

## Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students

Rajeev Kumar Gupta<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Academic learning is the main source of stress among adolescents and is associated with mental health problems; finding its determinants helps to know the risk factors that influence stress. stress becomes an integral part of human life. Anything that creates a challenge or a threat to our comfort is a stress. All kind of stress is not considered to be bad because it helps perform well. In academics, stress is unavoidable among students, and it influences students' performance in all academic activities. Academic stress plays a major role in determining the mental health of students. is study was conducted to explore the academic stress and its relationship with mental health among high school students. The study included 300 randomly selected adolescent students aged between 17 and 20 years. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee. Data were collected by employing random sampling technique. Self-administered questionnaires were administered which included sociodemographic data sheet, personality inventory, intelligence quotient (IQ) assessment, and educational stress scale for adolescents. The main aim of the study was to assess the educational stress and their predictors among adolescent students.

**Keywords:** *Academic stress, mental health, adolescent students*

Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even an awareness of the possibility of academic failure. During the school years, academic stressors may show in any aspect of the child's environment: home, school, neighbourhood, or friendship. Kouzma and Kennedy reported that school-related situations – such as tests, grades, studying, self-imposed need to succeed, as well as that induced by others – are the main sources of stress for high school students. The impact of academic stress is also far-reaching: high levels of academic stress have led to poor outcomes in the areas of exercise, nutrition, substance use, and self-care. Furthermore, academic stress is a risk factor for psychopathology. For example, fourth, fifth and sixth-grade students who have higher levels of academic stress are more likely to experience feelings of depression. The Indian school education system is textbook-oriented that focuses on rote memorization of lessons and demands long hours of systematic study every day. The elaborate study routines that are expected by high school students span from the morning till late evening hours, leaving little time for socialisation and recreation. In India, the school education system is governed by two major categories of educational boards recognised by the government of India. The first category includes the All-India Boards, like the CBSE

<sup>1</sup>Research scholar, Department of psychology, J.P. University, chhapra, Bihar, India

\*[Responding Author](#)

Received: March 26, 2020; Revision Received: June 3, 2020; Accepted: June 25, 2020

## Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students

(Central Board of Secondary Education), the CICSE (Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations) and the National Open School. The second category includes the State Level Boards that are authorised to carry on their activities within the states where they are registered. The education system in India is highly competitive because of a lack of an adequate number of good institutions to accommodate the ever-expanding population of children. Hence children face competition at the entry level of pre-primary education, and thereafter at the end of every year, in the form of examinations that determine their promotion to the next grade. In classrooms teachers attempt to cover all aspects of a vast syllabus, often disregarding the comprehension level of students. Today the entire world is witnessing stress and its consequences. Bernstein (2008) viewed stress as “a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors”. effect of stress is understood in many walks of life with diverse population especially among students. Richlin-Klonsky (2003) reported that “stress has lessened academic performance, hinder with a student's capability to involve in and add to campus life, and raise the probability of substance abuse and other potentially destructive behaviours”. Rawson (1999) highlighted that “many students reported their experience of high academic stress at predictable times which have resulted from preparing and taking exams, class ranking competition, and mastering huge amount of syllabus in a comparatively very small amount of time”. Fairbrother (2003) recognized that “academic stress as stressors which occurred due to various reasons such as too many assignments, competitions with other students, failures and poor relationships with other students or teachers”. Erkutlu (2006) opined that “pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful. One of the major impacts of stress is that it affects drastically the psychological functions in turn mental health of people”. According to World Health Organization (2014) mental health is viewed as “a state of well-being in which individuals realize their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and able to make a contribution to community”. Galderisi et al (2015) defined “mental health as a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium”. Being in a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, adolescents have to confront with varied types of stressors. Kaur (2014) pointed out that “the rising expectations of the parents in terms of scores and academic performance sometimes put extra burden on children, which may sometimes cause many physical or mental ailments”. Madlan (2004) indicated that “mental health is a way of thinking, feeling and behaviour in a person's daily lives. People with a positive mental health can recognize themselves on their ability, willing to accept failure, able to control their emotions and appreciate them. Adolescence is the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood and considered to be the period between the ages of 10 and 19 years. It accounts for approximately 17% of the world's population. India is home to the largest adolescent population in the world. During this period, adolescents undergo many psychosocial and physiological changes making them more prone to various stresses. For them, academic related events are believed to be major stressors, especially in Asian countries, as their academic performance at this stage plays a decisive role in higher education and career. Various studies carried out after the year 2000 revealed that the prevalence of stress among Indian adolescents varied between 13% and 45%. Another study conducted in

