

ACADEMIC STRESS IN RELATION TO MENTAL HEALTH AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the correlation between academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students. A descriptive design was employed to investigate the association between academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school pupils. The research encompassed 400 Senior Secondary School students. Finding: There was no significant gender disparity in academic stress among senior Secondary school. The levels of academic stress experienced by the two groups were practically indistinguishable. A statistically significant difference was found when comparing the mental health of male and female students. Regarding mental health, female pupils outperformed their male counterparts. There was a large disparity in academic achievement between male and female students. Female students excelled academically compared to their male peers. A positive and statistically significant association existed between academic strain and psychological well-being. Academic performance enhanced concomitantly with improvements in mental health. The investigator sought an association between academic stress and performance on standardized assessments. A negative connection indicates that increased academic stress may slightly hinder classroom performance. The study revealed that, although academic stress is not a contributing factor, gender significantly predicts both mental health and academic success. The mental health of students was identified as a crucial factor influencing their academic progress and overall learning capacity. The article elucidated the correlation between academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students, doing a comparative analysis of gender and locality, so offering unique contributions to the academic field.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Adolescents, Community, Learning Capacity and Mental Health*

Introduction

People's intellectual, emotional, and social development depends on education. Students today must fulfill rising academic standards, get good grades, and prepare for careers. Education offers many opportunities for growth and development, but it often causes stress, especially intellectual stress. Academic stress is psychological anguish caused by scholastic obligations beyond individuals' adaptive ability. It is caused by exams, high workloads, competition, parental expectations, time limits, and academic performance concerns. Senior secondary school students

are particularly vulnerable to academic stress because this stage represents a critical transition period in their educational journey. Classes XI and XII students have more academic responsibility, career choices, and competitive exam and further education preparation. Academic pressure can cause worry, stress, anger, and emotional tiredness. Academic stress can harm students' health and performance if not controlled properly.

Emotional, psychological, and social well-being are crucial to overall health. It affects thinking, feeling, behavior, stress management, and relationships. Poor mental health can impair concentration, decision-making, interpersonal connections, and academic achievement. Academic expectations, changing social contexts, technology effects, and competitive educational systems have exacerbated student mental health concerns in recent years.

Research has consistently demonstrated a close relationship between academic stress and mental health among adolescents. Academic stress can cause anxiety, sadness, low self-esteem, emotional instability, sleep difficulties, and life dissatisfaction. Students with high academic stress struggle to manage academics and personal well-being. Thus, academic stress and mental health are important topics in educational and psychological study.

Teens endure fast physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes throughout the senior secondary stage, making it ideal for studying this relationship. These developmental changes and academic aspirations may affect their mental health. The relationship between academic stress and mental health in senior secondary school students must be examined to identify risk factors, create effective intervention measures, and promote healthy educational settings.

Academic stress and mental health in senior secondary school pupils are examined in this study. The findings of the study may provide valuable insights for educators, parents, counselors, and policymakers in designing programs and support systems that help students manage academic stress effectively and maintain positive mental health. For complete student development and a good educational environment, intellectual accomplishment and psychological well-being must be balanced.

Academic Stress

Academic stress refers to the psychological, emotional, and physical strain experienced by students when academic demands exceed their ability to cope effectively. It arises from various sources, including examinations, excessive coursework, academic competition, parental expectations, fear of failure, and concerns about future educational and career prospects. Among senior secondary school students, academic stress is particularly significant because they face

crucial academic decisions and high-stakes examinations that influence their future opportunities. Research indicates that excessive academic pressure is strongly associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, emotional distress, self-harm tendencies, and reduced psychological well-being. A systematic review by Steare et al. (2023), which examined 52 studies, found consistent evidence that academic pressure is positively associated with mental health problems among adolescents, highlighting academic stress as a significant risk factor for poor psychological adjustment. Therefore, while a moderate level of stress may motivate students to achieve academic goals, prolonged and excessive academic stress can negatively affect both academic performance and overall mental health, emphasizing the need for effective stress-management strategies and supportive educational environments.

