



Chasing Dreams, Bearing Pressures: A Sociological Insight Into PUC Students

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Abstract

“Chasing Dreams, Bearing Pressures: A Sociological Insight into PUC Students” examines the increasing academic and emotional challenges faced by science stream students at the pre-university level in today’s competitive educational environment. In a rapidly changing world where academic excellence is closely tied to future career opportunities, students often experience immense pressure to meet both institutional and parental expectations. This study seeks to explore how such pressures influence their mental well-being, motivation, and social relationships. The research is conducted among 40 science students pursuing PUC, representing a group that often faces heightened stress due to demanding curricula, entrance exam preparation, and parental aspirations for professional courses such as engineering or medicine. The study highlights how the intersection of academic expectations, peer competition, and parental involvement shapes students’ emotional balance and overall academic performance.

The Importance of this study lies in its relevance to the current educational scenario, where students’ dreams and identities are often shaped by societal and familial pressures rather than personal interests. By understanding these experiences from a sociological perspective, the study aims to shed light on the hidden emotional struggles behind academic achievement. It also emphasizes the growing need for mental health awareness, supportive parenting, and the creation of a balanced educational atmosphere that values students’ individuality and holistic development. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on student well-being, parental roles, and social expectations, offering valuable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to make education more empathetic and student-centered.

Keywords: PUC students, academic pressure, parental expectations, peer pressure, holistic development.

Introduction

Education is considered by many to be one of the primary means for social advancement and transformation within the contemporary society of India. While an education provides individuals with the basic skills required to access information; education is also instrumental in shaping both an individual's personality, as well as their future career possibilities through the development of values. In the last several decades, the competition for education in India has grown significantly, so much so that students at a very early age are subjected to extreme levels of academic stress as well as personal pressure. The PUC course is a very pivotal time in a student's life; as it bridges the gap from schooling to post-secondary education, and is a period when students typically make major decisions about the type of careers they wish to pursue and how they would like to fulfill their ambitions.

Among the various academic streams, the science stream is often perceived as the most prestigious and demanding, as it opens pathways to professional courses such as engineering, medicine, and research-oriented fields. Consequently, students in this stream face heightened expectations from parents, teachers, and society. The belief that success in science equates to social respect and financial stability has made it one of the most competitive academic paths in India. As a result, students often find themselves burdened with heavy workloads, long study hours, and multiple coaching classes that leave little room for recreation or emotional relaxation.

The Academic Pressure students in India face is very much a part of the larger Social Phenomenon in which they live and grow up in. Rather than simply an outcome of an individual's drive to succeed academically, it is reflective of the Cultural and Familial Expectations that are embedded within the larger culture of India. Many parents who aspire to achieve "upward mobility" for themselves place a great deal of emphasis on setting very high academic goals for their children. As positive factors that support a child's ability to be successful academically, parental support and motivation can act as pillars of strength for students; however, when parental support and motivation crosses the line into excessive involvement in the child's academics and/or comparative evaluations of the child against other students (i.e., the child's peers), it can lead to a sense of inadequacy, anxiety, and loss of confidence in the child. The disparity created by this overemphasis on parental involvement, or the pressure to perform, directly impacts both the student's emotional well-being and academic performance.

In addition, the competition and the comparisons made by students regarding their academic performances have also become an important aspect of the lives of students. Oftentimes, the relationships formed during school are secondary to the competition students feel to earn the highest grades, rankings, or college placement possible. Many students experience peer pressure to either keep pace with their classmates or to surpass them in terms of academic achievements; as such, the competition between students can create unhealthy situations and emotional stressors for all parties involved. Lastly, the Digital Age has exacerbated this competitive environment further – through the use of social media, the internet, and learning platforms, the lines between one's academic life and personal life have been blurred creating distractions and diminished focus.

