

A Study the Impact of Academic Stress on Student's Mental health in Higher Education

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Abstract:- Academic stress is the mental and emotional strain students experience due to pressures and demands from their educational environment, such as exams, heavy workloads, and the pressure to succeed. This research paper investigates how academic pressures-arising from high-stakes examinations, competitive environments, and excessive curricular demands-adversely impact the mental health of adolescents and young adult Students. Existing literature highlights a strong correlation between academic stress and heightened rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidality among youth. Additionally, familial and social stressors often compound these challenges, leading to diminished academic performance and learning outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, with studies noting increased emotional distress due to disrupted academic routines and remote learning. The study aims to explore the multifaceted effects of academic stress on youth mental health through an educational psychology perspective, identifying risk factors such as negative emotions, sleep disturbances, and social isolation that may precipitate severe outcomes like suicidal ideation. Mixed Research method used includes a quantitative survey of 200 students age group 18-40. In various classes like Graduation, postgraduate, Ph.D. and other professional courses. For the data collection used Self - made tool and Interview. Academic Stress and Mental health. Data interpreted and discussed with the help of percentage method. result reveal students faced many type of mental and physical problems due to academic stress. Academic stress and mental health both are correlated. Suggestions To improve mental health during the academic stress, focus on a balanced lifestyle by getting regular exercise, eating healthy meals, prioritizing sleep, and staying hydrated. Connect with others, learn new skills, and engage in relaxing or creative activities to reduce stress. Practice mindfulness and gratitude, set realistic goals, and seek support from loved ones or professionals when needed.

Key words- Youth mental health, Academic stress, Anxiety, Depression, Self-efficacy, Coping mechanisms, Educational Interventions.

1. Introduction: - Academic stress is the pressure that students face due to their academic obligations, homework, curriculum tests, and performance requirements. the cause anxiety, fatigue, and sleep issues It comes from inside the students, like fear of failing, and out, like high expectations from teachers, parents, and yourself A student's mental and physical well-being, motivation, and academic performance can be negatively impacted by this type of stress, with younger students and females reporting higher levels of stress.

What Causes Academic Stress?- Academic stress is caused by a combination of factors related to schoolwork, syllabus, curriculum and the overall academic environment.

- **Academic over Load:** Excessive assignments, homework, projects, and term works can be overwhelming.
- **Performance Pressure:** The constant pressure by the teachers and parents to achieve high grades, perform well on tests, and meet academic goals contributes significantly to stress.
- **Fear of Failure:** One major source of stress is anxiety related to the possibility of failing in school or failing to meet expectation.
- **Classroom Environment:** Stress can be increased by things like poor learning skills, a lack of facilities, and unclear expectations from teachers.
- **Social and Personal Pressures:** Peer, Parents and self pressure, the need to balance extracurricular activities, adapting to new educational environments, and managing social relationships can add to the burden.
- **Personal Factors:** stress can be increased by internal stressors like imposter syndrome (feeling inadequate) and a lack of self-care.

Who Is Affected by Academic stress?- This one is really very critical problem for the all age group students, but mostly affected with this higher education's students.

- **All Age Groups-** Academic stress can affect students from elementary school through university.
- **Gender Differences-** Female students often report higher levels of academic stress and are more likely to experience stress-related symptoms like anxiety and depression.
- **Vulnerable Groups-** Other groups, such as non-binary students, may experience higher levels of stress.

Signs and Symptoms of Academic stress-

- **Psychological:** Anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, restlessness, and difficulty concentrating.
- **Physical:** Fatigue, sleep difficulties, headaches, muscle tension, and changes in appetite.
- **Behavioural:** Social withdrawal, decreased motivation, and a disengagement from academic tasks.

Impact of Academic Stress:-

- **Mental Health:** Academic stress is linked to depression, anxiety, and an overall decline in mental well-being.
- **Academic Performance:** High stress levels can lead to poorer examination results and reduced motivation.
- **Physical Health:** Chronic fatigue and other physiological responses can become prevalent with excessive academic pressure.

