

Fostering Mental Health in Students for Holistic Development

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the significant and multifaceted impact of expectations and influences from key factors namely, teachers, parents, peers and society, on the mental health of students. Given the escalating academic and social pressures within the contemporary educational systems, there is a critical need to understand how these distinct sources of expectation contribute to mental health challenges, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Utilizing a mix of surveys and interviews, this research deconstructs the unique and intersecting influences of each factor. The findings reveal that academic pressure, parental expectations (reported by 82% of students) and society's emphasis on success (agreed upon by 88%) are primary stressors. The research concludes that these pressures collectively contribute to a difficult psychological landscape for students and warrant a closer look at support systems.

Keywords: *Academic stress, Mental well-being, Student stress, Parental expectations, Peer influence, Societal norms, Self-esteem, Identity formation, Emotional support systems*

In today's academic landscape, the pursuit of education has become a highly demanding journey. For students, this journey is shaped not just by their own efforts, but by a complex web of interwoven forces. From the expectations of parents at home to the competitive dynamic with peers, and the standards set by teachers, a student's daily experience is a constant negotiation of these demands. Further complicating this is the pervasive societal narrative that often equates personal worth with academic success.

While existing literature has explored these influences individually, a comprehensive understanding of their collective effect remains elusive. This research posits that it is the convergence of these four distinct yet interconnected factors that creates a unique set of stressors. This multidimensional pressure can significantly impact a student's emotional and psychological well-being, a facet of their development that is often overshadowed by the relentless focus on grades and performance.

This paper will therefore analyse the way these four key influences contribute to student stress, and provide an in-depth exploration of how their combined expectations collectively shape a student's mental well-being.

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Problem Statement

In the modern educational environment, students often face a unique and intensifying set of pressures. While individual factors such as parental expectations and academic demand are often studied individually, there is a critical need for research that examines the cumulative and compounding effect of influences from parents, teachers, peers and society. This lack of holistic perspective leaves a significant gap in our understanding of why students are experiencing heightened levels of stress and mental health challenges. Therefore, this study is essential to deconstruct these simultaneous pressures and provide a comprehensive analysis of their collective impact on a student's mental well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

***1. Fortifying the Foundations: A Comprehensive Approach to Enhancing Mental Health Support in Educational Policies Amidst Crises* - Christian J. Wiedermann, Verena Barbieri, Barbara Plagg, Pasqualina Marino, Giuliano Piccoliori and Adolf Engl**

The research acknowledges several limitations and obstacles in enhancing mental health support within educational systems. Implementing mental health education and training educators requires substantial financial and time resources, posing a challenge for under-resourced schools. The stigma associated with mental health can hinder acceptance of these initiatives among students, staff, and the community, preventing those who need help from seeking it.

The diversity of student experiences and calls for tailored interventions, as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not adequately address specific issues faced by different student populations, including those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, those with special needs, or those affected by unique stressors like conflict or displacement. While interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial, coordinating efforts among educators, mental health professionals, policymakers, and community organizations can be challenging. Evaluating the effectiveness of mental health interventions is complex because mental health outcomes can be influenced by various factors outside the school's control.

Despite these obstacles, the research suggests the benefits of integrating mental health support into educational systems. It recommends that educational institutions should implement policies prioritizing mental well-being, recognize signs of mental distress, and adopt supportive measures. The study also recommends continuous evaluation and refinement of mental health support strategies to ensure their efficacy and adaptability.

***2. Empowering Students a Holistic Approach to Mental and Physical Health Education* - Ding-Han Wang**

Implementing a holistic approach to student well-being may face challenges like budget constraints, resistance to change, and the need for ongoing teacher training. These challenges can be overcome through strategic planning, community engagement, and advocacy for prioritizing student health. Schools can collaborate with local health organizations, community leaders, and government agencies to provide additional resources and support. Establishing partnerships with mental health professionals, nutritionists, and fitness experts can enrich the educational experience and offer students diverse perspectives on well-being.

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In the digital age, technology plays a significant role in students' lives, and excessive screen time and social media use can contribute to mental health issues. Educating students about responsible technology use, online safety, and the importance of digital detoxes is essential. Schools can use technology to support mental health initiatives by using online resources, apps, and virtual platforms that provide accessible tools for stress management, mindfulness practices, and mental health assessments. Integrating technology responsibly into mental health education ensures that students develop a healthy relationship with digital devices.

