

## Stress, Anxiety, and Depression among Adolescent School Students

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Depression and anxiety are considered a common mental health issue along with stress. During adolescence stage there are various protective as well as risk factors that one is exposed to. **Aim:** The present study aims at assessing depression, anxiety and stress among male and female school going adolescents. **Method:** Cross-sectional design was employed. Various schools were approached, and after obtaining permission, consent and assent, the administration of the study tool was done. DASS-21 was used for assessment along with socio-demographic data sheet. 260 adolescent students took part in this study (133 male and 127 female). Data was analysed using SPSS, frequency calculation, and Chi-square analysis was done. **Results and Conclusion:** Stress, anxiety, and depression is prevalent among adolescent population and prevalence of stress, and depression was higher in female as compared to males. There is need for early detection and intervention for this age group for healthy development.

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, Stress, Anxiety, Depression*

Mental health issues spread across the continuum ranging from mild to severe conditions, nevertheless the impact of problems related to mental health is debilitating and it impacting our functioning negatively in different degree. Mental health issues or concerns in adolescents can be broadly divided into internalising and externalizing problems. Those problems that are emotional in nature comes under internalising and those which behavioural are consider externalising (Hunduma et al., 2022). As mental health occurs in continuum across the individual, so is the three emotional states-stress, anxiety and depression. Stress is now considered an epidemic, while anxiety and depression if often consider common mental health problem. Mental health problems occur across all stages of life, and adolescents are not immune to it and in fact most of serious mental health disorders starts during this stage (Mehra et al., 2022). During adolescence period there is drastic growth and development in various spheres, which can both serve as vulnerability and opportunities for an individual. Hence identifying mental health needs and addressing them to be intervene can ensure health development of adolescents and thereby helped them in long lasting wellness (Bharat & Sethi, 2019).

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While adolescence is accompanied by changes in various aspects of life, be it physical, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal etc. These growth and changes which happens particularly during adolescence phase makes it a period of opportunity for mental health which also comes with increased vulnerability (Colizzi et al., 2020). Reports have shown increased in the prevalence of anxiety and depression compared to childhood stage (Singh et al., 2015). In a study conducted in Meerat, Uttar Pradesh to examined the psychiatric well-being among adolescents of age ranging from 12 years to 19 years using GHQ-12, the finding demonstrated 19.1% had poor mental well-being (Antara et al., 2019). Despite the increasing need for attention towards adolescent mental health, there is a drastic gap between those in need and those who are receiving the intervention (Nebhinani, 2022). As India is known for its diversity and heterogeneity of the population in India, it also makes it difficult to initiate as well as maintain any kind of government-run or voluntary programs in long run (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2012). Moreover, even today there is presence hesitation among people in India to seek help and support for mental health issues (UNICEF, 2021).

Globally suicide has become a second leading cause of death among youths of age between 15 years to 29 years (WHO, 2014). As per the survey on mental health which was done in 2015-16, the prevalence of morbidity in adolescent population was reported to be 7.3%. In a study conducted in Bangalore, India it was found that approximately 10% of adolescents had mental health concerns (Bhola et al., 2016). Prakash et al. (2024) conducted a study done Mysore, India using DASS21 to measure anxiety, depression, and stress in adolescents of both urban and rural area, the finding showed that the variables measured were quite prevalent among adolescents of both regions (depression-39.3% in rural, 24.2% in urban, anxiety: 50.6% in urban and 49% in rural and stress:16.6% in rural, 14.6% in urban). So, investing and addressing mental health problems and intervening is pivotal.

Despite the challenges, it is crucial to bring about novel ideas and solution to help overcome such obstacles and make necessary changes for adolescent mental health. More, promotion and early prevention are pivotal, as it can reduce the cost and burden on self, family and society at large. Good state of mental health during childhood and adolescence laid a foundation for development of healthy and positive mental health in adulthood. As much as early intervention and prevention is important, early detection and identification of adolescents who are in dire need of mental health interventions is necessary, better if this is carried out across various regions in India. The type of intervention to be applied differs across the continuum of health and wellness and different groups and individuals, therefore choosing a right type of intervention for right group backed by evidences literatures is of utmost importance.

