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Scenario of academic stress in late adolescent girls of Kanpur Nagar

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Abstract

Academic stress has become a pressing global concern, particularly among adolescents navigating the crucial developmental phase of late adolescence. Girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are especially vulnerable to stress due to a convergence of academic demands, developmental changes, and socio-cultural expectations. This study examined the relationship between academic stress, academic performance, and mental well-being among late adolescent girls in Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was employed, with a purposive random sample of 120 students. Academic stress was assessed using a 30-item self-report scale across five domains, while academic performance and mental well-being were measured using standardized 10-item Likert type 3-point rating scale. Data collection was conducted personally with the help of structured schedule. Collected data were calculated, analysed and interpreted in the light of objectives. Statistical techniques like rank order, percentage, arithmetic mean were used to analyse the data. Findings show that academic stress is a constant presence in the lives of late adolescent girls, shaping not just how they learn but also how they feel and cope each day. Many reported struggling to concentrate, solve problems, and stay motivated, while also carrying heavy fears of failure and pressure from parents and teachers. Stress was not only felt emotionally but also showed up physically through headaches, nervousness, and disturbed sleep, and socially through irritability and withdrawal from peers. Although a small amount of stress sometimes helped students stay focused, too much of it disrupted higher-level skills like applying concepts, organizing study habits, and performing well in exams. Findings also reveal that mental well-being with workload, exhaustion, and poor sleep affected their mental well-being. These findings make it clear that academic stress affects almost every part of a student's life, and that helping adolescent girls requires more than academic support alone it calls for counselling, supportive classrooms, and stronger family and community involvement to protect both learning and mental health.

Keywords: Academic stress, adolescent girls, academic performance, mental well-being, Kanpur Nagar

Introduction

The youth of today are highly motivated and ambitious, devoting considerable time and effort to education, careers, and the pursuit of future success. With rapid technological advancements and globalization, there is an increasing awareness among young people that academic excellence and professional competence are vital for securing opportunities in a competitive world. While this determination can lead to growth and achievement, it often comes at the expense of health and overall well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) [14] defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This holistic definition underscores that true health cannot be measured only by the absence of illness; rather, it encompasses the capacity to function effectively and maintain balance across all domains of life. Within this framework, mental health assumes special importance. It refers to emotional, psychological, and social well-being, shaping how individuals perceive themselves, relate to others, and respond to stressors. A person with sound mental health is better equipped to manage failures, regulate emotions, and maintain self-worth (Madlan, 2004) [4]. As emphasized by WHO, mental health is not only a fundamental aspect of general health but also a basic human right. Good mental health fosters resilience, adaptability, and positive coping, while poor mental health is linked to impaired functioning, reduced academic potential, and diminished quality of life. Adolescence, particularly late adolescence (15–19 years), is a critical stage of development that bridges childhood and adulthood. It is characterized by rapid changes in physical growth, emotional intensity, social roles, and cognitive abilities. According to UNICEF (2011) [10], this stage represents a period of heightened vulnerability as well as opportunity. For girls, late adolescence often brings additional challenges related to societal expectations, body image, identity formation, and future career aspirations. Combined with increasing academic demands,

these pressures can give rise to high levels of stress and emotional strain. The inability to manage stress effectively during this period can have long-lasting consequences, influencing not only academic trajectories but also overall well-being into adulthood. Among the various challenges faced by adolescents, academic stress stands out as one of the most pervasive and impactful. Academic stress refers to the body's psychological and physiological response to educational demands that exceed adaptive capabilities (Wilks, 2008) [11]. It arises from a wide range of sources such as exam pressure, heavy workload, performance expectations, competition with peers, and difficulties with time management. Research consistently shows that academic stress has become a global concern, affecting students across different educational levels and cultural contexts (Shamsuddin *et al.,* 2013; Tangade *et al.,* 2011) [7, 9]. Notably, late adolescent girls are found to be disproportionately affected, experiencing higher levels of anxiety, self-doubt, and pressure compared to their male counterparts (Sharma & Pandey, 2017; Reddy *et al.*, 2018) [8, 5]. The consequences of academic stress extend beyond temporary discomfort. High stress levels can disrupt sleep, concentration, and memory, thereby reducing academic efficiency and achievement. They also contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. Chronic stress has been associated with somatic complaints such as headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and fatigue, as well as maladaptive coping behaviours including irregular eating patterns, sedentary lifestyles, and isolation (Gobena, 2024) [2]. Evidence suggests that heightened academic stress is negatively correlated with both academic performance and overall mental well-being (Barbayannis *et al.,* 2022; Rehman *et al.*, 2023; Li *et al.,* 2023) [1, 6, 3]. In contrast, supportive environments, healthy coping mechanisms, and strong resilience have been linked to better academic outcomes and improved psychological health. Despite increasing research on student well-being, there remains a pressing need to specifically examine the experiences of late adolescent girls. Their academic and mental health challenges are shaped not only by school and family expectations but also by broader socio-cultural and developmental factors. Addressing this gap is particularly significant in local contexts such as Kanpur Nagar, one of the major urban centers of Uttar Pradesh. As a growing educational hub, Kanpur offers diverse schooling environments and increasing academic competition, while simultaneously being influenced by socio-economic disparities, gender norms, and cultural expectations. These factors uniquely affect the stress levels, coping mechanisms, and well-being of adolescent girls in the region. However, systematic research on this population remains limited, leaving a gap in understanding the interplay of academic stress, performance, and mental well-being in this specific setting.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, the present study was undertaken with the following objective-

