

Academic Stress among High School Students

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Abstract

In today's competitive landscape, students encounter a range of academic challenges, such as exam-related anxiety, a lack of motivation to attend classes, and difficulties grasping the material. It can lead to student being unable to perform to the best of their abilities in exams. Academic stress is the major source of stress among adolescent. Stress is generally defined as the body's non-specific response or reaction to demands made on it, or to disturbing events in the environment. Stress is simply defined as emotional disturbances or changes caused by stressors. Stress which promotes and facilitates learning is called good stress. An optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability. The present study intends to find out whether there is any significance difference in academic stress of high school students owing to difference in region and type of school. Simple random technique was used in the study and the sample consists of 500 high school students from Chennai district. The investigation of data was achieved using critical ratio and one way analysis of variance. The study found there is a significant difference in academic stress of high school students owing to difference in region and there is no significant difference in academic stress of high school students owing to difference in type of school.

Keywords: Stress, Academic Stress, High School Students

Introduction

“Education is a key that opens the eyes of a person towards the brightness of the world”.

– Dr. Radhakrishnan.

“Education is the capacity to feel pleasure and pain at the right moment. It develops in the body and in the soul of the pupil, all the beauty and all the perfection of which she is capable of”.

– Plato.

In today's competitive world, academic stress among school students has become a pressing issue, as they face immense pressure to excel in exams, meet high expectations, and secure a successful future. The pressure to perform well academically not only comes from the school environment but also from societal demands and family expectations, all of which can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Academic stress, if not addressed, can have serious consequences on students' mental health, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

Both teachers and parents play a pivotal role in alleviating this stress. Teachers can foster a supportive learning environment by providing guidance, understanding individual needs, and reducing unnecessary academic pressure. Parents, on the other hand, need to offer emotional support, encourage healthy study habits, and avoid setting unrealistic expectations. By working together, teachers and parents can help students manage stress effectively, thereby promoting not only academic success but also their emotional and psychological health.

Definition of Stress

“Stress as a state of tension produced by pressure or conflicting demands with which a person cannot adequately cope”.

– Jary and Jary

(1995)

Stress is our body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. When you sense danger-whether it's real or imagined the body defences kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction or the “stress response”.

Academic stress

Academic stress is mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure, or even unawareness to the possibility of such failure. Students have to face many academic demands. For example: school examination, answering questions in the class, showing progress in school subjects.

Factors Influencing Academic Stress

- **Age:** Stress arises in adolescence as teens navigate emotional changes, peer relationships, school expectations, family duties, and neighbourhood challenges.
- **Gender:** Society expects girls to be submissive and boys to be independent. Family expectations and low performance cause adolescent stress.

- **Socio-economic status of parents:** Socio-economic status measures a person's or family's economic and social position based on income, education, and occupation.
- **Sibling relationship:** The sibling relationship is the most enduring and influential of all familial bonds, despite its unique nature.
- **Psychological process and stress:** Adolescents face identity issues, inadequate self-concept, and role expectations, leading to emotional conflict during this transitional life stage.

Types of Stress

- (a) **Acute stress:** Acute stress is the most common type of stress. It is our body immediate reaction to a new challenge, event or demand, and it triggers our fight-or-flight response.
- (b) **Episodic acute stress:** When acute stress happens frequently, it's called episodic acute stress. Students who always seems to be having a crisis tend to have episodic acute stress. They are often short-tempered, irritable, and anxious.
- (c) **Chronic stress:** If acute stress isn't resolved and begins to increase or lasts for long period of times, it becomes chronic stress.

Causes of Stress

Stress is the physical and mental response of the body to demands made upon it. It is the result of our reaction to outside events, not necessarily the events themselves. There are several factors causing stress. Recently, Desai (1999) classified stressors into three major categories viz,

- **Physiological causes:** The physiological category includes genetic and congenital factors, life experience, biological rhythms, sleep, posture, diet.
- **Psychological causes:** The psychological causes comprised nine elements; perception, emotion, situation, experience, sensation, decisions, memory, motivation, cognition and appraisal.

Environmental Causes: This category of stressors consists of those factors which originate the environment like ambient environment, physical events, social events and biotic events.

Statement of the Problem

Academic Stress among High School Students

Objectives of the Study

The focus of the present study is to examine academic stress among high school students.

- To predict whether there is any significant difference in academic stress of high school students with respect to region.
- To study the difference in academic stress of the high school students owing to difference in type of school.

Hypothesis

Based on the objective, the hypothesis was formulated for the study.

- There is no significant difference in Academic Stress of High School Students owing to differences in Region.
- There is no significant difference in Academic Stress of High School Students owing to differences in Type of School.

Significance of the Study

- Investigating academic stress helps identify its impact on students' mental health, providing insights into anxiety, depression, and overall well-being during critical developmental years.
- Results can assist schools in tailoring counselling and support services to meet the specific needs of students experiencing high levels of stress.
- The findings can promote collaboration among educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers to develop comprehensive strategies for managing academic stress effectively.
- Findings can inform school policies and practices, helping educators develop programs that reduce stress and create supportive learning environments.

Review of Literature

- ❖ **Author:** Talib and Zia-ur-Rehman (2012)
 - **Objective:** To investigate the effect of perceived stress on the academic performance of university students.
 - **Tool Used:** A previously validated construct to evaluate the factors under study.
 - **Sample Size:** 199 university graduates and undergraduates in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.
 - **Findings:** Perceived stress had a significant negative correlation with academic performance. There were significant differences in mean scores between low and high achievers, as well as between low and high stress level groups. Stress levels did not differ significantly between male and female students, but engineering students had significantly different perceived stress scores compared to management science students. Major sources of stress included course load, sleep problems, and social activities.