Screening of mental health issues among adolescents can help in identifying and link or refer them to right intervention. School being one of the places where children and adolescents spend most time in, adding school mental health becomes a necessity. School based studies focusing on screening and assessing adolescents having mental health problems and later addressing this issue in intervention program can be beneficial in long run and for wider application. So, with the aim to assess the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression among adolescent students the present study was carried out.

### **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

Cross-sectional design was employed for the present study.

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### *Participants*

A total of 260 school going adolescent students took part in the study, with age range from 14 years to 17 years, the sample was drawn from class 8 to class 12 using simple random sampling technique from schools in Ranchi. Both male and female students who can understand English and Hindi were included in the study. Male student consisted of 51.2% (n=133) and 48.8% (n=127) of the participants were female. Students having severe psychiatric and physical illness, and students whose assent and consent could not be obtained were excluded from the study.

### *Measures*

1. **Socio-demographic data sheet:** This was used to collect the required and relevant information of the participants, such as name, age, gender, and class etc.
2. **Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21):** DASS-21 is one of the widely used scale to assess the emotional state of depression, anxiety and stress. It is shorter version of 42 items scale, the author of this scale believed that mental health occurs in continuum across the individual, so is the three emotional states included in this scale. The items are put in simple words, so this makes it feasible to be used among the adolescent population as well. The items in the scale were to be rated by choosing the appropriate opinions from the 4 options as per the extent to which it applies to the individual and 7 items each are included in the respective three domains. The DASS-21 has Cronbach's alpha values of 0.81, 0.89 and 0.78 for the subscales of depressive, anxiety and stress respectively (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

### *Procedure*

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee for the present study. After that various schools in Ranchi were approached, and permission was given by few schools. Taking the inclusion and exclusion criteria into consideration, the data collection was initiated using the socio-demographic data sheet and DASS-21. Assent and informed consent were obtained from the participants' parents and the participants themselves. Then scoring and the data entry was done to be analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26).

### *Statistical Analysis*

SPSS (version 26) software was used to analysed the data. Frequency and percentage were calculated for various socio-demographics, and prevalence of anxiety, stress, and depression. Moreover, Chi-square analysis was performed to compare the psychological variables (depression, anxiety, and stress) between gender.

## **RESULTS**

The tables and figure provided below show the results of the analysis. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. Out of the total 260 adolescents participated, 51.2% were male and 48.8% were female. Approximately 16.9% of the participants belonged to class 8<sup>th</sup>, 32.7% belonged to class 9<sup>th</sup>, 7.7% were from class 10<sup>th</sup>, 35% were from class 11<sup>th</sup>, and 7.7% belonged to class 12<sup>th</sup>. Majority of participants were of age 14 years old (33.5%), followed by 15 years (26.9%), 16 years (23.1%) and 17 years (16.5%).

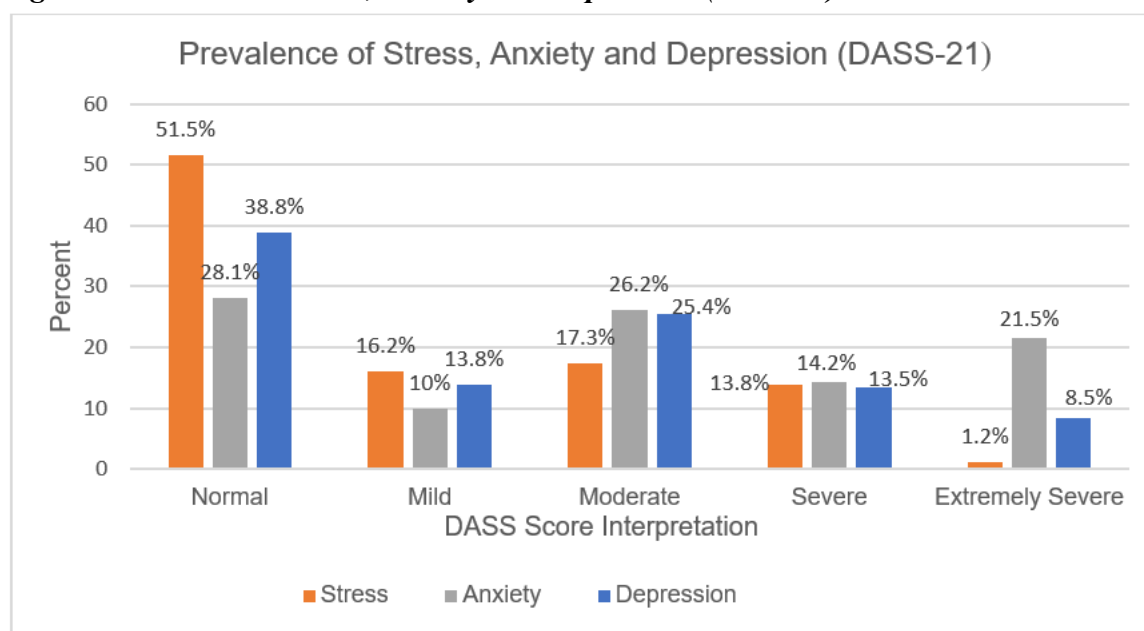
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**Table 1: Demographics of participants**

