

A Study of Academic Stress of Science and Arts Stream Intermediate Students

Abstract

This study aims to assess the level of academic stress felt by intermediate class students. Modern educational system has burdened the students. Increased stress level is also influencing student's academic performance and well being. Particularly in intermediate class, students face more academic stress. Their future is mainly dependent on the results of intermediate examination and at the same time they also prepare for entrance of medical and engineering admission. That is why their stress level is increased. The total population of 240 students of science and arts stream intermediate class students participated in the study. Among 240 students, 130 were boys and 110 were girls. Academic stress scale was used to measure the academic stress level. Mean, S.D. and t - test was computed. The results revealed a significant difference in stress level of boys and girls students. It was also found that science stream students were significantly more stressed than arts stream students. The finding of the study will be useful to teachers, parents and the education system to understand the level of stress and make substantive efforts to reduce them and enhance students' well-being.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Achievement, Anxiety, Examination, Parental Expectation, Competition.

Introduction

Stress has become a part of today's life. Everybody is facing some time of stress. Children, youth and older people all are suffering due to stress and its negative consequence. Bernstein et al (2008) defined stress as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressor. Auerback and Grambling (1998) defined stress as circumstances that disrupt or threaten to disrupt individual's daily functioning and cause people to make adjustments. They regard stress as an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that individuals experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being.

Stress has not always negative effects. It has some positive effects too. Stress work as a normal adaptive reaction to a difficult or threatening situation. It prepares and motivates individual to face the difficult-situation. It has been found in researches that moderate level of stress is correlated with better achievements, enhances creativity: Auerback and Grambling (1998). The negative effects of stress include hindrance in performance on difficult-task, lower achievements. It can also lead to serious physical problems like hypertension, sugar, asthma, high blood pressure and mental illness. It reduces individual's psychological well-being and satisfaction with life also.

Academic Stress

Academic stress is the anxiety and tension related with education and schooling. Students face many stresses at school and college. Studies, examination, assignment and homework, peer pressure, parental expectation extracurricular activities impose consistent pressure on students. They are puzzled in balancing between school, studies, coaching and deadlines. The lack of time, fear of failure in the exam, uncooperative school environments make students physically and mentally sick. Their academic performance decreases because of their academic stresses. Much research has been conducted on academic stress and its consequences for students. Academic stress among students has been studied well by the researchers and some important stressors have been identified.

Fairbrother and Warn (2003) have found too many assignments, competition with other students, failures, and poor relationship with other

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students or lecturers are the main stressors of college level students. Carveth et al (1996) found student's perceptions of extensive knowledge base required and perception of an inadequate time to develop it are the main stressors for students.

Abouserie (1994) found that students are most stressed at time of examination and main pressures are exams, competition for grades, shortage of time, vast syllabus etc. George Essel and Patrick Owusu (2017) have listed important academic stressors felt by college students. The increased work load, lower grades, longer hours of study, language difficulties, procrastination, examination, missing lectures, frustration due to misunderstanding were found to be main stressors of students by them.

Increased Work Load / Home Work Assignments

Too much load of homework and assignments make students tense. They face a lot of trouble in completing their assignments in given time limit. They are unable to give proper time to different study related activities and are all the time puzzled and anxious. Their academic performance also deteriorates.

Low Marks

Every student aspires to score higher marks in the examination. But many a times they do not score as per their expectation level, they get nervous and lose confidence. Sometimes they try to harm themselves.

Longer Study Hours

Students have a very tight study schedule. They hardly get time for leisure and other activities of their choice. The long hours to study make them bored and monotonous. They are always busy in their lectures, homework and assignments and hardly get time for their hobbies and recreation.

Language Problem

Sometimes language problem also disturbs students. Especially when Hindi medium students go for English medium, they face lots of difficulties. They become less confident and less vocal in the class.

Procrastination

Procrastination is the avoidance of doing a task which needs to be completed. It is act of accomplishing more pleasurable things and lingering less pleasurable and critical assignments. This approach is very detrimental for the students as they gradually lose interest in their assigned task and they become stressed for not completing their assignments on scheduled time.

Examinations

Examination poses the greatest threat to the students. Fear of not performing well in exams makes them ill. Sometimes fear of exam negatively influences students' physical and psychological well-being. They report lack of concentration in studies before exam night, sleep disturbance, forgetting everything learned and nervousness, scoring bad grades scares them for receiving parental rejection and peer pressure.

Missing Lectures

Students often miss lectures for fun and enjoyment. But when the lecture is missed, the students find it difficult to recollect the matter from

other students; they lag behind in studies gradually. Their burden increases and makes them stressed.

Parental Expectation

Every parent wants his child to perform best in studies and bring them fame in society but parents do not assess the capability of their child. They burden their child with their higher expectations. The child is very stressed because of his parent's high expectations. He feels how he will face his parents if he does not perform up to parents expectations. Many students have committed suicide due to their parent's unrealistic expectation.