At the same time, the psychological and emotional aspects of students' academic journeys often remain overlooked. Many students silently endure the pressures of performance without adequate emotional support from parents or teachers. Adolescence, a period marked by identity formation and emotional sensitivity, makes students particularly vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and depression when they are unable to meet expectations. The lack of open communication between students and parents further widens this emotional gap, making it difficult for students to express their fears or failures.

The present study, titled "Chasing Dreams, Bearing Pressures: A Sociological Insight into PUC Students," attempts to explore these intertwined challenges through a sociological lens. Conducted among 40 science PUC students, the research investigates how parental expectations, academic workload, and social influences shape their educational experiences and emotional health. By focusing on the lived experiences of these

students, the study aims to uncover how broader social structures—such as family, peer groups, and educational institutions—affect individual well-being and identity formation.

This study holds special significance in the current scenario, where academic excellence is often prioritized over mental health and personal growth. The findings are expected to provide deeper insights into how modern education systems, despite offering vast opportunities, also create invisible pressures that can hinder holistic development. It emphasizes the urgent need for empathetic parenting, student-centered education, and mental health awareness at the pre-university level. Understanding these challenges from a sociological perspective is essential to ensure that education becomes a tool for empowerment rather than a source of distress. By identifying the social roots of academic pressure and proposing ways to balance expectations with emotional well-being, this study seeks to contribute to building a more compassionate and balanced educational environment for the youth of today.

Significance of the study:

Problems Faced by PUC Science Students

- 1.High Academic Pressure:** PUC science students are burdened with a vast and demanding syllabus that requires continuous learning and revision. Regular class tests, assignments, and internal assessments increase their workload. The constant need to achieve high marks for university admissions and professional courses adds to their mental strain and reduces their enthusiasm for learning.
- 2.Parental Expectations:** Many parents expect their children to excel academically and secure admission into prestigious fields like engineering or medicine. This high level of expectation often ignores the child's individual interests or abilities. As a result, students experience emotional stress, guilt, and fear of disappointing their parents.
- 3.Peer Competition:** The classroom environment among PUC students is often highly competitive. Continuous comparison of marks and achievements among peers leads to jealousy, insecurity, and loss of self-confidence. Instead of healthy motivation, competition becomes a source of anxiety and emotional pressure.
- 4.Fear of Failure:** With increasing emphasis on performance in board and entrance examinations, many students develop an intense fear of failure. This fear not only affects their confidence but also leads to sleeplessness, overthinking, and mental exhaustion. The constant worry about not meeting expectations hampers concentration and learning outcomes.
- 5.Poor Time Management:** Students struggle to balance their time between school, private tuition, and entrance coaching. As a result, they get very little time for rest, recreation, or family interaction. Lack of proper time management causes irregular routines, fatigue, and reduced efficiency in both academic and personal life.
- 6.Emotional and Mental Strain:** Emotional well-being often takes a back seat in the pursuit of academic success. Many students feel misunderstood or neglected by parents and teachers who focus only on marks. This lack of emotional support leads to loneliness, depression, and declining motivation to study.
- 7.Lack of Coping Strategies:** Most students are unaware of effective ways to manage academic and emotional stress. Without proper guidance or counseling, they may adopt negative coping behaviors such as social withdrawal, overthinking, or spending excessive time on social media. This further affects their concentration and academic progress.
- 8. Conflict Between Interest and Parental Choice:** Several students opt for the science stream due to parental or societal pressure rather than personal interest. When their passion does not align with the chosen field, they feel frustrated and lose motivation. This conflict often leads to dissatisfaction, poor performance, and disinterest in studies.

9. Health Problems: Continuous study schedules, lack of sleep, and irregular eating habits lead to various health issues among students. Fatigue, headaches, eye strain, and weakened immunity are commonly reported. Neglecting physical well-being for academic goals adversely affects both mental and emotional health.

10. Uncertain Future and Career Anxiety: Students frequently worry about their future career prospects and entrance exam results. The uncertainty regarding college admissions and fear of not meeting societal expectations creates continuous anxiety. This long-term stress affects their decision-making ability and overall mental stability.