Objective of the Study

To measure the academic stress level on academic performance and mental well-being in late adolescent girls.

Methods and Materials

The present study was carried out using descriptive survey research approach in Kanpur Nagar (U.P.), as purposively chosen due to Kanpur Nagar having high concentration of educational institutions, hostels, and coaching centres. Kanpur Nagar is further divided into Kanpur city Under Kanpur Nagar Nigam (corporation) i.e. KNN and Kanpur rural. Kanpur Nagar Nigam is divided into 6 zones (Zone1-Zone 6). Among six zones of KNN**,** Zone-6 was selected purposively. From 20 wards in Zone-6, four were purposively chosen: Ward-25 (Naveen Nagar, Kakadeo), Ward-52 (Gita Nagar), Ward-43 (Nawab Ganj), and Ward-60 (Rawatpur). From each ward, 100 late adolescent girls were identified. Using Simple Random Sampling (SRS), 30 respondents per ward were selected randomly, yielding a total sample of 120 respondents. Thus, a total 120 respondents (100%) were selected from 4 wards of Zone 6 for interviewing and obtaining necessary information with the help of schedule. Before the survey, a pilot test was done by 15 persons as respondents to identify problems and shortcomings found in schedule. Thus, a total of total 150 respondents as urban households were selected for collection of data. A detailed and validated interview schedule was used to gather information about dependent variables (academic stress, academic performance, and mental well-being). Academic stress was assessed using a 30-item self-report scale across five domains, while academic performance and mental well-being were measured using standardized 10-item Likert type 3-point rating scale. Data collection was conducted personally with the help of structured schedule. Collected data were calculated, analyzed and interpreted in the light of objectives. Statistical techniques like rank order, percentage, arithmetic mean and chi-square, etc. were used to analyzed the data. These data were analyzed using both mechanical and manual methods as well as a calculator, to complete the statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

Domain-wise measurement of the academic stress level on academic performance and mental well-being in late adolescent girls

Academic stress level on academic performance and mental well-being in late adolescent girls was studied under five components of academic stress indicating expression of academic stress through different channels: cognitive, affective, physical, social/interpersonal, and motivational.

1. **Cognitive indicators:** A cognitive indicator is a measure or sign that reflects an individual's cognitive functioning, abilities, or processes. Cognitive indicators can include: Attention and focus (Ability to concentrate and stay engaged); Memory (Capacity to recall and retain information), Problem-solving (Ability to analyze and resolve complex issues), Decision-making (Capacity to make informed and logical choices), and Learning and adaptability (Ability to acquire new knowledge and adjust to new situations). Here Cognitive indicators were assessed through 7 item survey-schedule assessing perceived cognitive abilities under Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on the basis of cognitive indicators affecting academic performance and mental well-being *n* = 120

S. No.	Cognitive indicators	Frequency level			Mean value	Rank order
		Always	Sometimes	Never		
1	It is very difficult for me to concentrate on my studies.	05	113	02	2.025	III
2	I forget studied material very easily.	21	10	89	1.433	VI
3	I daydream a lot during study.	22	79	19	2.025	III
4	I have difficulty in problem solving.	87	28	05	2.683	I
5	Many times, I don't answer in the class though I know it.	35	68	17	2.150	II
6	I doubt whether I'll be able to complete my studies.	28	59	33	1.958	V
7	I hesitate to discuss my academic problems.	21	78	21	2.000	IV
	Average	31.285	62.142	26.571		

