

A Study on Academic Stress among Higher Secondary Students

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Abstract: *Stress can exist when working at a fast pace, doing difficult problems, or listening to someone shout at you. It can be brought about through conflicts, making decisions, or otherwise straining abilities, or it can exist because of numerous social demands on time. We have noted that emotional states tend not to be long lasting, whether they are unpleasant emotions like fear, or pleasant ones, such as joy. Yet on occasion such states may persist for long periods of time, or they may reach excessively high levels. When this happens, the result typically is labeled "stress", and its manifested in psychological as well as physiological terms. Stress and its manifestations, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, have always been as a common problem among people in different professions and occupations. In the last few decades, alarm has already been provoked by the proliferation of books, research reports, popular articles and the growing number of organized workshops, aiming to teach people how to cope with this phenomenon. The purpose of the study is to find out the level of academic stress among higher secondary students. The present study consists of 250 XI standard students studying in higher secondary schools situated in Namakkal District of Tamil Nadu, India. The sample was selected by using simple random sampling technique. The present study reveals that the higher secondary students are having moderate level of academic stress and irrespective of sub samples of the higher secondary students are having moderate level of academic stress. The male student's academic stress is higher than female students. The urban student's academic stress is higher than rural student. The Government school student's academic stress is less than private school student. The science subject student's academic stress is higher than arts student. The students whose parent's education as literate level academic stress is higher than their counter part.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is viewed as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors (Bernstein, et al 2008). Stressors are defined as circumstances that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, individuals' daily functioning and cause people to make adjustments (Auerbach & Grambling 1998). Auerbach and Grambling (1998) regard stress as an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that individuals experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being.

However, stress is perceived in different ways and may mean different thing to different individuals. It is perceived as events or situations that cause individuals to feel tension, pressure, or negative emotions including anxiety and anger. Moreover, other people define stress as the response to existing situations, which includes physiological changes (increased heart rate, and muscle tension), emotional and behavioural changes (Bernstein, et al 2008). Stress is always regarded as a psychological process that involves an individual's personal interpretation and response to any threatening event.

It is important to note that stress can have both positive and negative effects on people. It means that stress may be a normal, adaptive reaction to threat. Its role is to signal and prepare individuals to take defensive action. Take for instance, fear of things that present realistic threats motivates individuals to deal with them or avoid them. Most psychologists assert that moderate stress motivates individuals to achieve and fuels creativity, although stress may hinder individuals from performance on difficult tasks (Auerbach & Grambling 1998).

Auerbach and Grambling (1998) argue that stress can lead to serious problems if it is not managed effectively. Moreover, when a person is exposed to chronic stress, she or he is likely to experience both physical illness (including heart disease), and mental illness (e.g., anxiety disorders). The field of Health Psychology focuses in part, on how stress affects bodily functioning and on how people can use stress management techniques to prevent or minimize disease (Grambling and Auerbach 1998).

Stress can be imposed on an individual by unusual physical condition such as excessive heat or cold, illness, deprivation of oxygen, or exposure to strong light. Standing at attention a long time, climbing a mountain, or continuous immersion in water can also place strong demands for adaptation on the individual.

II. SOURCES OF STRESS

Bernstein et al. (2008) define the sources of stress as every circumstance or event that threatens to disrupt people's daily functioning and causes them to make adjustments. These sources of stress are called "Stressors".

Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset balance, thus affecting physical and psychological well-being and requiring action to restore balance (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). However, they differ from the degree of severity and duration of stress; what is stressful for an individual may not be a stressor for another.

For example, missing some lectures may be stressful for the first year undergraduate students, but may not be stressful for another student depending on his or her degree of expectations. Taking his final exam or sitting in rush hour traffic is not equivalent to being attacked by an angry Lion, where high arousal could facilitate fighting or fleeing. Catastrophic events, major life changes, and daily hassles are regarded as major categories of stressors that create demands to which people must adjust.

Auerbach and Gramling (1998) view catastrophes as an unexpected life-threatening calamity or disaster that cause individuals to be unable to cope with it. For instance, wars, floods, hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, sexual assaults and tornadoes are common catastrophes. Major life changes (e.g., losing a job, divorce, illness, death of a spouse or family member, and imprisonment) can be regarded as stressful situations for every adult. Most stress people experience in their everyday lives is caused by daily hassles.

Daily hassles can also be viewed as the irritations, pressures, and annoyances that might not be significant stressors by themselves but whose cumulative effects can be significant. This can be related to individuals' jobs, every day living circumstances and personal relationships (Bernstein et al., 2008).

III. EFFECTS OF STRESS

It has been argued that an individual can have possibly anxious thoughts, difficulty to concentrate or remember because of being stressed. Stress can lead also to change in people's behaviours, such as nail biting, heavy breathing, teeth clenching and hand wringing. When people are stressed, they may feel cold hands and feet, butterflies in stomach, and sometimes-increased heart rate, which all are regarded as common physiological effects of stress, which can be connected to emotion of anxiety (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998).