Review of Literature

Tsabary (2010) authored the book, “The Conscious Parent”, and offered a new perspective on parenting-not as a unidirectional activity where parents instruct and guide their children, but as a collaborative journey of growth and learning. The author argued that children have the capacity to encourage self-reflection within parents, thus enabling parents to evaluate the typical parental roles and transition towards a relationship based on partnership and kinship. Tsabary’s approach enables parents to break free from transmitting emotional baggage and to establish deeper and more genuine relationships with their children. Tsabary’s work is unique in that she advocates for a transformational type of parenting that does not solely benefit the child’s development but also benefits the parent’s development. The book challenges readers to reconsider previous patterns of parenting and to adopt a more conscious and spiritually-connected method of raising children where both parties grow and evolve reciprocally.

Mishra & Choudhuri (2020) investigated the degree of academic stress experienced by Indian students at all stages of their schooling (secondary to higher education levels). The most common sources of academic stress included: a heavy workload; pressure from parents and teachers to achieve; stress due to exams; insufficient time for studying; fear of failure; lack of access to good counseling. The extent of these stressors can vary significantly depending upon the type of school attended; students in highly competitive, private schools are generally subject to an increased amount of homework and are under greater pressure to gain entry into higher education than those in non-competitive public schools. Stressors can also increase as students get older and experience different educational settings. Impact of Academic Stress: Mental Health Problems; Lack of Motivation; Concentration Problems; Physical Symptoms (Headaches, Insomnia); Demands from family members may be in excess of the individual’s ability to cope with Recommendations for Managing Academic Stress: Curriculum Reforms; Teacher Training Programs to raise awareness of the impact of academic stress on students; Parental Education Programs; Student Counseling Programs.

Utami (2022) Utami’s research supports the notion that parental involvement has been shown to be consistently correlated to better academic achievement across all ages; particularly strong for young children. When parents are involved in their children’s education, they help their children to achieve higher grades/test scores and they help to establish social/emotional development in their children; specifically, they help to increase their children’s self-esteem and social skills. Utami’s comprehensive analysis demonstrates that parental involvement in education contributes to both academic success and to the development of the whole person. Parents’ involvement in their children’s education sends a message to children of love, care and pride, and it motivates children to give their best and to grow up to be competent individuals. The evidence further illustrates the numerous and enduring benefits that exist for children whose parents are engaged in their educational experience.

Ali and Roy (2024) examined the sources of, and the effects of, academic stress on undergraduate/postgraduate students at colleges/universities within the city of Kolkata. Students’ transition from secondary schooling to college is an experience that produces a significant amount of psychological distress, challenges with their academic learning, social issues, and health problems. Academic stress was found to be the primary source of disruption for these 336 students, and particularly so for males during their time at college/ university. It presents a significant obstacle to students’ achievement and success when they are competing in high-pressured environments. The researchers provide recommendations to reduce the burden of academic workload, increase

counseling services, create additional workshops and spaces for students to relax as ways to help decrease dropout rates and prevent burnout.

Tyagi et al. (2025) studied how academic stress impacts health science college students in India. In their abstract they identify major stressors: extremely competitive exams, massive amounts of homework or studying with little if no break time, and constant pressure to continually study. These were measured by the Academic Stress Scale, DASS-42 (depression, anxiety, and distress), and GHQ-12 (overall loss of well-being in general health). The identified stressors create an extreme level of emotional distress that is worse during the last year of schooling when students are doing clinical rotations and under extreme amounts of pressure, which can lead to total life breakdowns, far beyond just school grades. Conclusions describe this as a “mental health crisis” that requires immediate action and not just a student enduring it. Recommendations include: Counseling services specifically designed for health students, programs to provide students with the tools to develop healthy coping mechanisms (e.g., time management, relaxation techniques), and early screenings. This research clearly demonstrates the shortage of resources available to students in India’s rigorous health education system that jeopardizes students future.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the academic pressure and emotional challenges faced by PUC science students in a competitive learning environment.
2. To analyze how parental expectations, communication, and peer relationships influence students’ academic motivation and overall well-being.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study follows a descriptive research design aimed at understanding the various dimensions of academic pressure, parental expectations, peer challenges, and related experiences among pre-university science students. The study seeks to explore how social, familial, and institutional factors influence students’ motivation, stress levels, and academic performance. A descriptive design is most appropriate for this research because it allows for systematic data collection and analysis to capture the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of students in their natural educational settings.