Managing Academic Stress:-

- **Self-Care:** Prioritizing sleep, practicing self-care, and ensuring sufficient downtime can help manage stress.
- **Mindset:** Changing one's mindset and recognizing that mild pressure can be healthy, but excessive pressure is detrimental, is crucial.
- **Support Systems:** Seeking support from friends, family, teachers, or mental health professionals can provide essential resources.
- **Intervention Programs:** School-based programs can be effective in teaching coping strategies to students.

Mental health:-Your emotional, psychological, and social well-being affects how you think, feel, and act. It is more than just the absence of mental health; It allows you to handle life's pressures, work well, and make a contribution to your community. Depression or anxiety are examples of mental health problems. Academic stress increases anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and burnout. It can also cause physical symptoms like headaches and sleep issues, poor academic performance, and behavioural problems like drug use. These

symptoms often are caused by pressure to succeed and fear of failure, which leads to a cycle of poor well-being and performance **WHO “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.**

Mentally healthy people have a variety of characteristics, including:-

- **Self-esteem:** They are resilient to pessimistic ideas and possess a strong sense of self-worth.
- **Emotional regulation:** They can manage their emotions and don't become overwhelmed by them.
- **Social relationships:** Their interactions with others are fulfilling and long-lasting. They appreciate people and are at ease in social settings.
- **Sense of purpose:** They have clear goals and a sense of direction in life.
- **Optimism:** They maintain a positive outlook, even in the face of adversity.
- **Sense of responsibility:** They take accountability for their actions and understand their consequences.
- **Resilience:** They can adjust to life's challenges and cope with disappointment.
- **Autonomy:** They can make independent decisions and trust their own judgment.
- **Healthy habits:** They stick to routines that are good for them, such as eating and sleeping well. They may also exercise regularly.

Mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness. It's about how you feel about yourself and how you adjust to life events.

Factors affecting mental health- Categorized as biological (genetics, brain chemistry, physical health, hormones), psychological (depression, chronic stress, personality traits), and social/environmental (socioeconomic status, life experiences like abuse or neglect, relationships and peers, living conditions, discrimination, and even global threats). These factors can interact, with some acting as risk factors and others as protective factors, ultimately enhancing or undermining an individual's mental and physical well-being.

Biological Factors-

- **Genetics:** A family history of mental illness can increase the risk of developing a mental health condition.
- **Brain Chemistry:** Imbalances in brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) can affect nerve signals and lead to conditions like depression and anxiety.

- **Physical Health:** Chronic medical conditions, poor diet, lack of sleep, and even environmental factors before birth can negatively impact mental health.

Psychological Factors-

Trauma and Abuse: Experiences of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, as well as neglect, can cause deep-seated trauma and contribute to mental health problems.

- **Stress and Life Events:** Chronic stress and significant life changes, such as divorce, financial problems, or the death of a loved one, can increase vulnerability.
- **Personality:** Certain personality traits can influence one's susceptibility to mental health conditions.

Social and Environmental Factors-

- **Socioeconomic Conditions:** Poverty, unemployment, poor working conditions, and financial instability are major social determinants that can lead to psychological stress.
- **Life Experiences:** Social isolation, exposure to violence or bullying, and harsh parenting can undermine mental health.
- **Discrimination:** Experiencing discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors can lead to feelings of alienation, financial stress, and higher rates of mental illness.
- **Relationships:** Positive social interactions and strong connections with friends and family can serve as crucial protective factors.
- **Global Threats:** Broader societal issues such as economic downturns, humanitarian emergencies, and climate change can heighten risk for whole populations.

Interplay of Factors- It is important to remember that these elements rarely work together! Increased probability of developing a mental health condition can be caused by a combination of biological predispositions, stressful life events, and social disadvantages.

2. Need and significance of the study- Positive mental health includes better ability to handle stress, better mood and self-esteem, stronger relationships, and greater productivity at work and school! Additionally, it has a positive effect on physical health by enhancing coping skills during difficult times, providing better sleep, and having a stronger immune system In the end,

having a good mental health allows people to reach their full potential, make a positive contribution to their communities, and live a better life. Academic stress is negatively affected to the all stage students but we see this situation very badly effected after childhood age, because of after this stage many type of responsibilities given by the society and family. With all responsibilities competitive exam preparation, and higher education very difficult to us, so they are feel academic stress by the parents, teachers, society and ourself. In this study we studied the effect of academic stress on mental health in students, and after that give suggestions to reduce physical and mental (fever, digestive system, depression, anxiety, headache, migraine, fear and other psychological issues) problems and challenges due to academic pressure.

