

Research Paper

Effect of Parental Pressure on Academic Stress Mediated by Test Anxiety of College Students

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the impact of perceived parental pressure on academic stress among college students, with a focus on test anxiety as a mediating variable. In collectivist societies such as India, where academic achievement is closely associated with family honor and future stability, parental expectations can serve as both a source of motivation and a cause of stress. Utilizing cognitive-affective theory as a framework, the research examines how external pressures trigger emotional responses that affect cognitive performance and overall well-being. A quantitative, cross-sectional methodology was adopted, employing three standardized assessment tools: the Westside Test Anxiety Scale, the Student Stress Inventory – Academic Subscale, and the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, which emphasizes perceived parental expectations and criticism. Statistical evaluations, including Pearson correlation and mediation analysis through regression, indicated that heightened perceived parental pressure correlates with increased academic stress, with test anxiety acting as a significant mediator. These results highlight the importance of emotional regulation in academic success and suggest the necessity for interventions aimed at alleviating test anxiety, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy and psychoeducation. Encouraging emotionally supportive parenting while setting realistic academic expectations may enhance student performance. Future studies should explore longitudinal impacts, gender disparities, and cultural differences.

Keywords: Parental Pressure, Academic Stress, Test Anxiety, Cognitive- Affective Theory

Education is often seen as a fundamental element of success, especially in competitive academic settings where performance is closely linked to future prospects. Recently, the pressure to achieve has grown, with parents taking an active role in establishing high academic standards for their children. While parental involvement can enhance motivation and discipline, excessive pressure may lead to increased stress, anxiety, and diminished psychological health. Parental pressure has been recognized as a major factor contributing to academic stress, characterized by feelings of tension, frustration, and anxiety in response to academic demands (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). The transition to college introduces further challenges, such as heightened academic rigor, greater autonomy, and societal expectations. In this scenario, parental expectations continue to play a crucial role in influencing students' academic coping strategies.

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A significant psychological factor within this framework is test anxiety, encompassing cognitive concerns, emotional turmoil, and physical manifestations associated with examination scenarios (Landry, 2003). This form of anxiety not only influences students' academic outcomes but also mediates the effects of parental expectations on academic stress. In highly evaluative environments, students who internalize parental pressure frequently experience heightened anxiety before and during examinations, which can exacerbate their academic stress. Worldwide, academic performance is shaped by a variety of elements, including personal aspirations, cultural values, and family expectations.

Among these, parental pressure stands out as a particularly powerful influence. While moderate encouragement can foster achievement, excessive demands may result in psychological distress, especially when coupled with performance-related anxieties (Sassi & Hurst, 2008).

Despite numerous studies investigating the connections between parental pressure, academic stress, and test anxiety, there is a scarcity of research focusing on their interplay among college students in early adulthood. This study seeks to explore the direct effects of parental pressure on academic stress and to determine whether test anxiety serves as a mediator in this relationship, thereby heightening susceptibility to academic distress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic stress experienced by college students is increasingly recognized as being influenced by external factors, particularly parental pressures. These pressures, which include expectations and criticism from parents, have been correlated with increased levels of academic stress and anxiety related to examinations (Ang & Huan, 2006; Deb et al., 2011). Maladaptive perfectionism, especially that which is fueled by perceived expectations from parents, frequently serves as a mediator in this dynamic (Flett et al., 2002). Elevated levels of parental criticism and control have been linked to heightened test anxiety and a pronounced fear of failure (Chorpita et al., 1998; Hibbard & Walton, 2014).

Test anxiety, which is marked by cognitive and emotional distress during assessments, has been shown to considerably hinder academic performance (Zeidner, 1998). It serves as a crucial mediator between parental expectations and academic stress, particularly in high-achieving cultures such as India and China (Gupta & Welsch, 1996; Ang & Huan, 2006). Additionally, gender disparities exacerbate this situation, as females frequently endure greater academic stress and anxiety due to varying parental expectations (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Choi et al., 2009).

