

Research Paper

Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social Support: A Study of Senior Secondary Students

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ABSTRACT

Academic Stress is found to be the highest among the adolescents. The stress and anxiety to excel academically, fulfill the expectations of parents creates an unpleasant psychological situation for adolescent leading to the academic stress. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to perceive feelings and emotions that helps in achieving the positive results by managing daily life pressures. Social Support is the comfort (physical and emotional) given by family, friends and it creates the sense of belongingness among individuals. The present study aims to find out the gender differences among the male and female adolescent students on the measures of Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social Support. The study comprises of 200 students from the Senior Secondary Schools of the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. The data comprises of 100 (Science) and 100 (Commerce) stream students. Mean, SD and ANOVA were used to analyze results. The result showed significant mean difference among commerce and science stream students on the measures of Academic stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social support.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Social Support, adolescent*

ACADEMIC STRESS

Stress is experienced by everyone and has certainly become the unavoidable part of human life. The presence of optimum level of stress is important for the well being but the excess amount of stress disturbs healthy functioning of an individual (Schneiderman et al, 2004). Academic stress experienced by students creates a different level of psychological pressure on them, which is the result of the expectations by parents and teachers, their own expectations to perform well and the setting of unrealistic goals generates the mental distress which results in the frustration and the academic failure or the anticipation of failure (Gupta and Khan, 1987). Adolescents often evaluate themselves on the basis of the test results, grades and their academic achievements (Ang and Huan, 2006).

‘Stressors’ are the sources that create the disturbance in the daily life functioning as they are perceived as dangerous (Bernstein et al, 2008). Stressors disturb the physical and psychological balance and thus disturbing the well-being (Lazaus and Cohen, 1977). The setting of high self expectation was found to be the major stressor among the adolescents

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Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social Support: A Study of Senior Secondary Students

resulting in academic stress (Berg and Keinnan, 1986). Adolescent students are burdened with the assignments and presentations and the examination stress leading to the high level of the academic stress (Shirom, 1986).

The Education system is one of the key factors leading to higher academic stress. The design of the course and the curriculum, high student teacher ratio, teaching methods, more focus on the theory rather than practical implications and the less interaction between students and teacher all result in the increase of academic stress and performance anxiety (Masih and Gulrez, 2006). A study conducted by (Menaga and Chandrasekaran, 2014) showed higher level of academic stress among adolescents in relation to age, gender, type of school and family environment. In another study by (Anice James and Marie, 2004) the influence of academic stress on the academic achievement of class xi students was analyzed and the findings showed that the girls perform high in academic achievement and have low levels of academic stress when compared with their male counterparts.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence has obtained its roots from the concept of Social Intelligence. The term was first coined by (Mayer and Salvoey, 1989) as the ability to understand emotions of one and others. (Goleman, 1995) popularized the term emotional intelligence in his book “Emotional Intelligence: Why it matter more than IQ”. Emotional intelligence is the relation between attention and cognition (Mayer, Roberts and Barsade, 2008).

Emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to process emotional information as it involves perception, assimilation, understanding and managing emotions (Mayer and Cobb, 2000). Emotional intelligence plays an important role in the healthy functioning of an individual and they navigate our lives. It helps us to perceive our emotions and relate with them so that we can face any challenging situation. Even the students with higher academic performance are vulnerable to the unruly emotions. Emotional literacy is very important as emotions if left and suppressed leads to troubled marriages, depression, also affects the health and well being of individual (Goleman, 1994).

According to Goleman (1995), there are five domains of emotional intelligence- Self Awareness, Self Regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills. Goleman (1998) elaborated the concept of Emotional Intelligence by describing it as “Emotional Competencies” which suggested that for the outstanding performance an individual needs to understand emotions and learn from them.

