ACADEMIC STRESS WITH RELATION TO ADJUSTMENT AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study 'Academic Stress with Relation to Adjustment among High School Students' investigates the interplay between academic stress and adjustment patterns in adolescents, particularly students in high school. The research highlights the growing pressures faced by students due to academic demands, social expectations, and personal aspirations. Using a descriptive research design, the study surveyed 100 students (50 boys and 50 girls) in grades 9 and 10 from New Delhi through structured tools like the Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS) and the Adjustment Inventory for School Students. Key findings indicate significant gender disparities: boys reported higher academic stress, whereas girls exhibited better adjustment levels. Moreover, a weak but positive correlation was observed between academic stress and adjustment, suggesting that higher stress complicates students' adjustment processes. These results underscore the critical need for interventions focusing on reducing academic stress to improve students' adaptive capabilities. This research provides foundational insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to enhance adolescent well-being in academic settings.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Adjustment, High School Students.*

Introduction

In the modern educational landscape, high school students face mounting pressures to excel academically while simultaneously navigating significant developmental transitions. Schools, as primary agencies of formal education, shape students' academic, emotional, and social well-being. However, the increasing professionalization of education and societal expectations have intensified the stress levels experienced by adolescents. Academic stress—resulting from examination pressures, high parental expectations, and interpersonal challenges—emerges as a critical concern with far-reaching implications on students' psychological and academic outcomes. Adjustment, defined as the dynamic process of maintaining equilibrium between personal needs and environmental demands, plays a pivotal role in how students manage academic stress.

Academic stress is the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual (Wilks, 2008). Academic problems have been reported to be the most common source of stress for students (Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987). Stress associated with academic activities has been linked to various negative outcomes, such as poor health (Greenberg, 1981), depression (Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987), and poor academic performance (Clark & Rieker, 1986). High school students, particularly those transitioning through adolescence, are uniquely vulnerable to stress.

Adjustment is a multifaceted process encompassing emotional, social, and educational dimensions. It involves the psychological mechanisms students employ to manage stressors and achieve stability in their daily lives. According to Shaffer (1961), adjustment enables individuals to balance their needs and circumstances effectively. However, when students struggle to cope with academic stress, their adjustment patterns may deteriorate, leading to issues such as emotional instability, reduced social interactions, and diminished educational engagement.

The interplay between academic stress and adjustment is particularly significant among high school students in urban settings like Delhi, India. The findings aim to guide educators, parents, and policymakers in developing strategies to mitigate academic stress and foster adaptive coping mechanisms, thereby enabling students to achieve academic success and personal growth in a balanced and sustainable manner.

Need for the Research

Students aged between 12-18 years account for more than one fifth of the world's population i.e., almost 230 million. In India this age group forms 23 percent of the total population. Moreover, it is necessary to invest in adolescents as the future leaders and guardians of the Nation's development (Pattanashetty, 2014). Stress is a very uneasy feeling that most adolescents face in their life. Stressors are viewed as a circumstance that disrupts, or threatens to disrupt, individuals' daily functioning and cause people to make adjustments (Auerbach & Grambling 1998). Among these stressors, academic stress is found to be the major cause of stress among adolescents. Academic stress is a crucial problem of a student's life in the present scenario. Our education system has loaded the students with a variety of pressures such as a vast curriculum, examination fear; neck-to-neck competitions etc. peer and parental pressure add tons to their problem. In this kind of situation, they are not even able to adjust themselves. The problem arises when the adolescents are unable to cope with these stressful situations and end-up themselves in the distressed state of mind. The findings of doctors, psychotherapists and child psychologists reveal that students' especially secondary school students experience anxiety, stress and depression due to academic pressure and excessive academic pressure is associated with deliberate self-harm and even suicides. Keeping in view the growing problem of academic stress among school students the study was undertaken to examine the level of academic stress among high school students and its probable impact on the overall adjustment among them. Hence the researcher opted this study to find out better solutions, provide guidance and plan strategies for teachers, parents and students in order to help them cope with academic stress.

Review of Literature

"An essential aspect of a research project is review of related literature" ~J. Mouly (1979)

- Rubén Trigueros, Ana M. Padilla et al (2020) studied "**The Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Resilience, Test Anxiety, Academic Stress and the Mediterranean Diet. A Study with University Students**".This study aims to analyze the influence of emotional intelligence of university students on their resilience, academic stress, exam anxiety, and eating habits related to the Mediterranean diet at the university stage. This study was carried out with the participation of 733 male and 614 female students from the University of Almeria, aged between 19 and 27. A

structural equation model was made to explain the causal relationships between the variables. The results showed emotional intelligence positively predicted resilience. In turn, test anxiety and academic stress were negatively predicted by resilience. Finally, test anxiety and academic stress were negatively predicted by the Mediterranean diet. In short, the results of the present study have shown that academic transfer to university and grading pressure can generate maladaptive consequences for food consumption.