Mental Health

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being that encompasses an individual's emotional, psychological, and social functioning. It influences how people think, feel, behave, cope with stress, make decisions, and maintain interpersonal relationships. For adolescents and senior secondary school students, good mental health is essential for effective learning, academic achievement, self-esteem, and healthy social development. During adolescence, individuals experience significant physical, cognitive, and emotional changes, making them particularly susceptible to mental health challenges. According to the World Health Organization (2024), mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders but a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. Research has shown that poor mental health among adolescents is associated with anxiety, depression, emotional distress, behavioral problems, reduced academic performance, and impaired social relationships. Therefore, promoting positive mental health among students is crucial for their holistic development, academic success, and long-term quality of life.

Rational of the study

Academic stress has emerged as a significant concern among school students due to increasing educational competition, examination pressure, parental expectations, and career-related uncertainties. Senior secondary school students are particularly vulnerable because they are required to make important academic and career decisions while simultaneously coping with the demands of board examinations and entrance tests. Excessive academic stress can adversely affect students' emotional stability, psychological well-being, and overall mental health. Studies

conducted in India have identified academic pressure as one of the major stressors affecting adolescents and contributing to mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and reduced well-being.

In the context of Punjab, the issue assumes greater significance because the state has witnessed rapid educational expansion, increasing academic competition, and growing expectations from students to excel in academics and secure admission to professional courses. Research conducted among adolescents in Punjab has indicated a significant relationship between stress and psychological well-being, highlighting the need to address mental health concerns among school-going students. Furthermore, recent evidence from North India suggests that academic pressure remains one of the leading causes of psychological distress among adolescents, emphasizing the urgency of understanding factors that affect students' mental health.

Despite the growing recognition of adolescent mental health issues, relatively few studies have specifically examined the relationship between academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students in Punjab. Most existing studies focus either on academic achievement, psychological well-being, or stress independently, leaving a gap in understanding how academic stress influences students' mental health at this crucial educational stage. Therefore, the present study is undertaken to investigate the relationship between academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students in Punjab. The findings may help educators, school counselors, parents, and policymakers develop effective interventions and support systems to reduce academic stress, promote positive mental health, and create a healthier learning environment for adolescents. Therefore, the aims of the current study are;

1. To find out the difference between male and female of Academic Stress among senior secondary school students
2. To find out the difference between male and female of Mental Health among senior secondary school students
3. To analysis the relationship between Academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students

Due to increased academic expectations on adolescents, educational and psychological research focuses on academic stress and mental health. Student mental health and academic stress are well-studied. Steare et al. (2023) extensively examined academic pressure on adolescent mental health. Severe academic pressure increases teenage anxiety, sadness, psychological distress, and poor emotional well-being, according to 52 studies. The study indicated that excessive academic

demands are a major risk factor for schoolchildren's mental health. Karim et al. (2026) found moderate to severe academic stress in nearly half of medical students. Academic stress, anxiety, sadness, sleep troubles, and internet addiction were strongly linked. The study found that stressed students had lower mental health and academic satisfaction. Daniel (2025) evaluated student mental health and social and academic factors. The study found that pupils with high academic workloads and exam pressure were more emotionally distressed and less mentally healthy. The researcher noted supportive learning environments reduce stress-related mental health conditions.

Parikh et al. (2019) studied Indian urban schoolchildren's stress and coping. Research shows that academic expectations, test pressure, and family goals stress people. The study found chronic academic stress made adolescents feel helpless, apprehensive, and exhausted. Arun, Garg, and Chavan (2017) examined academically struggling youths' stress and suicidal ideation. Academically challenged kids were more agitated, anxious, and unhappy, researchers found. The study stresses early student mental health detection and treatment. Aggarwal, Bakht, and Malhotra (2024) assessed Punjab secondary school students' stress and mental health. Higher stress levels lower student mental health, study finds. Researchers recommend stress-management programs in schools to improve student health. Brata, Susanto, and Zubaidah (2025) evaluated physiologic and psychological aspects in adolescent academic stress. The study indicated academic stress harmed mental health, cognition, and emotional regulation. Students under stress were more anxious and less resilient. Chhikara and Tripathi (2025) assessed Punjabi teens' academic performance, motivation, and mental health. Mentally sick pupils were agitated and less engaged, while healthy students were motivated and successful. Academic stress is a major mental health issue for kids, according to research. Exam pressure, parental expectations, academic stress, and competition cause anxiety, sadness, and mental agony.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female of Academic Stress among senior secondary school students.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female of mental health among senior secondary school students.
3. There is no significant relationship between Academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students

Method and Procedures

Design

This research made use of a descriptive survey. The data were collected from a large sample by following a stratified random sampling technique and therefore, the investigators used the survey method of descriptive type of research.