Future Worries

Students are often stressed about their career and future plans. They are afraid of not attaining admission in desired college and not getting proper placement thereafter. There is very cut throat competition for admission in professional and good colleges and students always worry for their admission and good future.

Impact of Academic Stress

Review of Literature

Academic stress and its impact on students have been extensively researched by the researchers. They have identified different stress at school /college level. Impact of stress on student's academic achievement and physical and psychological well-being has also been studied thoroughly by the researcher.

Summary of few selected studies is presented here.

Smith, Johal, Wadworth and Smith and Petero (2000) have blamed the modern educational system for students stress. Academic stress has affecting students physically as well as mentally. Many researchers like Malach-Pines and Keinan (2007), Ontori (2007), Angolla and Ontori (2009) and Angolla (2009) have recognized stress symptoms in students as lose of energy, increased blood pressure, depressed mood, increase in craving, difficulty in concentration, impatience, nervousness and strain.

Misra and Mckean (2000) have presented a person-environment model for understanding stress in university students. This model suggests that individuals can consider stressful events as demanding or challenging. Perception of educational goals as a challenge brings stress and in turn this stress creates a sense of competence and enhances learning capability. But perception of educational goal as a threat brings such stress which creates a feeling of hopelessness and thus leads to lower academic achievement. Stress is considered to be a part of student's life. Agolla and Ongori (2009) found that academic work is always accomplished with stressful activities. In their study, students reported experience of high stress at college level especially in preparation for exams, class ranking, competition, mastering the extensive syllabus in the short time. Researchers have extensively studied the impacts of academic stress on the student's academic achievement and physical and psychological well-being. P. Sindhu (2016) found significant links between academic anxiety and achievement. Bloomer and Kendall (1999) have listed some stress of students like fear of

exam, competition for class ranks and vast course content. Academic stress not only influences student grades, and academic achievement, it also affects their health. Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley and whalen, (2005), Misra and Mckean (2000) have found evidence of relations between stress and physical and psychological well-being of students. Dwyer and Cummings (2001), found that in undergraduate students, stress was the most common factor among all health factor which influence students academic performance. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) have found high level of stress during the first year of overall adjustment and can make students more susceptible to many social and psychological problems, thus leading to lower grades in the final year. In many other studies it has been found that many psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and stress have significant impact-on students' academic achievements.

Williamson, Birmaher Ryan and Dahl (2005) have reported that anxious and depressed youth, stressful life events are significantly increasing and decreasing the academic performance.

Academic stresses among students have been a relevant topic of recent researches. Researchers have identified many academic stresses like excessive assignments, unhealthy competition among class students, fear of failure in exams and lack of pocket money, Fairbrother and Warn (2003), Ongori (2007), Awino and Agolla (2008) found overloaded lecture halls in important stress, they have also found the semester system, and insufficient resources to perform academic work. Kumar and Jejurkar (2005) have concluded in their studies that academic factors were mainly responsible for higher level of stress in undergraduate students. Wilks (2008) has identified some stress at college level as lack issues of time management, personal goals interaction with teacher's adjustment to school/college culture etc. Masih and Gulrej (2006) has identified main stresses full by students. Main stresses were complex admission process, higher parental expectation, lengthy and complex syllabus, long study hours, unhealthy school environment, and unhealthy relation with teachers, rigid discipline, too much homework / assignment, old teaching methodology, unconcerned teacher's attitude and overemphasis on weakness than acknowledging strengths.

Thus stress has affected all the students very much. It has negatively affected the academic achievement and well-being of almost all students irrespective of their gender. Significant gender difference has been reported in many researches. Misra and Castillo (2004) have found difference in perception and reaction to stress in boys and girl student. Jogaratnam and Buchanam (2004) have also found a significant difference between male and female students on the time pressure factor of stress. Sulaiman, Hassan, Sapin and Abdullah (2009) have found female students more stressed than male students. Thus the current scenario is very threatening. We cannot afford to overlook it at present time. This issue must be addressed seriously and students' stress should be decreased.

Significance of The Study

Since academic stress affecting negatively our students' achievement and physical and psychological well-being, it has become very urgent to understand its causes and measures to reduce it. If our students will be in deep stress, how will they accomplish in their carrier, achieve their future goals and contribute in national development process. This study is planned with this view point. The intermediate students have been chosen with a view in mind that mostly the career and future plans of the student are determined during this stage and the students face very high uncertainty. This study aims to understand the academic stress felt by intermediate students. Finding of the study may contribute in identifying the stress and ways to control it. Anxiety, depression, psychological disorder and suicide can be prevented in students by understanding the root causes of the stress and by addressing these properly.

Objectives of The Study

Present study has two objectives

1. To study the level of academic stress felt by science and arts stream students studying in intermediate class.
2. To study the difference in level of academic stress felt by boys and girl student studying in intermediate classes.

Hypotheses of The Study

1. There will be significant difference in academic stress level of science and arts stream students.
2. There will be significant difference in academic stress level of boys and girls students.

