

Academic Stress of Secondary School Students in Relation to Their Mental Health

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Abstract

This study examines the correlation between academic stress and mental health among secondary school students. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from a representative sample to assess how examination pressure, heavy workloads, and fear of failure influence psychological well-being. Key dimensions analyzed include emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and academic disengagement in core subjects. Results reveal a significant inverse relationship: heightened academic stress corresponds with increased irritability, social withdrawal, and reduced interest in learning. External factors such as parental pressure and competitive classroom environments intensify distress, whereas supportive family structures and positive teacher-student relationships foster resilience. The findings underscore the need for educational policies that balance academic rigor with mental health safeguards, advocating for stress-management interventions and holistic pedagogical practices to ensure student development remains both intellectually and psychologically sustainable.

Keywords: Academic stress and Mental health

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in the overall development of students, including their intellectual, emotional, and social growth. The secondary school stage is particularly important as it coincides with adolescence, a period marked by significant physical and psychological changes. During this phase, students face increasing academic demands along with personal and social challenges, often leading to stress.

In today's competitive education system, students are expected to achieve high academic performance and secure future opportunities. Factors such as heavy workloads, frequent examinations, and high expectations from parents and teachers contribute to academic stress. While a moderate level of stress can motivate students, excessive stress can negatively affect concentration, motivation, and academic performance.

Academic stress refers to the psychological pressure and emotional strain experienced by students due to academic demands and expectations. It arises when students perceive that the academic requirements placed upon them exceed their abilities or available resources to cope effectively. Although a moderate level of stress can motivate students to perform better and remain focused on their goals, excessive academic stress may have harmful consequences. Prolonged exposure to stress can negatively affect students' concentration, memory, motivation, and academic performance. More importantly, it can disturb their emotional balance and reduce their capacity to cope with everyday challenges effectively.

Mental health is another essential component of a student's overall well-being. It includes emotional stability, psychological strength, social adjustment, and the ability to handle stress in a constructive manner. A mentally healthy student is better able to manage academic responsibilities, maintain positive relationships with peers and teachers, and participate actively in school activities. On the other hand, poor mental health may lead to problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-confidence, and lack of interest in studies. These difficulties can create obstacles in academic achievement as well as in the healthy development of personality.

During adolescence, mental health becomes particularly sensitive because students experience rapid developmental changes along with increasing academic responsibilities. At this stage, they try to establish their identity, build relationships with peers, and develop independence. However, the pressure to succeed academically often limits their opportunities for relaxation, recreation, and social interaction. Continuous exposure to academic pressure may therefore disturb their emotional well-being and create psychological problems. If such conditions are not addressed properly, they may result in long-term consequences affecting students' personal, social, and educational growth.

The relationship between academic stress and mental health has received considerable attention in educational research. Studies have indicated that excessive academic stress is associated with emotional disturbances such as anxiety, depression, frustration, and lack of motivation among students. High stress levels can also reduce students' satisfaction with life and negatively influence their confidence and adjustment abilities. Furthermore, stressful academic environments may lead students to adopt unhealthy coping strategies such as social withdrawal, poor study habits, and avoidance of responsibilities. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine how academic stress influences the mental health status of secondary school students.

The present study aims to examine the level of academic stress experienced by secondary school students and examine its relationship with their mental health. By identifying the extent to which academic stress influences psychological well-being, the study aims to contribute to the development of strategies that can help reduce stress and promote healthier learning environments. Such efforts are essential not only for improving academic performance but also for ensuring the emotional stability and overall personality development of students. Ultimately, fostering a balanced relationship between academic achievement and mental health is essential for preparing students to face future challenges confidently and successfully.

Significance of the Study

In the present highly competitive educational environment, secondary school students are subjected to increasing academic demands, including frequent examinations, extensive syllabi, high expectations from parents and teachers, and intense peer competition. These pressures often result in academic stress, which manifests as anxiety, fear, and apprehension related to academic performance. Consequently, students may face several challenges such as lack of concentration, reduced interest in studies, poor academic achievement, and minimal participation in classroom activities.

Furthermore, prolonged academic stress significantly affects the mental health of students. It can contribute to various psychological issues such as tension, frustration, emotional instability, burnout, depression, and panic attacks. In severe cases, it may even lead to nervous breakdowns. Since individual responses to stress differ, the intensity and effects of academic stress vary among students, highlighting the need for a deeper investigation into this issue.