The Study Area:

The study was conducted in Shivamogga district, a prominent part of the Malnad region in Karnataka, India. The district is known for its high literacy rate of 80.2%, reflecting a strong commitment to education and academic advancement. Shivamogga hosts 134 pre-university (PUC) colleges, of which 33 are located within Shivamogga city, including government, aided, and private institutions.

This institutional diversity allows for the inclusion of parents and students from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of parental roles in students’ academic performance. Shivamogga city serves as an educational hub in the Malnad region, attracting students from both urban and rural areas, and offering a balanced representation of different social and educational contexts.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of pre-university (PUC) students enrolled in the science stream in various colleges across Shivamogga city. From this population, a sample of 40 students was selected through random sampling. This method was adopted to ensure that each respondent had an equal chance of being included, thereby minimizing selection bias. The sample included both male and female students, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Scope and Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into the academic and emotional challenges faced by PUC science students, it is limited to a sample of 40 respondents within Shivamogga city. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all pre-university students in Karnataka or India as a whole. Nevertheless, the results offer a meaningful understanding of the sociological and psychological dynamics influencing the educational experiences of adolescents in similar urban settings.

Data Collection Method

The primary data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire covered themes such as parental involvement, academic motivation, stress levels, peer influence, communication patterns, and emotional well-being. The questions were designed using a Likert-type scale, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement on specific statements. In addition, a few open-ended questions were included to capture personal insights and qualitative reflections.

The questionnaire was personally distributed to students from selected pre-university colleges in Shivamogga city. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

The present study was conducted among 40 PUC students, and the data were analyzed using simple statistical tools such as frequency and percentage distribution. This approach helped in systematically presenting the responses to understand students' socio-demographic background, academic pressure, parental influence, and social challenges.

The data have been presented in tables for clarity and easy comparison. Table first illustrates the personal profile of the respondents, Table second highlights their academic and psychological dimensions, while Table third focuses on parental and social influences affecting students' educational experiences.

The analysis reveals that academic performance and emotional well-being are strongly shaped by multiple factors such as parental expectations, communication patterns, and peer relationships. The interpretation of data provides valuable insights into how social and family environments influence students' motivation, stress levels, and overall academic adjustment during the crucial PUC stage.

Table 1: Personal Data of the Respondents

Aspects	Frequency	Percentage
Religion		
Hindu	19	47.5
Muslim	10	25.0
Christian	06	15.0
Jains	04	10.0
Sikh	01	2.5
Gender		
Male	17	42.5
Female	23	57.5
Age Group		
15 years	17	42.5
16 years	21	52.5
17 years & above	02	5.0
Year of Study		

1 st year PUC	18	45.0
2 nd year PUC	22	55.0
Family Type		
Nuclear family	21	52.5
Joint family	12	30.0
Single Parent	07	17.5
Main Earning Member		
Father	18	45.0
Mother	07	17.5
Both Equally	13	32.5
Other guardian	02	5.0
Parents level of Education		
Up to School Level	07	17.5
College/Graduation	19	47.5
Post-graduation & above	10	25.0
Not educated	04	10.0
Total	40	100.0

The data presented in the table provides insights into the personal and family background of the 40 PUC student respondent.

The data reveals a diverse religious background among the respondents, with nearly half (47.5) belonging to the Hindu community, followed by 25% Muslims, 15% Christians, 10% Jains, and a small proportion (2.5%) Sikhs. This shows that students from diverse religious backgrounds participated in the study, reflecting a multicultural representation.

