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Research Paper

Relationship Between Academic Stress and Self Esteem in Post-Covid Times: A Study Among College Students in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has brought about a drastic change in the education system. What were once blackboards and chalks are now cameras and mute buttons. The abrupt change in the medium of education has had a negative impact on students' psychological well-being. The present study traces the relationship among academic stress, socio-economic status, and self-esteem. Socio-economic status is a composite economic and sociological measure of an individual's work experience, economic access to personal or family resources, and social status in relation to others. Self-esteem is how we value and perceive ourselves, based on opinions and beliefs about yourself that are difficult to change. How much you love and value yourself as a person can have an impact on your self-esteem. To carry out the study, a sample of 60 college students from SCMS College, Cochin was given the questionnaire. Data collection was done as a survey using tools like the Academic Stress Scale by Kim (1970), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by Morris Rosenberg (1965), and a socio-demographic sheet. By the end of the study, through the method of one-way ANOVA, it was evident that socio-economic status and self-esteem are positively correlated.

Keywords: *Self-esteem, Academic stress, Post- Covid, College, Kerala*

Self-esteem is a similar concept to self-worth, but with a small (although important) difference: "*self-esteem is what we think, feel, and believe about ourselves,"* while "self-worth" is the more global recognition that we are valuable human beings worthy of love (Hibbert, 2013).

Having a healthy self-esteem can influence your motivation, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. However, having a self-esteem that is either too high or too low can be problematic. A better understanding of what your unique level of self-esteem is can help you strike a balance that is just right for you. Self-esteem tends to be lowest in childhood and increases during the period at college as well as adulthood, and eventually reaches a stable and enduring level. This makes self-esteem like the stability of personality traits over time.

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People with low self-esteem tend to feel less sure of their abilities and may doubt their decision-making process. They may not feel motivated to try novel things because they don't believe they can reach their goals.

Academic stress is the main factor that influences self-esteem in college students. Because it is the transitional stage during which psychological development occurs and the period during which they become more independent and understand their identity, academic stress is a major source of stress among college students, which may lead to low self-esteem. Socio-economic status among college students also affects self-esteem as college students from higher socio-economic backgrounds have a higher self-esteem compared to others coming from comparatively lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Lee and Larson (2000) explain academic stress as *"an interaction between environmental stressors, students' appraisals, and reactions to the same." Common stressors in college include increased academic demands, being on your own in a new environment, changes in family relations, changes in social life, and exposure to new people, ideas, and temptations (Kumaraswamy, 2013).* College is supposed to be enjoyed, not endured, and therefore it is important to keep stress at college under control. On the contrary, stress on college campuses keeps increasing at an alarming rate, resulting in serious consequences. Consistent academic stress will influence the personality of an individual, which affects their self-esteem. A change in education patterns puts academic stress on students, which leads to low academic performance, which thereby influences their personalities. A sudden and drastic change in education pattern affected college students in the post-covid times as after the pandemic, there was a remarkable change in education pattern.

1.1 Education in the Pre-COVID Times

On average, education is completed in a very organized fashion. Regular classes were held offline. Students were relatively active, had a well-organized and activity-oriented life, and obtained direct instruction from teachers. Students of the pre-covid times could engage in extracurricular activities, which gave them a chance to showcase their talents and develop their knowledge and skills.

1.2 Education in the IN COVID Times

As a result of the pandemic, educational institutions were forced to close. This shutdown lasted for about two years. In addition, classes switched to online. This circumstance contributed to poor productivity of the students as there were no explicit rules or methods. Online classes had a limited range of teaching strategies. The choice was left up the students. The way that students learn and go about their daily lives has completely changed. Additionally, it caused poor educational results. Some students experienced severe stress during the period due to the lack of gadgets and online course materials owing to their low socio-economic status. The general lack of stringent measures of examinations and evaluations made students lazier.

1.3 Education in Post-Covid Times

Students' education suffered a great deal in the post-covid era. Returning to their regular offline learning mode was extremely challenging. They had to experience adjustment issues while attending offline classes again as they had grown comfortable with hiding their identities in online instruction mode. They were forced to get out of their slacker mode and resume their studies. They had to alter their daily schedule. The examinations and

evaluations become regular and strict. They were plagued by negative emotions that was a resultant of the change in the teaching method. They experienced academic stress due to the shifting education pattern.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the literature indicates the relevance of the present study in connection with some of the previous studies and theories to the investigation. A review of the literature can help you define the problem, recognise its significance, determine data collection methods, choose an appropriate study design, and identify the source of data. The main functions of citing a review of literature are to provide a basis for developing a framework. This study focuses mainly on the relationship among academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status. Thus, an attempt has been made in this chapter to review the existing scholarship related to this investigation.