- Wildani Khoiri Oktavia et al (2019) studied "**The Role of Peer Social Support And Hardiness Personality Toward The Academic Stress On Students**." This study aimed to empirically examine the role of peer social support and hardiness personality on the academic stress of informatics engineering students. Methods of data collection used an academic stress scale, peer social support, and hardiness personality with a Likert scaling model. The number of subjects was ninety-nine students. The results of data analysis showed that peer social support and hardiness personality had a very significant effect on academic stress. Partially, there is no influence of peer social support on academic stress. There is a significant influence between personality hardiness and academic stress. The implication of this research is the importance of students having high hardiness so that they are able to survive in a state of stress. Besides, hardiness plays a role in determining behavior or individual adjustment in dealing with stress.
- Nihan Arslan (2017) studied "**Investigating the Relationship between Educational Stress and Emotional Self-Efficacy**." This research was conducted on 232 secondary school Turkish students. Emotional self-efficacy scale and educational stress scale were used in the study. It was found that there was a negative correlation between emotional self-efficacy and educational stress. Findings obtained from the structural equation model showed that educational stress was negatively predicted by emotional self-efficacy. The fit index obtained from the structural equation model shows that the model fits well.
- Darrin Thomas (2016) studied "**Cell Phone Addiction and Academic Stress Among University Students in Thailand**." The purpose of this study was to assess students' perceptions of cellphone addiction and academic stress. A survey was conducted among 243 students at a university in Thailand. Results revealed that there was no difference in cellphone addiction and academic stress for class and gender, but there was a difference by major. Results also indicated a mild correlation between cellphone addiction and academic stress. This relationship between cellphone addiction and academic stress is moderated strongly by gender, with the relationship being stronger among men than among women.
- Yangyang Liu (2015) studied "**The Longitudinal Relationship Between Chinese High School Students' Academic Stress and Academic Motivation**." In a sample of 298 Chinese high school students, this study examined the prediction of students' academic stress on their academic motivation in the subject of mathematics. The results showed that Chinese high school students' academic stress at grade 10 negatively predicted their intrinsic motivation and positively predicted their motivation at grade 12. Furthermore, the results revealed that academic stress was not significantly related to extrinsic motivation. These findings suggest that reducing academic stress can increase students' intrinsic motivation and reduce their amotivation.

- Ramya Bhaskar et al. (2014) conducted **"Study on Relationship Between Stress and Adjustment Among Adolescents"** on 600 students (300 boys and 300 girls) in the age group of 15-16 years, studying in PUC colleges in Mysore city selected at random. The Perceived Life Events Scale and the Bells Adjustment Scale were administered to assess the stress and adjustment levels of adolescents, respectively. The results revealed that more boys experienced significantly higher levels of severe and total stress as compared to girls. The mean score on adjustments showed that both boys and girls have unsatisfactory and average levels of adjustments. A highly significant correlation was noticed between stress and social, emotional, and total adjustment areas.

Objectives of the Study

I. To study the significant differences in academic stress levels between male and female high school students.

II. To study the significant differences in the adjustment patterns of male and female high school students.

III. To study the relationship between academic stress and adjustment patterns among high school students.

Hypotheses

I. There is no significant difference in academic stress levels between male and female high school students.

II. There is no significant difference in adjustment patterns between male and female high school students.

III. There is no significant relationship between academic stress and adjustment patterns among high school students.

Research Methodology

This descriptive research adopts a quantitative approach to analyze the relationship between academic stress and adjustment. The study falls under the domain of descriptive research as it intends to study the adjustment of high school students in relation to academic stress in different public and government schools of Delhi. A random sampling technique was used to select 100 students studying in IX and X classes (both male and female students) from schools of New Delhi. A total of 100 students (Boys = 50 and Girls = 50) were screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS), commonly attributed to Dr. Uday Kumar Sinha (often cited as U.K. Sinha), along with co-developers V. Sharma and M.K. Nepal (2001), was used for the current study. The SAAS is designed to systematically measure academic stress among students, focusing on stressors arising from educational environments (e.g., workload, competition, parental/teacher expectations).

The Adjustment Inventory for School Students by Dr. A.K.P. Sinha and Dr. R.P. Singh (1971) was used as a tool for measuring the extent of adjustment. This tool measures three areas of adjustment, viz., social, emotional, and educational adjustment. A demographic information sheet was used to collect various demographic details about the participants, including age, gender, and year of study. etc.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the following methods:

- Independent t-test: To identify significant gender differences in academic stress and adjustment patterns.
- Pearson's Product Moment Correlation: To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between academic stress and adjustment.