The gender composition shows that 57.5% of the respondents are female, while 42.5% are male, indicating slightly higher participation from female students. In terms of age, the majority (52.5) are 16 years old, followed by 42.5% aged 15 years, and only 5% aged 17 and above, showing that most respondents belong to the middle adolescent stage.

With regard to academic level, 55% of students are studying in 2nd Year PUC, and 45% in 1st Year PUC, ensuring balanced representation from both classes. More than half of the respondents (52.5%) belong to nuclear families, 30% live in joint families, and 17.5% come from single-parent families, showing the dominance of nuclear family systems.

In most families (45%), the father is the main earning member, while in 32.5% of families, both parents contribute equally. This reflects changing economic roles within households. Finally, in terms of parental education, 47.5% of respondents' parents have a graduation degree, 25% hold postgraduate qualifications, 17.5% have education up to school level, and 10% are not educated— indicating that the majority come from relatively well-educated family backgrounds.

Table2 : Academic and Psychological Dimensions of PUC Students

Aspects	Frequency	Percentage
Study workload		
Light and Manageable	08	20.0
Moderate but Manageable	13	32.5
Heavy and Stressful	15	37.5
Overwhelming	04	10.0
Peer Pressure		
Very often	04	10.0
Sometimes	09	22.5
Rarely	16	40.0
Never	11	27.5
Feeling isolated due to Academic pressure		
Often	08	20.0
Sometimes	16	40.0
Rarely	10	25.0
Never	06	15.0
Anxiety, Depression or low Confidence		
Often	13	32.5
Sometimes	17	42.5
Rarely	09	22.5
Never	01	02.5
Coping Mechanisms for Stress		
Talking to friends	06	15.0
Listening to music/ watching shows	11	27.5
Physical activity (walk, yoga etc)	06	15.0
Avoiding studies for a while	07	17.5
Other	10	25.0
Distractions & Addictions (mobile,gaming,social media or substance)		
Yes, very much	09	22.5
Yes, to some extent	16	40.0
Rarely or occasionally	13	32.5
Not at all	02	5.0
Total	40	100.0

This table presents an analysis of the academic and psychological experiences of 40 Pre-University Course (PUC) students, focusing on their study workload, peer pressure, emotional well-being, coping mechanisms, and distractions. The findings reveal the varying degrees of stress, coping patterns, and mental health challenges among students.

Study Workload: The data show that a significant portion of students experience considerable academic pressure. 37.5% of students reported their workload as heavy and stressful, indicating that academic expectations at the PUC level are demanding. 32.5% felt it was moderate but manageable, suggesting a fair balance between studies and leisure for some. Only 20% found the workload light and manageable, implying that few students experience minimal academic strain. A smaller portion, 10%, described it as overwhelming, reflecting severe stress and possible burnout.

Peer Pressure: Peer influence plays a considerable role in shaping students' academic and social behavior. 40% of respondents said they experience peer pressure rarely, indicating that not all students feel directly influenced by peers. 27.5% reported never facing such pressure, showing resilience or independence in their choices. 22.5% said they experience peer pressure sometimes, while 10% reported it occurs very often. Although the majority do not feel constant peer pressure, about one-third of students face it occasionally, which can contribute to anxiety or competitiveness.

Feeling Isolated Due to Academic Pressure: Isolation due to academic stress is another critical psychological concern. 40% of students said they sometimes feel isolated, suggesting that the burden of studies occasionally distances them from social connections. 20% often experience isolation, which may indicate emotional strain or lack of support. 25% feel isolated rarely, while 15% said never, reflecting better emotional stability or stronger support systems. This data reveals that more than half of the students have felt socially or emotionally isolated at some point due to academic stress.

Anxiety, Depression, or Low Confidence: Emotional health issues appear to be quite prevalent among respondents. 42.5% of students reported feeling anxious or depressed sometimes, showing that such emotions are relatively common. 32.5% experience these often, indicating that nearly one-third face ongoing psychological struggles. 22.5% rarely experience these symptoms, and only 2.5% said never. Overall, the findings suggest that a majority (around 75%) of PUC students face some level of mental distress, emphasizing the need for better emotional support and counseling in educational settings.