2.1 Academic stress and self-esteem

Faezeh Karimi, Mehrnaz Ahmadi, Sara Baghiri, and Omid Garkaz (2021) conducted a study on the topic "The relationship among self-esteem and academic stress of students of Shahroud University of Medical Sciences in the academic year 2020-2021." The sample for the study was 260 students selected by simple random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires: demographic, Copper-Smith self-esteem, and Godzella academic stress. Descriptive statistics and a correlation test were used to analyze the data. The result of the study shows that there is a significant relationship ($p = 0.012$) between self-esteem and academic stress; increasing self-esteem decreases students' academic stress.

Cayson Ooi Yi Chung, Dan Chiu Ping, Puerti Suziani Zahari, Tharoun Sharma Ravindran, and Kalaiyarasi Kannathasan (2020) conducted a study on "The association between self-esteem and academic stress among undergraduate medical students." The sample for the study consists of 204 medical students. Rosenberg A self-esteem scale and the perception of academic stress (PAS) scale were used to collect the data. Unpaired t-tests, ANOVA, and linear regression were used for statistical analysis. The result shows that there was a significant positive association between self-esteem and academic stress ($p = -0.522$), indicating that the higher the self-esteem, the lower the academic stress.

Lediana Xhakollari and Arben Hoti (2015) conducted a study on "Self-esteem and Academic Stress among Shkodra University Students." Data were collected from 513 students at Shkodra University. The student's Life Stress Inventory was used to measure stressors and reactions to stressors, and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale was used to assess personal self-esteem levels. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result shows that there was a negative and significant x self-esteem and academic stress.

R. Acharya Pandey and H.N. Chalise (2012) conducted a study on the topic "Self-esteem and Academic Stress among Nursing Students." The study consists of 190 samples selected randomly from Kathmandu University. Academic stress was assessed using the Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS), and self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The results of this study show that nursing students have low self-esteem and high academic stress. It also shows that the significant variables for high academic stress and low self-esteem were lower age, lower education, low perceived family support, and lower financial support.

2.2 Self-esteem and Socio-economic Status

Elmahdi Outbir (2019) conducted a study on the topic "Low Socio-Economic Status and Self-Esteem among Moroccans, Students of Ouarzazate City, as a Key Study." Data were collected from a sample size of 81 students selected randomly, using two questionnaire both scales of which were tested using Cronbach's alpha. The result of this study was that a weak, negative correlation exists between socio-economic status and self-esteem.

Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell (2002) conducted a study on "Self-esteem and Socio-economic Status: A Meta-Analytic Review." The sample size of the study was 446. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and Tennessee Self-Concept Scale were used for collecting data. Formulas by Hedges and Becker and linear regression were used for the analysis of the data. According to the findings of this study, socio-economic status has a small but significant relationship with self-esteem (d =.15, r = 0.8).

2.3 Academic Stress

Georgia Barbayannis, Mahindra Bandari, and Xue Ming (2021) conducted a study on "Academic Stress and Mental Well-Being in College Students: Correlations, Affected Groups, and COVID-19." Data were collected from a sample size of 843 students. The Perception of Academic Stress Scale and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale were used to collect the data. MANOVA was used for data analysis. The result of this study shows that there is a significant correlation between worse academic stress and poor mental well-being in all the students, and they also reported an exacerbation of stress in response to the pandemic.

K. Jayasankara Reddy, Karishma Rajan Menon, and Anjana Thattil (2018) conducted a study on "Academic Stress and its Sources Among University Students." Data were collected from a sample of 336 students who were selected randomly. The Academic Stress Scale was used to collect data. Data were analyzed using SPSS v. 21. Results show that the sources of stress in students are personal inadequacy, fear of failure, interpersonal difficulties with teachers, teacher-pupil relationships, inadequate study facilities, and gender differences.

The above review of literature has discussed different studies conducted on variables such as academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status. But there are no combined studies based on these three variables on how they influence an individual. Not many studies have been done based on these variables and their influence during post-covid times. So, the present study focuses on the relationship among academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status in post-Covid times.

Statement of the Problem

Learning and academic development of millions of students were disrupted and interrupted. The pandemic has exacerbated a well-documented opportunity gap, putting low-income students at a disadvantage compared to their wealthier peers. Opportunity gaps act as a limitation in access to conditions and resources that are conducive to learning and development, including access to food and nutrition, housing, health insurance and care, and economic relief.

In the pandemic scenario, one of the most significant gaps in the teaching-learning process is unequal access to devices and internet facilities, things that are imperative for online learning. This information divide has made it virtually impossible for some students to study during the pandemic.