Secondary school students are at a critical stage of development, during which their personality, behaviour, and future career paths are shaped. If academic stress is not properly identified and managed, it can adversely impact both their mental well-being and overall development. Therefore, this study is significant as it aims to examine the relationship between academic stress and mental health among secondary school students, thereby contributing to better understanding, early identification, and effective management of stress-related issues in the educational context.

Review of Related Literature

Academic stress

- **Ahmed S. and K. Duhan (2025)** studied academic stress among school-going adolescents and identified major sources of stress related to studies. The study found that heavy homework, frequent examinations, and competition among classmates were major contributors to academic stress. Many students reported feeling worried about completing assignments on time and achieving good marks. The researchers also observed that students who lacked proper study planning experienced higher stress levels. The study emphasized that improving study habits and providing guidance to students can help reduce academic stress and improve their learning performance.
- **Sara Madeleine Kristensen et al. (2023)** conducted a study on academic stress, self-efficacy, and psychological distress among adolescents. The study found that higher academic stress was strongly related to increased psychological distress among students. It also showed that students with stronger academic self-confidence were better able to manage stress and maintain mental well-being. The research highlighted that academic stress can affect students' emotional stability and learning behavior. The authors emphasized that schools should promote supportive learning environments and strengthen students' confidence to reduce the negative impact of academic stress on mental health.
- **Dr. Sharma (2022)** conducted a study on academic stress among secondary school students with reference to gender differences. The sample included 200 students (100 boys and 100 girls) from eight schools in Samba district. The Academic Stress Inventory (ASI) developed by R. Balaji Rao (2010) was used as the research tool. The findings indicated that girls (Mean = 76.10) experienced higher academic stress than boys (Mean = 63.80), showing a significant gender difference.

Mental health

- **R. Sureka, P. Sharma, and A. Verma (2023)** conducted a systematic review on mental health among students. The study found that many students suffer from emotional distress, anxiety, and depression. It highlighted that psychological interventions such as counseling, mindfulness, and emotional support significantly improve students' mental health and help them cope with challenges effectively.
- **Kaur and Singh (2021)** conducted a study on mental health among higher secondary students in relation to academic pressure. The sample consisted of 150 students selected from five schools. The Mental Health Scale by Sharma (1996) was administered. The results revealed that students experiencing high academic pressure (Mean = 61.30) had significantly lower mental health scores compared to those with low academic pressure (Mean = 78.55).
- **Kumar (2018)** conducted a study on mental health of adolescents in relation to academic achievement. The sample included 140 students from government schools. The Mental Health Scale by Bhatt and Geeda (1992) was used. The findings revealed that high achievers (Mean = 79.60) had better mental health than low achievers (Mean = 62.85).
- **Sharma and Kaur (2017)** conducted a study on mental health among school students in relation to peer relationships. The sample comprised 120 students from four schools. The Mental Health Inventory was used for assessment. The results showed that students with positive peer relationships (Mean = 81.45) had significantly higher mental health compared to those with poor peer relations (Mean = 67.20).
- **Patel and Shah (2015)** conducted a study on mental health among secondary school students in relation to emotional intelligence. The sample consisted of 130 students. The Emotional Intelligence Scale and Mental Health Inventory were used. The results revealed a positive relationship, where students with high emotional intelligence (Mean = 85.25) showed better mental health than those with low emotional intelligence (Mean = 68.90).