The analysis of Table 1 reveals that late adolescent girls experience substantial cognitive stress. The most significant stressor is difficulty in problem-solving (mean = 2.683), followed by challenges in sustaining concentration and daydreaming during study. Other issues include hesitation in class participation, lack of confidence in discussing academic problems, and occasional forgetfulness. Overall, the average mean score (2.296) indicates that cognitive struggles especially in higher-order thinking and focus are central contributors to academic stress. These difficulties often lead to frustration, longer ineffective study hours, and isolation due to reluctance in seeking help. Findings reveal that late adolescent girls experience notable academic stress due to difficulties in problem-solving, concentration, and sustained attention during study. The reluctance to discuss academic problems further compounds these issues. These findings underscore the necessity of developing interventions and support systems that specifically target these cognitive challenges to alleviate academic stress and promote better academic performance and mental well-being in this demographic.

2. **Affective indicators:** Affective indicators are measures or signs that reflect an individual's emotional state, feelings, or attitudes. Affective indicators can include: Emotional expression (Observable signs of emotions, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or body language), Mood (Prevailing emotional state, such as happiness, sadness, or anxiety), Emotional regulation (Ability to manage and modulate emotions in response to different situations), Attitudes and opinions (Evaluations or feelings towards people, objects, or ideas),and Well-being and satisfaction (Self-reported measures of happiness, life satisfaction, or overall well-being). Affective indicators were assessed through 6 items interviews assessing emotional experiences and attitudes as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents on the basis of affecting indicators affecting academic performance and mental well-being *n*=120

S. No.	Affective indicators	Frequency level			Mean Value	Rank Order
		Always	Sometimes	Never		
1	I feel myself inferior than my classmates.	08	104	08	2.000	III
2	I lack confidence in academic activities.	17	84	19	1.983	IV
3	I always feel under pressure for studies.	21	85	14	2.058	II
4	I always think of failure in the examination.	25	81	14	2.091	I
5	I always worry about my parents' expectations.	17	84	19	1.983	IV
6	I feel very sad for not concentrating on my studies.	17	85	18	1.991	V
	Average	17.500	87.166	15.333	--	--

The analysis of affective indicators (Table 2) reveal that late adolescent girls often struggle with difficult emotions tied to their studies. Many of them sometimes, and in some cases always, feel weighed down by academic pressure and the fear of failing exams two of the strongest emotional stressors. Feelings of inferiority and a lack of confidence were also common, suggesting that social comparisons and low self-belief make academic life even harder. On top of this, many students worried about meeting their parents' expectations, which added another layer of pressure. Even issues like sadness over not being able to concentrate though less intense were reported by the majority, showing how widespread these emotional struggles are. Taken together, the findings highlight that emotional stress, especially fear of failure and pressure to perform, deeply affects students' well-being and learning. Helping them build confidence, manage exam anxiety, and ease parental or peer-related pressures is vital for creating a healthier, more supportive environment. Findings reveal that a considerable proportion of the surveyed students experience significant emotional challenges related to their academic pursuits. The pervasive feelings of academic pressure and fear of failure highlight critical areas for intervention. Addressing these affective dimensions is crucial not only for improving student well-being but also for fostering a more conducive learning environment and ultimately enhancing academic success. Future research could explore the underlying causes of these affective states in more detail and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted interventions.

3. **Physical indicators:** Physical indicators are observable signs or measures that reflect an individual's physical health, well-being, or functioning. Examples include: Vital signs (Heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, and respiratory rate), Body mass index (BMI) (Weight-to-height ratio), Physical performance (Strength, endurance, and mobility), Sleep patterns (Quality, duration, and consistency of sleep), and Nutrition and hydration (Adequacy of dietary intake and hydration levels). Physical indicators were accessed through 5 items survey-schedule assessing perceived characters as showed in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents on the basis of physical indicators affecting academic performance and mental well-being *n*=120

