

## A Study of Academic Stress in Relation to Psychological Wellbeing and Emotional Intelligence Among University Students

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### ABSTRACT

Review of researches conducted in social sciences has indicated that academic stress has become a common feature of students' life at every stage of education. It has adverse impact on various aspects of students' personality, mental health as well as the academic performance. The present study endeavours to explore the impact of psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence on academic stress of university students. A sample of 249 students was randomly selected comprising 114 male and 135 female students. The data was collected by using standardised tools of academic stress, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence. The obtained data was analysed with appropriate statistical techniques in the light of objectives framed for the study. The study revealed that the emotional intelligence emerged as the most significant predictor of academic stress among university students.

**Keywords:** *Academic Stress, Psychological Wellbeing, Emotional Intelligence, University Students*

The transition from school to university is a pivotal milestone in a student's life, bringing both opportunities and obstacles. It marks a transition from a structured, instructor-led environment to a more autonomous and self-directed learning mode. In contrast to school, where educators continuously watch over progress, university students are supposed to independently regulate their learning, meet to deadlines, and look for assistance when required. Traditional classroom instruction has been replaced by lectures, seminars, conferences, workshops, debates, discussions and independent study. This transition in learning method from teacher centred approach to learner centred approach is highly stressful, impacting youngsters academically, socially, and personally in numerous ways. Academic stress is a prominent challenge for university students stemming from rigorous coursework, deadlines, examinations, and personal obligations. Academic challenges are considered the primary source of stress for college students. Academic stress among university students has been a perennial issue. The start generation learners, students belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged groups, minority students, rural students and girls students are more in disadvantageous situation and generally face difficulty in making their adjustment to university life having its own challenges. According to Yang et al. (2021) students reported that academic-related demands, such as continuous studying, writing papers, preparing for

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tests, and uninteresting lecturers, were the primary everyday challenges. Academic pressure arises from the demands of exams and test preparation, the competitive nature of grade levels, and the need to acquire a substantial amount of knowledge within a limited timeframe. Exams and test preparation, grade level competitiveness, and gaining a big quantity of knowledge in a short period of time all contribute to academic pressure. The stress that college students face is caused by a variety of reasons and can be related to a number of contributing factors (Reddy et al., 2018; Karyotaki et al., 2020). Academic stress refers to various factors in a student's life that can negatively impact their academic performance. These factors include excessive assignments, competition with peers, failures, financial difficulties, poor relationships with fellow students or teachers, and problems at home with family (Busari, 2014). Baker (2013) underlined that university students experience several new demands i.e. social, interpersonal and academic during their study, which can be stressful for them. Students encounter immediate challenges when their parents make hasty decisions without considering their preferences. Several global studies have demonstrated that students enrolled in higher education institutions, including universities and colleges, experience elevated levels of stress. Research in the *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* (2017) found that 37.7%, 13.1%, and 2.4% of Indian university students had moderate, severe, and extremely severe depression. Academic stress can lower motivation, impede academic progress, and contribute to increasing rates of college dropouts (Pascoe et al 2020). Research has demonstrated that academic stress has an adverse effect on the mental well-being of students (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Green et al., 2021). Mental well-being, or psychological well-being, is an important component of positive mental health. It encompasses various factors such as happiness, life satisfaction, stress management, and psychological functioning (Tennant et al. (2007), Trout and Alsandor (2020), Defeyer et al. (2021). According to research by Barbayannis et al. (2022), there is a strong relationship between higher academic stress and poor mental health and between academic stress and psychological well-being in college students. A negative and significant relation between academic stress and psychological well-being was investigated by Sankhyan (2021), and it was shown that academic stress was one of the major factors in influencing psychological health. Based on the previous studies it was found that Emotional intelligence also plays a vital role in managing academic stress. Roy et. al. (2021) discovered a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and academic stress. Jassal (2021) investigated a negative relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic stress. Ofori et al. (2018) showed that students with reduced academic stress had better interpersonal interactions and psychological well-being. *Guerra et al. (2019) explored that as the capacity of understanding and regulation of emotional intelligence increases, happiness also increases.* Emotional intelligence and psychological well-being have been found to be strongly correlated by Jugnu (2018). Kashif and Mehddi (2022) found that students with higher emotional intelligence (EI) levels reported lower levels of academic stress compared to their counterparts because of their better self-awareness of their emotions. Thus, it is evident from the review presented above that students find it difficult to cope with the unique challenges of higher education, which may be related to the academic, personal, social, and institutional aspects of student life. Keeping this in mind, the researcher attempted to explore two important variables—emotional intelligence and psychological well-being—in relation to the academic stress experienced by university students.

