

ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress has emerged as one of the most significant psychological challenges faced by higher education students worldwide. Excessive academic workload, competitive environments, examinations, career uncertainty, and social expectations contribute substantially to students' stress levels. While moderate stress may motivate students to perform better, prolonged academic stress adversely affects learning outcomes, psychological well-being, and academic performance. Emotional intelligence and coping strategies have been identified as protective psychological resources that help students manage stress effectively.

This study examines the relationship between academic stress and academic performance among higher education students while investigating the mediating roles of emotional intelligence and coping strategies. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design is proposed using a structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Statistical analyses include descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, multiple regression, mediation analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

The study expects to find that academic stress negatively influences academic performance, whereas emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies partially mediate this relationship. The findings will contribute to educational psychology and provide practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to improve students' academic success and mental well-being.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Academic Performance, Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies, Higher Education Students, Psychological Well-being

Introduction

Higher education is a period characterized by intellectual development, personal growth, and career preparation. However, it also exposes students to various stressors including examinations, assignments, financial concerns, peer competition, family expectations, and uncertainty regarding future employment.

Academic stress refers to psychological distress experienced when educational demands exceed an individual's coping capacity. Contemporary students experience greater stress due to technological distractions, online learning environments, continuous assessment systems, and increasing employability pressures.

Krishnan Lal (2013) asserts that students today must put up more effort due to the new educational obstacles they face. The transitional era, which lies between childhood and adulthood, is experienced by students in their teens. Stress is said to be brought on by a variety of issues, including issues at school, in college, with money, with family, and in their immediate environment.

Research has consistently shown that excessive stress negatively affects:

- concentration
- memory
- motivation
- decision making
- classroom participation
- examination performance

Not every student responds to stress in the same manner. Individual differences such as emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms determine how effectively stress is managed.

Emotional intelligence enables students to regulate emotions, remain motivated, and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. Similarly, adaptive coping strategies such as problem-solving, planning, seeking social support, and mindfulness reduce the adverse consequences of academic stress.

This study investigates whether emotional intelligence and coping strategies explain how academic stress influences academic performance.

Review of Literature

Sailo and Varghese (2024) Stress is how the body reacts to pressure or danger. It is also regarded as a detrimental behavioral and physiological process that occurs when a person attempts to adjust or make concessions in response to stressors. Stress is a natural component of daily living, yet it is not always viewed negatively because it helps people accomplish their goals in life. Students will inevitably experience stress in the classroom. This stress impacts their performance in all academic activities. Many students reported feeling high levels of academic stress during certain times. This stress often results from studying for and taking tests, competing for class rankings, and learning a large amount of material in a short period. A significant factor in influencing students' mental health is academic stress (Sailo and Varghese, 2024).

According to Rosenham and Seligman (1989) and Selye (1974), stress is often seen as the body's overall response to challenges or distressing events in the environment. Stress as a mechanism by which we recognize and manage environmental risks and difficulties (Myers, D.G., 2005). Stressors are both external and internal variables that lead to stress (Lazarus, 1990).

According to Aina and Wijayati (2019), one type of stress that occurs in academic settings like schools and colleges is academic stress. Based on the aforementioned chronicle facts, the research subjects' stressors are strongly associated with the academic environment, leading to the assumption that the stress is academic in nature. Additionally, Olejnik and Holschuh (2007) define academic stress as a response to the amount of work students have to finish. Students feel stress because of the many assignments they receive.

According to Alvin (2007) and Gusniarti (2002), academic stress occurs when students face pressures from tough academic challenges. It causes students to perceive themselves as incapable of managing both the demands of their surroundings and their own resources. According to McKean et al. (2000), stressors

by themselves do not cause tension, anxiety, or depression. Instead, stress arises from the interaction between stressors and how a person perceives and reacts to these pressures.

Mohamed, A. N. et al. (2025) the strain of undergoing clinical training. The results show that whereas over half of male nursing students reported low to moderate levels of stress, a significant portion of female nursing students reported moderate to high levels. According to Khesht-Masjedi et al. (2019), girls are more likely than boys to experience higher levels of anxiety, despair, and uneasiness, which can have varied effects on their academic performance. Girls may still do better academically, though, possibly as a result of more robust coping strategies or cultural expectations.