S. No.	Physical indicators	Frequency level			Mean value	Rank order
		Always	Sometimes	Never		
1	I get headache while studying.	08	97	15	1.941	II
2	I get nervous when my teacher asks question in the class.	19	81	20	1.991	I
3	I feel less desire to eat.	12	89	19	1.941	II
4	I gradually lose my sleep as examination test approaches.	16	81	23	1.941	II
5	My heart beats fast before answering the questions.	14	83	23	1.925	III
	Average	13.800	86.200	20	---	---

Data from Table 3 shows that physical symptoms of academic stress are moderate but widespread. The most common issue is nervousness when questioned in class (mean = 1.991), reflecting performance anxiety. Other frequent problems include headaches, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbances (mean = 1.941), while rapid heartbeat before answering questions ranks slightly lower. Most students reported experiencing these symptoms "sometimes," indicating that physical effects of stress occur intermittently but significantly. These findings highlight the need for stress management strategies, counselling, and supportive classroom practices. Findings underscores the moderate yet pervasive physical impacts of academic stress on students. The highest stress response is associated with being questioned in class, pointing to a need for supportive classroom communication practices. The results call for interventions like stress management programs, counseling, and teacher training to create a more supportive educational environment.

4. **Social/Interpersonal indicators:** Social/Interpersonal Indicators refer to signs or measures that reflect an individual's relationships, social interactions, and connections with others. Examples include: Social support (Presence and quality of supportive relationships), Communication skills (Ability to effectively convey and receive information), Conflict resolution (Ability to manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts), Social network (Size, diversity, and quality of social connections), and Empathy and understanding (Ability to understand and appreciate others' perspectives). Social/Interpersonal Indicators can be assessed through 5 items survey-schedule assessing perceived characters as showed in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents on the basis of social/ interpersonal indicators affecting academic performance and mental well-being *n*=120

S. No.	Social/ Interpersonal indicators	Frequency level			Mean value	Rank order
		Always	Sometimes	Never		
1	I feel no body is there to help me in studies.	10	103	07	2.025	IV
2	I get earlier irritated with everybody.	19	96	05	2.116	I
3	Most of the time I don't feel like talking to anybody.	18	85	17	2.008	V
4	I like to stay alone most of the time.	22	80	18	2.033	III
5	Nobody understands my difficulties.	21	85	14	2.058	II
	Average	18.000	89.800	12.200	---	----

Table 4 shows that academic stress significantly influences students' social and interpersonal well-being. The most common issue is irritability with others (mean = 2.116), followed by feelings that nobody understands their difficulties (mean = 2.058) and a tendency toward social withdrawal (mean = 2.033). Perceptions of limited academic help (mean = 2.025) and reluctance to talk to others (mean = 2.008) were less pronounced but still notable. Overall, the "Sometimes" response dominated across all indicators, suggesting that these challenges are intermittent yet widespread. The findings highlight trends of emotional strain, isolation, and lack of empathetic support, emphasizing the need for peer support programs, improved communication, and counselling services to strengthen students' social well-being and inclusion. Findings reflect a general trend of emotional strain and limited social connectivity among students. Priority areas for intervention include reducing interpersonal irritability, increasing empathetic communication, and fostering social inclusion through peer support programs and psychological counseling services.

5. **Motivational indicators:** Motivational Indicators refer to signs or measures that reflect an individual's drive, enthusiasm, and commitment to achieving goals. Examples include: Goal-setting (Ability to set and work towards specific, achievable goals), Self-efficacy (Belief in one's ability to succeed and overcome challenges), Intrinsic motivation (Drive to pursue activities for personal interest and enjoyment), Resilience (Ability to bounce back from setbacks and maintain motivation), Effort and persistence (Willingness to put in effort and persist in the face of obstacles), Motivational Indicators were assessed through 7 items survey-schedule assessing perceived cognitive abilities under table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents on the basis of motivational indicators affecting academic performance and mental well-being *n*=120

S. No.	Motivational indicators	Frequency level			Mean value	Rank order
		Always	Sometimes	Never		
1	I lack interest in studies these days.	11	106	03	2.066	III
2	I don't enjoy extracurricular activities now days.	22	76	22	2.000	IV
3	I have difficulties in completing my lessons.	22	89	09	2.108	I
4	I get easily bored of studies.	28	75	17	2.091	II
5	I strongly feel to discontinue studies.	24	58	38	1.833	VI
6	I don't feel like going to school/college/campus.	16	74	30	1.833	VI
7	I feel sleepy when I start studies.	16	76	28	1.900	V
	Average	19.857	79.142	21.00		