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### ***Significance of the study***

All the research reviews mentioned show that academic stress is a significant problem that needs to be addressed with possible manner by exploring all its various sources. These sources can be tied to various factors and have both positive and negative effects on different parts of a student's life. Every student perceives stress differently, depending on their cognitive abilities, personality, traits and a bunch of socio cultural factors. This study aims to analyse psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence in relation to academic stress among university students. This study being empirical in nature will make a substantial contribution to understand the extent to which these two variables exercise their influence on academic stress.

All the research reviews mentioned show that academic stress is a significant problem that needs to be addressed in a proper manner by exploring all its various sources. These sources can be tied to various factors and have both positive and negative effects on different parts of a student's life. Every student perceives stress differently, depending on their cognitive abilities, personality traits, and a range of socio-cultural factors. The present study aims to analyse psychological well-being and emotional intelligence in relation to academic stress among university students. This study, being empirical in nature, will make a substantial contribution to understanding the extent to which these two variables influence academic stress. The findings will assist the researcher to put forward useful recommendations to manage academic stress level of university students so that they may be able to achieve upto their potential and contribute their share in the creation of new knowledge.

### ***Objectives***

- To find the extent of relationship between criterion variable (academic stress) and predictive variables (psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence) among total sample, male and female samples of university undergraduates.
- To find out the influence of psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence on the academic stress of total sample, male and female samples of university undergraduates.
- To compare the academic stress, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence of male -female undergraduates studying at university level.

### ***Hypotheses***

- There would be no significant relationship between criterion variable (academic stress) and predictive variables (psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence) among total sample, male and female samples of university undergraduates.
- There would be no significant influence of psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence on the academic stress of total sample, male and female samples of undergraduates.
- There would be no significant difference between the academic stress, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence of male-female undergraduates studying at university.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study is based on descriptive survey method was used. The target population was undergraduate students studying in central university. A sample of 249 students was selected

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by using stratified random sampling technique out of which 114 were males and 135 were females.

### **Research Tools of the Study**

The researcher used the following standardised tools in order to collect data for present study.

- Academic stress scale developed by Poorva Jain and Neelam Dixit (2016). The test-retest reliability of this scale was 0.86. and the split-half method reliability coefficient was of 0.79.
- Psychological wellbeing scale developed by Anjum Ahmed (2021). The reliability of this scale calculated and reported by the author was 0.76.
- Emotional intelligence scale developed by Subhash Sarkar and Samrat Sarkar (2019). The reliability of this scale calculated and reported by the author was 0.83.

### **Statistical Techniques Used:**

Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between dependent and independent variables of the study. Multiple regression and linear regression was used to know the strength of the predictors. The t test was used to know the significant difference between male and female samples in regard to academic stress, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

Analysis and interpretation of data is being presented here in accordance with the hypotheses framed for achieving the objectives of the study.

**Ho1. There would be no significant relationship between criterion variable (academic stress) and predictive variables (psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence) among total sample, male and female sample.**

**Table 1: Correlation between Academic Stress and Predictive Variables for Total Sample, Male and Female Sample**

Variables	Psychological Well-Being			Emotional Intelligence		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Academic Stress	-0.163*	-0.118	-0.185*	-0.838**	-0.885*	-0.785**
Psychological Well-Being				0.195**	0.104	0.273**

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of confidence

The coefficient of correlation presented in Table-1 between academic stress and psychological wellbeing was ( $r=-0.163$ ) for total sample, ( $r=-0.118$ ) for total male and ( $r=0.185$ ) for total female students' sample. All correlational values were negative and significant at 0.05 level of significance except total male sample. Similarly, the coefficient of correlation between academic stress and emotional intelligence was ( $r=-0.838$ ) for total sample, ( $r=-0.885$ ) for total male students, ( $r=-0.785$ ) for total female students' sample. All correlational values were negative and highly significant at 0.01 level of confidence. The obtained correlational values between emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing were ( $r=-0.195$ ) for total sample and ( $r=-0.273$ ) for female students were significant at 0.01 level of confidence whereas the correlational value between emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing ( $r=-0.104$ ) for

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Male students was insignificant. The result led us to conclude that increase in emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing lowers the academic stress for all sample groups except male sample where no significant relationship was found between academic stress and psychological wellbeing. Jugnu & Vivekanand (2018) studied emotional intelligence was positively and significantly related to psychological well-being. Ho1 is thus partially rejected.

