

# Asian Resonance

## Academic Stress and Psychological Well-Being among Adolescents



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### Abstract

Academic stress is the main cause of stress which affects the psychological well-being of adolescents. In today's highly competitive and demanding world, adolescents and students face various academic problems including examination stress, lack of interest in attending classes, lectures and incompetence to understand the subject. As we know that in the present challenging and advanced life, adolescents (especially students) are suffering from behavioral problems such as aggression, depression, drug abuse, anxiety, social withdrawal, confusion and stressful or traumatic life events. The main goal of the present study was to investigate the academic stress and psychological well-being among adolescents. The sample for this study comprised of 200 adolescents who were drawn from schools of Aligarh Muslim University; Aligarh. Students completed the academic stress questionnaire developed by Akram, Khan, and Baby (2013) and Adolescent well being scale developed by Birlleson (1981). Results revealed that the main effect of gender and the interaction effect between stream and gender were found significant on academic stress and psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Academic Stress, Psychological Well-Being

### Introduction

The school environment has shown itself to be an important factor in explaining adolescent behaviour. The relationships and experiences that students have at school have been found to influence their development, psychological well-being, self-esteem and social adjustment (Barth, Dunlap, Lochman, & Wells, 2004; Murray & Greenberg 2000). In the fast and challenging era which is said to be a world of achievements, is also known as world of stress. Stress affects everyone regardless of age, gender, class, social and academic performance concerns, and uncharacteristic changes etc. Majority of the adolescents suffer from behavioral problems, whatever the causes of stress may be either external or internal which interrupts the functioning of day to day activities. Most of the adolescents undergo various problems in their life and they cope with different types of demands and pressures laid down by the peer group, society and family members.

In India, there is an increasing concern regarding study pressure which is related with psychological and mental health problems among school adolescents. Adolescence is defined as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, which describes the teenage years between 10 and 19 (WHO, 2014). It is a mandatory phase of growth and development and the body goes through various physical and biological changes. Adolescents experience various life stresses ranging from catastrophic or traumatic life events, persistent strain and daily hassles. Academic matters are the most important sources of chronic and sporadic stress for young people in both Western and Asian countries, and has significant associations with mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Anderman, 2002; Ang & Huan, 2006). Adolescents who were undergoing high stress were found to be indulging in various maladaptive and risky behaviours such as increased consumption of alcohol and drugs, unprotected sexual activities, physical inactivity, poor eating and sleeping patterns (American College Health Association, 2009; Bennet & Holloway, 2014; King, Vidourek & Singh, 2014). Incidences of depression were also found among stressful adolescents as it is linked with to concentrate, fear of failure, negative evaluation of future, etc. (Busari, 2012).

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**Academic stress**

Stress is an unavoidable phenomenon in every aspects of students' life. It is generally an emotional imbalance which may be due to several reasons such as exams, assignments, papers and projects, competitive nature in field of study, financial problems, worried about future job prospects. Students are often deal with pressures related to earn good marks and to get a degree is very high. There were other potential source like excessive homework, unclear assignment and uncomfortable classroom (Mazumdar, Gogoi, Buragohain, & Haloi, 2012).

Academic stress is the one of greatest health problem of students which affect academic performance, dropping course of or score lower grade. Achievement anxiety is one of the most common causes of academic stress among students (especially college students). Academic stress comes from schooling and education. There is often a lot of pressure that comes along with pursuing a degree and one's education. Studying, homework, tests, labs, readings are manifested as the academic stress in students. Academic stress is especially found in school students who are often living away from home for the first time (Prabu, 2015, p; 64). Academic stress is the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual (Wilks, 2008). Academic pressure by the parents as well as the children are themselves tensed about their career and future, when fail to cope up with the situation or fail to satisfy their needs then it results into stress and depression. Academic-related stress coupled with poor interpersonal relationships with friends and family is a crucial factor in relation to the psychological wellbeing of adolescents. Frustrations and pressures to achieve in school, inter alia, are substantially mitigated by the perception of social support from significant others (Demaray & Maleck, 2002; Lincoln, Chatters, & Taylor 2003) which consequently has a positive impact on psychological wellbeing (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