Emotional intelligence is related with individual’s ability to deal with stress. As an individual face any stressful circumstances and has difficulty in achieving goals, it requires coping strategies for creating a balance between individual internal and external self and it requires the proper assessment of the situation and changing our goals, objectives and aspirations as required rather than keeping aligned to the previous goals (Albeshar and Alsaeed, 2015). As an emotionally intelligent individual are more acceptable to change and are more happy and healthy in comparison to others and also perform well (Epstein, 1998).

A study conducted by James D.A Parker, Ronald E Creque Sr, David L (2004), on 667 high school students academic achievement and its relation to emotional intelligence. The findings showed that academic achievement is very strongly related with the dimensions of emotional intelligence and has an effect on the performance. Mishra and Ranjan (2008), examined the influence of emotional intelligence on the gender differences of adolescents.

The result shows that males are more emotionally secure as they are better on interpersonal, intrapersonal, better stress managing skills and their happiness and optimism are of higher order than girls.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support is an individual perception of the support they can get from others. The support can be given in the emotional form, informational, companionship, tangible and intangible. The National Cancer Institute dictionary of Cancer describes social support as the network of family, friends that stand with us at the time of need providing us with psychological, physical and financial help. Theoretical model of social support provide two important dimensions- Structural social support (including the size and frequency of social network); Functional support (specific support like emotional, informational, companionship that the social network could provide) by [Charney and D.S, 2004].

The social support an individual is getting depend on the developmental stage of the receiving individual, as for early adolescents parental support matters most in comparison to the late adolescent (Stice, Ragan and Randall, 2004). For elderly people the social interaction plays an important role in their perception of social support while the instrumental support stands out for younger people (Lynch et al, 1999). Social support enhances mental and physical health, as if the social support is rich an individual is more less likely to involve in risk taking behaviours (Rozanski, Kaplan, 1999) and prevent negative appraisals (Fontana, Kens, Rosenberg, 1989).

Jones (2012), conducted a cross sectional and correlational research on physical health, mental health and social support of students. The positive correlation was found between physical health and social support among students, as their mental health is also influenced by the quality of social support they get. Ryan et al (2009), found that students perceived high level of social support from their parents and the peers on campus. Ryan, also found that the adolescents are seeking the social support online and are joining different groups and communities for this purpose. Adolescents who are getting less parental social support are more likely to look for social support and friendships online. Sadaf (2011), found the positive correlation between the family environment and the academic achievement. Significant positive correlation was also found between academic achievement and study habits of students. The studies also found the significant difference among the academic performance of the students of the science and arts. Science students perform academically better. Rais (2011), found impact of parental encouragement on the scholastic performance. Yet the significant difference persists between the adolescent males and females response to the type of social support and the parental encouragement. The support and encouragement was found more towards the female adolescents as compared to the males.

Objective-

- To assess and compare male and female adolescents of science and commerce streams on the measure of academic stress, emotional intelligence and social support.

Hypotheses-

On the basis of the objectives of the study mentioned above and the review of literature the following hypotheses have been formulated-

- (Ha1) There will be the differences between male and female students (both commerce and science) on the measure of academic stress.

Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social Support: A Study of Senior Secondary Students

- (Ha2) There will be the differences between male and female students (both commerce and science) on the measure of emotional intelligence.
- (Ha3) There will be the differences between male and female students (both commerce and science) on the measure of social support.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Selection of the participants for the present study was done by using simple random sampling techniques. The data was collected from the four senior secondary schools located in the vicinity of the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh campus. The total of 200 participants was taken for the present study in which 100 students were from science stream and 100 students were from commerce stream. The participants were explained about the objectives of the study and their consent was taken. After the completion of questionnaire they were thanked for their participation and cooperation.

