

Research Paper

Academic Stress among Students Studying in Higher Education Institutes: A Gender-Based Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

One of the issues that get a lot of attention these days is stress. It can affect people's physical and mental health, even if it doesn't cause serious health problems. This qualitative comparative analysis aimed to provide a clear picture of academic stress among students of higher educational institutes. Due to challenges they face in such higher institutes, students often feel pressure to perform well. The purpose of this study is to measure the level of academic stress in students. The study included 40 students (20 boys and 20 girls) selected through random sampling and used a quantitative descriptive design with surveys to gather data. The Academic Stress Scale measured stress levels. A T-test compared the psychological traits of male and female students. The results indicated the boys experience more academic stress than girls. Based on these findings and their implications, the researcher recommends further investigation into the psychological factors affecting students.

Keywords: *Stress, Academic Stress, gender comparison, higher education students*

In the seventeenth century, the word "stress," which comes from the Latin word "stringeres", which means to draw tight, was used to characterize suffering and adversity. Agolla (2009) claims that stress has grown in importance in academic circles. After doing in-depth research on stress and its effects, numerous behavioral scientists came to the conclusion that the subject required further attention.

Krishnan Lal (2013) asserts that students today must put up more effort due to the new educational obstacles they face. The transitional era, which lies between childhood and adulthood, is experienced by students in their teens. Stress is said to be brought on by a variety of issues, including issues at school, in college, with money, with family, and in their immediate environment.

Stress is any circumstance that makes someone feel and think negatively, (Menaga, S., and Chandrasekaran, V., 2013). Stress is regarded as a detrimental emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological process that occurs when people cope with or adapt to stresses

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(Bernstein et al., 2012). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is a physical or psychological phenomenon that occurs when a person interacts with their surroundings and is brought on by their cognitive evaluation of stimuli. In particular, academic stress refers to the worry or mental discomfort that students encounter during the learning process as a result of worries or ideas about failing academically (Lal, 2014). Tension in the body or mind is called stress. Anger, frustration, and anxiety are just a few of the bad emotions that can result from a wide range of accidents in a person's life.

Academic stress can have detrimental emotional effects like anxiety, burnout, depression, and a decline in academic motivation, according to Pascoe et al. (2020). Additionally, the stress reaction can show up behaviourally (such as procrastination, retreat, or academic disengagement) or physiologically (such as headaches, exhaustion, or sleep difficulties). Academic stress is a common occurrence for university students as part of their education, but when it persists or becomes excessive, it can affect academic performance, focus, and cognitive function (Putwain, 2007).

Sailo and Varghese (2024) Stress is how the body reacts to pressure or danger. It is also regarded as a detrimental behavioral and physiological process that occurs when a person attempts to adjust or make concessions in response to stressors. Stress is a natural component of daily living, yet it is not always viewed negatively because it helps people accomplish their goals in life. Students will inevitably experience stress in the classroom. This stress impacts their performance in all academic activities. Many students reported feeling high levels of academic stress during certain times. This stress often results from studying for and taking tests, competing for class rankings, and learning a large amount of material in a short period. A significant factor in influencing students' mental health is academic stress (Sailo and Varghese, 2024). According to Rosenham and Seligman (1989) and Selye (1974), stress is often seen as the body's overall response to challenges or distressing events in the environment. Stress as a mechanism by which we recognize and manage environmental risks and difficulties (Myers, D.G., 2005). Stressors are both external and internal variables that lead to stress (Lazarus, 1990).

Academic stress: According to Aina and Wijayati (2019), one type of stress that occurs in academic settings like schools and colleges is academic stress. Based on the aforementioned chronicle facts, the research subjects' stressors are strongly associated with the academic environment, leading to the assumption that the stress is academic in nature. Additionally, Olejnik and Holschuh (2007) define academic stress as a response to the amount of work students have to finish. Students feel stress because of the many assignments they receive. According to Alvin (2007) and Gusniarti (2002), academic stress occurs when students face pressures from tough academic challenges. It causes students to perceive themselves as incapable of managing both the demands of their surroundings and their own resources. According to McKean et al. (2000), stressors by themselves do not cause tension, anxiety, or depression. Instead, stress arises from the interaction between stressors and how a person perceives and reacts to these pressures. Environmental pressure occurs when an individual perceives environmental stimuli or demands that surpass their capacity to manage them (Shirom, 1986). Researchers have long studied academic stress in students, and they have found that stressors include an excessive number of assignments, peer competition, failures, a lack of pocket money, bad relationships with lecturers or other students, family issues, and problems at home. Stressors at the university level include crowded lecture halls, the semester system, and not enough resources for academic work (Marwan Zaid Bataineh,

