

## Impact of Academic Stress on the Behavior of the Adolescents: A Review

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### ABSTRACT

High expectations set by the parents and society coupled with peer competition and academic work load creates tremendous pressure on the adolescents from Class 9 to Class 12. Unable to cope with the stress during the 'so called crucial years of their academic life' can have an adverse effect on the physical, mental, social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of the adolescents. During the 'high stress period', the adolescents who are not equipped with adequate coping mechanism may be at increased risk for depression, anxiety and sometimes suicidal tendencies which may manifest in the form of some of deviant behaviors like loneliness, aggression or bully behavior. This review of literature aims to understand the impact of academic stress on the some of the frequently noticed deviant behavior viz. loneliness, substance abuse and the negative impact on learning that may be exhibited by the adolescents. The specific objectives of this review are to identify the factors causing academic stress that result in the deviant behaviors, develop a coping strategy to minimize the impact of deviant behavior during the crucial development phase and to provide counseling guidelines to deal with the such adolescents. The study gave an insight into the impact of academic stress on the behavior of the adolescents more specifically on the deviant behavior. The findings through the above study will help in formulating the counseling strategies for such students, which will be beneficial to the School Counselors, Teachers and Parents.

**Keywords:** *Academic Stress, Behavior, Loneliness, Coping, Adolescents*

A review by UNICEF in June 2018 state: 'Adolescents – defined by the United Nations as those between the ages of 10 and 19 – number 1.2 billion in the world today, making up 16 per cent of the world's population. As children up to the age of 18, most adolescents are protected under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, their vulnerabilities and needs often remain unaddressed'. In India, approximately 20% of the population is between the ages of 10 and 19 years (Census 2011). By 2020, it is predicted that India will have the highest percentage of young people in the world, with 34.33% of its total population between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Government of India 2017). India is likely to be one of the youngest nations in the world by 2020. The last several years have seen a plethora of studies addressing the adolescent issues

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In a typical middle class and upper middle-class Indian society academic achievement is of primary importance with huge expectations burdened on the adolescents' shoulders to excel academically, behaviorally and socially. As the adolescents enter their high school phase of life and thereafter the higher secondary level, lot of pressure is placed on them to perform, as the performance in Class X determines their entry to a good higher secondary educational setup which in turn plays a crucial role in determining their future academic trajectory, commonly termed as 'Gate way to their Life'. At this stage, the academic performance of the adolescents plays a crucial role in deciding about next higher education and probably career too (Rosa and Preethi, 2012). They are expected to perform academically and make a mark for themselves, behave like a mature adult but the parents still retain the reigns of control with them and socially they are expected to be responsible grown-ups. Added to the expectations from parents, peers and society, they are troubled by the hormonal changes adding to the stress and storm of this phase of their lives.

Therefore, excessive stress during this stage could result in increased prevalence of psychological problems like depression and nervousness, which could ultimately have negative impact on the outcome of the achievements Waghacharve, et.al (2013). The adolescents have no choice but to score, perform, prove and make their parents proud which creates tremendous pressure to perform academically.

**Objective:** The objective of this literature review was to identify the adverse effect of academic stress on the behavior of the adolescents that are commonly noticed in the population under study by reviewing studies published between the years 2007 and 2018.

### METHODOLOGY

Academic databases including Google Scholar, PubMed and JStor were included for the search using the keywords: Academic Stress, Behavior of Adolescents, Loneliness, Depression, Anxiety among Adolescents and Coping Mechanism. Searches were limited to literature from 2007 to 2018 both in the Indian and International context. The studies in English language only were included for the review. The exclusion criteria included articles focusing on adolescents, academic stress and related behavioral issues, excluding, socio economic status, relationship issues, physiological and pharmacological studies. The potential articles identified were 1820 from Google scholar, 15 from PubMed, 40 from JStor apart from bibliographic database. Although title and abstract were found to be relevant, due to non-availability of full paper access, the articles had to be excluded.

Sl.No	Search Terms	Articles Identified	Articles Retrieved
1.	Academic Stress among Adolescents	26	8
2.	Academic Stress and Loneliness	27	11
3.	Academic Stress and its impact on the Behavior	21	8
4.	Academic Stress and Depression, Anxiety & Coping Mechanism	28	11
	Total	102	38

## RESULTS

### *1. Academic Stress among Adolescents*

In India, academic stress has been identified as a key factor, placing many students at risk for suicide. In Kota, where the maximum number of students in the country flock to receive coaching for medical and engineering exams, the suicide rates are recorded to be as high as 17 suicides in 2016 (Hindustan Times, 2017). Many psychological problems such as depression and suicide occur as a result of low self-esteem (Nikhitha et al. 2014).

Examination stress is the feeling of anxiety or apprehension over one's performance in the exam. It can lead to students unable to perform to the best of their abilities in exams (<http://www.iitr.ac.in>).