Table 5 shows that late adolescent girls face moderate but recurring motivational challenges in academics. The most common issues are difficulty completing lessons (mean = 2.108), boredom with studies (mean = 2.091), and declining interest in academics (mean = 2.066). Disengagement extends beyond studies, as reflected in reduced enjoyment of extracurricular activities (mean = 2.000). Lower-ranked but still significant concerns include sleepiness during study, reluctance to attend school/college, and even thoughts of discontinuing studies (all means above 1.8). The dominance of "Sometimes" responses indicates that these challenges fluctuate but are widespread. Persistent motivational struggles especially boredom, disengagement, and workload-related stress may undermine academic performance and well-being, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to boost interest, engagement, and resilience. Findings of the study emphasize the need for targeted interventions to address academic boredom, lesson completion difficulties, and a lack of interest among students. These motivational factors, if left unaddressed, may lead to decreased academic performance and well-being in the long run.

Dependent variables wise measurement of academic stress level on academic performance and mental well-being in late adolescent girls

(i) Measurement of academic stress level on academic performance: Academic stress refers to the pressure and anxiety students experience due to academic demands, expectations, and deadlines. Excessive stress can negatively impact academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. For measurement of Academic Stress Level on Academic Performance a survey based 3-point rating scale were used for measuring 10 items standardized Academic Stress statements.

Table 6: Measurement of the academic stress level on academic performance in late adolescent girls *n*=120

S. No.	Academic stress level on academic performance	Frequency level			Mean value	Rank order
		Low/Poor	Medium/Average	High/Excellent		
1	Overall understanding of course material	03	106	04	1.891	IV
2	Ability to complete assignments on time and to a satisfactory standard	25	84	11	1.883	V
3	Participation in class discussions and activities	17	95	08	1.925	III
4	Performance on tests and examinations	24	91	05	1.841	VII
5	Quality of written work and presentations	30	80	10	1.833	VIII
6	Demonstrated problem-solving skills	28	66	26	1.983	I
7	Ability to apply learned concepts to new situations	37	76	07	1.750	X
8	Organization and study habits	31	80	09	1.816	IX
9	Effort and engagement in academic tasks	26	85	09	1.858	VI
10	Overall academic progress throughout the term/year	16	92	12	1.966	II
	Average	23.7	85.5	10.1	---	---

The findings from Table 6 indicate that most late adolescent girls reported medium or average levels of academic performance under stress, with a mean frequency of 85.5 out of 120. Only a small proportion of students demonstrated high or excellent performance (mean = 10.1), highlighting that while many are able to cope with stress, fewer manage to excel under it. This suggests that stress is a constant but manageable presence in their academic lives, influencing the quality and consistency of performance rather than completely hindering learning. Notably, some areas of academic performance were more resilient than others. Problem-solving skills ranked the highest (mean = 1.983, Rank I), followed by overall academic progress (mean = 1.966, Rank II) and participation in class discussions (mean = 1.925, Rank III). These results suggest that even under stress, students are able to think critically, engage actively, and maintain steady progress over time demonstrating adaptability and determination in managing academic challenges. In contrast, weaker areas emerged in tasks requiring flexibility, planning, and creativity. The lowest-ranked indicators included the ability to apply learned concepts to new situations (mean = 1.750, Rank X), organization and study habits (mean = 1.816, Rank IX), and the quality of written work and presentations (mean = 1.833, Rank VIII). This shows that stress more strongly affects systematic study practices and expressive tasks, which demand structure and innovation. Overall, the analysis suggests that while late adolescent girls under stress are able to sustain progress, problem-solving, and engagement, their efficiency, organization, and knowledge application are more vulnerable. This underscores the need for targeted support strategies to strengthen weaker areas, ensuring that

students not only cope with stress but also have the tools to perform at their best. Summary suggests that while moderate academic stress is common among late adolescent girls, its effects vary across performance areas. Skills such as problem-solving and sustained academic progress appear resilient, indicating that moderate stress can support focus and persistence. In contrast, higher-order abilities like applying concepts, organizing study habits, producing quality work, and performing in examinations are more negatively affected. These findings underscore the need for stress management programs, tailored academic support, and adaptive teaching strategies to balance stress's motivational effects with its potential drawbacks.