Assessing the success of a holistic approach to student well-being involves monitoring indicators like academic performance, attendance rates, and behavioural changes. Surveys and feedback mechanisms allow students, parents, and educators to share their experiences and suggest improvements. Additionally, tracking long-term outcomes, such as students' post-graduation well-being and mental health, provides valuable data on the lasting effects of a holistic education. Success should be measured not only in terms of academic achievements but also in the students' ability to navigate challenges, maintain healthy lifestyles, and contribute positively in our society.

3. The Relationship Between Parents' Expectations and Mental Health of High School Students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam - Tuan Pham Van

This research paper identifies gaps in the understanding of the relationship between parental expectations and the mental health of high school students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study aims to address the limited research on this specific topic, noting that the interplay between parents' expectations, mental health, and their correlation among high school students in Ho Chi Minh City requires further investigation. The causes leading to mental health problems in high school students are multifaceted, involving factors such as academic pressure, family expectations, and individual psychophysiological characteristics.

This study seeks to contribute by providing evidence on several key points: the level of parents' expectations, the prevalence of stress, depression, and anxiety among students, the correlation between these mental health issues, and the relationship between parental expectations and students' mental well-being. By addressing these gaps, the research aims to inform interventions and support systems that can promote the mental health of high school students in Ho Chi Minh City. Further research is needed to clarify the primary causes of student mental health problems.

4. A Latent Transition Analysis of the Longitudinal Stability of Dual Factor Mental Health in Adolescence - Stephanie A. Moore, Erin Dowdy, Karen Nylund-Gibson, and Michael J. Furlong

This study explored how teenagers' mental health changes throughout high school, focusing on both emotional difficulties and positive well-being; a framework known as the 'Dual Factor Model. While this model offers a more complete picture of mental health, there hasn't been much research on how stable these mental health states are over time. Most previous studies only tracked students for short periods, like five months to a year, and used simple methods to categorize their mental health.

What makes this study different is that it followed students over a longer period, examining how their mental health changed at three different points in high school. This allowed the

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researchers to observe one- and two-year patterns of change and stability in students' mental health.

Despite its contributions, the study had a few limitations. The main tool used to measure mental health, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), didn't produce consistently reliable results. In addition, the researchers didn't have information on whether students received any kind of mental health support after each screening, which made it difficult to tell whether interventions affected the outcomes. The researchers suggest that future studies should involve larger, more diverse groups of students, track whether or not participants receive support services, and measure mental health over longer time periods and across different age groups.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to gather a comprehensive understanding of how expectations influence student mental well-being. A survey was used for students to collect broad data on their experiences, while interviews were conducted with parents and teachers to gain a deeper, more qualitative perspective

1. SURVEY METHOD (Students)

The survey method was selected for the student population to efficiently collect quantitative data from a larger group. This approach allows for the identification of common trends and the measurement of prevalent feelings and experiences among students. A total of 50 students from an urban population participated in the survey, providing a strong foundation for identifying overarching patterns of academic and social pressure. A primary limitation of this method, however, is its inability to capture the individual nuance and depth of a student's personal struggles.

2. INTERVIEW METHOD (Parents and Teachers)

To complement the survey data, a qualitative interview approach was used for parents and teachers. This method was chosen to gain detailed insights into their personal perspectives and expectations. Which are not easily captured through a survey. The interviews provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of the "why" behind their actions and beliefs. A small size of five parents and five teachers from an urban population was chosen to allow for extensive and focused conversations. To ensure a comprehensive and varied perspective, the teacher sample included educators from a cross-section of different schools. The insights gained are specific to the individuals interviewed and serve to enrich the understanding rather than provide statistical proof.