Analysis and Interpretation

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

"There will be no significant difference between the academic stress of male and female high school students."

The results below are from an Independent t-Test to measure Mean Academic Stress Scores

Academic Stress	Gender	N	Mean	T Value	P Value	Level of Significance
	Male	50	20.24	6.657	$p<0.05$	Significant
	Female	50	13.82			Significant

Table 1: Mean Academic Stress Scores by Gender

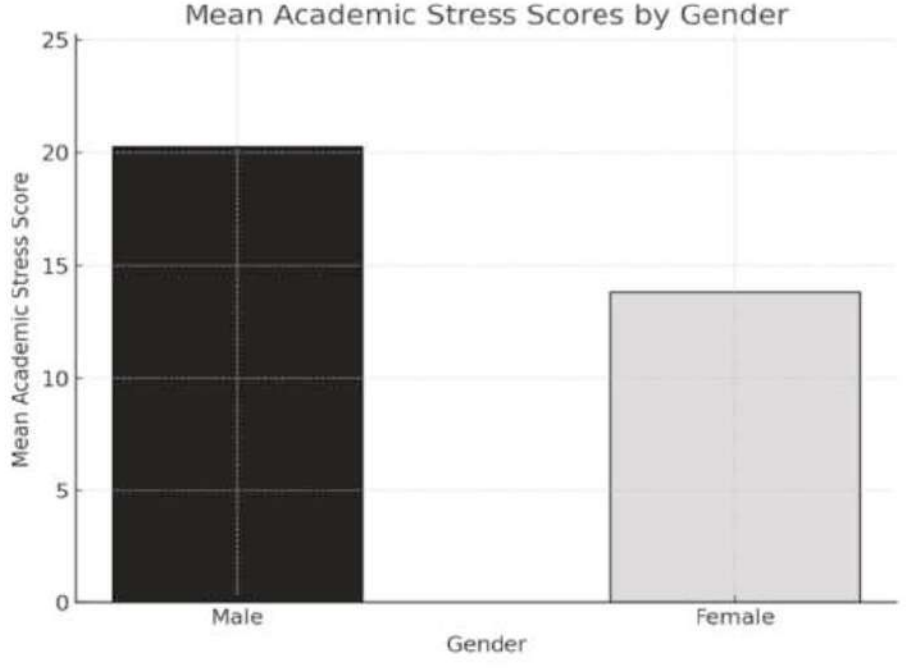


Figure 1: Mean Academic Stress Scores by Gender

Table 1 presents the mean scores for academic stress, revealing that high school boys scored 20.24 and girls scored 13.82. An independent *t*-test yielded a *t*-value of 6.657 ($p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between boys and girls.

Consequently, **Hypothesis 1**—which posited no significant difference—**was rejected**.

Thus, there is insufficient evidence to maintain that academic stress is equivalent for boys and girls at the high school level.

This finding suggests that male students may be more prone to academic stress—possibly due to differential societal expectations, gender-role stereotypes, or distinct coping mechanisms. Recognizing these gender-specific stress profiles can help educators and counselors design tailored interventions to mitigate stress and enhance overall student well-being

Hypothesis 2 (H2)

"There will be no significant difference between the adjustment pattern of male and female high school students."

The results below are from an Independent t-Test to measure Adjustment Scores.

Adjustment	Gender	N	Mean	T Value	P Value	Level of Significance
	Male	50	48.74	6.89	$p < 0.05$	Significant
	Female	50	24.04			Significant

