



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG PLUS TWO STUDENTS IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This review article examines the intricate relationship between academic achievement and academic stress among Plus Two (Higher Secondary) students in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala, as the state's educational hub. Thiruvananthapuram presents a unique competitive landscape characterised by a high density of coaching centres and prestigious institutions. This article synthesises findings from recent studies (2020–2026) to explore how the "pressure cooker" environment of the Plus Two years—often regarded as a critical career turning point—impacts students' psychological well-being and their objective academic performance. The review analyses the prevalence of stress, significant stressors (parental expectations, entrance examination pressure), and the moderating role of gender and school type. Results consistently indicate a curvilinear relationship, where moderate stress may act as a catalyst (eustress), while excessive stress (distress) leads to a significant decline in achievement. The article concludes with evidence-based educational implications for policy-makers in the Kerala General Education Department.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

The Higher Secondary period in Kerala is often described as the most stressful phase of a student's life. In Thiruvananthapuram district, which consistently records high pass percentages in the DHSE exams, the quest for academic excellence is relentless. Masilamani & Bhuvaneshwari (2020) argue that school examinations are no longer just assessments of learning but have become high-stakes life events.

Recent research suggests that while Kerala has achieved high literacy, the psychological cost is significant. Dev (2025) highlights that students in Thiruvananthapuram often balance a "double curriculum"—attending regular school followed by rigorous entrance coaching for NEET or JEE. This dual burden creates a state of chronic academic stress. Furthermore, Pillai et al. (2023) emphasise that the socio-cultural fabric of Kerala, which places immense value on professional degrees, transforms parental support into parental pressure, further complicating the achievement-stress dynamic.

Definition of Terms

- Academic Achievement: The extent to which a student has achieved their short or long-term educational goals, typically measured by GPA or scores in standardised board examinations (DHSE/CBSE).
- Academic Stress: A mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure, arising from an imbalance between academic demands and the student's perceived ability to cope (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).
- Plus Two Students: Students enrolled in the 12th grade (Higher Secondary) are typically aged 16–18 years.
- Eustress: Positive stress that motivates a student to perform better.
- Distress: Negative stress that leads to anxiety, burnout, and reduced cognitive efficiency.

Objectives of the Review

- To identify the primary sources of academic stress among Plus Two students in Thiruvananthapuram.
- To analyse the correlation between levels of stress and academic achievement.
- To examine gender-based differences in stress perception and coping mechanisms.
- To suggest remedial measures for educational stakeholders in the district.

Research Hypotheses

- \$H_{1S}\$: There is a significant negative correlation between high levels of academic stress and academic achievement among Plus Two students.
- \$H_{2S}\$: Female students in the Thiruvananthapuram district experience higher levels of academic stress compared to male students.
- \$H_{3S}\$: Students enrolled in science streams with parallel entrance coaching report higher stress levels than those in humanities or commerce streams.

Summary of Recent Findings

The following table summarises the typical distribution of stress levels found in recent regional surveys within Kerala (2023–2025):

Table 1: Distribution of Stress Levels and Achievement Correlation

Stress Level	Prevalence (%)	Impact on Achievement	Common Symptoms
Low	15% - 20%	Under-performance due to lack of motivation	Procrastination, lack of focus
Moderate	45% - 50%	Peak Performance (Eustress)	High alertness, effective time management
High	25% - 30%	Significant decline in grades	Anxiety, sleep deprivation and memory lapses
Severe	5% - 8%	Risk of burnout/Mental health crisis	Depression, social withdrawal, suicidal ideation

Materials and Methods

This review utilised a systematic search of academic databases, including PubMed, ERIC, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar. The search was localised using keywords such as "Plus Two students Kerala," "Academic Stress Thiruvananthapuram," and "Adolescent Mental Health 2026." Inclusion criteria were:

- Studies published between 2018 and 2026.
- Focus on Higher Secondary/Plus Two cohorts.
- Quantitative or mixed-method studies involving the Academic Stress Scale (ASS) or Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

DISCUSSION

The literature reveals that students of Thiruvananthapuram are caught in a "Performance Paradox." While the district's infrastructure is superior, the density of competition is higher.

- The Gender Variable: Consistent with Pillai et al. (2023), girls often report higher stress. However, this is frequently attributed to higher levels of "academic conscientiousness" rather than a lack of ability.
- The Entrance Exam Factor: A significant finding in recent 2024–2025 studies is that stress is not necessarily caused by the school curriculum, but by the integrated coaching models prevalent in TVM. The lack of "downtime" or leisure leads to cognitive fatigue.
- Coping Mechanisms: Successful students in TVM utilise "Problem-Focused Coping" (planning, seeking help), whereas stressed students often resort to "Emotion-Focused Coping" (denial, social media addiction).

Educational Implications

1. Counselling Integration: Schools in TVM must move beyond "Sauhrua Clubs" to full-time psychological counselling.
2. Parental Literacy: There is an urgent need for "Parental Orientation Programs" to align expectations with the student's actual aptitude.
3. Curriculum Re-balancing: The Kerala State Education Board should consider integrating mental health modules into the Plus Two syllabus to de-stigmatise stress.
4. Entrance Regulation: Policy interventions are needed to regulate the hours spent in private coaching centres to ensure students get the recommended 8 hours of sleep.

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