at a pressure of $\sim$45 GPa. This implies that the material has undergone a semiconductor-metal transformation with a potential application to high pressure.

Data Availability

The KPSe6 input and output data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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