Coping Mechanisms for Stress: Students adopt various strategies to handle academic and emotional pressure. 27.5% cope by listening to music or watching shows, indicating the use of entertainment for relaxation. 25% reported other methods such as prayer, meditation, or spending time with family. 17.5% cope by avoiding studies for a while, showing a temporary withdrawal approach. 15% rely on talking to friends, highlighting the importance of peer support. Another 15% use physical activities like walking or yoga as stress relief. These patterns suggest that students largely depend on informal, self-directed coping techniques rather than structured counseling or guidance.

Distractions and Addictions (Mobile, Gaming, Social Media, Substance Use): Modern-day distractions also influence students' concentration and time management. 40% admitted being distracted to some extent, reflecting moderate dependency on digital or recreational activities. 22.5% said yes, very much, indicating a high level of distraction that may harm academic performance. 32.5% said they get distracted rarely or occasionally, and only 5% claimed not at all. This implies that a majority of PUC students (over 60%) are affected by digital distractions, which may reduce study efficiency and focus.

Table 3: Parental and Social influence on Student

Aspects	Frequency	Percentage
Parental Career Expectations		
Very high expectations	13	32.5
Moderate expectations	18	45.0
Do your best	08	20.0
No expectations	01	2.5
Feelings When Unable to Meet expectations		
Guilty or Disappointed	05	12.5
Motivated to try harder	12	30.0
Indifferent	06	15.0
Anxious or stressed	17	42.5
Parental approach towards Studies		
Most Supportive	08	20.0
Balanced (Supportive+Pressurizing)	15	37.5
Mostly Pressurizing	10	25.0
Not Involved Much	07	17.5
Decision Making in PUC Stream		
Fully My Choice	06	15.0
Partially My Choice	11	27.5
Parents Decided	19	47.5
No Preference	04	10.0
Comfort discussing Career Goals with Parents		
Very comfortable	08	20.0
Somewhat comfortable	18	45.0
Not very comfortable	09	22.5
Not at all comfortable	05	12.5
Communication with Parents (Exam stress Peer Pressure)		
Almost Daily	02	5.0
Weekly	14	35.0
Occasionally	19	47.5
Rarely/Never	05	12.5
Parents Understanding of PUC Challenges		
Very much	05	12.5
Somewhat	17	42.5
Not really	15	37.5
Not at All	03	7.5
Pressure to Maintain Friendship/Social Image		
Yes, a lot	14	35.0
Yes, Sometimes	19	47.5
Rarely	06	15.0
Never	01	2.5
Total	40	100.0

This table presents an analysis of the parental and social influences experienced by 40 Pre-University Course (PUC) students. It focuses on various aspects such as parental career expectations, emotional reactions to parental pressure, parental approach to studies, decision-making autonomy, communication patterns, and social pressures. The findings highlight the close connection between family expectations, emotional well-being, and students' social experiences.

Parental Career Expectations: The data reveal that parental expectations play a crucial role in shaping students' academic and career goals. 45% of students reported that their parents have moderate expectations, reflecting a balanced and encouraging attitude. 32.5% stated that their parents hold very high expectations, showing that many parents push their children toward excellence and competitive success. 20% said their parents simply expect them to do their best, reflecting a healthy and flexible approach. Only 2.5% indicated that their parents have no expectations regarding career outcomes. This shows that a majority of PUC students (over three-fourths) grow up under moderate to high parental expectations, which can act as both motivation and pressure.

Feelings When Unable to Meet Expectations: Students' emotional reactions to not meeting parental standards vary widely. 42.5% said they feel anxious or stressed when they fail to meet expectations, indicating emotional vulnerability and fear of parental disappointment. 30% responded that they feel motivated to try harder, showing a positive and determined attitude. 15% were indifferent, suggesting emotional detachment or resilience. 12.5% felt guilty or disappointed, indicating self-blame and emotional strain. The data suggest that while some students use pressure as motivation, a large proportion (over 50%) experience negative emotions like anxiety or guilt when they fall short.

