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A comparative study on academic stress of adolescents as per area of residence and gender

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical stage in human development, marked by physical, emotional and cognitive changes. One of the challenges faced by many adolescents today is academic stress. The pressure to succeed academically has intensified due to several factors, including increased competition, high academic expectations and societal values placed on educational achievements. Stress, in this context, refers to the psychological and physiological responses triggered by academic demands, which can overwhelm adolescents, affecting their overall well-being. The present study was conducted with the aim to find the level of academic stress across area of residence and gender. The study was conducted in Gurugram and Hisar districts of Haryana state. The study was conducted on adolescents of 11th and 12th grade across three academic streams. The total sample comprised of 360 adolescents (180 from Gurugram and 180 from Hisar). Academic stress was measured using the Academic Stress Scale developed by Rao (2012). Self-developed questioner was used to collect information on personal and socioeconomic variables. Results of the study elucidated that moderate level of academic stress was present in adolescents. Gurugram adolescents had higher level of academic stress as compared to Hisar adolescents. Female adolescents had higher level of academic stress as compared to male counterpart.

Keywords: Academic stress, adolescence, critical stage

Introduction

Stress is a universal human experience characterized by an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal triggered by perceived threats or challenges (Auerbach & Grambling, 1998) ^[1]. Within the educational context, academic stress specifically refers to the mental strain associated with anticipated academic difficulties or the pressure to meet educational expectations (Gupta & Khan, 1987) ^[4]. It encompasses anxiety related to academic performance, fear of failure, and the burden of academic responsibilities such as homework, exams, and extracurricular commitments (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003) ^[2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 'Adolescence' refers to a period of critical development, spanning from the ages of 10 to 19 years. This phase brings significant physical, psychological, and social changes as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood. Besides these changes, this period coincides with intensive educational demands and societal pressures, making adolescents particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of academic stress (WHO, 2015) ^[19]. In today's competitive society, especially where academic achievement holds significant societal value, adolescents face escalating pressures throughout their educational journey. When discussing education, the burden of academic stress stands as a major issue. Academic stress manifests itself in diverse forms and various aspects of adolescents' lives, resulting in

affecting the life of an adolescent in all possible ways. It includes stressors such as academic workload, performance expectations, competition with peers, and the pressure to succeed academically (Scott, 2008) ^[17]. These stressors can lead to physiological symptoms like headaches, sleep disturbances, and gastrointestinal issues, as well as psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Gutman & Midgley, 2000) ^[5]. The nature of academic stress is certainly multifaceted and is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include individual perceptions of academic competence, self-efficacy beliefs, and coping strategies, while external factors encompass parental expectations, teacher-student relationships, school climate, and societal attitudes towards academic achievement (Patton & Viner, 2007) ^[11]. The prevalence of academic stress among adolescents is a well-documented concern in the domain of educational research. Adolescents often experience heightened stress during critical transitions such as entering high school, preparing for standardized tests, or applying to colleges and universities (Gutman *et al.*, 2002) ^[6]. However, academic stress levels may vary according to cultural expectations, socioeconomic backgrounds, and individual differences in coping mechanisms and resilience. Research indicates that academic stress is not only prevalent but also increasing among adolescents due to societal pressures for academic success and the competitive nature of

contemporary educational systems (Auerbach & Grambling, 1998) [1]. The impact of academic stress extends beyond the immediate academic environment, affecting adolescents' overall well-being and psychological health. The consequences of prolonged academic stress can be profound and way too far-reaching in long term. Physiologically, chronic stress may weaken or impair adolescents' immune systems, leading to increased susceptibility to illnesses and fatigue (Scott, 2008) [17]. Psychologically, academic stress can contribute to symptoms of anxiety disorders, depression, and behavioral problems (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003) [2]. These mental health issues not only impair academic performance but also affect adolescents' social interactions, family dynamics, and long-term educational and career goals; which can eventually make them feel guilty, isolated, less confident, inferior to others, and hard to be accepted and appreciated by their loved ones.

Objectives

- To assess the level of academic stress of adolescents across area of residence and gender.
- To compare the level of academic stress of adolescents across area of residence and gender.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Haryana state. Two districts namely Gurugram and Hisar were selected randomly. A list of government and private senior secondary schools offering science, commerce and arts streams was prepared from both the cities. Further three government and three private schools were randomly selected from each district. From the selected schools, stratified random sampling ensured equal representation of boys and girls (90 each) across three academic streams of 11th and 12th grade. The total sample comprised of 360 adolescents (180 from Gurugram and 180 from Hisar). Academic stress was measured using the Academic Stress Scale developed by Rao (2012) [14]. Self-structured questionnaire was used to gather socio-demographic details. The data were personally collected from participants after explaining the study objectives and obtaining their informed consent.

Result and Discussion

Academic stress among adolescents

Academic stress was assessed by using a standardized scale. Table 1 shows the data regarding frequency distribution of academic stress. The data reveals the academic stress experienced by all of the respondents (N = 360). The figures reveal that the largest proportion of adolescents experienced moderate levels of academic stress (45.8%) while nearly one-third of the total respondents (22.8%) experienced low levels of academic stress. However, a little less than one-third of the total adolescents, that is 31.3 percent of them, reported experiencing low levels of academic stress.