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2013). Additionally, college students face a distinct set of stressful situations or stressors. There are a number of reasons why college students' stress levels are higher, according to Ross, Neibling, and Heckert (1999), students must first adapt significantly to college life. Second, interpersonal interactions are strained due to the demands of academics. Third, college students' stress levels are influenced by housing arrangements and lifestyle modifications. Additionally, academic demands, support networks, and inadequate coping mechanisms cause stress for college students. Academic stress, according to Bedew and Gabriel (2015), is "the body's response to academic-related demands that are perceived as exceeding available resources." From a psychological standpoint, academic stress results from both internal and external pressures, such as self-expectations and fear of failing, as well as external stressors, such as competition, workload, and evaluation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mohamed, A. N. et al. (2025) the strain of undergoing clinical training. The results show that whereas over half of male nursing students reported low to moderate levels of stress, a significant portion of female nursing students reported moderate to high levels. According to Khesht-Masjedi et al. (2019), girls are more likely than boys to experience higher levels of anxiety, despair, and uneasiness, which can have varied effects on their academic performance. Girls may still do better academically, though, possibly as a result of more robust coping strategies or cultural expectations.

Furthermore, a statistically significant difference in the level of stress experienced during clinical placements was found between male and female nursing students. This conclusion is in line with the study's findings, which showed that women's and men's perceived stress levels differ dramatically, with women reporting much greater levels of overall felt stress. Additionally, compared to their male counterparts, more females reported stress of moderate levels. Men and women nurses experience different types of job stress. Male nurses have reported greater levels of job stress compared to female nurses (Lee and Cho, 2016).

In terms of occupational stress, this difference was quite small among individuals with less than four years of work experience. However, among those with more than five years of work experience, gender disparities were noticeable in several areas pertaining to workplace stress and stress coping strategies. Men experience significantly higher levels of stress compared to women students, according to Khan et al. (2015). According to the study, schoolboys are more susceptible to stress-related academic and psychological difficulties in the school setting than schoolgirls because they experience higher levels of academic pressure, performance expectations, and competitive stress. According to Bartwal and Raj (2014), there is no discernible gender difference in the levels of academic stress experienced by male and female students. Their results also imply that pupils who possess greater social intelligence are better equipped to handle the demands of their studies. Strong social intelligence has a critical role in lowering and managing academic stress by enabling people to ask for help, communicate effectively, and adjust to academic obstacles. According to MacLean et al. (2013), compared to boys, girls regularly report higher levels of perceived stress and more health issues associated to stress. Crucially, adolescence—a crucial developmental stage characterized by biological, psychological, and social changes—is when this gender difference first manifests. Teenage girls are typically more vulnerable to emotional, social, and academic pressures, such as expectations for relationships and performance. The necessity for early detection and gender-responsive stress management

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strategies in schools is highlighted by the possibility that these elevated stress levels may increase susceptibility to anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic problems.

Timothy et al. (2011) quoted Compas & Wagner (1991). Stressful life events had a greater impact on women's reports of depressive symptoms; in other words, women appear to be more sensitive than boys to external stressors, at least when it comes to internalizing symptoms like stress, melancholy, worry, etc. Khaksari, M. et al. (2003) based on the findings we may draw the conclusion that males and girls have different physiological reactions to exam stress, with males exhibiting a higher rise in cortisol and systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Therefore, we recommend that when a test is stressful, various impacts of stress should be taken into account for male and female students. Even for female students, stress is thought to affect the luteal phase differently from the follicular phase.

METHODOLOGY

The research used a descriptive approach and was quantitative. According to Slevitch (2011), quantitative research explores different phenomena by collecting numerical data and applying statistical, computational, and mathematical methods. To examine gender-related psychological factors at the college level, the groups were compared using descriptive statistics like means and inferential statistics such as the t-test.

Objective

1. To evaluate the levels of academic stress levels among male and female students of higher education.
2. To ascertain the analysis of academic stress and other psychological factors among students of higher education according to gender.

Hypothesis

- **H01:** There will be no notable difference in academic stress between male and female students.

Sample: The study population included both men and women college pupils. There existed twenty boys as well as twenty girl pupils out of a total of forty students.

Table 1

Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Group (a) Male	20	50%
Group (b) Female	20	50%
Total Sample	40	100%

Tool: A standardized psychological test called the Academic stress Scale given by Rajendran, R., & Kaliappan, K. V. (1991) is used to assess students' stress levels. It assesses students' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological responses to stress in addition to academic, interpersonal, environmental, and personal pressures. The scale is helpful for research, counselling, and creating stress-management interventions in educational contexts since it assists in identifying the main causes of stress and coping mechanisms.