Variables		Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	133	51.2%
	Female	127	48.8%
<b>Class</b>	8 <sup>th</sup>	44	16.9%
	9 <sup>th</sup>	85	32.7%
	10 <sup>th</sup>	20	7.7%
	11 <sup>th</sup>	91	35%
	12 <sup>th</sup>	20	7.7%
<b>Age</b>	14	87	33.5%
	15	70	26.9%
	16	60	23.1%
	17	43	16.5%

The present study the mean score of depression is 13.54 (S.D.= 9.04), anxiety is 13.11 (S.D.=13.11), and stress is 15.15 (S.D.= 9.37). Moreover, the prevalence of depression is 13.8% in mild, 25.4% in moderate, 13.5% in severe, and 8.5% in extremely severe. The prevalence of stress as 16.2% in mild, 17.3% in moderate, 13.8% in severe, and 1.2% in extremely severe. And the prevalence of anxiety is 10% in mild, 26.2% in moderate, 14.2% in severe and 21.5% in extremely severe.

**Figure 1: Prevalence Stress, Anxiety and Depression (DASS21)**



When it comes to gender and stress, anxiety and depression, gender has significant relationship with stress and depression. Female participants have more prevalence in stress and depression as compare to male participants. While there is no significant relationship between gender and anxiety.

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**Table 2: Relationship between Stress, Anxiety, Depression and Gender**

Variables		Gender				X <sup>2</sup>	p-value
		Male		Female			
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		
<b>Stress (DASS 21 score range)</b>	Normal	82	61.7%	52	40.9%	15.15	0.003**
	Mild	22	52.4%	20	47.6%		
	Moderate	17	37.8%	28	62.2%		
	Severe	11	30.6%	25	69.4%		
	Extremely Severe	1	33.3%	2	66.7%		
<b>Anxiety</b>	Normal	45	61.6%	28	22%	8.852	0.065
	Mild	15	57.7%	11	42.3%		
	Moderate	36	53.9%	32	47.1%		
	Severe	16	43.2%	21	56.8%		
	Extremely Severe	21	37.5%	35	62.5%		
<b>Depression</b>	Normal	62	61.4%	39	38.6%	17.989	0.001**
	Mild	22	61.1%	14	38.9%		
	Moderate	32	48.5%	34	51.5%		
	Severe	8	22.9%	27	77.1%		
	Extremely Severe	9	40.9%	13	59.1%		

Significant level \*\* $p < 0.01$

### Discussion

As one transitioned from childhood to adolescents there is increased in reports of poor mental well-being. Adolescence is a phase of drastic growth and development which pave way for opportunities while exposing to various types of stressors. Globally it has been reported that 10-20% of adolescents experience poor mental health, however in most of the cases it remains underdiagnosed without receiving the proper treatment it requires (Nebhinani & Jain, 2019). Adding to this issue is the kind of social exclusion faced by adolescents having mental health issue (WHO, 2024). Therefore, it is the high time to increase the awareness of what mental health is and its importance, and also to normalised so to make people understand of mental health better, thereby reducing the associated stigma and make more people come forward to seek help.