Parental Approach Toward Studies: Parents adopt different styles in dealing with their children's academic performance. 37.5% described their parents' approach as balanced (supportive and pressurizing), indicating both care and expectation. 25% said their parents are mostly pressurizing, showing high demands and limited emotional cushioning. 20% viewed their parents as most supportive, reflecting encouragement without pressure. 17.5% felt their parents are not much involved, revealing possible neglect or lack of engagement. Overall, the majority of parents (about 62.5%) show some level of involvement that combines support and pressure, suggesting an effort to ensure success while maintaining guidance.

Decision Making in PUC Stream Selection: Parental influence is strongly visible in academic decision-making. 47.5% of students reported that their parents decided their PUC stream, indicating strong parental control. 27.5% said it was partially their choice, reflecting shared decision-making. 15% mentioned it was fully their choice, showing some autonomy. 10% had no preference, indicating indecisiveness or parental dominance in educational choices. This implies that nearly three-fourths of students (around 75%) had limited independence in choosing their stream, which could influence their academic interest and motivation.

Comfort Discussing Career Goals with Parents: Communication comfort regarding future plans varies among students. 45% of students said they feel somewhat comfortable discussing their career goals. 20% feel very comfortable, showing strong emotional bonding with parents. 22.5% said they are not very comfortable, indicating hesitation or fear of disagreement. 12.5% are not at all comfortable sharing their ambitions with parents. The data show that while most students (around 65%) maintain at least some level of comfort in career discussions, a notable portion still find communication difficult.

Communication with Parents (About Exam Stress and Peer Pressure): Communication frequency about emotional or academic challenges shows mixed trends. 47.5% of students said they talk to their parents occasionally about such issues, showing irregular communication. 35% discuss weekly, indicating moderate openness. Only 5% communicate almost daily, reflecting very strong parental bonding. 12.5% said they rarely or never discuss such matters, pointing to a communication gap. This suggests that while most students maintain some level of dialogue, only a few share their emotional struggles regularly with parents.

Parents' Understanding of PUC Challenges: Students' perceptions of their parents' understanding of their academic struggles vary notably. 42.5% believe their parents somewhat understand their challenges, implying partial empathy. 37.5% said their parents do not really understand, showing a communication or generational gap. 12.5% felt their parents understand very much, while 7.5% said not at all. This indicates that while some parents are supportive, many lack a full grasp of the stress and workload faced by PUC students.

Pressure to Maintain Friendships or Social Image: Social expectations also affect students' emotional well-being. 47.5% of respondents said they feel sometimes pressured to maintain friendships or a social image. 35% reported feeling this pressure a lot, reflecting high social expectations and the need for acceptance. 15% said they rarely experience such pressure, and only 2.5% said never. This reveals that over 80% of students face at least some degree of social or peer-driven pressure, which may add to their emotional stress.