Bisht (1989) has defined academic stress as a demand related to academics that tax or exceed the available resources (internal or external) as cognitively appeared by the student involved. According to her, academic stress reflects perception of individual's academic frustration, academic conflict, academic pressure and academic anxiety. She has given the definition of four components of academic stress as follows: **Academic Frustration:** - Academic frustration is a state caused by harm of some academic goals. **Academic Conflict:** - Academic Conflict is the result of two or more mutually incompatible response tendencies to academic goals. **Academic Pressure:** - When the student is under heavy demands of time and energy to meet academic goals. And **Academic Anxiety:** - Apprehension of harm to some academic goals. Academic Stress is an important factor accounting for variation in academic achievement. It also contributes to major mental health hazards, problems both physical and mental stress related diseases.

Globally, studies have reported the adolescent stress levels range from 20% to 45%. Frustrations and pressures manifest in the form of behavioral issues like anger, aggression, bully behavior and in worst case scenario even contemplating or committing suicide. Frustrations and pressures to achieve in school, inter alia, are substantially mitigated by the perception of social support from significant others (Ames, 1992; Baumrind 2012) which consequently has a positive impact on psychological wellbeing Burns, A., & Darling, N. (2002). Academic Stress is an important factor accounting for variation in academic achievement. It also contributes to major mental health hazards, problems both physical and mental stress related diseases. Stress makes a significant contribution to the prediction of subsequent school performance and act as a negative predictor of academic performance in school children Ender et al. (1994) shows the components of Academic Stress Krishanlal (2014).

In the above context, in India particularly, adolescents are put under pressure to perform well in school examinations. For some students, the experience of academic stress leads to a sense of distress, which is generally manifested in a variety of psychological and behavioral problems. The experience of academic stress and adolescent distress has been identified and explored by researchers in Korea and Japan Lee M, Larson RW (2000). It is relevant to mention here that in India, in the year 2011 alone, 2381 children, or more than six children per day, committed suicide because of failure in examinations (<http://www.ncrb.nic.in>). Kaur S and Verma S (2010) in their study have found a high degree of negative correlation between abuse and academic achievement of adolescents.

The above studies have well reiterated the fact that there is tremendous pressure on the high school and higher secondary school students. In the present day, Indian scenario, the

highlight of the news during the months of March to May, is about the student population in class X and Class XII who face tremendous pressure and academic related issues like exam stress, attempted suicide or suicidal thoughts, anxiety, psycho somatic illness like migraine headache & back ache, lack of interest in attending classes and taking revision tests, inability to comprehend the subject, memory issue.... Academic stress is the therefore, the major source of stress among adolescents and it may lead to low self-esteem.

### **2. Academic Stress and its impact on Behavior**

Latha K.S Reddy H(2006) in their study have found that the main sources of academic stress were getting up early in the morning, pressure to study, having to concentrate for too long and long working hours. Verma S et al. (2002) in their study found that those who spent more time doing homework experienced lower average emotional states and more internalizing problems, while those who spent more time in leisure experienced more favorable states but also reported higher academic anxiety and lower scholastic achievement. Leung et al., (2010) indicated that academic stress was a risk factor that heightened student anxiety levels and that parental emotional support was a protective factor that contributed to better mental health among children. However, paternal informational support delivered to children during times of high academic stress appeared to heighten student anxiety levels. Sharma A and Sharma (2011) came up with a finding that adolescent smokers irrespective of gender and type of school were significantly higher on anxiety, stress and family conflict. Mohan (2005) found that low educational performance predict tobacco use among adolescent boys. A study conducted in Australia also came up with similar findings in NSW Public Health Bulletin (2007). Substance abuse is another commonly reported mental health problem among Indian adolescents. Alcohol use (15%) Jaisoorya et al. (2016) and addiction to drugs like ganja and marijuana (8.18%) Sharma and Chaudhary (2016) is common among teenagers in schools, in urban and rural India. In addition to these common mental disorders, with the rise in technological advancements and the arrival of the digital age, adolescents are increasingly using the internet; thus, addiction to internet is also on the rise (Goel et al.(2013); Jhala and Sharma (2017).

Other common psycho-social concerns experienced by adolescents include peer-related problems contributing significantly to difficulties in everyday life: friendships and classroom interactions (Bhola et al. (2016); Reddy et al. (2011) as well as feelings of loneliness and worry Samanta et al. (2012).

The above studies have well established impact of academic behavior on the behavior of the adolescent. Unable to cope up with the academic stress and not finding avenues to give vent to the negative impact of academic stress results in taking recourse to abrasive and aberrant behavior like addiction to internet, alcohol, substance abuse and harsh, stringent and aggressive behavior.

### **3. Academic stress and Loneliness**

Experts have stated that adolescence is a period of storm and stress characterized by alienation, solitude, distress and loneliness. According to Keniston (1960), many adolescents experience a "developmental estrangement" - which is a sense of alienation or a feeling of loss that is caused by the abandonment of childhood egocentrism and the acceptance of responsibility, decision-making and independence of adulthood. Heinrich and Gullone (2006) suggested that humans are inherently social beings who strive to achieve a sense of belonging, and fulfilling this need helps to maintain positive physical and mental health; accordingly, researchers have found that those who report feelings of loneliness are more

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likely to experience poor physical health, depression and psychological distress (Arkar et al., (2004); Berkman & Syme, (1979); Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, (1993); Wei, Russell, & Zakalik, (2005); Wright et al., (2014). In addition, feelings of loneliness can further lead to a negative impact on learning ability and learning achievement among students (Benner, 2011). Lasgaard and Elklit (2009) conducted a study to find out the level of loneliness in fourteen years old adolescence. Researchers concluded that dysfunctional social strategies and attributions in associated situations are directly related to loneliness. It was explored that lonely students experience more negative emotions.