Table 2: Mean Adjustment by Gender

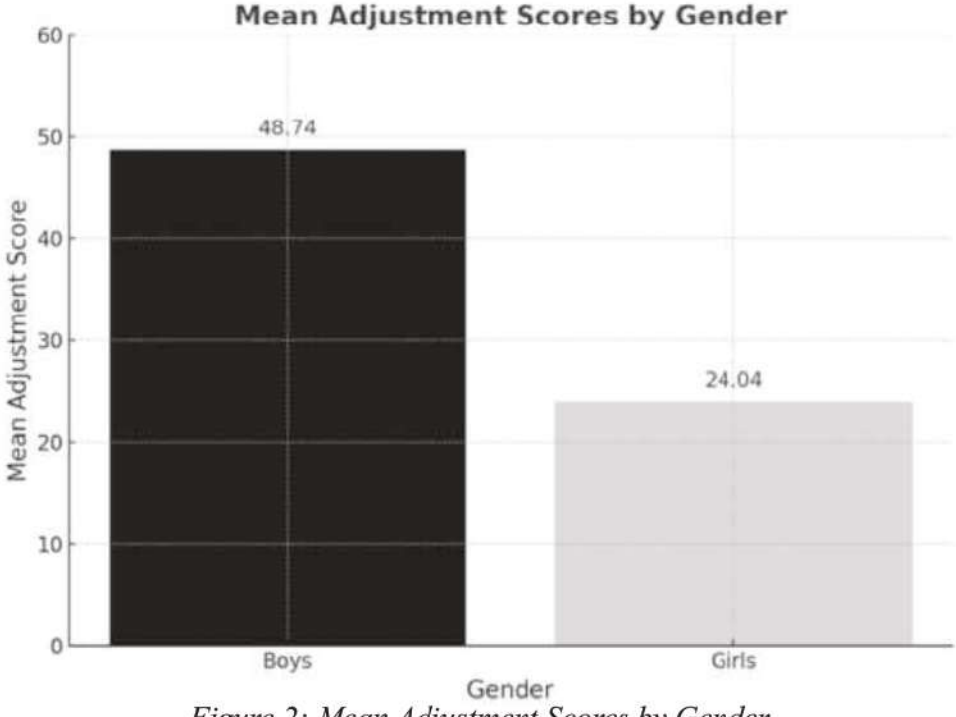


Figure 2: Mean Adjustment Scores by Gender

Table 2 indicates that the mean adjustment score for high school boys is 48.74, whereas for high school girls it is 24.04. An independent *t*-test yielded a *t*-value of 6.89 ($p < .05$), demonstrating a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Consequently, **Hypothesis 2**—which posited no significant difference—**was rejected**.

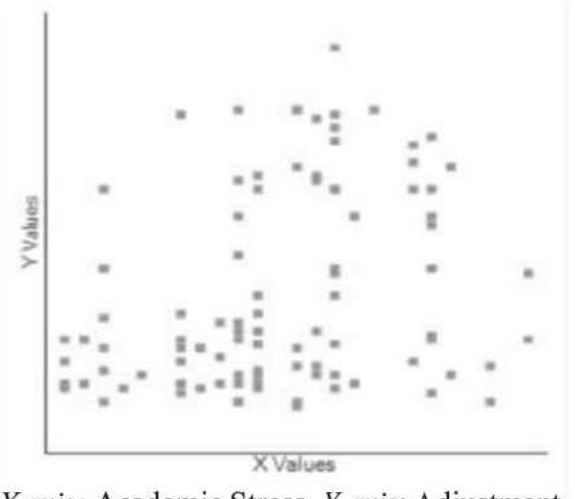
Thus, there is insufficient evidence to maintain that a significant difference exists in the adjustment patterns of boys and girls at the high school level.

Since higher scores indicate poorer adjustment, this implies that male students in this sample exhibit lower levels of adjustment compared to female students. The disparity points toward differences in coping styles, social support, or other psychosocial factors across genders. Education professionals should be mindful of these variations, implementing targeted strategies to improve male students' adjustment experiences in academic and social contexts.

Hypothesis 3 (H3)

"There will be no significant relationship between academic stress and adjustment of high school students."

Table 3: Pearson's product moment correlation (r) between academic stress and adjustment



X axis: Academic Stress, *Y axis*: Adjustment

Figure 3: Correlation between academic stress and adjustment

Table 3 displays Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) between academic stress and adjustment, which is +0.298. This positive correlation indicates that as academic stress increases, adjustment among high school students also tends to increase. However, the relationship is weak, given that the value of r is relatively close to zero.

It is important to highlight that higher scores on the adjustment scale reflect poorer adjustment.

Consequently, **Hypothesis 3**—which proposed that there would be no significant relationship between academic stress and the adjustment of adolescents—**was rejected**.

Given that higher scores on the adjustment scale point to poorer adjustment, the positive correlation suggests that as academic stress increases, students tend to exhibit more difficulty in adjusting. Although the magnitude of the relationship is relatively small, it emphasizes the need for strategic interventions that target both academic stress and overall adjustment. Ensuring adequate psychological support and promoting effective coping strategies could help mitigate the adverse effects of rising academic demands.

Conclusion

This study confirms significant gender differences in academic stress and adjustment patterns and establishes a correlation between stress levels and adjustment difficulties. These findings underscore the need for targeted, gender-sensitive interventions to reduce stress and improve student adjustment. Educational institutions should prioritize mental well-being alongside academic goals to foster holistic development.

Future research should explore the causes of gender disparities and the two-way relationship between academic stress and adjustment. Longitudinal studies can provide deeper insights, enabling the creation of sustainable strategies for adolescent support.

By addressing these areas, stakeholders can create environments that minimize stress and enhance adjustment, promoting balanced and meaningful educational experiences.

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