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# AN OVERVIEW OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENCE

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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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**Abstract**

Academic stress is considered the potential contributor to adolescent mental health problems which affects students all across the globe and has gained widespread recognition as a major issue in higher education. Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand the sources and effects of academic stress. It has been stated that during the high stress periods students who are not adequately equipped with the coping mechanisms may be at increased risk for depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies. In contemporary times, students are living in a highly competitive world where academic stress coupled with increased peer competition and high expectations set by the parents and society exerts tremendous stress and pressure on students resulting in symptoms of chronic stress and psychosomatic symptoms in adolescents. With the growing concern about the increasing levels of school stress among adolescents this research paper aims to review the literature to 1) provide a theoretical overview of academic stress and its sources. 2) to assess the impact of academic stress on adolescents and 3) to briefly examine few strategies of managing stress. Methods – The present paper is an attempt to review the studies related to academic stress and its impact on the mental health of adolescents. The review process included research journals, articles, editorial, report & books. Findings – The findings revealed that academic stress is the major cause of stress among adolescents and the pressure to achieve success and perform well in academics cause immense stress among adolescence leading to multiple mental health problems. Conclusion – It has been strongly emphasised that harmonious and supportive school and home environment is considered essential for the mental well -being of the students.

**Keywords:** *Academic stress, mental health, adolescents, school, sources of stress, effects of stress, stress management*

## Introduction

Every student faces numerous challenges as they progress through their educational path/journey and different individuals perceives and deals with stress differently. (Iqra, 2024). Stress is an unavoidable phenomenon in all aspects of human life. In today's competitive world it is quite likely that everyone will experience stress at some point in their life. Although, the intensity/degree and the coping mechanisms in dealing with it differs from individual to individual. (Moya, Diez & Paniagua, 2023). The current global higher education environment is characterized by a growing complexity, posing significant challenges for students who frequently encounter and experience increased level of academic pressure and psychological distress, which can exert a detrimental influence on academic results, achievements and the overall growth of students. (Islam & Rabbi, 2024).

The World Health Organization, defined the phase of adolescence 'as the period between 10 to 19 years frequently causes rise of apparent stress as teenagers learn to deal with increasing demands and burdens.' (Lin & Yusoff, 2013). This is a phase where individuals navigate the complexities of academic demands and the expectations associated with scholarly achievements. (Singh & Gupta, 2023). Adolescence experiences various life stressors ranging from ordinary/mild to severe (Nikhita, Tessy & Blessy, 2015) and academic stress has emerged as one of the most important/central sources of stress, the long-term exposure to which affects their physical and mental well -. being. (Kumari & Singh, 2022).

In India academic stress has been identified as a key factor in increasing many psychological problems and placing many students at risk for suicide. (Nikhitha et al., 2014 as cited in K & Sokhi, 2019). Through several studies it has been found that academic stress pervades the life of students and tends to impact adversely their mental and physical health and their ability to perform schoolwork effectively. (Mahapatra, 2024). Therefore, excessive stress during this stage could result in increased prevalence of psychological problems which could have negative impact on the outcome of their achievements (Waghacharve, et al., 2013 as

cited in K & Sokhi, 2019). School is an environment where adolescents regularly encounter potential stressors (Moya, Diez & Paniagua, 2023), therefore, in this regard, supportive and harmonious school and home environment is considered integral for the overall development of the students as they are considered the future pillars of our country essential for building an educated society. (Karim, 2024).

## Objectives

The aim of the present study was

1. To provide a brief outline of the concept of academic stress and its sources.
2. To assess and examine the impact of academic stress on the mental health of adolescents.
3. To briefly assess few strategies of managing stress.

## Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, academic databases including Google Scholar, Research Scholar, Academia Journal, Taylor and Francis and JStor were included for the search using the keywords: Academic Stress, sources of stress, impact of academic stress on adolescence, coping strategies. Searches were limited to literature from 2013 to 2025 both in the Indian and International context. The studies in English language only were included for the review. The inclusion criteria comprised articles focussing on academic stress, adolescence, impact of academic stress on adolescence and few strategies of managing stress excluding gender, socio economic status and relationship issue. The potential articles identified were 100. In this study around 42 articles have been retrieved and reviewed.