1) SURVEY OF STUDENTS

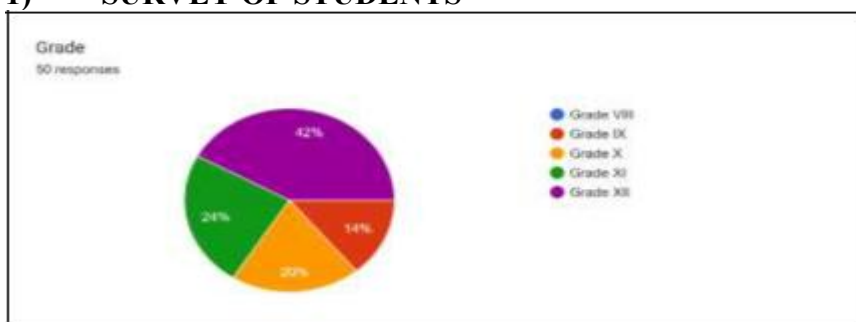


Fig:1 Distribution of student participants by grade, showing Grade XII had the highest representation (42%)

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The pie chart represents the distribution of 50 student responses across different grades. It is evident that the majority of the respondents are from *Grade XII*, making up 42% of the total, which shows strong participation from this grade. This is followed by *Grade XI* students at 24%, indicating a moderate level of engagement. *Grade X* contributes 20% of the responses while *Grade IX* has the least participation at 14%.

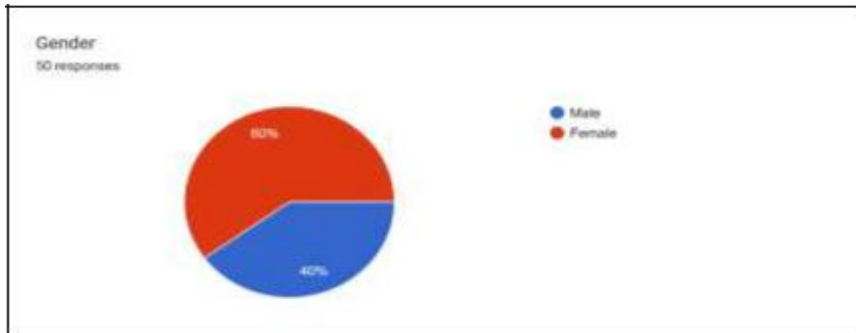


Fig:2 Gender distribution of respondents, indicating higher female participation (60%) than male (40%)

The pie chart shows the gender distribution of 50 respondents. *Females* form the majority at 60%, while *Males* make up 40% of the participants. This indicates a higher level of female participation in the survey compared to males.

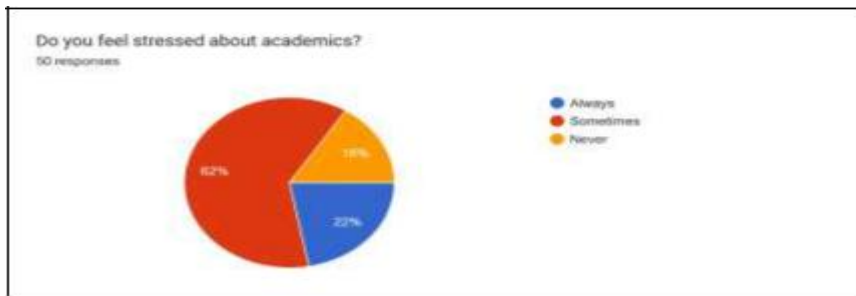


Fig:3 Academic stress frequency among students, with most (62%) feeling stressed sometimes.

The pie chart illustrates students' stress level related to academics among 50 respondents. A significant majority of 62%, reported feeling stressed *Sometimes*, indicating that academic pressure is a common experience. Meanwhile, 22% of students feel stressed *Always*, highlighting a group that may need targeted support. A minority of 16% of students stated they *never* feel stressed about academics, showing that very few are completely free from academic pressure.

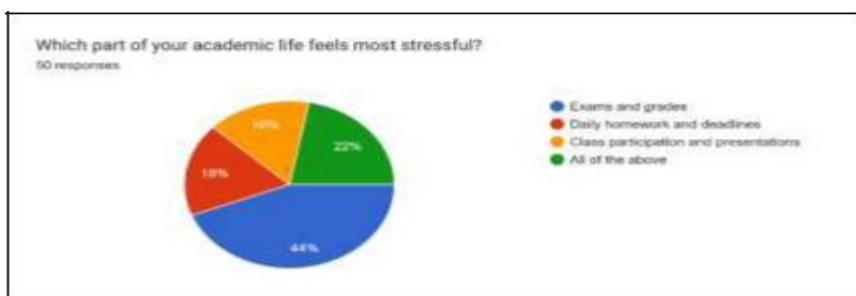


Fig:4 Major academic stressors identified, with exams and grades causing the highest pressure (44%).