(ii) Measurement of the academic stress level on mental well-being in late adolescent girls

Academic stress can significantly impact students' mental well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, and burnout. Measuring the impact of academic stress on mental well-being is crucial to identify students at risk and provide targeted support. For measurement of Academic Stress Level on mental well-being a survey based 3-point rating scale ('Rarely/ Poor', 'Sometimes / Average', and 'Often/ Excellent' score as 1, 2 and 3 respectively) were used for measuring 10 items standardized Academic Stress statements.

Table 7: Measurement of the academic stress level on mental well-being in late adolescent girls *n*=120

S. No.	Academic stress level on mental well being	Frequency level			Mean value	Rank order
		Rarely/ Poor	Sometimes/ Average	Often/ Excellent		
1	Frequency of feeling overwhelmed by academic workload	08	107	05	1.975	I
2	Level of anxiety related to upcoming exams or assignments	39	75	06	1.725	X
3	Impact of academic pressure on sleep patterns	14	105	01	1.891	III
4	Frequency of experiencing feelings of sadness or hopelessness due to academic stress	26	83	11	1.875	V
5	Level of difficulty concentrating or focusing on academic tasks due to stress	19	98	03	1.866	VI
6	Impact of academic stress on social interactions and relationships	26	91	03	1.808	IX
7	Frequency of experiencing physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomach aches) related to academic stress	23	92	05	1.850	VII
8	Level of perceived pressure to achieve high grades from parents/teachers	22	90	08	1.883	IV
9	Impact of academic stress on feelings of self-worth and confidence	35	72	13	1.816	VIII
10	Frequency of experiencing feelings of burnout or exhaustion due to academic demands	23	85	12	1.908	II
	Average	21.90	69.50	15.80	----	----

The findings highlight that academic stress significantly influences the mental well-being of late adolescent girls, with different dimensions being affected in varying intensity. The most prominent concern is the feeling of being overwhelmed by academic workload, which ranked highest. This suggests that the sheer volume of tasks and expectations often leaves students feeling emotionally burdened and mentally drained. Closely following this is the frequent experience of burnout and exhaustion, reflecting how sustained stress erodes energy and motivation over time. Sleep disturbances also emerged as a notable area, ranking third, indicating that academic pressure often disrupts healthy rest patterns an issue that directly impacts overall mental and physical health. Feelings of sadness or hopelessness due to academic stress, as well as difficulty concentrating, were also found to be quite common, showing how emotional strain spills over into both mood and cognitive functioning. Parental and teacher expectations to achieve high grades were perceived as another stress-inducing factor, underscoring the role of external pressure in shaping students' mental states. On the more social and emotional side, stress negatively affected self-worth, confidence, and interpersonal relationships, though these were relatively less impacted compared to cognitive and emotional outcomes. Interestingly, anxiety related to exams and assignments, though commonly assumed to be a major stressor, ranked lowest in this study. This may suggest that while exam-related nervousness is present, it is the continuous and cumulative workload, exhaustion, and lack of rest that weigh more heavily on students' mental well-being. Overall, the majority of respondents reported being in the "sometimes/average" category of stress impact, showing that while they manage to cope most of the time, there are still significant emotional and physical costs. The findings make it clear that academic stress not only hinders academic functioning but also deeply affects mental health, emotional balance, and social connectedness. This calls for proactive interventions such as stress-management programs, supportive counselling, and healthier expectations from both families and institutions. Summary suggests that academic stress has a multifaceted and measurable impact on the mental well-being of late adolescent girls, with most responses falling in the average range (69.5%). Workload, exhaustion, and sleep disturbances ranked as the most critical stressors, while parental/teacher pressure, sadness, concentration issues, and physical symptoms reflected moderate effects. Lower-ranked factors included self-worth, social interactions, and exam-related anxiety, the latter being least reported. Overall, workload-related stress emerged as the dominant concern, underscoring the need for balanced academic planning, stress management, and resilience-building interventions.