Research has indicated that a culturally embedded focus on achievement intensifies these pressures (Yoon, 2011), particularly in collectivist societies that prioritize family success. Furthermore, social support and effective coping mechanisms can serve as protective factors against these stressors (Kugbey et al., 2015; Misra & Castillo, 2004).

In conclusion, the current body of research consistently illustrates a strong connection between parental pressure and academic stress, with test anxiety acting as a crucial mediating variable. Additionally, these effects are influenced by gender and cultural context, highlighting the importance of incorporating these factors into intervention strategies. This study expands upon previous findings to investigate the mediating influence of test anxiety on the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress in Indian college students.

METHODOLOGY

Objective of the study

1. To investigate the correlation between perceived parental pressure and academic stress among college students
2. To evaluate the connection between parental pressure and test anxiety
3. To analyse the relationship between test anxiety and academic stress
4. To assess whether test anxiety serves as a mediator in the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress.
5. The research seeks to enhance the psychological understanding of how external influences, such as parenting styles, shape students' internal emotional experiences.
6. The study aspires to provide valuable insights for parents, educators, and mental health professionals, enabling them to support students more effectively.

Research Hypotheses

Drawing from prior research and established theoretical models, the following hypotheses are put forward:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between parental pressure and academic stress.
- H2: Test anxiety is significantly related to academic stress.
- H3: Test anxiety serves as a mediator in the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress.

Sample

The research utilized Convenience Sampling, a type of Non-Probability Sampling. This approach involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to participate, rather than randomly sampling from the entire population. Due to practical constraints in data collection, a non-random sampling technique was implemented, inviting students to take part through online platforms such as email, social media groups, and academic forums.

While convenience sampling allows for quick and cost-effective data collection, it poses challenges related to representativeness and generalizability. Since the sample is not randomly chosen, the findings may not accurately represent the broader population of college students. However, given the study's focus on psychological experiences rather than demographic statistics, convenience sampling is considered a suitable and practical method.

Instruments

1. Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS)

The Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS) was employed to assess the levels of test anxiety among participants. This scale consists of 10 self-reported items, each evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, where responses range from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (extremely true). Higher scores indicate greater levels of test anxiety. The WTAS is widely used in psychological studies due to its strong internal consistency and solid construct validity.

- Assesses the intensity of test anxiety.
- Comprises 10 items rated on a Likert scale (1 = Not at all anxious, 5 = Extremely anxious).
- High reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91).
- Example item: *"During a test, I feel so nervous that I forget what I studied."*

2. Student Stress Inventory (Academic Subscale)

The academic subscale of the Student Stress Inventory (SSI) was utilized to evaluate the academic stress experienced by students. This subscale includes a series of statements that

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measure perceived stressors such as workload, exam pressure, and academic expectations. Responses are rated on a Likert scale, reflecting the intensity of the stressors encountered. The academic subscale of the SSI has been validated in various educational contexts and demonstrates strong psychometric properties.

- Evaluates levels of academic stress.
- Contains 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale.
- Reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89).
- Example item: *"I feel overwhelmed by my academic workload."*

3. Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) – Items Related to Perceived Parental Scrutiny

To assess the influence of parental expectations, selected items from the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) were employed. This scale evaluates students' perceptions regarding parental demands and criticism related to their academic achievements. The research specifically concentrated on items that reflect perceived parental pressure concerning examination results. The FMPS has been thoroughly validated and is recognized for its high reliability in measuring perfectionistic characteristics associated with parental impact.

- Assesses perceived academic pressure from parents.
- Comprises 8 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale.
- Reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.86).
- Example item: *"My parents expect me to always excel academically."*

Procedure

The study utilized a Google Form integrating all three psychometric scales and was distributed through WhatsApp, Telegram, and university email groups, with participants taking approximately 10–15 minutes to complete the survey. Descriptive statistics were computed, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among perceived parental pressure, test anxiety, and academic stress. Mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4, with perceived parental pressure as the independent variable, academic stress as the dependent variable, and test anxiety as the mediator. This involved three regression steps: regressing test anxiety on parental pressure, regressing academic stress on parental pressure, and then regressing academic stress on test anxiety while controlling for parental pressure. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which parental pressure predicts levels of academic stress and test anxiety. All instruments demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80. Content validity was ensured through expert review, while construct validity was established using factor analysis.