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The pie chart shows which aspect of academic life students find most stressful, based on 50 responses. The majority, 44% feel most stressed by *Exams and grades*, pointing to performance pressure being a top concern among students. *All of the above* is at 22% suggesting that a sizable group of students feel overwhelmed by not one but multiple factors. *Daily homework and deadlines* stress 18% of students, while *Class participation and presentation* are the least chosen stressful factor at 16%. Overall, assessments and workload are the key stressors for most students.

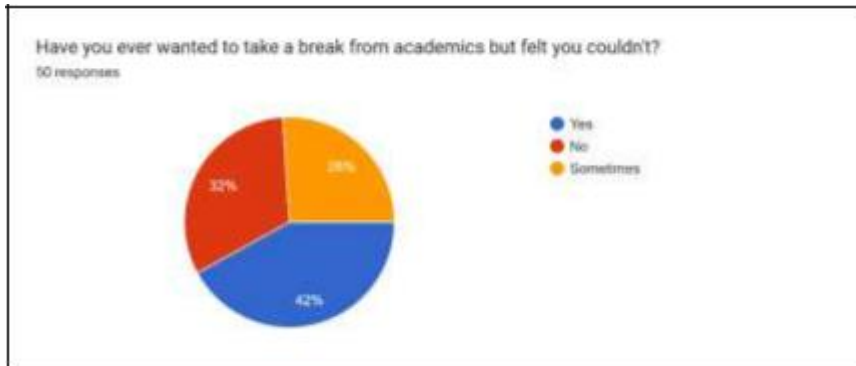


Fig:5 Students' desire for academic breaks, with 42% feeling unable to take a pause despite wanting to.

The pie chart shows if students have ever wanted to take a break from academics but felt that they couldn't. Out of 50 respondents, 42% answered *Yes*, clearly reflecting a strong need for breaks. 32% said *No*, indicating that they manage fine without feeling trapped. Meanwhile, 26% choose *Sometimes*, showing that occasional burnout is also common. All in all, the majority of students feel they lack the freedom to pause and recharge.

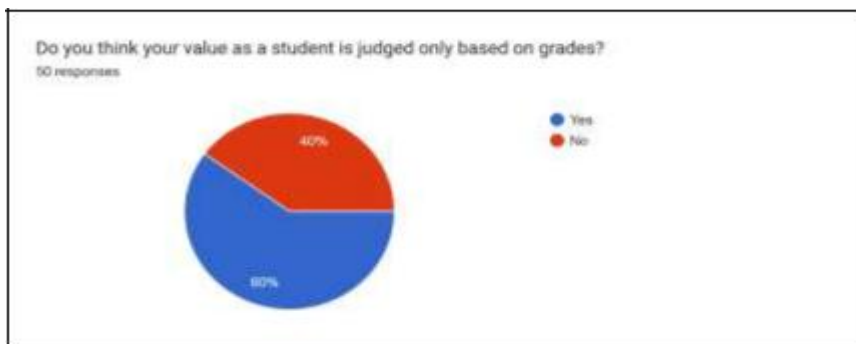


Fig:6 Perception of self-worth linked to grades, where 60% believe their value depends mainly on academic scores.

The pie chart reveals students' view on whether their value is judged solely on grades. Among 50 respondents, 60% believe *Yes*, their worth is mainly linked to academic scores, reflecting a strong grade-centric mindset. Meanwhile 40% answered *No*, feeling their value goes beyond just marks. This highlights that while grades dominate, a significant number recognises that other qualities are important as well.

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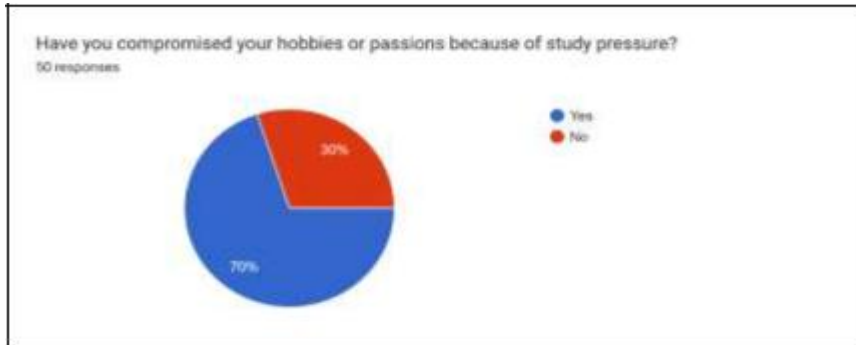


Fig:7 Impact of academics on hobbies, as 70% of students admitted giving up personal interests due to pressure.