Method

Sample

Sample consisted of 240 students (130 boys and 110 girls) studying in two intermediate colleges at Sant Kabirnagar district. 155 students were from science stream and 85 students were from arts stream. Age range was 16-17 years.

Sample was selected by using simple random sampling.

	Science	Arts	Total
Boys	80	50	130
Girls	75	35	110
Total	155	85	240

Tools

Hindi translation of Balaj Rao (2000) scale of academic stress was used to measure academic stress in students. Academic stress scale comprises of 40 items. Each items had five alternatives varying from the response, 'No stress' to 'Extreme Stress'. Each response carries a score of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 respectively. 160 is the maximum possible score.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected in two intermediate schools at Sant Kabirnagar district. Prior permission was taken from the school administration. The academic stress scales in Hindi were administered to students in their respective class rooms. Students enthusiastically filled the questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis and Results

Filled scales were scored and mean, S.D. and t - ratio have been calculated. Obtained results have been presented in table 1 and 2.

Table 1
Academic Stress Level of Intermediate Students
N=240, (Boys=130, Girls=110)

	N	Mean	S.D	SED	T-Ratio	Level of Significant
Boys	130	63.40	9.62	1.11	2.06	.05
Girls	110	61.11	7.64			

Table 2
Academic Stress Level of Science and Arts
Stream Intermediate Students
N=240

	N	Mean	S.D.	SEd	t-ratio	Level of Significance
Science Students	155	45.80	10.66	1.27	5.70	.01
Arts Students	85	38.55	6.82			

As evident from table 1, boys are significantly more academically stressed than girls. Mean score of academic stress of boys is 63.40, while girl's mean score is 61.11. The t-test was also found to be significant at 0.05 level. Thus the first hypothesis of the study is confirmed. Boy students had more academic stress than girl students. Table 2 shows that science stream students had higher level of academic stress than arts stream students. Mean score of academic stress of science stream students is 45.80 while art stream students mean score is 38.55. The t-ratio is also statistically significant at 0.01 level of significant. Thus the second hypothesis was also confirmed.

Discussion

Thus, the present study assessed the academic stress of intermediate students. Results show significant difference in stress level of science and arts stream students and boy students were significantly found to be more stressed than girl students. It appears that girl students are more regular, disciplined and focused at their studies. They study regularly, attend lectures, complete assignments within time and prepare for exams in planned way. They hardly bunk classes, distracted in other academic pursuits therefore they are less stressed. That is why, girls score higher in exams as compared to boys. Waston (2002) have found similar finding in his study of academic stress among college students in Philippines. Female students were less stressed because they have learnt the time management and stress coping strategies. Girls enjoy their studies by adopting effective and efficient study habits. They are much more devoted, concerned and consistent in their studies. Misra and Castillo (2004) have also found gender difference in perception and reaction to stream. Sulaiman et al (2009) have also found different stream level in male and female students. Reason behind this is the difference in approach of boys and girls towards studies. Boys are less serious, regular and casual in their studies than girls. Sometimes they are distracted to other recreational and social activities. They are not well-prepared for exams. When exam approaches they become stressed, puzzled in last minute preparation and depend on short cuts. They perform lower than

girls. The parental expectations are also responsible for increasing boy's stress level.

Socio-culturally, boys are supposed to be more responsible and earn well to take care of their family in future and because of these over expectations, boys become anxious and perform worse in exam. Academic anxiety has been found responsible for lower achievement in many researches. P Sindhu (2016) has found academic stress roll in lower achievement. Dwyer and Cummings (2001) have also found similar results. They found academic stress as the most common factor influencing students' academic performance.

Science stream students have reported significantly more academic stress than arts stream students. It seems that science curriculum is quite extensive and tough and demands a regular, planned and disciplined study throughout. Science students cannot afford to miss lectures, practical etc. They are cut off from all the extracurricular, social and cultural activities going on in the college campus. They are continuously busy in long hours of study, coaching and practice. All this routine makes them anxious and mentally puzzled. While arts stream students study comfortably, they enjoy their studies and college life as well. They participate in different social and cultural activities in the college. Their career option is not solely dependent on their intermediate results. They plan for higher studies in university and go for academics or government jobs. Thus, at intermediate level arts students are less stressed than science students. Satappan and Kuppan (1980) have found similar results. They found humanities students to be more adjusted generally and socially than science students.

Conclusion

To sum, it can be stated that academic stress is affecting our student's academic achievement and physical and psychological well being. Most students are in grip of acute academic stress now a day. The scenario is very threatening. If students will become so stressed, how they will contribute to national progress. Students are the future of any nation. At present they are at stake. It is very urgent to identify the causes of this stress and some substantive measures should be taken by the government, school authorities and parent to cope with this stress and secure students' physical and psychological well-being. Student counseling and parent counseling should be done occasionally at schools/ colleges. Parents should be advised to curtail their unrealistic expectations and should be encouraged to freely communicate with their children. Parents should bear in mind that the children have their own wishes and dreams. Let them cherish their own dreams and be a happy person, rather than to force children to fulfill parent's unfulfilled desires and expectations.

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