- ❖ **Author:** Seiffge-Krenke, Persike, and Cecilia (2012)
 - **Objective:** To investigate how adolescents from 18 countries perceive and cope with future-related and school-related stress.
 - **Sample Size:** 5,126 adolescents (mean age of 15 years) from 18 countries.
 - **Tool Used:**
 - Problem Questionnaire (PQ): To assess stress levels.
 - Coping Across Situations Questionnaire (CASQ): To assess three coping styles (reflection/support-seeking, emotional outlet, and withdrawal/denial).
 - **Findings:**
 - Adolescents reported higher levels of future-related stress than school-related stress across all countries.
 - Adolescents from the "continental" group of countries showed low stress and high coping skills, while the East/Asia group showed medium stress and low coping. The "south" group experienced high stress and low coping.

- Developmental context had a stronger association with stress perception and coping styles than age or gender, highlighting the importance of fostering positive future orientation and improving coping competence in preventive approaches.

❖ **Author:** Liu and Lu (2011)

- **Objective:** To investigate the relationship between stress in school and academic achievements among Chinese high school students.
- **Tool Used:** Regression mixture modelling to analyse the relationship.
- **Sample Size:** 466 Chinese high school students.
- **Findings:** The analysis identified two classes regarding the effects of stress on academic achievements. In one class (87% of students), stress negatively predicted academic achievements, while for the other class (13% of students), stress did not predict academic achievements. Gender did not moderate the relationship between school stress and academic performance.

Methodology

Data was collected from the school students adopted by survey method. By using random sampling method a sample of 500 students from high schools were selected for this study in Chennai.

Tools Used

The *Academic Stress Inventory* was constructed and standardized by R. Savithiri (2014) was used to assess the academic stress of high school students consists of 26 items. The reliability of the inventory was 0.902 found by Cronbach's Alpha Method. The obtained reliability coefficient is revealing that the tool is reliable.

Statistical Techniques Used

The tool used for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire contains questions on academic stress. The analysis of data was done using critical ratio and one way analysis of variance. The scale is a liker type scale, with multiple choice responses. Responses range from Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. In this five-point scale, the responses are given weight from 1 to 5 given, shown: 5- Strongly Agree, 4- Agree, 3- Undecided, 2- Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree.

Analysis of Data and Testing of Hypothesis

In testing the hypothesis stated, the researcher used critical ratio and one way analysis of variance.

Hypotheses - 1 There is no significant difference in Academic Stress of High School Students owing to differences in region.

Table.1

Representing the difference in Academic Stress of High School Students owing to differences in region

| Variable | Category | Sub-Category | N | Mean | SD | df | 't' Value | Sig. level |
|-----------------|----------|--------------|-----|-------|--------|-----|-----------|-------------|
| Academic Stress | Region | Rural | 250 | 64.00 | 7.377 | 498 | 26.605 | 0.000 |
| | | Urban | 250 | 42.97 | 10.090 | | | P<0.05 S |

Interpretation

The above table.1 shows that the mean scores of rural area students is 64.00 with standard deviation 7.377. Similarly, the mean scores of urban area students is 42.97 with standard deviation of 10.090. Here the 'p' value is 0.000 which is less than 'p' value at 95% confidence level (0.05) with degrees of freedom 498. The hypothesis which is assumed that there is no significant difference in academic stress of high school students owing to the difference in region is not accepted. Therefore, it is concluded that there is significant difference in academic stress of High School Students owing to the differences in Region, favouring Rural Area Students.

Hypotheses – 2 There is no significant difference in Academic Stress of High School Students owing to differences in Type of School.

Table.2

Representing the difference in Academic Stress of High School Students owing to differences in Type of School

| Variable | Category | Sub-Category | N | Mean | SD |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----|-------|--------|
| Academic Stress | Type of School | Boys | 168 | 53.65 | 14.055 |
| | | Girls | 167 | 53.19 | 13.716 |
| | | Co-Education | 165 | 53.63 | 13.515 |

The above table.2 shows that the mean scores of boys school students is 53.65 with standard deviation 14.055 and the mean scores of girls school students is 53.19 with standard deviation of 13.716. Similarly, the mean score of co-education school students is 53.63 with standard deviation of 13.515.

Table. 2 (a)

One-way ANOVA showing the difference in academic stress of high school students owing to Type of school

| Variable | Category | ANOVA | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | Sig-level |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-----------|
| Academic stress | Type of School | Between groups | 22.954 | 2 | 11.477 | 0.061 | 0.941 |
| | | Within groups | 94171.974 | 497 | 189.481 | | NS |

Interpretation

The above table.2 (a) shows that P value 0.941 which is greater than the P value 95% of confidence level 0.05 at 498 degree of freedom. The hypothesis which is assumed that there is no significant difference in academic stress of high school students owing to the difference in type of school is accepted. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no significant difference in academic stress of high school students owing to the difference in type of school.

Findings of the Study

- There is a significant difference in academic stress of High School Students owing to the differences in region, favouring Rural Area Students.
- There is no significant difference in academic stress of high school students owing to the difference in type of school

Conclusion

This study reveals a difference in academic stress between high school students based on region, with urban students experiencing less stress than rural students due to better access to educational resources. Rural students face more stress due to a lack of teacher support, parental involvement, and technological advancements. However, no significant difference in academic stress is found between students attending different types of schools (government, government-aided, or private). To manage academic stress, students should develop time management skills, healthy study habits, and maintain a balanced lifestyle.

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