Instruments

1. **Academic Stress Scale-** The scale was developed by Akram, Khan and Baby in (2013). The scale consisted of total 36 items and is a four point scale where 1 assigns for no stress, 2 for slight stress, 3 for lot of stress and 4 for extreme stress. The scores of participants would range from 36 to 144 where higher score shows higher degree of academic stress and low score show low academic stress. The construct validity of the scale ranges from 0.41 to 0.88.
2. **Emotional Intelligence Scale-** The emotional Intelligence scale was developed by Singh in (2004). The scale consists of 59 items with 5 subscales that measures self awareness, self regulation, motivation, social awareness and social skills. Each statement has to be rated on the five point scale where the highest score would be 259 and lowest score would be 59. High and low score indicating the high and low degree of emotional intelligence. The reliability of this scale was found to be 0.70.
3. **Social Support Scale-** The scale for social support was developed by Cohen et al (1985). The scale consisted of 15 items and is a four point scale. Where the score of 1 is assigned for completely false, 2 for somewhat false, 3 for somewhat true and 4 for completely true. The highest and the lowest score would be from 1 to 60. High score indicating higher degree of social support and low score indicates lower social support. The adequate test retest reliabilities range from 0.77 to 0.90 and from 0.70 to 0.90.

Statistical Analysis

The descriptive statistics i.e. the mean, standard deviation and standard error of mean was used to assess the level of academic stress, emotional intelligence and social support. ANOVA was used to determine the significance of difference between groups in terms of the academic stress, emotional intelligence and social support. Gender differences were also determined on all these variables and compared them with their male counterparts to determine whether they differ on all these measures or not.

RESULTS

Table 4.1(a)- Represents the Mean, SD and F value of male and female students both commerce(Comm.) and science(Sci.) with regard to their academic stress.

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	ST.E	F	P
ACADEMIC STRESS	Comm. Males	50	76.62	25.69	3.63	9.135**	.000
	Sci. Males	50	96.12	14.70	2.07		
	Comm. Females	50	85.56	20.23	2.86		
	Sci. Females	50	90.98	14.39	2.03		

**p< .01

Table 4.1(a) shows a comparison made between male and female students of commerce and science streams on the measure of their academic stress. The ‘F’ value was found to be 9.135**which is significant at 0.01 level. This gives an indication that male and female students (commerce and science) differ significantly with regard to their level of academic stress. If we consider the mean scores it can be seen that males from science stream have got the higher mean scores, it gives an indication that they have shown increasing trend of academic stress. Almost a similar trend of mean scores was shown by females of the streams. This means that females of commerce and science in comparison to males of science stream are having somewhat lower level of academic stress. And finally, a decreasing trend of mean score was shown by males of commerce stream this means that they are having lower degree of academic stress.

Table 4.1(b)- represents the post hoc comparison (Turkey HSD) of male and female students of commerce and science stream.

Variable	Group	Mean Difference	P
ACADEMIC STRESS	Comm Males Vs Comm Females	-11.94	P< .05
	Sci Males Vs Sci Females	5.14	P> .05

*p<.05

Table 4.1(b) shows the mean difference of commerce and science students both males and females on the measure of academic stress. It can be observed that the significant mean difference was found between commerce males and commerce females while there was insignificant mean difference between science males and science females. The (Turkey HSD) test provides the support to the findings obtained in table 4.1(a).

Table 4.2(a)- represents the Mean, SD and F value of male and Female students both commerce and science with regard to their emotional intelligence.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	ST.E	F	P
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE	Comm. Males	50	220.78	36.23	5.12	6.985**	.000
	Sci. Males	50	190.30	21.82	3.08		
	Comm. Females	50	196.14	42.56	6.01		
	Sci. Females	50	197.18	39.88	5.64		

**p< .01

Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social Support: A Study of Senior Secondary Students

Table 4.2(a) shows the comparison of male and female students both commerce and science on the measure of their emotional intelligence. The ‘F’ value is 6.985** which is significant at 0.01 level. It can be clearly observed that the four groups of students commerce and science streams differ significantly in terms of their emotional intelligence, while considering the mean scores obtained by them the males of commerce stream have shown the upward trend of their mean score. This means that they are highly emotionally intelligent. On the other hand, somewhat similar trend of mean scores was shown by males of science stream and females of commerce and science streams too. This is an indication that they have also shown higher level of emotional intelligence but comparatively lower than that of males of commerce stream.