## Academic Stress – A Brief Outline

Stress is the topic of many conversations in our day-to-day life, though people talk about it in general terms but it is very difficult to define the term stress in scientific terms. (Shahmohammadi, 2011). The etymological meaning of stress has been derived from the Latin word, Stringere, meaning to 'draw tight' and it was used to describe hardship and affliction in the seventeenth century (Menaga & Chandrasekaran, 2014). Stress has been studied by researchers since the mid- 20$^{th}$ century and it remains the topic of interest across various disciplines. (Iqra, 2024). The term stress in relation to the human condition first appeared in scientific literature in the 1930s, but it did not enter the general vocabulary until the 1970s. (Lyon, 2012 as cited in Barot & Rai, 2020). Stress can be of two forms – Eustress is a positive stress which is set off by a positive event in one's life and Distress is a negative stress which is caused by an unpleasant event in one's life. (Holahan & Moos, 2001 as cited in Shahmohammadi, 2011). Stress and anxiety are the emotional conditions that are considered basic components of every individual's life and students in the course of their educational journey come across several academic tasks that can be a major stressor during their learning process. (Iqra, 2024). It is assumed that school should be an enjoyable educational experience for all students and teachers but on the contrary the experiences in schools might be stressful for many children and adolescents as it is a source of social and academic pressure. (Fathiyah, 2021).

Academic stress is defined as the emotional and psychological responses to perceived academic pressure and holds a profound influence on the cognitive and emotional well -being of adolescents contributing to major mental health hazards. (Singh & Gupta, 2023). Bisht (1989) defined academic stress as 'demand related to academics that tax or exceed the available resources (internal or external) as cognitively appeared by the student involved'. It comprises of the four components- 'Academic Frustration – is a state caused by harm of some academic goals. Academic Conflict – is the result of two or more factors in compatible response tendencies to academic goals. Academic Pressure – When the student is under heavy demands of time and energy to meet academic goals. Academic Anxiety – Apprehension of harm to some academic goals.' (Kaur & Kaur, 2015).

Academic stress among students have long been researched on and it has been found that a lot of pressure comes along with pursuing a degree and one's education and researchers have identified various stressors which includes studying, assignments, tests, competition with other students and balancing the time in doing all the tasks. (Prabu, 2015). Academic stress is an important stressor in a student's life and it can be characterized as anxiety and pressure that comes from schooling and education. (Mishra, Singh, Maravi & Varma, 2023). There is an alarming increase in the prevalence of academic stress with a substantial proportion of high school and college students reporting significant stress related to academic pressures. (American College Health Association, 2021 as cited in Iqra, 2024).

## Sources of Stress

Multiple causes/origins of academic stress among students are highlighted by researchers. (Iqra, 2024). The sources or causes of academic stress are known as stressors which is defined 'as every circumstance or events that threatens to disrupt people's daily functioning and causes them to make adjustments. (Bernstein et al. 2008 as cited in Kumari & Singh, 2022). It is stated that during the school years, academic stressors may show in any aspect of the child's environment: home, school, neighbourhood, or friendship. (Gupta, 2020) and since these groups form the major socializing influences on adolescents, the expectations or demands they make may convert into stressors. (Nandagaon & Raddi, 2020).

Various studies have emphasised and highlighted that the leading and primary cause of stress among students is caused by academic related stress, like academic workload and academic pressure, exam and test preparation, fear of poor performance and academic failure, highly competitive educational environment, peer pressure and efforts to attain all the knowledge quickly.

(Gilbert et.al, 2009 & Mishra, 2017 as cited in Bindu & Happy, 2024). Supporting this statement, it is further stated that academic demands are reinforced by pressure from parents, schools and peers. class conditions, inadequate resources available to achieve academic achievement. (Kim et, al, 2016, Deb et. al, 2014 as cited in Fathiyah, 2021).

It is further stated that in the Indian context**,** parental pressure for better grade is considered to be the most common source of academic stress among secondary school students. (Gilbert et.al, 2009 & Mishra, 2017as cited in Bindu & Happy, 2024) so much so that due to these high academic expectations from parents and teachers, students experience elevated levels of stress and anxiety. (Singh & Gupta, 2023). As per the study conducted by Fathiyah (2021), the findings revealed that 98% students experienced academic stress and the primary source of the stress was cited as difficulty in understanding the subject matter (26.7%). Strong emphasis on achieving higher grades, balancing multiple academic responsibilities and lack of proper time management, fear of failure in examination act as a major stressor and can pose significant challenges in a students' life. (Islam & Rabbi, 2024 & Sailo & Varghese, 2024).

