



A STUDY TO ASSESS THE ACADEMIC STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: High school students are referred to psychiatric units for symptoms of depression, anxiety and low performance. Every day 6.23 Indian students commit suicide.

Aim: To assess the academic stress and mental health of the high school students.

Methodology: 100 students were selected by multistage sampling from three schools in Patna, Bihar. A structured questionnaire administered with 5 items to collect demographic data, 40 items to assess academic stress developed by Kim (1970) and GHQ-12 to assess mental health.

Results: 51% students reported moderate academic stress and 23% high stress. Significant differences in academic stress seen between secondary and higher secondary classes, parents' qualification, family income and presence of siblings. 29% had high GHQ scores suggesting psychiatric caseness. Academic stress was positively correlated with psychiatric caseness.

Conclusion: High school students has high academic stress and requires early intervention to maintain mental health.

KEYWORDS

Academic Stress, High School Students, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION:

Stress is a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors (Bernstein, 2008). The definition of academic stress is the anxiety and stress that comes from schooling and education. There is often a lot of pressure involved with studying, homework, tests, labs and quizzes. There is the stress of doing all of the work, balancing the time and finding time for extra-curricular activities.

According to World Health Organisation, mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

Psychiatrists have expressed concern at the disturbance in mental health because of emergence of education as a serious source of stress for high school children. Many adolescents in India are referred to hospital psychiatric units for school-related distress – exhibiting symptoms of depression, high anxiety, frequent school refusal, phobia, physical complaints, irritability, weeping spells, and decreased interest in school work.

Anxiety disorder is seen in about 8% of children and adolescents worldwide. It has substantial negative effects on children's social, emotional and academic success. Depression is becoming the most common mental health problem in students these days – caused by poor social support, problem-solving, cognitive distortions and family conflict, as well as with alienation from parents and peers, helpless attribution style, gender, and perceived criticism from teachers. Mental health problems among children and adolescents are frequent in India as well. Because of academic stress and failure in examination, every day 6.23 Indian students commit suicide.

Methodology: An analytic study was adopted and the setting was three selected schools in Patna, Bihar. The objectives were to assess the academic stress and mental health, second to find any association between academic stress and selected demographic features and finally determining correlation between academic stress and psychiatric caseness. 100 students from class IX to XII were selected randomly through multistage sampling after taking ethical clearance from respective school authorities. The time chosen for data collection was mid of July at reopening of schools after summer vacations when there was no examination scheduled. Students with chronic illness and unwilling students were excluded. A structured questionnaire was administered to be completed in forty minutes after obtaining written informed consent. The tool included 5 items to collect demographic information, 40 items on a likert scale to assess academic stress which was originally developed by Kim (1970) and adopted to Indian conditions by Rajendran and Kaliappan (1990) and The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)-12, screening device for identifying minor psychiatric disorders.

Results: 51% of the students reported moderate stress, 23% high stress, 19% mild stress and 7% extreme stress with a Mean Academic Stress Score of 105. The difference between means of Academic Stress Scores across the demographic variables were calculated by Unpaired Students t Test at 95% level of confidence. There was no significant difference between academic stress scores across genders. However, there is a significant difference in academic stress between students of IX-X classes (Mean 132.08 an SD 12.80) and XI-XII classes (Mean 212.5 and SD 37.64).

Students who had at least one parent with graduation or post-graduation degree (Mean 126 and SD 33.80) had significant level of higher stress than those with undergraduate parents (Mean 85 and SD 12.74).

Table 1: Academic Stress against Monthly Income of Family

n = 100

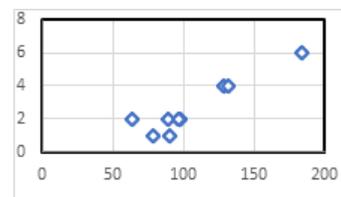
Income in Rs	Frequency	Mean	St Dev
<40,000 pm	79	107.62	36.31
>40,000 pm	21	97	1.03

Table 1 shows students from families with monthly income less than Rs 40,000 had higher academic stress than others with a significant t value of 2.61 at 0.05 level.

83% of the samples who had one or more siblings had significantly higher level of academic stress than the rest 17% who had no siblings, t value 3.47 at 0.05 level of significance.

29% of the samples showed GHQ score more than 4 suggestive of psychiatric caseness. The relationship between academic stress and psychiatric caseness were tested by Karl Pearson's Correlation Coefficient.

n = 100



GRAPH 1: Relation between Academic Score (X axis) and GHQ Score (Y axis)

Graph 1 shows there is a strong positive correlation between Academic Stress Score and GHQ Score with Pearson's Correlation Coefficient 0.9338. That suggests academic stress and psychiatric caseness are positively correlated.

DISCUSSION: The present study has brought out that high school students are suffering from moderate to high grade academic stress. The stress level was significantly higher in XI-XII than IX-X students.

Similar results were found by Dr. P.S. Prabhu (2013) in a study conducted on 250 XI standard students from Namakkal District of Tamil Nadu, India.³

This study shows no significant difference in academic stress across genders. However female students found to be more stressed in a similar study conducted by Christina Wilbert in 2012 among 144 students in the University of Twente, Netherlands. Whereas, Dr. P.S. Prabhu (2013) concluded in his study that the male students' academic stress is higher than female students.²

The present study shows students with highly qualified parents had significantly higher level of academic stress than others. This may be explained as expectation and pressure for performing well is higher on students with highly qualified parents which is causing more academic stress.

This study also reflects that children from low socio-economic background had higher level of academic stress. The possible explanation can be the affordability of educational expenditure due to scarce resources and the unmet need for recognition among peer group.

The present study focuses on another interesting finding that students who have no sibling had lower stress than others. May be they had more resources and undivided parental attention to lower the stress level. However this requires further exploration.

Almost one third of the samples were suggestive of psychiatric caseness on GHQ and this was positively correlated with academic stress. The findings were similar with the study conducted by Christina Wilbert (2012) in Netherlands³ and Sibnath Deb (2014) in Kolkata.¹

CONCLUSION: Academic stress is experienced at varied level derived from moving to a higher class, parents' educational qualification, family income and number of siblings. Anxiety, burnouts, depression are also apparent among high school students. Students are considered to be the future pillars who would construct the foundation of the new India. Being eustressed integrates impulse control and engagement in higher level cognitive tasks. A student-friendly environment and early interventions are mandated for sound mental health.

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