Academic stress relation to mental health

- **Shaikh Arif Mohammad Salim, et al. (2026)**, conducted a study on “Impact of Academic Pressure on Secondary School Students’ Mental Health” examined the relationship between academic pressure and mental health among secondary school students studying in Classes IX and X. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between academic pressure and mental health. Students experiencing high academic pressure showed higher anxiety levels and lower emotional stability compared to those experiencing low academic pressure.
- **Kashif et al. (2024)** examined the effects of academic stress on mental health among undergraduate students. The study involved 550 students from public (58%) and private (42%) universities. Data were collected using the Academic Stress Inventory (Ang & Huan, 2006) and the Mental Health Test (Cavioni et al., 2020). The results revealed that academic stress has a significant negative impact on mental health, with female students being more affected than males.
- **Dr. Sonali S. and Jahan M. (2022)** studied academic stress and mental health among 700 senior secondary school students in Samastipur district, Bihar. Using standardized tools and statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, and correlation (via SPSS and Excel), the study found that students are consistently exposed to academic stress, which adversely affects their mental health. The findings emphasize the importance of effective stress management for maintaining students’ mental well-being.
- **Kumari and Singh (2022)**, examined the differences in academic stress levels experienced by senior secondary school students based on gender, type of school, and stream of study. The study randomly selected 120 senior secondary school students from various schools in Patna district. The findings revealed that male and female students differed significantly in their academic stress levels, with female students experiencing more academic stress than male students. A significant difference was also found in academic stress levels concerning the type of school, with students from missionary schools experiencing the highest academic stress compared to those from government and private schools.
- **Sharma and Gupta (2022)** conducted a study on academic stress and mental health among secondary school students. The sample consisted of 200 students selected from various schools. The Academic Stress Scale and Mental Health Inventory were used as research tools. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between academic stress and mental health, indicating that higher levels of stress were associated with lower mental health scores.
- **Smith and Johnson (2022)** conducted a study on academic stress and mental health among high school students in the United States. The sample included 250 students from public schools. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Mental Health Inventory (MHI) were used as research tools. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.61$, $p < 0.01$) between academic stress and mental health, indicating that increased stress levels were associated with poorer psychological well-being.
- **Lee and Kim (2020)** conducted a study on academic stress and its impact on mental health among secondary school students in South Korea. The sample included 220 students. The Academic Stress Scale and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) were used. The findings indicated a strong negative relationship ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.01$) between academic stress and mental health.
- **Williams and Taylor (2017)** conducted a study on academic stress among adolescents in Canada in relation to gender. The sample consisted of 200 students. The Perceived Stress Scale was used. The results showed that female students (Mean = 72.95) experienced higher stress levels than male students (Mean = 63.70).

Statement of the Problem

“Academic stress of Secondary School Student in Relation to Their Mental Health”.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is:

1. To find out the relationship between academic stress and mental health of secondary school students.

Hypotheses of the study

The following hypothesis was formulated for the study:

H₁: 1. There will be a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health of secondary school students.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design:

The study adopts a descriptive survey design to examine academic stress and its relationship with mental health among secondary school students. The descriptive survey method is widely used in educational research for studying relationships between variables without manipulating them. Therefore, it was considered suitable for examining the relationship between academic stress and mental health among secondary school students.

2. Population and Sample:

The population of the study consists of secondary school students studying in Jaipur. From this population, a sample of 80 students was selected for the study. The selection was done using a simple random sampling technique, which ensured that each student had an equal chance of being included.

3. Research Tool:

A self-constructed, non-standardized questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was designed to measure both academic stress and mental health. It includes five main dimensions:

- Academic workload and pressure
- Examination anxiety
- Parental and teacher pressure
- Emotional well-being
- Social and behavioural impact

The responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neutral

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

4. Data Collection Procedure:

Data were collected during school hours with prior permission from the concerned authorities and informed consent from participants. Clear instructions were provided to ensure proper understanding of the questionnaire before completion.

5. Statistical Techniques Used:

The collected data were analysed using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (r) (correlation analysis) to examine the relationship between academic Stress and mental health. Testing To test the statistical significance of the obtained correlation coefficient, the t-test was applied.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

There will be a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health of secondary school students.

Table -1

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	t-value	df	p-value	Significant
Academic Stress	Mental Health	-0.562	-6.004	78	<0.001	Significant

Interpretation of Table – 1

- The calculated Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = -0.562$) shows a moderate negative correlation between the academic stress and mental health. This suggests that an increase in academic stress is associated with a corresponding decrease in the level of mental health among students.
- The significance of this relationship is confirmed by the computed t-value ($t = -6.004$) with 78 degrees of freedom ($df = 78$). The obtained p-value ($p < 0.001$) is lower than the prescribed level of significance (0.01), indicating that the correlation is statistically highly significant.

Conclusion

1. Based on the obtained results ($r = -0.562$, $t = -6.004$, $df = 78$, $p < 0.001$), it is concluded that a statistically significant relationship exists between academic stress and mental health among secondary school students. The negative correlation indicates that academic stress has a considerable influence on students' mental health status.
2. Higher academic stress is associated with lower levels of mental health.
3. Lower academic stress is linked to better mental health and emotional stability.
4. Effective management of academic stress is essential for maintaining good mental health among secondary school students.

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