The present study reported that stress, depression, and anxiety is quite prevalent among the adolescent population. Stress isn't a disorder per se but it is a mental health concern that impacts all the age group and can have detrimental effect on our health. Approximately 33.4% of the participants reported experiencing mild to moderate stress and 15% reported extreme to severely extreme stress. In line with results from the present study is a study done in Kannur, Kerela where it was found that 16% of the adolescents having stress (Nair and Elizabeth, 2016). In another study by Watode et al. (2015) which was done in Delhi to assess stress among adolescents, around 87.6% of the participants were found to be positive for stress. Stress related to academic is one of the most common type stressors during adolescents (Yusoff et al., 2011). Stress is also considered an epidemic, having stress complicates our health both physical and mental in numerous ways and when it is not managed it can lead to burn-out. Therefore, inculcating healthy strategies and coping can ensure us to overcome stress and withstand any difficulty that may come our way, so intervention targeting stress among adolescents is much needed.

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According to the findings of the study 35% of participants had mild to moderate anxiety while 35.7% had severe to extremely severe anxiety. A study conducted in Mysuru, showed that 31% of adolescents belonging to non-orphan group had mild to moderate anxiety and 27% of adolescents from orphan group had mild to moderate anxiety, while 52% from non-orphan group and 72% from orphan group had extreme to very extreme anxiety (Duraishamy et al., 2022). In another study conducted in Tamil Nadu, the prevalence of anxiety was found to be 86.5%, for depression it was 73.5% and stress it was 24.7%. Anxiety is considered a common mental health concern during adolescents, it may be due to changes and development that occur during this phase (Pal et al., 2022). It can lead to severe impairment in health and functioning. Therefore, recognising the signs in the earliest and prompt intervention can be beneficial as leaving it untreated can have serious implication in later stage of life (Garcia & Niall, 2021).

Depression as an emotional state can range from mild to extreme, when this concern is left unchecked have a tendency to drift towards disorder level. In the study 39.4% of the participants were found having mild to moderate depression while 22% of the participants had severe to extremely severe depression. In a study done in Shivamogga, Karnataka, prevalence of adolescents having depression was found to be around 19% in urban and approximately 23% in rural (Mallya et al., 2024). Another study done in New Delhi, the result showed 25.92% prevalence of depression among adolescent participants (Sonam et al., 2025). Depression is considered to be one of the most prevalent mental health concerns globally (WHO, 2024) and it is also been observed that the onset-age of depression to be reducing, as it is happening among children and adolescents commonly (Grover et al., 2019). At present there are various intervention for depression among adolescents, with early identification, adolescents can be benefitted with timely intervention as it can reduce the illness burden in individual as well as societal level.

In the present study gender has significant relationship with stress and depression while no significant relationship was found between gender and anxiety. Female participants have more prevalence in stress and depression as compare to male participants. Studies have showed mixed results when it comes to relationship between gender and depression. In one study there was no significant difference found in the prevalence of depression between boys and girls whereas significant difference could be observed in the anxiety prevalence. (Mishra et al., 2018). In another study conducted in West-Bengal, the results demonstrated significant difference between boys and girls in stress, depression and anxiety prevalence (Gupta et al., 2023). When assessing and providing intervention for mental health, it would more beneficial if we consider the socio-demographic variables as these can have direct or in-direct role in mental health. Male-female differences can be understood in context of biological differences as well social constructs, therefore, addressing this is deemed favourable (Otten et al., 2021).

The present study draws special attention to the prevalence of mental health concerns viz. depression, anxiety and stress among adolescents. This emphasis the need for intervention that focuses on improvement of mental health and well-being that caters to adolescents at large. In the recent decades we have witnessed the rise in research and study in child and adolescent mental health, so the results from this study can also contribute to the current body of research that focuses the mental health of adolescent population to enhance mental health and well-being of adolescents. Hence, this can make adolescents' mental health visible and help in reducing the gap that still exist.

### CONCLUSION

The present study suggest that stress, anxiety and depression is prevalent among adolescents that are school going. Female have more prevalence in stress, and depression as compared to male. This highlights the importance of and need for early identification of mental issues by undergoing screening among adolescents, then later suitable intervention be planned or developed to meet mental health needs. This can make promotion and prevention of mental health and mental health issues possible without delaying it further.

As the study was done only in Ranchi with small sample size, in future increasing the sample size can ensure the generalizing the finding. Taking other socio-demographics information such as family structure, income and place of residence into consideration can help in understanding better and later to address in intervention plan.

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

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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