Ethical Considerations

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval: Ethical clearance was secured from the university.
- Informed Consent: Participants willingly consented to participate, retaining the option to withdraw at any time.
- Confidentiality: All responses were kept anonymous.
- No Psychological Harm: The survey questions were designed to be non-intrusive.

RESULTS*Table No. 1 Pearson's Correlation Analysis*

Variables	Academic Stress	Parental Pressure	Test Anxiety
Academic Stress	1	.289**	.633**
Parental Pressure	.289**	1	.418**
Test Anxiety	.633**	.418**	1

The correlation findings are significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically meaningful relationship among all three variables. Below is a detailed examination of the results:

1. Parental Pressure and Test Anxiety

- $r = .418, p < .001$
- A moderate positive correlation is observed between perceived parental pressure and test anxiety.
- **Interpretation:** This result suggests that students who feel a higher level of pressure from their parents are more likely to experience increased test anxiety. The influence of performance-oriented expectations and perfectionistic standards from parents may lead students to internalize a fear of failure, which in turn contributes to elevated levels of test anxiety.

2. Test Anxiety and Academic Stress

- $r = .633, p < .001$
- A strong positive correlation is found between test anxiety and academic stress.
- **Interpretation:** Students with heightened test anxiety often report experiencing greater academic stress. This relationship underscores the notion that test anxiety is a fundamental psychological element of academic stress and may act as a mediating factor between external pressures, such as parental expectations, and the internal stress responses of students.

3. Parental Pressure and Academic Stress

- $r = .289, p = .001$
- A weak to moderate positive correlation exists between perceived parental pressure and academic stress.
- **Interpretation:** While this correlation is statistically significant, it is not as robust as the correlation between test anxiety and academic stress. This indicates that although parental pressure does affect academic stress, its direct influence is comparatively weaker. Nevertheless, when test anxiety is present, this relationship is intensified. This finding supports the hypothesis that test anxiety may act as a mediator between parental pressure and academic stress.

The analysis results provide strong evidence for the primary thesis of this research: that perceived parental pressure has a significant impact on academic stress among college students, with this relationship being mediated by test anxiety. The correlation findings lend empirical support to this hypothesis, highlighting test anxiety as a crucial emotional response that transforms external pressures into internalized academic stress.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore the connection between perceived parental pressure, test anxiety, and academic stress among college students, particularly examining whether test anxiety serves as a mediator in the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress. The results, derived from a sample of 121 undergraduate and postgraduate students, offer valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of external expectations and internal psychological factors that influence students' academic experiences.

The findings of the research indicated a moderate positive correlation between parental pressure and academic stress ($r = .289$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that an increase in perceived parental pressure corresponds with a rise in academic stress among students. This observation aligns with various prior studies that have highlighted the detrimental impact of parental expectations and control on students' emotional health and academic performance (Ang & Huan, 2006; Deb et al., 2015). A statistically significant correlation was identified between parental pressure and test anxiety ($r = .418$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that elevated parental expectations correlate with increased anxiety related to testing. The primary conclusion of the present study is the significant positive correlation observed between test anxiety and academic stress ($r = .633$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that students with elevated levels of test anxiety are also prone to experiencing considerable academic stress. This relationship is both intuitive and extensively documented in existing literature (Zeidner, 1998; Rana & Mahmood, 2010).

The mediation analysis revealed that test anxiety serves as a mediator in the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress. This suggests that one of the primary ways parental pressure leads to academic stress is by heightening test anxiety. In essence, parental pressure not only directly elevates stress levels but also indirectly contributes to it by increasing anxiety in evaluative situations.

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Conflict of Interest

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