**Ho2.1 There would be no significant influence of psychological well-being, emotional intelligence on academic stress of total sample.**

*Table-2. Regression Analysis among Criterion (Academic Stress) and Predictive Variables for total Sample*

Predictive Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change
Emotional Intelligence	0.838	0.702	0.702	580.885**

*Table 2.1 Summary of ANOVA for Regression*

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F ratio
Regression	39860.704	1	39860.704	580.885**
Residual	16949.304	247	68.621	
Total	56810.008	248		

*Table 2.2 Regression Coefficients*

Predictive Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t value
	B	Std Error	Beta	
Constant	218.778	5.219		41.920**
Emotional Intelligence	-0.820	0.034	-0.838	-24.102**

The above tables reveal that emotional intelligence was found to be the significant predictors of academic stress. The magnitude of predictability as represented by multiple regression factor R<sup>2</sup> appears to be 0.702 for the criterion variable. It indicates emotional intelligence account for 70.2% of variance in dependent variable academic stress. Emotional intelligence was more important contributing factor for total sample being significant at 0.01 level (F=580.88). Psychological well-being was removed from the model, indicating it had no significant contribution in predicting academic stress in the total sample. The ANOVA table 2.2 reveals that the model of prediction in academic stress for total sample explains significant variance due to regression as can be inferred by the F ratio (580.885) given in the said table. It means that for the total sample, the predictor emotional intelligence can be used to predict the academic stress. Moreover table 2.3 shows that the regression coefficient Beta is negative (-0.820) but significant with a t-value of -24.102 for emotional intelligence inferring that it will cause significant and negative change in the criterion variable i.e. more it will increase lower will be the academic stress.

The results may be justified on the ground that emotional intelligence which is the resultant factor of self-awareness, self-regulation skills, motivation, empathy and social skills exercise its positive impact in managing the academic stress of the university students.

**Ho2.1 There would be no significant influence of psychological well-being, emotional intelligence on academic stress of Male sample.**

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**Table 3. Regression Analysis among Criterion (Academic Stress) and Predictive Variables for Male Sample**

Predictive Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change
Emotional Intelligence	0.885	0.783	0.783	404.087**

**Table 3.1. Summary of ANOVA for Regression**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F ratio
Regression	22806.521	1	22806.521	404.087**
Residual	6321.234	112	56.440	
Total	29127.754	113		

**Table 3.2. Regression Coefficients**

Predictive Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t value
	B	Std Error	Beta	
Constant	223.969	6.445		34.753**
Emotional Intelligence	-0.850	0.042	-0.885	-20.102**

The results from the regression analysis, presented in Table 3 reveals that the emotional intelligence had a strong and significant influence on academic stress for the male sample. In the first step, emotional intelligence emerged as the strongest predictor of academic stress, accounting for 78.3% of the variance (R<sup>2</sup> change= 0.783), with a highly significant F-change value of 404.087 at the 0.01 level. Psychological well-being was removed from the model, indicating it had no significant contribution in predicting academic stress in the male sample. The ANOVA results for the male sample (Table 3.1) confirm the model's significance with an F-ratio of 404.087 that is highly significant at the 0.01 level. In the regression table 3.2 emotional intelligence emerges as the most significant predictor, with a standardized beta coefficient of -0.850 and a t-value of -20.102 negative and significant at 0.01 level of confidence, indicating that the variations due to predictive variable will cause inverse change in the academic stress of male sample and signifying its critical role in reducing academic stress. In case of the male sample the obtained results are on the same pattern. However strength of predictive value of emotional intelligence has increased being 78.3%. in this case also the other independent variable psychological wellbeing has not produced any significant influence on academic stress on university students.