The necessity and importance of the research: In today's highly competitive environment, students face several academic challenges. These include anxiety during

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exams, low motivation to engage in lectures, and trouble understanding the material. Academic pressure is characterized defined as worry or fear over one's performance on academic assignments. It can discourage students from trying their hardest on exams. Numerous factors at school, including popularity in extracurricular activities, demands from parents, the need for flawless performance, anxiety about academics, and a heavy course load, can cause academic pressure. Psychological illnesses, panic attacks, fatigue, and melancholy are common among younger students. Students were viewed as the future stars or builders who would take on the duties required to advance the country more effectively. In order to determine this, the researcher decided to look at college-bound students' stress levels (Prabu, S. P. 2015).

Procedure: Participants were given a thorough explanation of the study's objectives. Academic stress Scale given by Rajendran, R., & Kaliappan, K. V. (1991) was used for collection of data, students were given all necessary instructions, handed questionnaires, and assured that their data would be kept private. The participants were asked to answer honestly and to try every item. Following the gathering of data, response sheets were scored appropriately, and data analysis was then carried out to find out results with the help of SPSS.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Table 2: Summary Statistics of Psychological Elements

Variables	Sub-variables	No. Of Items	Mean	Overall Mean
Stress	Acute Stress level	5	2.762	2/894
	Episodic Stress level	5	2.944	
	Chronic Stress Level	5	2.978	

A moderate amount of stress is indicated by the overall stress mean of 2.894, with chronic stress having the highest score, which may indicate persistent, long-term stress in the individuals' life. The mean values for all three variables—Depression, Anxiety, and Stress—indicate moderate levels of these psychological characteristics. This implies that people tend to maintain interpersonal relationships and feel somewhat in control of their anxiety, despite experiencing mild degrees of sadness/depression, concern/anxiety, and strain/stress. However, chronic stress, which denotes extended stress exposure, could be a cause for concern. This analysis is focused on gender, and additional gender-based comparison or breakdown could highlight particular patterns and variations in how these psychological characteristics appear in different sexes.

Table 3: T-Statistics for Gender-specific Mean Stress Score:

Gender	Mean	Df	T	Sig
Male	47.04			
Female	42.09	39	2.447	0.031

The mean scores of the male and female groups are shown in Table 5. The boys' group has a mean score of 47.04, while the girls' group has a lower mean score of 42.09. There are 39 degrees of freedom (df). The results of the t-test were a significance level "(p value)" of 0.025 and a "t-value" of 2.447. This finding is "statistically significant," suggesting that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of males and females for psychological aspects related to stress.

DISCUSSION

These present outcomes show that the male group experienced more stress than the female group. This result could be explained by the fact that men are subjected to more social and familial expectations, more emotional sensitivity, and more academic pressure. Ali, K. et al, (2025), due to the demands of multitasking and a lack of coping mechanisms, men may also be under more stress, which can have a negative impact on their academic performance and psychological health. Men pupils experience more stress than female classmates, according to Khan et al. (2015). This discrepancy may be related to increased social expectations and parental pressure. Male students are expected to succeed academically, find steady work, and provide for their families in various cultural contexts, which raise performance-related stress. Males may be less inclined to ask for assistance or communicate their stress due to social norms that prioritize independence, competitiveness, and emotional control.

The results presented by Iskandar et al. (2024) showed that female students had far greater levels of academic stress than male students, showing significant gender-based disparities in stress responses, which goes contradictory to the current study. This result is consistent with a University at Buffalo study (quoted in Hafifah et al., 2017) that found female students outperformed male students in academic contexts in terms of stress regulation, emotional control, and adaptive coping methods. The present study aligns with the findings of Rehman and Shah (2023) Male and female students had significantly different stress levels, despite the fact that male students were marginally more dominant in the group. According to the investigation, there are significant gender differences, with men scoring higher than women on certain psychological characteristics. This is in line with research such as that conducted by Fawzy and Hamed (2017).

CONCLUSION

According to the findings previously stated and discussion, it can be said that my current study found that male students experienced higher levels of stress than female students. Gender, socioeconomic level, academic pressure, overload, lack of leisure time, lack of independence, and increased societal expectations or subpar exam results were all found to have an impact. The current research study found a strong correlation between gender differences in stress and academic achievement and college work. The overall results of the study suggest that stress varies by gender. According to our research, men's attitudes, anticipated hopes, and poor coping mechanisms related to college success—such as a focus on achievement, grades, hard work, and future concerns may be responsible for their higher stress levels.

Limitations

1. The results may not be applicable to all students because the survey only included students from a few higher education colleges in India
2. The sample size was small and may not accurately reflect the large student population.
3. Mainly academic stress was investigated, and other essential aspects such as assistance networks and personality qualities were not examined.

Suggestions

1. Future research should include students from other colleges or universities to have a more comprehensive perspective.

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2. A greater sample size may boost statistical power, minimize bias, increase dependability, and improve the overall accuracy and generalizability of the findings.
3. Future studies should include other factors like social support, study habits, or emotional health.

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Conflict of Interest

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