The sources of academic stress can originate from negative attitudes towards learning, such as loss of interest and difficulties in learning and also from the academic expectations from the significant others like parents and teachers. (Wunsch, Kasten, and Fuchs, 2017 as cited in Gobena, 2024) The cultural norms and notions about success and failure, academic settings with its inherent difficulties also tend to exert and impose substantial pressure and stress on students. (Islam & Rabbi, 2024)

In India, adolescents are put under tremendous pressure to perform well in school examinations, as a result of which students experience severe academic stress which is manifested in a variety of psychological and behavioural problems. (K & Sokhi, 2019). The findings of stress studies emphasize the importance of addressing stress as a critical factor in promoting mental health. (Olivera, et al., 2023).

## The Impact of Academic Stress on Adolescence – A Comprehensive Overview.

Academic stress is a growing problem among all student communities and at all stages but it is at its peak during secondary school period due to unrealistic parental and societal expectations and rigid school plan. (Bindu &Happy, 2024). It has emerged as a significant concern for secondary and higher secondary school students, particularly in Asia where it is closely linked to various mental health issues like anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and suicide. (Mahapatra & Sharma, 2020; Nandagaon & Raddi, 2020 as cited in Deb & Deb, 2025) Adolescence marks the crucial transition from childhood to adulthood characterized by significant physical, cognitive and psycho social changes This is a phase where individuals navigate the complexities of academic demands and the expectations associated with scholarly achievements. (Singh & Gupta, 2023) and experience excessive stress more than any other age groups, which can have detrimental impact upon physical and mental health later in life. (Lin & Yusoff, 2013). Adolescence experiences various life stressors ranging from mild to severe (Nikhita, Tessy & Blessy, 2015) and academic stress has emerged as one of the central sources of stress, the long-term exposure to which affects their physical and mental well -. being. (Kumari & Singh, 2022). Adolescence are the precious human resources of the country, these excessive competition, constant comparisons will hamper the development of the adolescents affecting their overall mental health and well-being. (Sonali, 2018).

Academic stress refers to the unpleasant psychological situations that occur due to factors such as educational expectations from parents, teachers, family members, and the present educational and examination system etc. (Sukumar & Kanagarathinam, 2017). It is reported that in India, academic stress among adolescents is alarmingly high owing to its social, cultural and economic context, wherein academic achievements is often considered a marker of self-worth so much so that the societal norms and parental expectations exerts tremendous pressure on students compelling them to engage in extended study hours to achieve high grades or percentages in examination, (Deb & Deb, 2025) impacting adversely their mental and physical health and their ability to perform schoolwork effectively. (Mahapatra, 2024). In current times, many students are experiencing stress and pressure as they have to deal with numerous factors such as academic, personal and societal leading to poor academic achievement and a higher dropout rate among students. (Lalthanpuii, S & Lalhriatpuii, 2024).

Due to the high prevalence of stress in recent years, numerous studies have demonstrated that chronic stress when sustained for extended periods can trigger various mental health issues. (Olivera et, al. 2023). Nandagaon & Raddi (2020) have stated that for ages there was a popular notion and belief that children don't suffer from depression, but many recent studies have revealed the prevalence of mental health issues, suicidal ideation and suicide among school students. In India mental health issues among school children are widespread, often aggravated by the immense pressure to excel academically as shaped by societal and parental expectations. (Pinquart, 2017 as cited in Deb & Deb, 2025). WHO (2024) states that globally one in seven 10 -19-year-olds experiences a mental health condition accounting for 15% of the global burden of disease in this age group. Depresssion, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents yet these remain largely unrecognized and untreated. Severe academic stress is linked to poor mental health, regardless of factors such as gender, role, race, or academic grade (Barbayannis et al., 2022 as cited in Iqra, 2024).

Bindu & Happy (2024) have stated in its study that it has been reported that an estimated 10-30% of the students experience some extent of academic stress during their educational career. Sharma, G & Pandey, D. (2017), Singh (2021) & Moya. Et.al (2023) have highlighted that students' academic achievement and school performance is the main source of stress among adolescence which is affected by various factors such as classroom environment and teachers support.