Table 1: Level of academic stress among adolescents

| Academic stress | Total | |
|-------------------|-------|------|
| | F | % |
| Low (40-93) | 113 | 31.4 |
| Moderate (94-146) | 165 | 45.8 |
| High (147-200) | 82 | 22.8 |

N=360

Academic stress of adolescents as per their area of residence

The data presented in Table 2 highlights that the highest percentage of respondents from Hisar (45.5%) reported experiencing moderate levels of academic stress, followed by those experiencing low (36.7%) and high (17.8%) levels of the same. Similarly, the data from Gurugram shows that 46.1 percent of the adolescents reported moderate levels of academic stress, making it the highest percentage. However, around rest half of the respondents reported having high (27.8%) and low (26.1%) levels of academic stress among them.

Table 2: Level of academic stress among adolescents from Hisar and Gurugram city

| Academic stress | Hisar (n= 180) f (%) | Gurugram (n=180) f (%) |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Low (40-93) | 66(36.7) | 47(26.1) |
| Moderate (94-146) | 82(45.5) | 83(46.1) |
| High (147-200) | 32(17.8) | 50(27.8) |

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

Academic stress of adolescents as per gender

Data presented in Table 3 indicate the frequency and percentage distribution of adolescent boys and girls among different levels of academic stress. It can be observed that a similar and the highest percentage of both boys (45.5%) and girls (46.1%) reported experiencing moderate levels of academic stress. However, one-third (34.5%) of boys and more than one-fourth (28.3%) of girls rated their academic stress to be 'Low' whereas 20 percent of boys and one-fourth (25.6%) of girls reported having High academic stress. All in all, the results indicate that boys experienced relatively lesser academic stress than girls.

Table 3: Level of academic stress among adolescent boys and girls

| Academic stress | Boys (n= 180) f (%) | Girls (n=180) f (%) |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Low (40-93) | 62(34.5) | 51(28.3) |
| Moderate (94-146) | 82(45.5) | 83(46.1) |
| High (147-200) | 36(20.0) | 46(25.6) |

*Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

The findings show that most of the adolescents experience moderate levels of academic stress across various categories, such as their residential area and gender. This supports earlier research highlighting how academic stress is widespread due to increasing educational demands and competitive environments (Neeta and Singh, 2020) [9]. The previous literature by Nagabhooshanam (2022) [8] and Nikitha *et al.* (2014) [10] revealed that majority of students also display moderate stress levels.

Mean comparison of academic stress of adolescents as per area of residence and gender

A close perusal of table 4 throws light on the comparison of academic stress of adolescents on the basis of area of residence and gender. Statically significant differences (t = 2.85*) were observed in academic stress on the basis of residential area. It indicates that level of academic stress was significantly high in Gurugram as compared to Hisar adolescents. Data regarding gender shows no significant difference in academic stress, but it is clear from the mean

scores that female adolescents (112.15±30.18) outscored male adolescents (106.52±27.07).

Table 4: Comparison of academic stress of adolescents as per residential area and gender

N= 360

| Personal Variables | Academic stress | |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Mean ± SD | 't' value |
| District | | |
| Hisar | 105.05±27.44 | 2.85* |
| Gurugram | 113.62±29.50 | |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 106.52±27.07 | 1.86 |
| Female | 112.15±30.18 | |

Adolescents from Gurugram reported slightly higher academic stress than those from Hisar. This finding aligns with studies highlighting the heightened academic expectations, competitive atmosphere and peer pressures commonly found in urban environments (Sonali, 2016) [18]. Whereas the study found that areas like Hisar offer a more relaxed academic environment, where students may face fewer external pressures and enjoy stronger community and family support networks (Pinki *et al.*, 2020; Sagar & Singh, 2017) [12, 16]. Further, previous research reveals distinct stress patterns between urban and rural student populations which emphasize the need for context-specific interventions that address the unique psychological challenges in different educational environments (Kumar & Lata, 2023; Prabhu, 2015) [7, 13]. The results further indicated that girls experience higher academic stress than boys. This aligns with literature suggesting that adolescent girls are generally more prone to academic stress, partly due to societal expectations that emphasize academic success for females (Rueger *et al.*, 2016; Nikitha *et al.*, 2014) [15, 10]. Similarly, a study by Gonzalez *et al.* (2017) [3] and Sagar & Singh (2017) [16] showed that girls are more affected by social and relationship-related pressures, as they are traditionally socialized to internalize stress more than boys and experience heightened stress in academic contexts. Prabhu (2015) [13] observed that male students exhibited higher levels of academic stress than female students. Whereas, Nagabhooshanam (2022) [8] showed no significant difference in academic stress among undergraduate boys and girls. However, it reflected that boys and girls were experiencing the same level of academic stress in different situations.

Conclusion

Academic stress among adolescents is a pervasive issue that affects their mental, emotional, and physical health. The causes of stress are multifaceted, including high academic expectations, fear of failure, peer pressure, and time management challenges. Higher percent of total adolescents had moderate level of academic stress (45.8%) followed by low and high level of academic stress. The study further elucidated that significant differences were found in academic stress of senior citizens on the basis of area of residence. Gurugram adolescents had higher level of academic stress as compared to Hisar adolescents. Female adolescents had higher academic stress as compared to male adolescents.

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