The findings of this study reveal that academic stress among late adolescent girls is a multi-dimensional experience, affecting cognition, emotions, physical health, social interactions, motivation, academic performance, and mental well-being. These results are consistent with global evidence that stress in adolescence not only undermines academic success but also places young people at risk for long-term psychological difficulties (World Health

Organization, 2024) [14]. Cognitively, the strongest stressor reported was difficulty in problem-solving, followed by poor concentration and frequent daydreaming. This suggests that higher-order cognitive skills are especially vulnerable to academic pressure. Li *et al.* (2023) [3] similarly found that academic stress weakens critical thinking and problem-solving abilities while leaving basic recall less affected. Hesitation to participate in class or reluctance to share academic concerns observed in this study also reflects low self-efficacy, a finding echoed by Sharma and Pandey (2017) [8], who linked stress with heightened anxiety and reduced classroom engagement in Indian students. Emotionally, the most dominant indicators were fear of examination failure, constant academic pressure, and worry about parental expectations. These findings support Reddy *et al.* (2018) [5], who identified exams and parental demands as primary stressors in university settings. Rehman *et al.* (2023) [6] likewise demonstrated that adolescent stress is strongly tied to depression, anxiety, and reduced academic achievement. The perception of inferiority compared to peers and a lack of confidence are consistent with Madlan (2004) [4], who linked low emotional quotient to greater stress and maladaptive behaviours in Malaysian students. Physical symptoms such as nervousness when questioned in class, headaches, appetite loss, sleep disturbance, and rapid heartbeat were frequently reported. These findings mirror Tangade *et al.* (2011) [9], who showed that stress among Indian dental students often manifests in physiological complaints, further impairing academic functioning. Socially, many students reported irritability, withdrawal, and a sense of being misunderstood. This aligns with Wilks (2008) [11], who emphasized that social support is a crucial buffer against academic stress, helping students cope with interpersonal difficulties. Without such support, withdrawal becomes more likely, reinforcing feelings of isolation. Motivational indicators including boredom, declining interest in studies, difficulty completing lessons, and thoughts of school discontinuation are particularly concerning. Gobena (2024) [2] highlighted that academic stress often erodes intrinsic motivation, undermining both achievement and long-term aspirations. This suggests that unmanaged stress may trap students in cycles of disengagement and underperformance. In terms of academic performance, problem-solving skills and sustained academic progress were the most negatively impacted, while routine tasks like assignment completion were less affected. This finding is in line with Li *et al.* (2023) [3], who noted that academic stress disproportionately harms higher-order cognitive abilities.

With respect to mental well-being, the most significant outcomes were feeling overwhelmed by workload, exhaustion, and sleep disruption. These findings resonate with Barbayannis *et al.* (2022) [1], who found strong correlations between stress, burnout, and diminished well-being among college students. While exam anxiety was present, it was less dominant than the chronic effects of workload, echoing the emphasis placed by UNICEF (2011) [10] and WHO (2024) on the cumulative impact of academic demands during adolescence. Overall, these findings highlight the urgent need for holistic interventions that address academic, emotional, physical, and social dimensions of stress. Evidence-based strategies include resilience-building through social support (Wilks, 2008) [11], school-based counselling and screening (Shamsuddin *et al.*, 2013) [7], and structured stress management programs. Reducing unrealistic parental and institutional expectations is also essential, as emphasized by Gobena (2024) [2], to ensure that students balance

Conclusion

This study shows that academic stress in late adolescent girls is not limited to just feeling worried about exams it touches nearly every part of their lives. From struggling to concentrate and solve problems, to feeling constant pressure and fear of failure, stress often makes learning feel overwhelming instead of motivating. It also shows up in the body through headaches, nervousness, and lack of sleep, while at the same time straining relationships and leaving many students feeling isolated. Motivation suffers too, with boredom, loss of interest, and difficulty keeping up with lessons becoming common. While some stress can help students stay focused, too much of it tends to harm higher-level skills like applying concepts, organizing study habits, and performing in exams. The biggest toll, however, is on mental well-being especially the exhaustion, workload pressure, and sleep problems that students face almost daily. These findings make it clear that supporting adolescent girls requires more than academic help alone; schools, families, and communities need to work together to provide counselling, create healthier learning environments, and teach coping skills so that academic growth goes hand in hand with mental well-being.

Recommendations

1. **School-based interventions:** Establish counselling centers and peer support programs.
2. **Teacher training:** Equip teachers to identify stress symptoms and provide timely support.
3. **Parental involvement:** Conduct awareness workshops to reduce unrealistic expectations and pressure.
4. **Curriculum reform:** Introduce mental health education and stress management strategies in schools.
5. **Further research:** Undertake longitudinal studies to examine long-term effects of stress on academic and psychological outcomes.

By implementing such measures, stakeholders can help safeguard the educational success and psychological resilience of adolescent girls.

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