Covid-19 pandemic has prompted all schools around the world to introduce online teaching. Courses were delivered through online meeting platforms like zoom, google classrooms and the like; exams were delivered online, and assignments were submitted by email. Some students were quick to adjust to the new system while others took time to get used to it. Students did not just lose their academic learning during the pandemic but came under extreme trauma due to the demise of friends, family, and loved ones. Others had caregivers who lost their jobs and sources of income. Added to it was the experience of forced social isolation. This pressure had taken its toll on students of all ages. One of the limitations of emergency distance learning is the lack of face-to-face interaction between teachers and students which was not possible with the broadcast. Challenges arised as they navigated the post-COVID-19 scenario. The transition period had to be managed through a combination of digital and physical teaching and learning approaches. When the pandemic came to a close, students faced psychological issues. The practice of attending physical school became extremely mentally draining to some students. The online mode of education prioritized students not straining themselves. The sudden shift did not consider the fact that the routine change could affect the physical and mental health of the students. Notes, books, assignments, etc. were all digital. In the switch however, physical classrooms no longer accommodated these mediums. Some adapted to the sudden change while some others struggled miserably. Though online education is a break though in teaching-learning practice, the considerable gap between teaching and understanding in this mode cannot be neglected. Students who cannot access digital learning devices or connect with their peers find it difficult to keep up with daily classes.

Student engagement has declined due to the shift to a full online learning mode and lack of discipline. Their attention span decreased dramatically. Since the beginning of the pandemic, students' learning and social-emotional needs have been severely impacted, resulting in poor concentration. In addition, increased indoor activities and decreased outdoor activities reduced motivation. As a result, maintaining interest in classroom lectures was not easy. Educators have noticed a significant decline in the verbal and written communication skills in students post-pandemic. More than ever, students suffer from anxiety, alienation, fear, and confusion. The fluctuation in the mode of instruction and evaluation, has negatively impacted the enthusiasm and vigour of students. There drive to get away with shortcuts and little hard work is common and the increasing rate of malpractices during exams is testament to this fact. The ease of online education fuels this idea. This form of education also caters to a much more liberal evaluation in examinations.

This study analyses the following questions in details:

- Do the above factors push the stress level in students when shifting to offline mode?
- Are students still hungover from the online mode of education?
- Does the transition cause a fluctuation in self-esteem?
- Is the socio-economic status of a student relevant to learning or stress?

The study attempts to answer the above questions to show how relevant and important the three variables selected; academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status; are for this research.

Objectives

1. To study the relationship among academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status of college students.
2. To study the difference in self-esteem of college students between high and low academic stress.
3. To study the difference in self-esteem based on socio-economic status.
4. To study the difference in academic stress based on socio-economic status.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship among academic stress, self-esteem and socio-economic status of college students.
- There is a significant difference in self-esteem of college students between high and low academic stress.
- There is a significant difference in self-esteem based on socio-economic status.
- There is a significant difference in academic stress based on socio-economic status.

METHOD

Methodology crucial to the success of a research and depends on the method adopted and the measures and techniques employed for data collection and analysis. It gives a detailed description of how the investigation has been carried out. It includes sample selection, data collection techniques, procedures for data collection, and statistical analysis.

3.1 Sample

The sample for the study consists of 60 randomly selected students from SCMS School of Technology and Management, Cochin, Affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala who fall under the age group, 17-26.

3.2 Data Collection Technique

The present study involves three variables: academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status.

The following tools were used for this study:

- Academic Stress Scale by Kim (1970)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by Morris Rosenberg (1965)
- Socio-demographic Sheet

3.2.1 Academic Stress Scale:

The Academic Stress Scale was developed to measure academic stress in students. It consists of 40 items. The items are classified into five areas, which contain eight items each. They are personal inadequacy, fear of failure, interpersonal difficulties with teachers, teacher-pupil relationships, or teaching methods, and inadequate study facilities. The respondents answered these statements as "no stress," "slight stress," "moderate stress," "high stress," and "extreme stress." It consists of 40 items. The items are classified into five areas, which contain eight items each. They are personal inadequacy, fear of failure,

interpersonal difficulties with teachers, teacher-pupil relationships, or teaching methods, and inadequate study facilities.

Reliability and Validity
The Academic Stress Scale has test-retest reliability. The test-retest correlation of 50 students within an interval of 25 days has been found to be 0.82. The authors establish content validity based on the scrutiny of experts and item validity through item analysis.