**Psychological well-being**

The term "psychological well-being" can be explained through two perspectives- the Hedonic and Eudaimonic perspective of well-being, the former indicating emotional well-being and the latter indicating well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). According to Jessica and Savage (2011) psychological wellbeing of adolescents means being satisfied with life and experiencing a plentitude of positive emotions, when coupled with the absence of psychopathology, is associated with maximum academic function, social competency and support and physical health. Being a stage that lays strong foundation for future personality, and a critical period during human development in which life goals, values, direction and purpose in life are created (Berman, Weems, & Stickle, 2006) ensuring psychological well-being of adolescents is a socio psychological necessity. According to Kitchener and Jorm (2002), psychological well-being can be described as a state of mind with an absence of a mental disorder, from the perspective of positive psychology, it may include an individual's ability to enjoy life, and create a

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balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. Ryff and Singer (2008), Ryan and Deci (2001) and Waterman (1993) conceptualized positive well-being as subjective (hedonic) well-being, which emphasizes happiness and pleasure; and psychological (eudaimonic) well-being, which focuses on the fulfillment of human potential. Snyder and Lopez (2007) correctly proposed the formula: Happiness + Meaning = Well-being. In the words of Ryan and Deci (2001), it refers to subjective well-being by which an individual subjectively assess one's life. Psychological well-being (PWB) is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively.

**Objectives of the Study**

The present research study aims to investigate the academic stress and psychological well being among school adolescents of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (U.P., India). The following objectives were formulated as:

1. To examine the main effects of gender (male and female), stream (science and social science) on academic stress among adolescents.
2. To examine the main effects of gender (male and female), stream (science and social science) on psychological well-being among adolescents.
3. To examine the interaction effect between gender (male and female), stream (science and social science) on academic stress and psychological well-being

**Hypotheses**

1. There will be main effect of gender and stream on academic stress.
2. There will be main effect of gender and stream on psychological well-being.
3. There will be interaction effect between gender and stream on academic stress and psychological well-being.

**Methodology****Participants**

There were Two hundred adolescents were drawn from two schools of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. These are Saiyyid Hamid Senior Secondary School (Boys) and Senior Secondary School for Girls. 100 science stream adolescents and 100 social science stream.

**Measures**

The following tools were used to carry out the present study

**Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ)**

Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ) was developed by Akram, Khan, and Baby (2013) was used to measure and assess academic stress among adolescents (15-18 years). The ASQ consisted of 36 items. Responses were scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from No Stress at all (0), Slight Stress (1), a lot of Stress (2) to Extreme stress (3). Cronbach's alpha of 36 items was found to be .829. The construct validity of ASQ ranges from 0.41 to 0.88.

**Adolescent Well- Being Scale**

Adolescent Well- Being Scale (Birlleson, 1981) consisted of 18 questions-each relating to

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different aspects of an adolescent's life and how they feel about them. The responses to each item are scored 0, 1 or 2. How the responses are scored depends on the nature of the statement that is being responded to as well as the response. Test-retest reliability of the scale is ( $r < .80$ ) Internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.73-0.90$ )

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## Statistical Analysis

In the present investigation, *analysis of variance* was applied. Analysis was done using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0).

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Analysis of Variance using overall scores obtained on academic stress as the dependent variable**

Sources	Sum of Square	df	Mean Scores	F	Sig.
Stream	25.920	1	25.920	.134	.714
Gender	5020.020	1	5020.020	26.047	.000
Stream*Gender	233.280	1	233.280	1.210	.273
Error	37774.280	196	192.726		
Total	1425838.000	200			
Corrected Total	43053.500	199			

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the influence of gender (male and female), stream (science and social science) and the interaction between them on *academic stress*. As it can be seen from the Table 1 significant main effect of

gender was found on overall academic stress scores ( $F = 26.047, p < .01$ ), while the effects of stream ( $F = .134, p > .05$ ) and interaction effects between stream and gender ( $F = 1.210, p > .05$ ) were not found statistically significant on overall academic stress.

**Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Sample Size**

Stream	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Science	Boys	79.58	13.07	50
	Girls	87.44	16.07	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>83.51</b>	<b>15.10</b>	<b>100</b>
Social Science	Boys	76.70	13.34	50
	Girls	88.88	12.78	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>82.79</b>	<b>14.37</b>	<b>100</b>
Total	Boys	78.14	13.22	50
	Girls	88.16	14.46	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>83.15</b>	<b>14.70</b>	<b>100</b>

As the Table 2 shows that the mean scores of female students ( $M = 87.44$ ) were much higher than the male students ( $M = 79.58$ ). It may be inferred that female students perceived more academic stress

than the male students. The mean score of science stream ( $M = 83.51$ ) was slightly higher as compared to social science ( $M = 82.79$ ) but difference was not significant.