The findings of the researches conducted by Leung(2002) and Petro, (2008) that lonely students experience more negative emotions. So, a student who experience feelings of loneliness will also experience negative emotions and negative emotions associated with stress. Students experience negative emotions such as they thought they will be failed in studies and this lead to stress among students, there are many other factors and negative emotions which lead to academic stress. Heinrich and Gullone (2006) suggested that humans are inherently social beings who strive to achieve a sense of belonging, and fulfilling this need helps to maintain positive physical and mental health; accordingly, researchers have found that those who report feelings of loneliness are more likely to experience poor physical health, depression and psychological distress Arkar et al., (2004); Berkman & Syme, (1979); Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1993; Wei, Russell, & Zakalik (2005); Wright et al., (2014). In addition, feelings of loneliness can further lead to a negative impact on learning ability and learning achievement among students Benner (2011).

Therefore, the above literatures reveal that one of the impacts of academic stress on the adolescent is 'Loneliness'. Taken together the above findings, those students experiencing academic pressure without adequate coping mechanism are more likely to report feeling lonely which in turn have a cascading effect in other areas of their lives manifesting in the form of poor physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.

### **4. Academic Stress and Depression**

Persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation leading to anxiety, withdrawal behavior and depression is considered as distress Nat Rev Neurosci (2005).Baviskar et.al (2013) noted that uncertainty regarding future, past academic performance, low self-esteem may all be contributing to higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress. Stress associated with academic activities has been linked to various negative outcomes such as poor health Greenberg (1981) Lesko & Summerfield (1989); Campbell & Stevenson (1992), depression Aldwin & Greenberger (1987), and therefore poor academic performance Clark & Rieker (1986); Linn & Zeppa (1984); Misra, Mckean, West & Russo (2000). For example, Lesko and Summerfield (1989) found a significant positive correlation between the incidence of illness and the number of exams and assignments. Similarly, Aldwin and Greenberger (1987) found that perceived academic stress was related to anxiety and depression in college students. Nevertheless, while too much stress can interfere with a student's preparation, concentration, and subsequently performance, but positive stress can be helpful to students by motivating them to peak performance Pfeiffer (2001).

Articles reviewed on academic stress and depression point towards the helplessness, hopelessness and undue pressure, either self-imposed or imposed through their parents or through peers coupled with inadequate coping mechanism, lack of social support and understanding tend to lead the adolescents towards being depressed and anxious.

### 5. Coping Strategies

Sinha (2013) noted that adolescent can easily cope with their academic stress by using stress relief techniques, managing work, taking help from friends and counselors. Parents can also help their adolescents in overcoming academic stress by being supportive, paying attention to their wards' needs, having realistic expectations and teaching children to overcome obstacles and so on. Waghachavare et.al (2013) suggested that steps should be taken to incorporate stress management education in curriculum, while Bartwal and Singh (2014) suggested that in order to make adolescents stress free, there is a need to adopt better methods of teaching-learning. Dixit and Singh (2015) suggested that the teacher should understand the child psychology and should not over expect from the child. Haraldsson et al (2008) claimed that by engaging in health promotion activities adolescents can improve their sense of well being related to stress.

### DISCUSSION

An attempt was made in this paper to review the literature on academic stress among the adolescent's students and tried to present the impact of academic stress on the behavior of the adolescents as well as coping mechanism for stress. The review of literature indicates that the reasons for stress during adolescence are because of disturbed family dynamics, peer pressure, inability to cope with studies, drug abuse, and lack of competence. The pressure to achieve cause a lot of stress in the adolescents, leading withdrawal from social interaction with family and peers. The students exposed to excessive pressure have shown symptoms in the form of deviant behavior which mildly termed are the 'behavioral aberrations coming from academic anxiety, peer pressure and parental control.

### CONCLUSION

In order to overcome deviant behaviors, the parents play a constructive role in channelizing energies of the adolescents. Proper care should to be taken in helping to take the right decisions which may affect their future. Anxiety reduction and time management techniques, in conjunction with leisure activities may be an effective strategy for reducing academic stress among students. Students should have the aspiration/expectation about their study, not beyond their capacities and abilities, Students also need proper counseling while selecting their courses at intermediate level. The parents should also consider the child's interest and aptitude and not impose their ambition on selecting the courses. The family environment should be congenial, and the learning process should be made pleasurable and parents should avoid making it as a stressful event for adolescents. Author concludes that supportive and stimulating atmosphere is very essential for the student to progress in their academic life and for reaching their aim or goal.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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