Table 4.2(b)- represents the post hoc comparison (Turkey, HSD) of male and female students of commerce and science stream.

Variable	Group	Mean Difference	P
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE	Comm Males Vs Comm Females	24.64	P<.05
	Sci Males Vs Sci Females	-6.88	P>.05

*p< .05

Table 4.2(b) indicates the mean differences of commerce and science students both males and females on the measure of their emotional intelligence. It was observed that significant mean difference was found between commerce males and commerce females. The insignificant mean difference was found between science males and science females. The (Turkey HSD) test provides the support to the findings obtained in table 4.2(a).

Table 4.3(a) - represents the Mean, SD and F value of male and Female students both commerce and science with regard to their social support.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	ST.E	F	P
SOCIAL SUPPORT	Comm. Males	50	39.80	5.33	.754	3.086**	.028
	Sci. Males	50	40.92	4.61	.652		
	Comm. Females	50	37.40	7.82	1.10		
	Sci. Females	50	39.69	5.47	.807		

*p< .05

Table 4.3(a) comparison was made between science and commerce students both male and female with regard to their degree of social support. The ‘F’ value came out to be 3.086** which is significant at 0.05 level. This means that there appeared significant difference between male and female students of both commerce and science stream. If we consider mean score of the group on the measure of social support it can be clearly observed that all the groups of students have shown the increasing trend of their mean scores on the measure of social support. This means that all the groups are getting better support from the significant people in the society in which they live. However, the groups differ significantly in terms of their social support which they are getting.

Table 4.3(b) - represents the post hoc comparison (Turkey, HSD) of male and female students of commerce and science stream.

Variable	Group	Mean Difference	P
SOCIAL SUPPORT	Comm Males Vs Comm Females	2.40	P> .05
	Sci Males Vs Sci Females	1.22	P> .05

*p< .05

Table 4.3(b) represents the mean differences between the male and female students of commerce and science streams; it can be observed from the Turkey (HSD) that the comparisons were found insignificant as there exist no major difference in the amount of social support they are getting.

DISCUSSION

(Ha1)- There will be the differences between male and females students (both commerce and science) on the measure of academic stress. This hypothesis was supported when their existed significant differences between male and female students both commerce and science on the measure of their academic stress. Academic stress arises from the expectations of self and others causing the situation of discomfort and pressure (Ang and Huan 2006, Wong et al 2005). The male and female adolescents from science stream are more stressed about their performance as compared the commerce students. As the science adolescent students have set the higher goals and with these goals comes the pressure, anxiety and stress. Male and female adolescents do not differ much in their level of the academic stress. The lack of experience, skills and knowledge make them more vulnerable to stress.

(Ha2)- There will be the differences between the male and female students (both commerce and science) on the measure of emotional intelligence. This hypothesis got the support from the findings and it was revealed that their appeared significant differences between male and female students of commerce and science. Commerce males have shown a little higher level of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is said to influence the academic performance (Abdullah, 2006), as adolescents who have the ability to manage their emotions can deal with the academic stress effectively and is responsible for the success in career, growth in life (Abraham, 2006). The adolescents with the less emotional intelligence can have more conflict creating an inability to manage the work life balance resulting in the academic stress (Ayoko et al, 2008).

(Ha3)- There will be the differences between male and female students (both commerce and science) on the measure of social support. The findings provided support to this hypothesis after the significant differences existed between male and female students of commerce and science. As we can see from the result that there exists no major difference among the male and female (commerce and science) adolescents students. Both the males and females are getting equal social support from their surroundings. The earlier findings also shows that if the family, teachers and the peers are supportive it has a positive influence on the academic performance of an individual and also helps them to deal with the daily life stressors by maintain a balance of emotions (Goodenow 1993; Levitt et al. 1994; Wentzel 1998). An individual's social relations also influence their performance and good social support experience more happiness and enjoyment and deal with anxiety and stresses easily (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

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Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Social Support: A Study of Senior Secondary Students

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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