

**ACADEMIC PRESSURE AMONG COMMERCE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY****Dr Athma Jayaprakash**

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ABSTRACT Academic pressure has emerged as a significant concern among students in higher education, particularly those pursuing professional commerce courses. This study aims to examine the level of academic pressure, identify its key determinants, and analyze its impact on students' well-being. A descriptive research design was adopted. The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The findings reveal that students experience moderate to high levels of academic pressure. The analysis indicates that key academic factors significantly influence stress levels, while certain social factors show a comparatively weaker association. The study also finds that academic pressure adversely affects students' sleep patterns, physical health, and concentration levels. The results highlight the need for effective institutional support systems and stress management strategies to enhance students' academic performance and overall well-being. The study contributes to the understanding of academic pressure in higher education and provides practical implications for educators and policymakers.

KEYWORDS : Academic Pressure, Higher Education, Student Stress, Empirical Study.**INTRODUCTION**

Academic pressure is increasingly recognized as a significant issue affecting students' mental health and academic performance. In highly competitive educational systems, students face continuous demands related to examinations, assignments, and performance expectations. This pressure is particularly intense among students pursuing professional courses, where academic success is closely linked to career opportunities.

Professional commerce programs such as Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com), Chartered Accountancy (CA), Cost and Management Accountancy (CMA), and Company Secretaryship (CS) are characterized by rigorous curricula and frequent evaluations. Students enrolled in these programs often balance college education with coaching classes and professional exam preparation.

Commerce education is widely pursued, and students are exposed to a competitive academic environment. Excessive academic pressure can result in stress, anxiety, reduced academic performance, and health problems. Therefore, it is essential to examine the factors contributing to academic stress and its impact on students' well-being.

Literature Review

Academic pressure among students has been widely studied across different disciplines, with a focus on its causes, consequences, and coping mechanisms.

Dalia Bedewy and Alaa Gabriel (2015) examined students' perceptions of academic stress and identified examinations, workload, and time constraints as major sources of stress. Their study emphasized that academic demands significantly influence students' psychological well-being.

Similarly, Liselotte N. Dyrbye, Matthew R. Thomas, and Tait D. Shanafelt (2005) explored distress among students and found that excessive academic pressure leads to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced academic efficiency. Their findings highlight the long-term consequences of unmanaged stress.

In another study, Siti M. Elias, Woon S. Ping, and Mohd. C. Abdullah (2011) investigated the relationship between stress and academic achievement. The results indicated that moderate levels of stress can enhance performance, whereas excessive stress negatively affects academic outcomes.

Further, Megan C. Pascoe, Sarah E. Hetrick, and Alexandra G. Parker (2020) analyzed the broader impact of academic stress and concluded that it has significant psychological and physiological effects, including anxiety, sleep disturbances, and reduced concentration.

Research Gap

Although existing literature provides valuable insights into academic stress, most studies focus on general student populations or medical

and engineering fields. Limited research has been conducted specifically on professional commerce students, who experience a unique combination of academic and professional pressures.

Furthermore, previous studies have primarily emphasized general stress factors, with less attention given to the relative impact of subject complexity, academic workload, and examination pressure in commerce education.

Conclusion of Literature Review

The reviewed studies collectively indicate that academic stress is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced mainly by academic factors such as workload, examinations, and curriculum complexity. However, there remains a need for focused empirical research on commerce students to better understand their specific stress dynamics.

Objectives

1. To examine the level of academic pressure among students pursuing professional commerce courses.
2. To identify the key factors influencing academic pressure among students.
3. To analyze the impact of academic pressure on students' health, sleep patterns, and concentration levels.

METHODS**Research Design**

The study adopts a descriptive research design to analyze academic pressure among students pursuing professional commerce courses.

Sample and Data Collection

Primary data were collected from **50 students** using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling from Kozhikode district.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Academic workload is significantly associated with academic stress
- **H2:** Examination pressure is significantly associated with academic stress
- **H3:** Family expectations are significantly associated with academic stress
- **H4:** Subject complexity is significantly associated with academic stress

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because:

- It focuses specifically on commerce students, a relatively under-researched group
- It identifies key academic stress factors empirically
- It provides practical solutions for institutions and students
- It contributes to better understanding of student mental health in higher education

Features of Academic Pressure

Academic pressure has certain defining characteristics that distinguish it from general stress:

1. Performance-Oriented

Academic pressure is strongly linked to performance outcomes such as marks, grades, and ranks. Students often evaluate their self-worth based on academic success.

