Original Research Article

Academic Stress and Mental Health among Adolescents: A Descriptive Survey

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Abstract

Background: Academic stress is a significant psychological burden among adolescents and has been linked to adverse mental health outcomes. Increasing academic competition, parental expectations, and examination pressure contribute to stress levels among school-going students. ***Objective:*** To assess the level of academic stress and its association with mental health status among adolescents. ***Methods:*** A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 120 adolescents studying in selected secondary schools. Participants were selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured Academic Stress Scale and a standardized Mental Health Assessment Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and chi-square test) were used for analysis. ***Results:*** The findings revealed that 52% of adolescents experienced moderate academic stress, while 28% reported high stress levels. Regarding mental health status, 46% demonstrated mild psychological distress, and 22% showed moderate distress. A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) was found between academic stress and poor mental health outcomes. ***Conclusion:*** Academic stress significantly influences adolescent mental health. Early identification and implementation of stress management interventions in schools are recommended to promote psychological well-being.
Keywords: Academic stress, Adolescents, Mental health, Psychological distress, School students.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional phase characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and social development. Academic achievement plays a crucial role during this period, often becoming a primary source of stress. Academic stress refers to the psychological distress arising from educational demands that exceed an individual's adaptive capacity.

Globally, increasing competition, high parental expectations, fear of failure, peer pressure, and examination-related anxiety have intensified stress levels among adolescents. Studies suggest that prolonged exposure to academic stress can lead to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and reduced academic performance.[1]

The World Health Organization reports that mental health conditions account for a substantial proportion of the global burden of disease among adolescents. [2]In India, examination stress and academic pressure are frequently reported contributors to emotional disturbances and suicidal tendencies among school students.[3]

Despite growing concern, there remains a need for localized data to understand the magnitude of academic stress and its association with mental health among adolescents. Hence, this study was undertaken.[4]

Objectives
1. To assess the level of academic stress among adolescents.
2. To evaluate the mental health status of adolescents.
3. To determine the association between academic stress and mental health.
4. To find the association between academic stress and selected demographic variables.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Study Design: A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted.

Study Setting: The study was conducted in selected secondary schools.
Study Population: Adolescents aged 13–17 years studying in classes VIII–XII.
Sample Size: A total of 120 adolescents were selected.
Sampling Technique: Simple random sampling technique was used.

Inclusion Criteria
- Students present during data collection
- Students willing to participate

Exclusion Criteria
- Students with diagnosed psychiatric illness

Tools for Data Collection
1. **Section A:** Demographic data (age, gender, class, parental education, family income).
2. **Section B:** Academic Stress Scale (Likert 5-point scale).
3. **Section C:** Mental Health Assessment Questionnaire (screening for anxiety, depression, emotional well-being).

Validity and Reliability
Content validity was established by experts in psychiatry and community health nursing. Reliability of the Academic Stress Scale was established using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Ethical Considerations
Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee. Permission was obtained from school authorities. Written informed consent from parents and assent from students were secured.

Data Analysis
Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS
Demographic Characteristics
- Majority (48%) were aged 15–16 years.
- 55% were females.
- 60% belonged to nuclear families.

Level of Academic Stress

Level of Stress	Frequency	Percentage
Mild	24	20%
Moderate	62	52%
Severe	34	28%

Mental Health Status

Mental Health Status	Frequency	Percentage
Normal	38	32%
Mild Distress	55	46%
Moderate Distress	27	22%

Correlation Between Academic Stress and Mental Health
Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that higher academic stress was associated with poorer mental health.

Association with Demographic Variables
Significant association was found between academic stress and class of study ($p < 0.05$). No significant association was found with gender.

DISCUSSION
The present study revealed that more than half of adolescents experienced moderate academic stress. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting high stress levels among secondary school students due to examination pressure and academic competition.[6]

The study also identified a significant association between academic stress and mental health status. Adolescents with higher stress levels were more likely to experience psychological distress. These findings align with earlier research demonstrating that academic pressure is a major risk factor for anxiety and depressive symptoms.[7,8]

The transition period during adolescence, combined with academic demands, may exacerbate emotional vulnerability. Schools must integrate mental health promotion programs and stress management strategies into the curriculum.

Limitations
- Cross-sectional design limits causal inference.
- Self-reported data may introduce response bias.
- Limited to selected schools; generalizability is restricted.

Recommendations
- Implementation of school-based counseling services.
- Stress management workshops for students.
- Parental awareness programs.
- Further longitudinal research.

CONCLUSION

Academic stress is prevalent among adolescents and significantly impacts their mental health. Early identification and preventive interventions are essential to promote psychological well-being and academic success.

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