## **Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students**

Thiruvananthapuram; India revealed that 93%–100% of school children had medium to moderate stress while 1.9% exhibited severe stress. A study by Deb et al., 2015, revealed that nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of the Indian students reported stress due to academic pressure. It is, therefore, worthwhile to undertake further research which would seek to protect the growing adolescent population. Due to the ever expanding population in India, the education system has become highly competitive. As a result, the children begin to face the pressure of competition from the preprimary level itself in the form of year-end examinations which determine their promotion to the next higher grade. The academic stress further increases at the preuniversity level as getting admission to good colleges depends on their grades or marks obtained in the qualifying examination. In the Indian system of education, obtaining good marks are more important than acquiring knowledge. This leads to overburdening the students with academic workload causing a lot of academic stress among Indian adolescents. There are inconsistencies in literature related to the relationship between stress and personality traits among adolescent students. Malik, 2015, found that there was no significant relationship between stress and personality traits among adolescent students. A study by Nechita et al., 2015, revealed that personality factors significantly influence stress levels. A study by Sachdeva revealed no significant relationship between physical stress, personality, and reasoning ability among adolescent students. The present study has been undertaken to investigate the role of personality factors in academic stress. Research on finding the determinants of academic stress may provide evidence for understanding the risk factors that influence academic stress. This knowledge could be used to guide the professionals such as teachers and psychologists in implementing specific preventive measures to reduce academic stress among adolescents. Based on these findings, preventive programs can be developed and conducted to promote mental health among adolescent students. The present study was conducted in the said background with an objective to assess academic stress and investigate the significant demographic, personality, and intelligence factors that could predict it among adolescent students.

### ***Hypotheses***

1. we are is a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health among high school students
2. Students from government and private schools differ significantly in their academic stress
3. Students from government and private schools significantly differ in their mental health

### ***Tools and Methods***

1. The Academic Stress Scale by Jinadong Sun (2012). It consisted of 16 statements with 5-point responses, measuring five factors of academic stress
2. The Positive Mental Health Scale by Vaingankar et al, (2011) this tool consisted of 48 statements with 6 responses measuring six dimensions of mental health,

A cross-sectional study was carried out in ten high schools in Chhapra City, Bihar, India, involving high school and adolescent students pursuing studies at that high school. These included both government and private high school with an average of 60–80 students in each class section. In coeducational institutions, girls are considered to account for 40% –50% of class power. Both government and private high schools were randomly selected. The study population consisted of students between the ages of 17 and 20 studying in 10th and 12th grades and under graduate courses. Students were selected using the random sampling technique. A total of 700 students were approached for the study, out of which 180 students

## Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students

expressed reluctance to participate due to inconvenient time. Of the remaining 520 students, who were initially examined using a stress subset of the depression, anxiety, and stress scales, 320 students met the criterion of cut off scores. Of these, 320 students participated in the study, with data related to 300 students. In the final analysis, while 20 students were left out due to incomplete filling of the questionnaire.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONTABLE

**Table 1. Relationship between academic stress and mental health of high School Students**

Dimensions of Academic Stress/Mental Health	Pressure from Study	Workload	Worry about Grades	Self-Expectation	Despondency	Total
General Coping	0.205	0.163	0.12	0.055	-0.144	0.166
Emotional Support	0.074	0.042	0.180	-0.012	-0.165	0.056
Spirituality	0.231	0.005	0.104	0.07	-0.019	0.186
Interpersonal Skills	0.263	0.133	0.216	-0.058	-0.105	0.193
Personal Growth and Autonomy	0.258	0.193	0.252	-0.024	0.103	0.283
Global Affect	0.13	0.160	0.017	0.002	-0.066	0.088
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.252</b>	<b>0.156</b>	<b>0.205</b>	<b>-0.005</b>	<b>-0.113</b>	<b>0.216</b>

Table 1 revealed the relationship between academic stress and mental health among students. From the table, it is observed that the academic stress and mental health are significantly correlated with each other. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. It is observed from the table that general coping is negatively correlated with despondency which is clearly indicative that students are frustrated from their academic. This may be due to the pressure from parents as well as school to get higher grades. Emotional support and despondency are negatively correlated which is evident that students did not get proper emotional support from their family and school management. It was found that academic stress and mental health of students positively correlated each other. The result is indicative that students will be mentally healthy when they are more productive in their academic activities. The findings are relevant to the Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) which suggested that there was a relationship between performance and arousal. Increased arousal can help improve performance, but only up to a certain point. At the point when arousal became excessive, performance diminishes.

**Table 2. Academic Stress among Government and Private School Student**

Dimensions of Academic Stress	Government (n=160)		Private (n=140)		t' value
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
Pressure from study	13.19	3.67	14.37	4.3	3.60
Work load	10.48	3.17	11.66	3.68	4.19
Worry about grades	11.99	3.34	12.66	4.06	2.62
Self-Expectation	11.89	3.46	11.27	3.33	275
Despondency	10.51	3.25	10.72	3.44	0.71
Academic Stress Total	58.06	6.93	60.79	8.31	3.60

Table 2 it is found from the table that students from government and private schools differ significantly in pressure from study, workload and overall academic stress. Generally, in private schools, students are provided with a lot of home works and pressurized to get higher

## Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students

marks. Also, parents of these children invested huge money on their academics and expect their children to get very high marks. So, these children experience pressure from school as well as parents and obviously they could experience higher academic stress.

**Table 3. Mental Health of Students from Government and Private Schools**

Dimensions of Mental Health	Government (n=160)		Private (n=140)		t' value
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
<b>General Coping</b>	45.68	8.48	47.75	6.18	1.21
<b>Emotional Support</b>	46.16	12.11	45.08	8.39	.86
<b>Spirituality</b>	39.51	10.53	41.46	6.98	1.75
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	47.12	12.62	52.83	7.97	4.13
<b>Personal Growth and Autonomy</b>	47.23	10.72	52.76	8.89	4.28
<b>Global Affect</b>	28.68	6.33	30.63	6.6	2.45
<b>Mental Health Total</b>	254.38	53.36	269.51	28.48	2.87

Table.3 Revealed the differences in mental health of students from government and private schools. It is noted that students differ significantly in the dimensions of interpersonal skills, personal growth & autonomy, global affect as well as in the overall mental health. It is witnessed from the practices that most of the private schools focus on training activities to promote academic success, motivation and other social skills. Also, many students from private schools are from upper middle class and also their parents educated. On the other hand, majority of students in government schools are from poor socio-economic background and illiterate family, and many of them are first generation learners. These students struggle a lot to fulfil their basic academic activities and these factors would have affected their mental health adversely. This finding is also supported.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Most adolescents' students included in this study were found to be experiencing educational stress. The level of educational stress experienced by students was dependent on the personality type, father education, combination of subjects chosen during preuniversity, and number of siblings. Thus, these factors can be considered while identifying stress among adolescent students and develop suitable stress prevention interventions. Teachers, parents, and other primary caregivers should be aware of these stress causing factors. Introduction of stress management programs at school level will be more helpful. and the findings of the study indicated the need for understanding academic stress among school students. Periodical training programmes could be organized for school students and parents to sensitize about academic stress and ways to handle it in an efficient way. Teachers can provide interventions to reduce stress among students. Teachers can break the complex tasks into manageable segment which will be easy to do without stress. Relaxation techniques such as meditation and yoga can be provided to students to reduce the stress and being mentally healthy.