Scoring
The scoring of this scale for each respondent is done by summing up the total ratings given to all situations experienced by the respondent. The total number of items was 40. Therefore, 200 is the maximum possible score, and the highest score on each factor would be 32. The score was given on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4 as "no stress," "slight stress," "moderate stress," "high stress," and "extreme stress," respectively. The higher the score, the greater the academic stress, and vice versa.

3.2.2 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was developed to measure self-esteem. It is a 10-item scale. Originally, it was designed to measure self-esteem. However, since its development, the scale has been used with a variety of groups, including adults, with norms available for many of those groups. The respondents answered the statement as strongly agreeing, agreeing, disagreeing, and strongly disagreeing.

Reliability and Validity
The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale demonstrates a Guttaman Scale coefficient of reproducibility of 0.92, indicating excellent internal consistency. Test-retest reliability over a period of 2 weeks reveals correlations of 0.85 and 0.88, indicating excellent stability and demonstrated concurrent, predictive, and construct validity using known groups. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale correlates significantly with other measures of self-esteem, including the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. In addition, it correlates in the predicted direction with measures of depression and anxiety.

Scoring
Scoring involves a method of combining ratings. Low self-esteem responses are "disagree" or "strongly disagree" on items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10, and "strongly agree" or "agree" on items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. Two or three out of three correct responses to items 3, 7, and 9 are scored as one item; items 1, 8, and 10 are scored as individual items; and combined correct responses (one or two out of two) to items 2 and 6 are considered to be a single item. The scale can also be scored by totaling the individual 4-point items after reversing the scoring for the negatively worded items.

3.2.3 Socio-demographic Sheet
Along with the two questionnaires, a socio-demographic sheet was also given. It was developed by the researchers. It contains questions based on the personal information of the students, like age, gender, income level, etc. The main objective of this form was to collect data based on sociodemographic variables like socio-economic status.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected from among college students of age 17–26. The data were collected through a set of questionnaires, namely the Academic Stress Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Socio-demographic Sheet. A good rapport was established with them, they were given general instructions, and the purpose of the study was explained. The three tools were distributed, and assurance was given that the information shared by the subjects would only be used for research purposes and their identities would be kept strictly confidential. They were further asked to complete questionnaires. After being completed, the questionnaires were collected. Incomplete responses were rejected during the data collection process.

3.4 Statistical Tools for Data Analysis

Statistical tools used for data analysis were selected based on objectives and hypotheses. The statistical tools used are Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, an independent t-test, a one-way ANOVA and post Hoc test.

3.4.1 Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

Correlation is an analysis that helps determine the degree of relationship that exists between two or more variables. The correlation ranges between -1 and +1. If the value of the correlation is zero, it indicates that one variable cannot be associated with the value of another variable. A correlation value of one indicates that all variables are moving in the same direction and are perfectly positive. A correlation value of -1 indicates perfect negative correlation, and the variables are going in the opposite direction.

3.4.2 Independent t-test

An independent t-test compares the means of two independent groups to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

3.4.3 One-way ANOVA

A one-way ANOVA is used to investigate if variations, or different levels of that factor, have a measurable effect on a dependent variable.

3.4.4 Scheffe Post Hoc test

A Scheffe test is a statistical test that is a post-hoc test used in statistical analysis. It is used to make unplanned comparisons, rather than pre-planned comparisons, among group means in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) experiment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Correlation among Academic Stress, Self-Esteem, and Socio-economic Status.

Variable	Academic Stress	Socio-economic Status
Self Esteem	-0.221	0.219

From the above table, it is evident that there is a correlation between self-esteem, academic stress, and socio-economic status. The correlation coefficient between self-esteem and academic stress is -0.0221.

The correlation coefficient between self-esteem and socio-economic status is 0.219. It is not significant at the accepting level. The correlations among the variables are weak, and there is

no significant relationship between them. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is rejected, and the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, t-value, and significant level of self-esteem and academic stress.

VARIABLE	GROUP	N	MEAN	Standard deviation	DF	t-value	Significant LEVEL
Self Esteem	LOW Academic Stress	42	29.0238	5.75300	58	1.448	0.091
	HIGH Academic Stress	18	26.8333	4.30116			

Values of academic stress below 120 are considered as low academic stress, and values above 120 are considered as high academic stress. As per the finding tabulated above, the mean scores of self-esteems for low academic stress and high academic stress are respectively 29.0238 and 26.8333. It shows that the mean value of self-esteem with respect to low academic stress is greater than that of high academic stress. The probable reason behind this is that the number of participants in low academic stress (42) is greater than the number of participants in high academic stress (18). The corresponding standard deviations of the mean values are 5.75300 and 4.30116. The t value is 1.448. The t value shows that the mean score of self-esteem and low academic stress and the mean score of self-esteem and high academic stress are not significantly different. According to the hypothesis, there will be a significant difference in self-esteem between students with low academic stress and those with high academic stress, but the t value shows there is only a slight difference, and it is not significant at the accepting level. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table:3 One-Way Anova - Mean, Standard Deviation, F, And Significant Level of Self-Esteem and Socio-economic Status.