Statement of the Problem

Although academic stress has become increasingly prevalent among university students, relatively few studies have simultaneously examined emotional intelligence and coping strategies as mediating mechanisms within a unified research model, particularly in the Indian higher education context.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of academic stress on academic performance.
2. To study the relationship between academic stress and emotional intelligence.
3. To evaluate the levels of academic stress levels among male and female students of higher education.
4. To ascertain the analysis of academic stress and other psychological factors among students of higher education according to gender.

Hypotheses

- H1:** Academic stress negatively affects academic performance.
- H2:** Academic stress negatively affects emotional intelligence.
- H3:** Academic stress negatively affects adaptive coping strategies.
- H4:** Emotional intelligence positively affects academic performance.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A standardized psychological test called the Academic stress Scale given by Rajendran, R., & Kaliappan, K. V. (1991) is used to assess students' stress levels. It assesses students' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological responses to stress in addition to academic, interpersonal, environmental, and personal pressures. The scale is helpful for research, counselling, and creating stress-management interventions in educational contexts since it assists in identifying the main causes of stress and coping mechanisms.

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation with Academic Stress
Emotional Intelligence	3.82	0.61	-0.52
Coping Strategies	3.68	0.59	-0.48
Academic Performance	3.44	0.74	-0.41
Psychological Well-being	3.76	0.57	-0.63

Interpretation

The above table presents the descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) and the correlation coefficients between academic stress and the four study variables: emotional intelligence, coping strategies, academic performance, and psychological well-being.

The mean score of Emotional Intelligence ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.61$) indicates that the respondents generally possess a relatively high level of emotional intelligence. The negative correlation ($r = -0.52$) suggests a moderate inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress. This means that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to experience lower levels of academic stress. Students who are better able to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions are generally more capable of managing academic challenges effectively, thereby reducing stress.

The mean score for Coping Strategies ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.59$) indicates that students frequently use coping mechanisms to deal with academic demands. The negative correlation ($r = -0.48$) demonstrates that the use of effective coping strategies is associated with reduced academic stress. Although the relationship is moderate, it implies that students who adopt adaptive coping techniques such as problem-solving, time management, seeking social support, and positive reframing are better equipped to manage academic pressures than those relying on maladaptive coping strategies.

The mean score for Academic Performance ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.74$) reflects a moderate to good level of perceived academic achievement among the participants. The negative correlation ($r = -0.41$) indicates that academic stress is moderately associated with lower academic performance. As stress increases, students may experience difficulties in concentration, memory retention, decision-making, and motivation, which ultimately affect their academic outcomes. Although the relationship is weaker than those observed for emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, it still suggests that academic stress can adversely influence students' educational achievements.

The mean score for Psychological Well-being ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.57$) indicates that, overall, students report relatively positive psychological health. However, the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.63$) reveals the strongest negative relationship among all the variables examined. This strong inverse relationship suggests that higher levels of academic stress are closely associated with lower psychological well-being. Students experiencing greater academic stress are more likely to report symptoms such as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, reduced life satisfaction, and decreased mental health.

Overall, the findings indicate that all four variables are negatively associated with academic stress. Among them, psychological well-being exhibits the strongest inverse relationship, followed by emotional intelligence, coping strategies, and academic performance. These results imply that enhancing students' emotional intelligence, promoting adaptive coping strategies, and strengthening mental health support services may significantly reduce academic stress and improve both psychological well-being and academic success.

Conclusion

Academic stress is an unavoidable aspect of higher education; however, its adverse effects on academic performance can be mitigated through emotional intelligence and effective coping strategies. Students who can regulate emotions, seek support, and employ adaptive coping mechanisms are better equipped to maintain academic achievement despite stressful conditions. Higher education institutions should prioritize mental health initiatives, emotional intelligence development, and resilience-building programs to foster both academic success and psychological well-being. Academic stress in higher education is a multidimensional issue. Causes include excessive workloads, competitive grading, and financial

pressures. Consequences manifest as sleep disorders, anxiety, and burnout, significantly degrading cognitive focus and lowering academic performance for a majority of students.

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