This pie chart shows whether students have given up hobbies or passions due to academic pressure. Among 50 respondents, a large majority of 70% answered *Yes*, meaning most students sacrifice personal interests to cope with academics. Only 30% said *No*, indicating that they manage to balance studies and hobbies. This highlights how academic stress often limits students' time for personal growth and enjoyment.

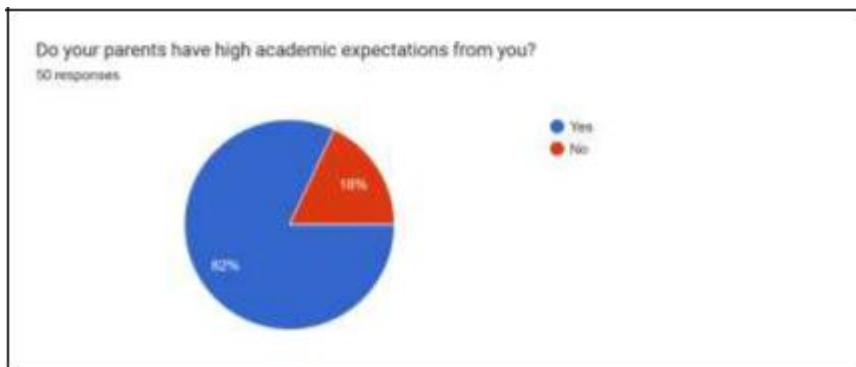


Fig:8 Parental expectations, showing 82% of students feel high academic pressure from parents.

This pie chart displays whether students feel that their parents have high academic expectations from them. A striking 82% of students answered *Yes*, showing that most students face significant pressure from their parents to excel academically. The remaining 18% answered *No*, suggesting that a very small group experiences relatively less parental pressure. This indicates that high parental expectations are a major factor in students' academic stress.

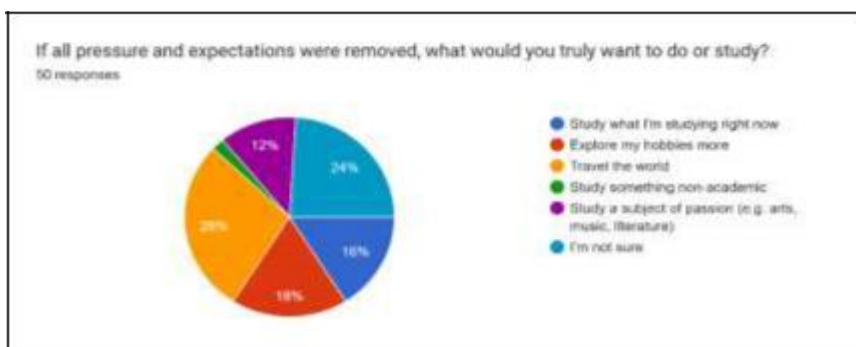


Fig:9 Aspirations without external pressure, with 28% wishing to travel the world instead of studying.

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The pie chart shows what students would truly want to do if all pressure and expectations were removed. Among the 50 respondents, the largest group comprising 28% of the students would *travel the world*, reflecting a strong desire for freedom and exploration. Only 16% would continue *studying what they currently study*. Smaller portions would *study a subject of passion* (12%) or *something non-academic* (2%). This highlights how external pressure shapes students' future significantly.