**Table 3: Analysis of Variance using Overall Scores Obtained on Psychological Well Being as The Dependent Variable**

Sources	Sum of Square	df	Mean Scores	F	Sig.
Stream	.005	1	.005	.001	.974
Gender	588.245	1	588.245	125.390	.000
Stream*Gender	26.645	1	26.645	5.680	.018
Error	919.500	196	4.691		
Total	35049.000	200			
Corrected Total	1534.395	199			

The above table- 3 indicates that main effects of gender ( $F = 125.390, p < .01$ ) and their interaction effects ( $F = 5.680, p < .05$ ) on psychological well

being were found significant, while there was no significant main effect of stream ( $F = .001, p > .05$ ).

**Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and Sample Size**

Stream	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Science	Boys	11.60	1.457	50
	Girls	14.30	3.005	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12.95</b>	<b>2.713</b>	<b>100</b>
Social Science	Boys	10.86	1.107	50
	Girls	15.02	2.527	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12.94</b>	<b>2.853</b>	<b>100</b>
Total	Boys	11.23	1.340	50
	Girls	14.66	2.786	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12.95</b>	<b>2.777</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen from Table 4 that the mean scores of female students ( $M = 14.66$ ) were much higher than the male students ( $M = 11.23$ ). It may be inferred that female student's psychological well being

is better than her counterpart. The mean scores of science stream ( $M = 12.95$ ) and social science ( $M = 12.94$ ) did not differ significantly.

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## Discussion

The problem of students, especially academic stress and its effect has become a serious problem among researchers because of increasing incidence of suicidal attempt among students in the world. In order to verify the first hypothesis, that there will be main effect of gender and stream on academic stress. It is evident from the analysis (table-1) that the significant main effect was found between male and female adolescents on overall academic stress scores, whereas the effect of stream was not significant. It is suggested that the mean scores in table-2 science stream (M=83.51) was slightly higher as compared to social science (M=82.79) but difference was not found significant. This may be due to the fact that adolescents' studying either in science or social sciences stream, they have same level of academic stress. So, the first hypothesis that there will be main effect of gender and stream on academic stress is partially accepted. The female adolescents as compared to male adolescents perceived more academic stress. This is because of seriousness regarding their academic pursue. Females are more sincere and punctual by nature and take everything very seriously whereas males generally pursue their goals with ease. It is general observation that the girls are hardworking and serious-minded even though they get less/fewer opportunities. Perception of academic overload and high competitions are most often reported as the cause of academic stress among students.

When the investigator verified the second hypothesis, that there will be main effect of gender and stream on psychological well-being, it is also clear from table- 3, that significant main effect of gender was found on psychological well-being, whereas the effect of stream was not significant. The second hypothesis is also partially accepted. This may be due to the fact that academic stress significantly influences psychological well-being of adolescents and also a notable risk factor for psychological health problem. As a result, unmanageable stress can impact on adolescents' psychological well-being, leading to various illnesses such as depression.

To test third hypothesis, there will be significant influence of interaction effect between gender and stream on academic stress and psychological well-being. It is clear from the results in table-3 that the interaction effect was found significantly on psychological well-being but the interaction effect was not found significant on academic stress. The third hypothesis is also partially accepted. These findings indicated that the students perceived academic stress due to their parental expectations, and getting success for entering into institute and university. The results showed that a clear there is no significant interaction effects between gender and stream on academic stress among adolescents. It is suggested that parents should give freedom to their children to choose career/course according to their capacities, interests, needs, and capabilities. It is also suggested that teachers should help students whenever they are in need.

## Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the present study have important implications not only for adolescents/students but their families also. Counseling programme should be started at secondary level of education. Thus, it is the prime duty of both (parents and teachers) to provide bias free environment to adolescents for their well being. To reduce the academic stress and enhance psychological well-being among adolescents, schools administration and teachers should understand students' problems and use different strategies to overcome negative outcomes and improve their well being. The school should organize regular guidance and counselling programme to provide proper direction to the students. It is the responsibility of family members and schools administration to provide stress free and hospitable environment to adolescents for their academic growth and well-being. Beside the school responsibilities, it is the prime duty of adolescents' parents that they should trust their children and develop friendly relation so that they are able to share all their secrets with them. They should spend time in interacting with their children in dealing with their academic stress related issues and increase the well-being which will provide a scope for independent decisions making related to various career aspects. Thus there is an urgent need for improving performance and enhance psychological well-being through stress management programs for adolescents in schools.

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