In relation to this the exposure to other types of stress such as family stress, vocational stress, social stress and emotional stress aggravates the situation for students thus having an impact on their overall development and academic performance. (Mishra, Singh, Maravi & Varma, 2023).

It is reported that due to the academic stressors' students experience depression, nervous breakdowns, panic attacks and burnouts. (Prabu, 2015). The consequences of this increased academic stress also potentially affect the cognitive functions, memory retention and decision- making processes which can negatively affect the performance of the students. (Sultan & Bhatt, 2019 and Singh & Gupta, 2023). In the 'Social Survey of the German Student Union', it was estimated that majority of students with stress reported high scores of poor self-esteems and also scored high on depression scales, suggesting higher levels of stress to be associated with poor academic performance (Baste and Gadkari, 2014 as cited in Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015)

A study conducted by Sibnath et al and Feld et al have shown the prevalence of academic stress from 63.5% and 84.5% among adolescence. (Pillai, Jose, Velukutty & Riyaz, 2023). And adding to all of this, the stigma attached to academic failure increases the stress with many students fearing judgement from their families and communities, leading to multiple psychological issues. (Deb & Deb, 2025). It has been reported that the current educational system is an important source of stress for school going children and it leads to high incidence suicide. (Verma & Singh, 1998 as cited in Basu & Chakrabarty, 2019). Various research has highlighted the symptoms such as depression, anxiety, school avoidance, physical complaints as common manifestations of academic stress which has worrying consequences contributing to a trend in students' suicides. (Mahapatra & Sharma, 2020 & Thippaiah et al., 2019). Mainly stressed students experience depression, anxiety, restlessness, distractibility, and tension which also affects their cognitive functions like feelings of hopelessness, guilt and frustration, leading to deviant behaviours like self-harm, aggression and substance abuse. (Garett et al, 2017 & Chua et al., 2018 as cited in Iqra, 2024).

As per the WHO report of 2016, suicide rate in India was 16.5/100,000 population which was much higher than the global average of 10.5/100,000, among those aged 15 -29 years old and the report has also included depression as one of the priority mental disorders in childhood and adolescents. (Thippaiah, Nanjappa & Math, 2019). According to the reports of the National Crime Records Bureau, it was found that among the 1.8 % of students who commit suicide is due to academic failure caused by academic stress. (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020 as cited in Bindu & Happy, 2024). As per the Banerjee report, every year about 25,000 students in the age group of 16 to 20 years commit suicide in the examination month (i.e. March to June) as they are really worried about their future and desired results in the examinations.' (Nandagaon & Raddi, 2020).

Psychiatrists have expressed concern at the emergence of education as a serious source of stress for school -going children, leading to an incidence of suicide deaths. (D'Mello, 1997 as cited in Rana, Gulati & Wadhwa, 2019). The relationship between the incidence of academic stress and students' mental health indicates the importance of the academic environment and related experiences on students' psychological, emotional and social well-being. (Olivera et al., 2023). It is stated that many adolescents in India are referred to a psychiatrist for school related distress, depression, high anxiety and decreased interest in school work. (Chawla, 1997 & Rangaswamy, 1982 as cited in Rana, Gulati & Wadhwa, 2019). it is therefore considered crucial & imperative to measure the impact of academic stress on the mental health of adolescents and devise effective initiatives in schools to reduce stress. (Olivera et al., 2023)

## Basic Strategies of Managing Academic Stress

Multiple mental health conditions arise if students aren't able to manage stress, therefore, it is extremely important to address academic stress properly. (Malbas, Catacutan, Valiente, Moneva & Gonzaga, 2022). Academic resilience is the capacity of the student to effectively manage academic stress and study pressure as it plays a vital role in helping them rise and survive in the face of challenging conditions. (Sari & Sutaro, 2023). It has been stated that adolescent can easily cope with academic stress by using different stress relief techniques, managing work, taking help from friends and counsellors. (K & Sokhi, 2019). Physiological, behavioral, psychological, and cognitive methods to manage stress are known as stress-coping methods (Kassymova et al., 2018 as cited in Iqra, 2024). It has been suggested that steps should be taken to incorporate stress management education in the curriculum. (Waghachavare et.al, 2013 as cited in K & Sokhi, 2019). Kaur. H (2019) has enlisted few of the comprehensive strategies which the educational institutions can incorporate as coping strategies for academic stress and help students obtain the greatest benefits from it –