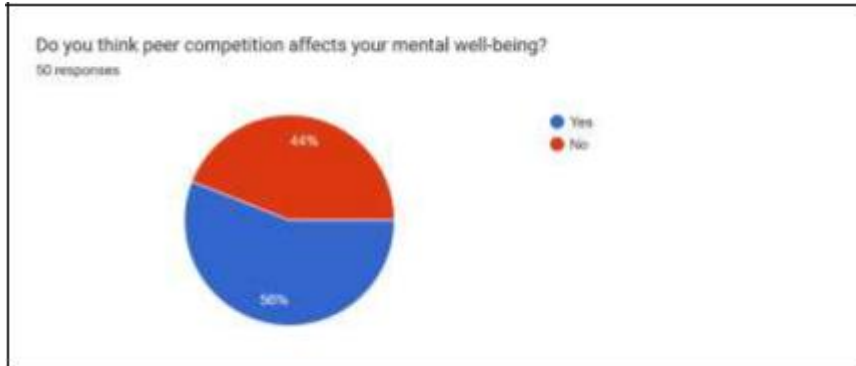


Fig:10 Influence of peer competition, with 56% acknowledging its negative effect on mental well-being.

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 50 individuals to the question if students think peer competition affects their mental well-being. A majority of 56% answered *Yes*, indicating that over half the participants feel that peer competition impacts their mental health. Meanwhile, 44% responded *No*, suggesting that a significant portion do not perceive it as a concern. This reflects a divided opinion among the students, though more people recognize peer competition as a factor influencing their mental well-being.

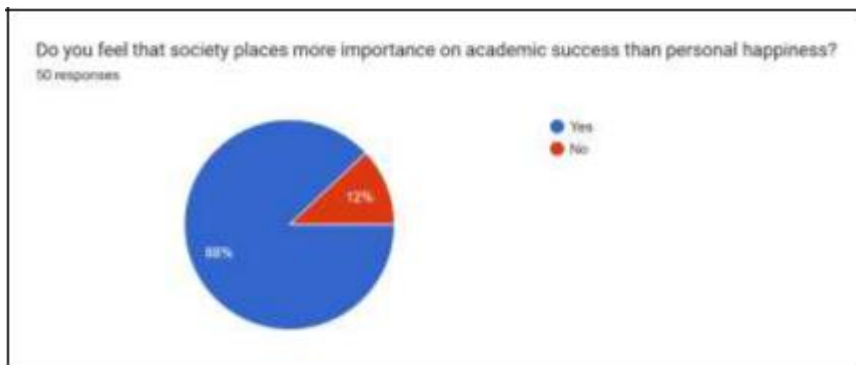


Fig:11 Societal values comparison, as 88% believe society prioritises academic success over happiness.

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 50 individuals to the question if students feel that society places more importance on academic success than personal happiness. A majority of 88% responded *Yes* pointing out that a vast majority believes that society places too much importance on academic success. Only 12% disagreed with this view. This overwhelming agreement suggests a strong perception among individuals that societal expectations prioritize achievements over well-being, highlighting a potential imbalance in values that could influence mental and emotional health.

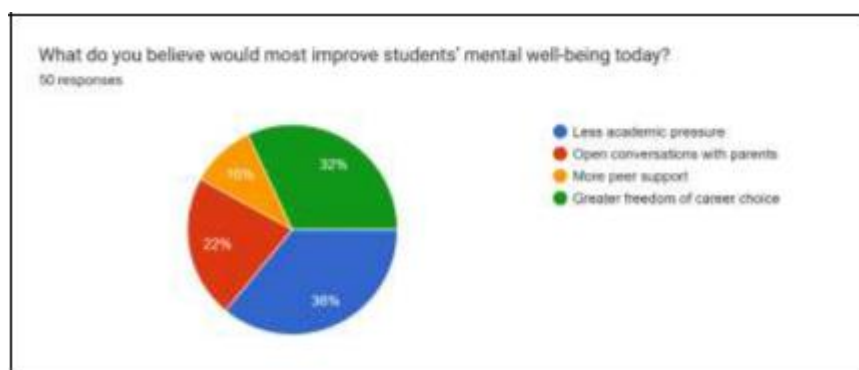


Fig:12 Key factors to improve mental well-being, where reducing academic pressure (36%) tops the list.

The pie charts highlight the factors that respondents believe would most improve students' mental well-being. The top choice, with 36%, is *less academic pressure*, followed closely by 32% favouring *greater freedom of career choice*. Meanwhile, 22% support more *open conversations with parents*, and 10% believe increased *peer support* would help. In a nutshell, the responses emphasize a need for educational and emotional flexibility to better support students' mental health.

INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS

1. Have you noticed any particular mental or emotional challenges that your child is facing in their high school years?

Approximately 60% of parents noted their children were struggling emotionally, to some extent, and often in a more subtle manner; like withdrawing, mood fluctuations, or some internal struggle. The other 40% did not observe any identifiable difficulties, which could suggest that children are to some degree resilient, or that there is an inability to identify signs of emotion that are not easily visible.

2. From your perspective, what are some of the biggest sources of stress or pressure for your child; academics, peer relationships, social media, or something else?

Academic pressure was identified as a major stressor by most parents, especially due to competitive expectations and demanding curricula. However, about 40% also noted peer dynamics and social media as contributing factors, sometimes more strongly than academics. Some responses highlighted the layered nature of stress; where social validation, identity issues, and fear of comparison coexist with academic goals to create a complex emotional burden.

3. Have you ever sought professional help (like therapy or counselling) for your child, or would you be open to doing so if needed? Why or why not?

Only 40% had actively pursued professional help, often to show solidarity or address specific concerns like ADHD or language challenges. On the other hand, 20% rejected the need for therapy, expressing confidence in parental support as sufficient. The remainder expressed openness to counselling if necessary, underscoring a growing but cautious acceptance of mental health support in parenting.

4. How does your child usually unwind or recharge after a stressful school day or exam period?

Responses were highly in contrast with one another. Some children preferred calm, sedentary activities such as singing and watching movies while others resorted to sporty or

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physically active play. A handful of children also sought comfort through emotionally supportive conversations with parents or peers. This suggests that coping mechanisms are particularly diverse and often shaped by personality, home life, and access to relaxation or expression activities.

5. Have there been situations where your child struggled to stay motivated or confident? How do you approach these situations as a parent?

Almost every parent made note of experiencing moments of demotivation, though to varying degrees. To get their motivation back, most people used encouragement, relatable anecdotes, or gentle emotional support to rekindle motivation. A very small portion used more rigid approaches such as discipline. In general, parents understood that confidence-related concerns were more complex and required tailored emotional solutions, rather than blanket approaches.

6. Do you think today's academic environment leaves enough room for students to care for their mental and emotional health? Why or why not?

A strong majority agreed that the current academic climate is too intense, leaving minimal space for emotional well-being. While a few believed that balance is possible with prioritization, most emphasized the systemic failure to integrate mental health into educational expectations. Many felt students are rushed toward success without adequate preparation for the emotional toll it takes.

7. Are there any particular values or life skills you try to instill in your child to help them cope with emotional challenges?

Parents, for instance, highlighted the importance of emotional fortitude and resilience alongside empathy, self-awareness, and perseverance. Some approached the subject philosophically, positing that happiness should be established as the primary life goal, while others identified humility, grit, and openness as critical attributes. There was consensus that values fundamentally bolster emotional development and often offset the gaps left by formal systems.

8. If schools and parents were to work together more closely to support students' well-being, what kind of collaboration would you imagine being most helpful?

Most parents expected to receive holistic support systems, like mentoring sessions and customized attention, including structured emotional backing, check-ins, and personal care. They pointed out the necessity of receiving feedback, holistic progress monitoring, and practical life lessons. Parents thought collaboration was meant to extend beyond academics into moral and emotional development, especially through relatable storytelling and real-life examples.

9. Have there been moments when your child's behaviour made you wonder if they were silently struggling? What did you do then?

Half the parents reported observing the signs of silent battle, such as mood changes, withdrawal, or restlessness. In such situations, these parents adopted non-intrusive empathy by offering safe spaces and encouraging gentle conversation. The rest reported no such issues, either less visible problems, or unexpressed belief that children are open and willing to communicate problems without being prompted.

10. In what ways do you think parental expectations; spoken or unspoken; impact a teenager's mental well-being?

All parents agreed that expectations play a powerful role; both positively and negatively. Supportive, balanced expectations can nurture motivation and resilience, while unrealistic or silent pressures can breed anxiety, guilt, or identity struggles. The consensus was that teenagers are deeply perceptive of parental hopes, and even unspoken expectations can shape their emotional world profoundly.

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHERS

1. In your experience, what are the most common sources of stress among students?

Many teachers agreed that academic pressure remains the leading source of stress among students. This is often worsened by the need to balance studies with extracurriculars, peer expectations and time constraints. A shared concern among educators was that students are increasingly anxious about future uncertainties, which adds to their emotional burden. Several also highlighted the negative role of social media in amplifying these stressors by promoting unrealistic standards and constant comparison.