**Ho2.3 There would be no significant influence of psychological well-being, emotional intelligence on academic stress of Female sample.**

**Table 4. Regression Analysis among Criterion (Academic Stress) and Predictive Variables for total Female Sample**

Predictive Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change
Emotional Intelligence	0.785	0.616	0.616	213.012**

**Table 4.1. Summary of ANOVA for Regression**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F ratio
Regression	16725.738	1	16725.738	213.012**
Residual	10443.195	133	78.520	
Total	27168.933	134		

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**Table 4.2. Regression Coefficients**

Predictive Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t value
	B	Std Error	Beta	
Constant	212.093	8.242		25.732**
Emotional Intelligence	-0.781	0.054	-0.785	-14.595**

Table 4 shows the stepwise regression analysis results for female undergraduate sample. The perusal of the table shows that only emotional intelligence was found to be the significant predictor of academic stress. The contribution of emotional intelligence alone accounted for 61.6% of the variance in academic stress, which was significant at 0.01 level with an F-change value of 213.012. Psychological well-being was removed from the model, indicating it had no significant contribution in predicting academic stress in the female sample. The ANOVA results for the female sample (Table 4.1) confirm the model's significance with an F-ratio of 213.012 that is highly significant at the 0.01 level. It means that this model can significantly predict the academic stress of female sample by the knowledge of scores of the predictive variable emotional intelligence. The regression coefficients Beta (-0.781) for emotional intelligence with t-value -14.595 was found to be significant and negative at 0.01 level of significance inferring that the variations due to it will cause inverse change in the academic stress of female student sample.

**H03-There would be no significant difference between the academic stress, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence of male -female undergraduates.**

**Table 5. Comparison of mean scores of variables for male and female undergraduates.**

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	dF	t	Remark
Academic Stress	Male	114	95.193	247	1.501	Not significant
	Female	135	92.311			
Psychological Wellbeing	Male	114	136.289	247	2.09*	Significant at 0.05 level
	Female	135	139.844			
Emotional Intelligence	Male	114	151.526	247	0.942	Not significant
	Female	135	153.378			

\* Significant at 0.05 level of confidence

When the mean scores obtained on the measures of academic stress, psychological wellbeing and Emotional intelligence were compared for male and female students; the t-value of Academic stress (1.501) and Emotional intelligence (0.942) came out to be insignificant at both level of confidence. Whereas, there is significant difference was found between the male and female students in regard to psychological wellbeing as the obtained t value (2.09) was significant at 0.05 level of confidence. On the basis of mean values of compared groups it can be concluded that female (139.84) students having higher psychological wellbeing than male (136.28) counterparts. It can be inferred that based on gender no significant difference was found on the measure of academic stress and emotional intelligence.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Results of the present study revealed that Emotional intelligence was found to be strongly and negatively related to academic stress for total sample, male and female sample. At the same time psychological wellbeing had significant but negative correlation with academic stress for

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total sample and female sample, while negative insignificant relationship was found among male sample. The significant relationship was found between psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence among all study groups except male sample. The study revealed significant contribution of emotional intelligence in the academic stress among university students was found. Emotional intelligence was found to be strong and significant predictor of academic stress revealing that better the emotional intelligence of students less will be the academic stress. On the other hand psychological wellbeing came out to be insignificant predictor in academic stress. Gender difference was found to be significant in psychological wellbeing of students. The gender differences were insignificant in academic stress and emotional intelligence.

### ***Suggestions:***

In view the obtained finding the researcher may put forward following suggestions in order to manage the academic stress of university students.

Teachers of higher education need to create conducive environment in the classroom by providing adequate freedom to students to engage in learning process. Motivation and encouragement provided by the teachers to the students play a positive role in boosting the morale of the students. An environment of cooperation, coordination, collaboration among students assists to develop social skills. The overall impact of such environment is reflected on the emotional intelligence of the students leading to better adjustment in academic life. It is important to teaching students how to control their emotions may help them deal with academic stress more successfully, so minimizing the adverse impact on their mental health. Universities need to include courses on emotional intelligence in their academic offerings. This could include classes, seminars, or workshops, teaching social skills, self-awareness, self-control, and compassion. The institutions should provide counseling services, mental health resources, and stress management programs, regular mental health check-ins may assist identify students who are suffering. Educating counselors to identify symptoms of stress and facilitate suitable referrals and providing them specific guidance on course choices and career planning to mitigate academic uncertainties. Encouraging open communication between students and educators; establishing peer mentorship programs; and providing safe venues for students to voice their concerns. Conducting frequent surveys to measure student well-being and the efficacy of support programs and taking feedback constantly to enhance and modify interventions to student needs. Curriculum development and course design should strike a balance between academic rigor and possibilities for students' personal development. Different evaluation strategies should be use to lessen test stress, provide timely and constructive feedback, and encourage self-assessment and reflection. Stress and anxiety among students in general have reached to alarming stage at all levels of education. Therefore, there is an urgent need to take appropriate measures for enhancing mental health of the students.

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

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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