Physical and psychological responses to stress generally occur together, principally when stressors become more intense. However, one category of stress responses can influence other responses. For instance, mild chest pain may lead to the psychological stress response of worrying about getting a heart attack. Physical responses can be when a person escapes from a terrible accident or some other frightening events, he or she will experience rapid breathing, increased heart beating, sweating, and even shaking little later. These reactions are part of a general pattern known as the fight-or-flight syndrome. The psychological responses to stress can appear as changes in emotions, thoughts (cognition), and behaviours (Bernstein et al., 2008).

COPING WITH STRESS

Stress does not affect all people equally, but stress can lead to illness and negative experiences. Coping with stress is therefore an important factor, it affects whether and how people search for medical care and social support and how they believe the advice of the professionals (Passer & Smith 2007).

The transactional model of Stress and coping (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977), is an approach for evaluating the coping processes of stressful situations. Stressful situations are viewed as the transactions between an individual and the environment. However, the external stressors play an important role in these transactions. Two important types of appraisal characterize these transactions: appraisal of the stressor by the person, and appraisal of the stressor in terms of social and cultural resources available to the person.

The first appraisal known also as primary appraisal is resulting from a person examining or appraising the potential threat when facing a stressor. The primary appraisal is described as an individual evaluation of major effects of an event, as stressful, positive, controllable, and challenging or irrelevant. The second appraisal is the assessment of the available resources and options available to a person in order to cope with the actual stressor. It is an appropriate action taking by a person to find a solution (Cohen, 1984).

ACADEMIC STRESS

The definition of academic stress is the anxiety and stress that comes from schooling and education. There is often a lot of pressure that comes along with pursuing a degree and one's education. There is studying, homework, tests, labs, reading, and quizzes. There is the stress of doing all of the work, balancing the time and finding time for extra-curricular activities. Academic stress is especially hard on school students who are often living away from home for the first time.

Teachers expect work to be completed on time. Students may underestimate the amount of time it takes to complete reading and writing assignments, to print out copies of their work.

Stress and its manifestations, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, have always been seen as a common problem among people in different professions and occupations. In the last few decades, alarm has already been provoked by the proliferation of books, research reports, popular articles and the growing number of organized workshops, aiming to teach people how to cope with this phenomenon (Keinan & Perlberg 1986). Keinan and Perlberg (1986) argue that the feelings of frustration, anxiety, and depression are among the potential consequences of high degree of stress. Mckean et al. (2000) maintain that stressors alone do not produce anxiety, depression or tensions. Instead, the interaction between stressors and the person's perception and the reaction to these stressors cause stress. Environmental stress occurs as a result of environmental stimuli or demands apprehended by a person that are exceeding his or her ability to deal with them (Shirom, 1986).

Academic stress among students have long been researched on, and researchers have identified stressors as too many assignments, competitions with other students, failures and poor relationships with other students or lecturers (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Academic stressors include the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it (Carveth et al, 1996).

Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). When stress is perceived negatively or becomes excessive, students experience physical and psychological impairment. Methods to reduce stress by students often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits (Murphy & Archer, 1996). The pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006). This is likely to affect the social relations both within the institution and outside which affects the individual person's life in terms of commitment to achieving the goals (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

IV. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Sibnath Deb, Esben Strodl and Jiandong Sun (2012). Academic-related stress among private secondary school students in India. The purpose of this study is to examine the prevalence of academic stress and exam anxiety among private secondary school students in India as well as the associations with socio-economic and study-related factors. Participants were 400 adolescent students (52 percent male) from five private secondary schools in Kolkata who were studying in grades 10 and 12. Participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique and were assessed using a study-specific questionnaire. Findings revealed that 35 and 37 percent reported high or very high levels of academic stress and exam anxiety respectively. All students reported high levels of academic stress, but those who had lower grades reported higher levels of stress than those with higher grades. Students who engaged in extra-curricula activities were more likely to report exam anxiety than those who did not engage in extra-curricula activities.

Marwan Zaid Bataineh (2013). Academic stress among undergraduate students: the case of education faculty at King Saud University. This study investigated the academic stressors experienced by the students at university. A total sample of 232 subjects participated in this study were obtained from faculty of education at KSU. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaire which was randomly distributed to the students during lecture time. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The result showed that academic overloads, course awkward, inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams awkward, low motivation, and high family expectations were drive moderately stress among students. It was also found that fear of failure is the major source of stress among undergraduate students. Moreover, the study found that there were positive correlation between religiosity sources and academic stress ($r = .300^{**}$, $p = .00$). Lastly, the study found that there were no significant differences in academic stress among students with different, level of study and specializations.

Rajasekar (2013). Impact of academic stress among the management students of AMET university – An analysis. The study examined the impact of academic stress among the management students. Stress management encompasses techniques to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with psychological stress. Students have different expectations, goals and values that they want to fulfill, which is only possible if they are integrated with that of the institution. The objective of the study is to find out the present level of stress, sources of stress and stress management techniques that would be useful for management students. The study takes into account various criteria like physical, psychological, individual, demographical and environmental factors of stress among the management students. The sample comprises of 100 students of AMET Business School, AMET University in Chennai. Data was collected through structured questionnaire by using convenient sampling method.

V. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In today's highly competitive world, students face various academic problems including exam stress, disinterest in attending classes and inability to understand the subject. Academic stress is the feeling of anxiety or apprehension over one's performance in the academic activities. It can lead to students being unable to perform to the best of their abilities in examinations.

At school there is a range of academic pressure feel, derived from a need for perfection, worry over grades, parental pressure, competition, sports, or a tough class load. The nervous breakdowns, panic attacks, burnouts, and depression are also apparent in many younger students. The same situation is not always stressful for all people, and all people do not undergo the same feelings or off-putting thoughts when stressed.

Students were considered to be the future pillars who take the responsibilities to take our country to the next phase they should be in better way. To know this, the investigator decided to analysis the academic stress among higher secondary students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem under taken by the investigator is stated as “**A STUDY ON ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS**”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The investigator of the present study framed the following objectives:

1. To find out the level of academic stress among higher secondary students in Namakkal district, TamilNadu, India.
2. To find out whether there is significant difference between the following sub samples with respect to academic stress.
 - a) Gender [Male / Female]
 - b) Locality [Rural / Urban]
 - c) Management [Government / Private]
 - d) Subject [Science / Arts] and
 - e) Parents Education [Literate / Illiterate]

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The investigator of the present study framed the following hypotheses:

1. There is significant mean difference between male and female students with respect to academic stress.
2. There is significant mean difference between rural and urban area students with respect to academic stress.
3. There is significant mean difference between Government and private school students with respect to academic stress.
4. There is significant mean difference guidance needs between science and arts subject students with respect to academic stress.
5. There is significant mean difference between the students whose parent's education as literate and illiterate level with respect to academic stress.

THE METHOD

In the present study, the investigator applied normative survey as a method. The normative survey method studies, describes and interprets what exists at present.

SAMPLE

A sample is a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis. By observing the characteristics of the sample, one can make certain inferences about the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn.

The present study consists of 250 XI standard students studying in higher secondary schools situated in Namakkal District of Tamil Nadu, India. The sample was selected by using simple random sampling technique. The sample forms a representative sample of the entire population.

TOOL USED

The investigator of the present study selected and used the academic stress scale was constructed and standardized by 'R.Balaji Rao' for data collection.

DESCRIPTION OF ACADEMIC STRESS SCALE

One of the important objectives of the present investigation is to find out the level of academic stress among higher secondary school students for this purpose the investigator used the academic stress scale constructed and standardized by R.Balaji Rao. This scale consists of as many as 40 items and each item has five alternative responses i.e. "No Stress", "Slightly Stress", "Moderate Stress", " Highly Stress" and "Extremely High Stress".

So the scoring to the response given by the students should be like the following

Response	Weightage
No Stress	0
Slightly Stress	1
Moderate Stress	2
Highly Stress	3
Extremely High Stress	4

High scores are an indication of high stress and low scores on the scale are an indication of low stress.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

For the analysis of the data, the following statistical techniques have been used.

- a. Descriptive analysis (Mean & S.D) and
- b. Differential analysis ('t' test)

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

TABLE - 1
SHOWING THE MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF ACADEMIC STRESS SCORES OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Significant at 0.05 level
Gender	Male	136	96.82	32.12	0.64	Not Significant
	Female	114	94.24	30.71		
Locality	Rural	108	96.12	33.41	0.58	Not Significant
	Urban	142	98.51	31.52		
Management	Government	160	91.12	32.48	0.71	Not Significant
	Private	90	94.15	31.73		
Subject	Science	127	98.11	31.96	0.93	Not Significant
	Arts	123	94.43	30.18		
Parents Education	Literate	102	97.76	33.67	0.36	Not Significant
	Illiterate	148	96.24	31.36		

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following are the main findings of the present investigation.

1. The higher secondary students are having moderate level of academic stress and irrespective of sub samples of the higher secondary students are having moderate level of academic stress.
2. Male and female students do not differ significantly in their academic stress scores.
3. Rural and urban area students do not differ significantly in their academic stress scores.
4. Government and private school students do not differ significantly in their academic stress scores.
5. Science and Arts students do not differ significantly in their academic stress scores.
6. The students whose parent's education as literate and illiterate level does not differ significantly in their academic stress scores.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that the higher secondary students are having moderate level of academic stress and irrespective of sub samples of the higher secondary students are having moderate level of academic stress. The male student's academic stress is higher than female student. The urban student's academic stress is higher than rural student. The Government school student's academic stress is less than private school student. The science subject student's academic stress is higher than arts student. The students whose parent's education as literate level academic stress is higher than their counter part.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The result of the study shows that the level of higher secondary students about academic stress, being in touch with daily lessons is a good idea. Try to be regular in attending and concentrating in lectures. Last minute studying should be avoided and remember that a regular seven hours of sleep is mandatory for the body to function well. One should identify the best time and place for studying and this varies with each individual. The students are aware of the exact topics that are going to come for the exams and previous year's question papers should give you an idea about the exam pattern.

Taking regular short breaks while working helps one relax and concentrate for longer. One should always set 'realistic' goals in life and never let negative thoughts get into one's mind. On the day of the exams one should remain calm and stop being nervous.

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