- Incorporate stress education into the curriculum and include stress management skills such as relaxation techniques and problem-solving approach.
- Shift the focus from the preoccupation of grades to learning and understanding.
- Revise homework and testing policies,
- Communicate with all stakeholders about the causes and consequences of academic stress,
- Ensure that students receive adequate support,

The other techniques/strategies beneficial for students to manage their educational stress effectively are as follows- (Murphy & Archer, 1996 as cited in Prabu, 2015, Chen et, al. 2022 & Iqra, 2024).

- Time management – Effective time management skills enable students to use their time effectively by setting deadlines, boundaries and focussing on task directed approach.
- Social Support – Support from a network of individuals including family, friends, communities is essential for the psychological well -being of students.

- Study Techniques – Study techniques like distributed learning practices, taking a practice test and spaced repetition enhances students' learning, understanding and retaining skills.
- Engagement in leisure pursuits – Leisure engagement can help individuals develop psychological resources, like building social support, resilience, increasing optimism which in turn enhance positive affect (PA), coping abilities and contribute to emotional well-being by reducing the effects of daily stress on the individuals.

In recent years, there have been growing interest in incorporating mindfulness and meditative practice into school settings, considering its potential positive benefits and effectiveness for students' psychological well -being and academic performance. (Delavari, Talebi, Delavari, 2023). Schools should focus and invest in the mindfulness training workshop in supporting students of diverse backgrounds and ages experiencing stress. (He, 2023). Some popular and universal techniques include, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn, 2007 as cited in Singh et al., 2012).

## Discussions

An attempt was made in this paper to review the literature on academic stress. The study gave an insight into the concept of academic stress, sources of academic stress, the impact of academic stress on adolescence and few strategies of managing academic stress. In recent years various studies revealed that academic stress has become a pressing problem for students arising from multiple internal and external stressors having a significant impact on the academic performance and the mental, emotional and physical well-being of students.

The students exposed to excessive pressure have shown symptoms in the form of deviant/ unusual behaviour emanating from academic anxiety, peer pressure and parental control. The study has further highlighted that the levels of academic stress and mental health problems are concerningly high among adolescents which may result in low self -esteem and the psychological problems such as depression and suicidal tendencies.

The findings of the various literature on academic stress accentuate the need to establish initiatives to be undertaken by the schools to reduce stress, like fostering healthy school environments to promote the mental well-being of the students. better, implementing relaxation spaces, mindfulness-based programmes, raising awareness among teachers and academic staff about the impact of stress on student's mental health and the coping strategies to reduce the academic load.

## Conclusion

It has been strongly stated that among the multitude of other factors influencing the development of the nation, the mental well -being of adolescents has been considered fundamental, but the issue of adolescents' health has been overlooked and neglected for long. (Lin & Yusoff, 2013). Academic stress is a significantly disturbing multi factorial issue originating from a myriad of stressors causing psychological distress, therefore addressing academic related stress is integral and it requires collaborative efforts across multiple fronts to empower students with the support they need to excel academically and emotionally. (Iqra, 2024). Many studies have emphasised that problem focussed and emotion focussed strategies are the preferred choice to alleviate stress. (Iqbal et al., 2015 as cited in Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). For the students' physical and psychological well -being it is essential that the teachers and counsellors take the task of teaching students the coping skills for their better future and healthy well-being. (Rana, 2019). It is further stated that the harmonious, supportive and stimulating school and family environment is considered integral for the students' academic growth as well as their mental well-being. (K & Sokhi, 2019 & Karim, 2024)

## Recommendations

- In order to overcome the mental health stigma, schools can normalise mental health conversations by organising awareness programs by involving and forming partnerships with trusted communities and NGOs.
- Educational institutions should incorporate few of the coping strategies in the form of mindfulness and meditative practices which would benefit school children in addressing the issues they face.
- It is also recommended that teachers should be trained as lay counsellors by upskilling them with basic mental health training so that they can be equipped to effectively provide adequate support and guidance to the students.

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