VARIABLE	GROUP	N	MEAN	Standard deviation	DF	F	Significant LEVEL
Self Esteem	Low Socio-economic status	19	27.7368	5.54619	59	3.839*	0.027
	MIDDLE Socio-economic status	13	25.4615	4.90944			
	HIGH Socio-economic status	28	30.1429	5.03112			

** 0.05 level of significance.*

The table shows that the mean scores of self-esteem with respect to low socio-economic status, middle socio-economic status, and high economic status are respectively 27.7368, 25.4615, and 30.1429. It shows that the mean value of self-esteem with respect to high economic status is greater than that of lower and middle socio-economic status. The corresponding standard deviations of the mean values are 5.54619, 4.90944, and 5.03112. The f value is 3.839. It is significant at the 0.05 level.

It can be said that according to the socio-economic status of the students, there will be a difference in self-esteem. The probable reason behind this is that students are highly dependent on their families. The relationships among the variables are strong, and there is a significant relationship between each other. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

A study conducted by Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell (2002) shows that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and socio-economic status. This study supports those findings.

Table 4: Scheffe Test: Mean Difference of Self-Esteem among various Socio-economic Status.

VARIABLE	GROUP		MEAN DIFFERENCE	SIG LEVEL
SELF-ESTEEM	LOW	MIDDLE	2.27530	.479
	LOW	HIGH	-2.40602	.302
	MIDDLE	HIGH	-4.68132*	.033

* 0.05 level of significance.

The mean difference of self-esteem with respect to low and middle socio-economic status is 2.27530, between low and high socio-economic status is -2.40602, and between middle and high socio-economic status is -4.68132*. It shows that there is a significant mean difference between middle and high socio-economic status at a significance level of 0.05. From the table, it shows that the mean value of self-esteem with respect to high and middle socio-economic status is 30.1429 and 25.4615. It means that the mean value of self-esteem with respect to high economic status is greater than that of middle socio-economic status. From the above table, it is also clear that there is no significant mean difference between low and high socio-economic status. The probable reason behind this is that the number of participants in low socio-economic status is less than the number of participants in high socio-economic status. The mean difference between middle and high socio-economic status is because students are highly dependent on their family status and money.

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation, F, and Significant Level of Academic Stress and Social and Economic Status.

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN	Standard deviation	DF	F	Significant LEVEL
Academic Stress	Low Socio-economic status	110.9474	23.40815	58	.153	.858
	Middle Socio-economic status	115.41667	21.61842			
	High Socio-economic status	110.4643	30.43570			

From the above table, it is clear that the mean scores of academic stress with respect to low, middle, and high socio-economic status are respectively 110.9474, 115.41667, and 110.4643. It shows that the mean value of middle socio-economic status is greater than that of low and high socio-economic status. The corresponding standard deviations of the mean values are 23.40815, 21.61842, and 30.43570. The f value is 0.153. It indicates that it is not significant at the accepting level. The relationship among the variables is weak, and there is no significant relationship between them. It may be because there is no difference in the academic stress of students based on their socio-economic status. Due to concerns about their future, students from middle socio-economic backgrounds have a higher academic stress compared to their peers coming from the privileged classes. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is rejected, and the null hypothesis is accepted.

CONCLUSION

Karl Pearson's product moment correlation was used to analyze the relationship among academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status. The results imply that there is no significant relationship among academic stress, self-esteem, and socio-economic status. By analyzing the relationship between self-esteem and academic stress using an independent t-test, it was concluded that the academic stress of college students doesn't influence their self-esteem. The one-way ANOVA used to analyze the difference in self-esteem among various socio-economic status shows that there is a significant difference in self-esteem based on the socio-economic status of the students. The students with higher socio-economic status tend to have higher self-esteem, and those with lower socio-economic status tend to have lower self-esteem. And analysis on the difference in academic stress based on various socio-economic status shows that there is no significant difference in academic stress based on socio-economic status of the students.

Major Findings

- There is no significant relationship among self-esteem and socio-economic status among college students.
- Higher socio-economic status students show higher self-esteem.

- Students from middle socio-economic status face academic stress rather than other students.
- The academic stress of students does not significantly influence their self-esteem.

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Conflict of Interest

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