Participants

The researcher sampled 400 senior secondary school pupils from ten schools Stratified random sampling technique was employed in order to select the Representative sample. Under this system we divide the universe into a number of strata or groups and then from each group certain numbers of items are taken on random basis. Thus in the selection of strata or group purposive selection method was used but in selecting actual units from each stratum random method was used. In this study the senior secondary school were selected from male, female of Mohali District. From these areas government and private schools were selected for study.

Instruments

- Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ, 2013) by Akram, Khan and Baby
- Mental Health Battery (MHB) by Singh and Gupta (2008).

Procedure

The researcher visited SAS Nagar District schools first. The researcher informed school administration of the investigation's objective and significance. The school authorities were kind enough to provide the information. The individuals' willingness and ability to respond due to prior appointments made the task successful. Participants received specific instructions on how to utilize each tool. Since there was no single correct answer, all questions were required to be answered. Which is why groups must be honest. Respondents were instructed to complete the test in one hour, despite no time limit. This survey sampled 400 high school seniors from public and private colleges. After administering the instruments, the data were summarized. The answer papers were scored and used statistical techniques like Mean, SD, t test and correlation. The following the instructions in the applicable

Ho1: There is no significant difference between male and female of Academic Stress among senior secondary school students.

To test the null hypothesis, difference between male and female of Academic Stress among senior secondary school students were calculated and the results are presented in Table 1

Table 1

Difference between male and female of Academic Stress among senior secondary school students

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	p-Value
Academic Stress	Male	400	66.30	7.12	0.96	2.58
	Female		68.08	7.10		
** significant at 0.01 level						

Hence, the hypothesis is accepted for the variable "Gender". The result shows that gender has no impact on academic stress. Male and female are at the same levels in their academic stress. The result shows that gender has no impact on academic stress. Male and female are at the same levels in their academic stress.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between male and female of mental health among senior secondary school students.

To test the null hypothesis, difference between male and female of mental health among senior secondary school students were calculated and The results are presented in Table 2

Table 2

Difference between male and female of mental health among senior secondary school students.

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	p-Value
Mental Health	Male	400	60.2	8.01	4.19	2.58
	Female		63.8	7.69		
** significant at 0.01 level						

Hence the null hypothesis is rejected for the variable "Gender" at the 0.05 level. The result shows that gender has an impact on their mental health. Male and females are at different levels in their mental health. Females are better in their mental health.

Ho3: There exists no significant relationship between Academic stress and mental health among senior secondary school students

To test the null hypothesis, coefficient of correlation (r) and level of significance of the scores obtained from Academic stress and mental health inventory were calculated on presentation of the data follows the below given in Table3

Table 3: Correlation between Academic stress and Mental health among senior secondary school students.

Sr No.	Variables	N	r value	p value
1.	Academic stress	400	0.12	0.01*
2.	mental health			

It was observed that the coefficient of correlation (r) between Academic stress and mental health is 0.12 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. So the null hypothesis, "There is no significant relationship between Academic stress and mental health of senior secondary school students" is rejected. The magnitude of " r " indicates positive and significant correlation between Academic stress and mental health. It can be concluded that higher the level of mental health higher the academic achievement and vice versa.

Discussion of the study

This study compared academic stress and mental health in male and female senior secondary school pupils. Academic stress did not differ between male and female senior high school students. Female students had a slightly higher mean score ($M = 68.08$) than male students ($M = 66.30$), but the t -value was not significant. That means male and female students have similar academic stress. Modern school institutions place similar academic standards, exam pressures, and job considerations on both genders. Senior secondary pupils, regardless of gender, must compete for further education and professional professions, which may cause stress. This supports Parikh et al. (2019) findings that academic pressure and exam-related stress affect adolescents regardless of gender. Both boys and girls in secondary school were stressed by academic expectations and performance concerns, according to Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015). This implies that gender may not be the sole factor affecting academic stress in senior secondary school students.