2. Have you noticed any link between parental pressure and student stress levels? Can you share an example?

Most teachers observed a direct and often intense link between parental pressure and student stress. They noted that students frequently internalize expectations, leading to anxiety and fear of failure. Several educators shared examples where high-achieving students began to underperform due to emotional burnout caused by unrealistic demands from home. Teachers felt that a more collaborative and empathetic relationship with parents could ease this pressure and create a healthier learning environment.

3. How do peer relationships or social dynamics at school affect students' emotional well-being?

Teachers consistently emphasized the powerful influence of peer relationships on students' emotional well-being. While supportive friendships boost confidence and engagement, negative interactions such as exclusion, bullying or toxic competitiveness were commonly cited as sources of distress. Many felt that a student's sense of belonging in school is deeply tied to these social dynamics, making it crucial to nurture a positive, inclusive peer environment.

4. In what ways does social media impact students' mental health?

There was a strong consensus among teachers that social media has become a double-edged sword in students' lives. While it provides connection, most felt that it more often leads to unhealthy comparison, 'FOMO' (fear of missing out), and exposure to cyber-bullying.

Teachers noted that these factors significantly impact students' self-image, confidence and ability to concentrate, especially during academic hours.

5. Are there any signs you look for to identify when a student might be under emotional or psychological stress?

Many educators shared that identifying emotional distress in students often starts with subtle behavioural changes. Common indicators they looked for included withdrawal, irritability, underperforming academically and unexplained physical complaints. Teachers stressed the importance of paying attention to even minor shifts, as these often signal deeper psychological challenges that may otherwise go unnoticed.

6. How often do you feel that family problems outside of school affect a student's focus and behaviour in class?

Teachers widely agreed that family issues have noticeable and frequent impact on students' classroom behaviour and focus. Emotional instability at home often shows up as inattentiveness, mood swings or defiant behaviour in school. Several teachers pointed out that even students who usually perform well may suddenly disengage if they are facing stress in their personal lives.

7. How can parents collaborate with teachers to better support students' emotional well-being?

A majority of teachers emphasized that emotional support is most effective when parents and educators work as a team. They suggested that regular, open communication and shared understanding of a child's emotional needs can significantly reduce stress. Teachers respected parents who valued feedback and reinforced positive habits at home, creating a unified support system for the student.

8. What suggestions do you have for schools to create an environment where students can thrive both academically and emotionally?

Most educators believed that schools must play a proactive role in promoting both academic and emotional development. Suggestions included having trained counselors, implementing wellness programmes and creating a safe space for students to express themselves. Teachers felt that a shift in school culture, one that prioritizes emotional safety, could lead to healthier learners.

9. How can the curriculum or teaching style be adjusted to support students' holistic development?

There was a strong agreement that the current curriculum needs to evolve to support holistic development. Many teachers advocated for the inclusion of emotional literacy, life skills and student-led projects. They felt that flexible, student-centered teaching not only supports academic achievements but also encourages creativity, empathy and personal growth, qualities essential for life beyond school.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that the mental well-being of a student is subject to a complex confluence of internal (parents) and external (teachers, peers and society) pressures. The analysis consistently demonstrates that a student's lived experiences is fundamentally shaped by four key stressors; the high expectations and academic scrutiny from parents, the relentless performance demands and workload management imposed by teachers, the essential yet frequently challenging dynamics of peers and the overarching, competitive structure of society. These four factors collectively define the emotional landscape of a child's life.

This research also suggests that digital platforms often function as an unregulated stressor, contributing to issues of social comparison, isolation and persistent anxiety, thereby worsening the pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Ultimately, we may conclude that the responsibility of mitigating these stressors and fostering mental health cannot, and should not, be placed entirely upon the student. Instead, a necessary, comprehensive shift in priorities is required. For the student to thrive, educational environments must evolve into supportive ecosystems where everyone actively

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collaborates to prioritize psychological safety alongside academic achievement. Only through such effort can students be empowered to navigate the inevitable challenges of life, leading to long-term well-being.

Future research could explore specific, tailored interventions for diverse student populations and track the long-term effects of implementing such a support focused framework.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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