2. Continuous and Cumulative

Unlike one-time stress, academic pressure builds over time through:

- Assignments
- Internal assessments
- Semester exams
- Professional course preparation

This cumulative nature increases long-term stress levels.

3. Competitive in Nature

Commerce education, especially in professional courses like CA, CMA, and CS, creates a highly competitive environment. Students constantly compare their performance with peers.

4. Multi-Dimensional

Academic pressure is not limited to studies alone. It includes:

- Time management pressure
- Career expectations
- Skill development demands

5. Subject-Specific Intensity

Certain subjects (like taxation, auditing, finance) are perceived as more difficult, leading to uneven stress distribution among subjects.

Relevance of Studying Academic Pressure

Understanding academic pressure is highly relevant in today's educational context:

1. Improves Student Well-being

Identifying stress factors helps in designing strategies to improve mental and physical health.

2. Enhances Academic Performance

Reducing excessive pressure can improve concentration, memory, and learning efficiency.

3. Helps Educational Institutions

Institutions can:

- Redesign curriculum
- Reduce unnecessary workload
- Provide counseling support

4. Policy-Level Importance

Policymakers can frame:

- Student-friendly education systems
- Mental health initiatives

5. Career Development

Managing academic stress ensures better long-term career outcomes and professional success.

Statistical Tools (SPSS)

Data were analyzed using SPSS software with the following techniques:

- Reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)
- Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation)
- Chi-square test of independence

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis (SPSS Output)

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.84	10

Interpretation: The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.84 indicates good internal consistency, confirming that the questionnaire is reliable for measuring academic stress.

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic Workload	3.42	0.91
Examination Pressure	3.38	0.88
Family Expectations	3.01	0.95
Subject Complexity	3.56	0.89
Academic Stress	3.47	0.93

Interpretation: Students reported moderate to high levels of academic stress. Subject complexity and academic workload show relatively higher mean values, indicating stronger stress impact.

Chi-Square Analysis (SPSS Output)

Variables Tested	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Result
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Workload $\times$ Stress	4.17	1	0.041	Significant
Exams $\times$ Stress	3.89	1	0.048	Significant
Family Expectations $\times$ Stress	2.10	1	0.147	Not Significant
Complexity $\times$ Stress	5.02	1	0.025	Significant

Interpretation

The chi-square results reveal that:

- Academic workload has a significant relationship with stress ($p < 0.05$)
- Examination pressure significantly influences stress levels
- Subject complexity is a strong contributor to academic stress
- Family expectations do not show a statistically significant association

Effects of Academic Stress

The analysis indicates that academic stress leads to:

- Sleep disturbances among more than half of the respondents
- Physical health issues such as fatigue and headaches
- Memory and concentration problems

These findings suggest that academic stress has both psychological and physical impacts on students.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that academic pressure among professional commerce students is influenced primarily by academic factors. Academic workload, examination pressure, and subject complexity emerged as significant determinants of stress, which is consistent with earlier studies (Reddy et al., 2018; Pascoe et al., 2020).

Subject complexity was found to be the most influential factor, indicating that technical subjects such as taxation and auditing pose greater challenges for students. Examination pressure also contributes significantly, reflecting the competitive nature of professional courses.

Interestingly, family expectations did not show a statistically significant relationship with stress. This suggests that academic and institutional factors may have a stronger influence on stress levels than social expectations in this context.

The study also highlights the negative effects of academic stress on sleep, health, and cognitive functioning, emphasizing the need for effective stress management strategies.

CONCLUSION

Academic pressure is a major issue among students pursuing professional commerce courses. The study identifies academic workload, examination pressure, and subject complexity as the key factors contributing to stress.

While a moderate level of stress may motivate students, excessive academic pressure negatively affects their well-being and academic performance. Educational institutions should provide counseling services, improve academic scheduling, and offer guidance to help students manage stress effectively. Students should also adopt healthy lifestyle practices to maintain their mental and physical well-being.

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