3. Objectives of the study- Research Objectives should be clear and focused, and they should guide the process from data collection to analysis and findings| SMART objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound| They focus, stop unnecessary data collection, and help develop the research methodology by clarifying the desired results and answering specific research questions. There are some research studies objectives-

1. The study aims to explore the multifaceted effects of academic stress on youth mental health.
2. To investigate the causes & Sources of Academic stress.
3. To examine the type of problems (mental & physical) faced by students due to Academic stress.
4. To examine the relationship between Academic stress and mental health.

4. Delimitation of the study- When it comes to research, "delimitation" is a term that refers to the conscious decisions that a researcher makes in order to narrow the study's scope. These decisions are made by establishing clear boundaries on what will be included and excluded in the study. In this study researcher were selected only college and competitive exams students, Age group of sample 18-40, who were belong Uttar Pradesh, India. Sample were collected with the help of self- made tool (Google form- Academic stress and Mental health) interview. Only 200 student sample were collected by online survey and interviews.

5. Methodology of the study- The researcher, was used Survey research method in this study, because Survey research method related to present time problems. Population of the study were selected in multiple colleges and coaching student who were belong different cities in Uttar Pradesh, India. They were studied in Graduate, post graduate, Ph.D. & other competition classes. Data was collected online survey and interviews with the use of self - made tool, it is focusing on stress and mental health problems due to academic stress (anxiety, depression, fear

and sleeping cycle). In this tool 20 questions are given related academic stress impact on mental health, All questions are multiple choice answer type and one question is detailed and open answer type because of respondent given own view freely without any obligation. Data was interpreted and discussed with the help of percentage and explain analysis method.

6. Analysis and interpretation of the data- Researcher found the data by various class students age group 18-40 year. male and female both are students respond the questions regarding academic stress. Most of the students show Academic stress and faced many physical and mental problems (fever, blood pressor, depression anxiety, fear, anger frustration etc). some students faced low self-esteem, over thinking, panic attack, migraine headache, and sleeping problems.

- **51.5%** students faced many types of academic problem during the study, exams, assignments, and extra curriculum activities.
- **Academic stress source-** 57.3% self, 10.1%, relative, 10.1% parents and 22.5% by the teachers.
- During the academic stress sleeping cycle was very disturb, 50% students accepted they were sleep only 4-6 hours a full night.
- In interview some students told to me they were fell self confidence and self esteem low, forgetting problems, depression, panic attack, anger, anxiety, insomnia and feel many physical problems.

7- Conclusion- The present research study, was found that 51.5% of the students struggling with Academic stress 10.1% students faced very high academic stress and 17.% students faced high academic stress. Students accepted and tells about academic stress source and support system, student's family, relative, teachers, peer, counsellor and themselves. They were felt and struggling with many problems, like less sleep, anxiety, depression, severe headache, fever, headache, stomach pain etc. during academic stress, their social and family relationships are also affected, they prefer to stay in isolation and their relationships also get spoiled. Academic stress and mental health significantly correlated, those students who were not struggling with academic stress have good mental health and who were students struggling with academic stress have poor mental health.

8. Suggestions:- Focus on learning, Use academic resources, Reframe negative thoughts. Make a schedule for the work, Set realistic goals for your good health and Practice self-compassion. Other some suggestions to help reduce the impact of academic stress on mental health.

1. Self - Care:- Minimum 7-9 hours of sleep each and every night to help your brain function, body temperature at its best.
2. Exercise regularly:- Engage in physical activity that you enjoy, such as walking, running, or yoga.
3. Healthy eating:- Fuel your body with nutritious foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
4. Stress-Reducing Techniques:- Meditation to help reduce stress and improve focus, Deep breathing exercises Practice and
5. Seeking Support:- Consider seeking help, talk to a trusted friend or family member and Join a support group.

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