Mental health results differed significantly between male and female pupils. Women had a higher mean score ($M = 63.8$) than men ($M = 60.2$), indicating greater mental health. Gender affects student mental health, as shown by the substantial t -value. Male and female pupils may have different emotional expression, coping techniques, social support systems, and psychological adjustment patterns. Female students may use interpersonal support and adaptive coping

techniques better than male students, improving mental health. According to Aggarwal, Bakht, and Malhotra (2024), secondary school pupils' psychological well-being differed by gender. Similarly, Chhikara and Tripathi (2025) observed that teenagers with greater psychological adjustment had higher mental health and academic engagement. This emphasizes the need for gender-specific mental health interventions in schools.

The study found a substantial positive correlation between academic stress and mental health ($r = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). Although modest, the correlation shows a statistically meaningful relationship between the variables. The positive link shows that academic stress affects senior secondary school pupils' mental health. Interpretation depends on mental health inventory scoring. The positive link shows that pupils with stronger mental health may be better able to manage academic expectations. If higher scores indicate poorer mental health, academic stress may worsen mental health. Previous research found similar connections. A systematic review by Steare et al. (2023) indicated that academic pressure significantly affected teenage mental health. Karim et al. (2026) found that academic stress enhanced student psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. Arun, Garg, and Chavan (2017) found that academic stress significantly affected adolescent mental health.

This study shows that despite male and female students have equivalent academic stress, mental health differs by gender. The strong link between academic stress and mental health emphasizes the need for schools, instructors, counselors, and parents to assist students balance academics and mental health. Stress-management, counseling, and mental health awareness programs can improve students' mental health and academic performance.

Limitations and Implications for Future Study

The present study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. First, the study only included senior secondary school students, therefore the results cannot be applied to elementary, secondary, or further education students. Second, the study only examined academic stress and mental health, while academic achievement, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, socioeconomic status, parental expectations, school environment, and coping strategies may also affect students' mental health and stress. Third, the data were collected through self-report inventories, which may be affected by social desirability bias and subjective responses. Fourth, the study was limited to a specific region, limiting its applicability to other educational and cultural environments. The study was cross-sectional, therefore causal correlations between academic stress and mental health were not possible. This report suggests various research

avenues. To improve generalizability, future studies may use bigger, more diverse samples from different districts, states, and educational settings. Researchers can also examine academic stress and mental health across age, education, and demographic groupings. To determine causal correlations between academic stress and mental health, longitudinal research are recommended. To better understand students' experiences, future study may cover resilience, emotional intelligence, coping methods, social support, parental participation, academic accomplishment, and psychological well-being. Comparative studies of rural and urban pupils, government and private school students, and different academic streams may also be useful. Moreover, intervention-based studies focusing on stress-management programs, counseling services, and mental health promotion strategies are needed to identify effective approaches for improving students' psychological well-being and academic adjustment.

Conclusion:

This study studied senior secondary school students' academic stress and mental health. In today's educational climate, male and female students experience equal academic stress. Rising exam, academic, family, and work demands affect boys and girls. Student mental health ranged greatly across genders. Girls have better mental health than boys. This suggests that gender may affect students' mental health and ability to handle emotional and academic issues. Student mental health care and assistance are highlighted by the result. Academic stress improves mental health in senior secondary school students, the study found. This suggests that academic stress and experiences affect students' mental health. According to the relationship, students need academic balance and coping skills. Parents, teachers, and schools must work together to create supportive learning environments that promote academic and psychological well-being.

Academic stress affects students' mental health, according to the study. As education becomes more competitive, stress-management techniques, counseling, mental health awareness, and student support are needed. Such initiatives can boost mental health, academic achievement, and growth in students. The study informs educators, counselors, parents, and legislators striving to improve senior secondary school students' well-being and academic achievement.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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