## REFERENCES

- Academic Stress, Parental Pressure, Anxiety and Mental Health among Indian High School Students
- Agarwal, A., (2011). Impact of Academic Stress upon Academic Achievement and Mental Health of the Adolescents. *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences*.
- Bennett TH, Holloway KR. Drug misuse among university students in the UK: implications for prevention. *Subst Use Misuse*. 2014; 49:448–55.
- Bernstein, D.A; Penner, L.A; Stewart, A.C and Roy, E.J (2008) *Psychology* (8th edition). Houghton Mifflin Company Boston New York.
- Busari AO. Evaluating the relationship between gender, age, depression and academic performance among adolescents. *Sch J Educ*. 2012; 1:6–12.
- Campbell-Sills, L., Cohan, S. L., & Stein, M. B. (2006). Relationship of resilience to personality, coping and psychiatric symptoms in young adults. *Behaviour. Research and therapy*, 44, 585-599
- Chandramouli C. Release of Social and Cultural Tables: Age. Data Highlights. Census of India; 2011. 2013. Aug,
- Coon, D. & Mitterer, J. O. (2007). *Introduction to psychology*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Davis MC, Matthews KA, Twamley EW. Is life more difficult on mars or Venus? A meta-analytic review of sex differences in major and minor life events. *Ann Behav Med*. 1999; 21:83–97.
- Deb, S., Strodl, E., & Sun, J. (2015). Academic Stress, Parental Pressure, Anxiety and Mental Health among Indian High School Students. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 5(1), 26-34.
- Erkutlu H. V, Chafra J (2006). Relationship between leadership power bases and job stress of subordinates: example from boutique hotels, *Manage. Res. News* 29(5): 285-297.
- Fairbrother, K. & Warn, J. (2003). Workplace Dimensions, Stress and Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 18(1): 8-21
- Galderisi.S et al., (2015). Toward a new definition of mental health. *World Psychiatry*. 14(2): 231–233.
- Ghosh, M.S., (2016). Academic Stress among Government and Private High School Students. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*.
- Guo H, Yang W, Cao Y, Li J, Siegrist J. Effort-reward imbalance at school and depressive symptoms in Chinese adolescents: The role of family socioeconomic status. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*
- Hussain, A., Kumar, A., & Husain, A. (2008). Academic stress and adjustment among high school students. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 34,70-73.
- Jayanthi P, Thirunavukarasu M, Rajkumar R. Academic stress and depression among adolescents: A cross-sectional study. *Indian Pediatr*. 2015; 52:217–9
- King KA, Vidourek RA, Singh A. Condoms, sex, and sexually transmitted diseases: exploring sexual health issues among Asian-Indian college students. *Sex Cult*. 2014; 18:649–63.
- Rosa MC, Preethi C. Academic stress and emotional maturity among higher secondary school students of working and non-working mothers. *Int J Adv Res*. 2012; 1:40–3.
- Talwar R, Kumar V. Determinants of psychological stress and suicidal behavior in Indian adolescents. *J Indian Assoc Child Adolesc Ment Health*. 2014; 10:47–68. ii and M.Iskender,(2011) Internet Addiction and Depression, Anxiety and Stress. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*.2011,3 (1),138-148.
- Washington TF. Psychological stress and anxiety in middle to late childhood and early adolescence: Manifestations and management. *J Pediatr Nurs* 2009; 24:302–13.

## **Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students**

World Health Organization. Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health. World Health Organization. 2019.

### ***Acknowledgements***

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** R K Gupta (2020). Academic stress and mental health among adolescent students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 384-390. DIP:18.01.045/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.045