Findings

1. The respondents represented a mix of religious and social backgrounds, mostly aged between 15 and 16 years, with slightly more females (57.5%) than males (42.5%). Most belonged to nuclear families, indicating a typical middle-adolescent demographic.
2. Students came from relatively well-educated families—over 70% of parents were graduates or postgraduates—and nearly equal representation was observed between 1st and 2nd Year PUC students. Fathers were the main earners in most families, though many households (32.5%) had dual income.
3. Academic workload emerged as a major source of stress. Nearly 38% described their workload as heavy and 10% as overwhelming, while only 20% found it light. This shows that a large portion of PUC students experience study-related pressure and limited academic relaxation.
4. Emotional and psychological challenges were highly prevalent. About three-fourths of students reported feeling anxious, depressed, or low in confidence, and around 60% admitted to feeling isolated at times due to study pressure. These patterns suggest considerable mental strain among adolescents.
5. Students primarily adopted informal coping strategies to manage stress. Listening to music or watching shows (27.5%), prayer or family time (25%), and talking to friends (15%) were common. Only a few used structured or guided approaches like counseling, showing reliance on self-directed relief.
6. Peer and social pressures significantly influenced students' emotions and behavior. Around one-third faced peer pressure occasionally or frequently, and over 80% felt compelled to maintain friendships or a social image—adding to their emotional stress.
7. Parental expectations played a decisive role in students' academic lives. About 77.5% reported moderate to high expectations, and nearly half said their parents decided their PUC stream. This highlights limited autonomy but also parental involvement in educational choices.
8. Communication between students and parents appeared moderate. While 65% felt somewhat comfortable discussing career goals, only a few communicated regularly about exam stress or peer pressure. Many students felt their parents only partially understood their academic challenges, indicating a gap in emotional connection and support.

Suggestions

1. Promote Mental Health Awareness and Counseling Services: Since a majority of PUC students reported anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation, institutions should integrate regular mental health awareness programs into their academic calendar. Schools and colleges need to establish access to professional counselors who can guide students in managing academic pressure and emotional distress. Teachers should be trained to identify early signs of stress and provide initial emotional support.
2. Encourage Balanced Academic Workload: With nearly half of the students finding their workload heavy or overwhelming, academic institutions should review the volume of assignments and exam frequency. A more balanced approach that emphasizes understanding over rote learning can reduce burnout. Introducing time

management workshops and flexible study schedules would help students maintain equilibrium between academics and leisure.

3. Strengthen Parent–Child Communication: Many students expressed that their parents only partially understand their academic challenges. Schools can organize parent-student interaction sessions to bridge this communication gap. Encouraging open discussions at home about academic stress, career choices, and emotional well-being will foster trust and reduce fear of disappointment.

4. Provide Career Guidance and Autonomy: Since almost half of the respondents reported that parents chose their academic stream, it is vital to provide professional career counseling. This will empower students to make informed decisions based on their aptitude and interests, reducing dissatisfaction and academic disengagement. Parents should be guided to support rather than dominate these choices.

5. Promote Healthy Coping Mechanisms: Students mainly relied on informal coping methods such as music or entertainment. Institutions can introduce structured stress management programs including yoga, meditation, art therapy, and physical education to help students handle stress constructively. Peer support groups and mentorship programs can further strengthen emotional resilience.

6. Regulate Digital Distractions: Over 60% of students admitted being distracted by mobile phones and social media. Schools should conduct digital well-being workshops that educate students on managing screen time effectively. Encouraging device-free study hours and promoting hobbies or sports can reduce dependency on digital media.

7. Address Peer and Social Pressures: Since over 80% of students face social or peer pressure, educators should promote inclusivity and discourage unhealthy competition. Programs that build teamwork, empathy, and acceptance can help students develop a healthy self-image.

8. Foster Supportive Educational Environments: Overall, institutions should create a nurturing academic atmosphere where emotional health is prioritized alongside academic success. Encouraging teachers to adopt empathetic teaching methods and providing regular motivational sessions can help students thrive both intellectually and emotionally.

Conclusion

The study “Chasing Dreams, Bearing Pressures: A Sociological Insight into PUC Students” sheds light on the multiple dimensions of academic life that shape the emotional and social experiences of adolescents. It reveals that while students are determined to excel, they often endure immense stress, anxiety, and a sense of isolation due to constant competition, parental expectations, and academic workload. Many students feel caught between the desire to achieve and the fear of failure, leaving them emotionally drained and socially disconnected.

The findings emphasize that education must not turn children into machines that merely chase grades or ranks. Instead, it should nurture their individuality, creativity, and curiosity. Preventing unhealthy competition among students is essential to build a learning environment based on cooperation, empathy, and self-improvement rather than comparison. Encouraging students to pursue their personal interests — whether in academics, arts, sports, or other creative pursuits — helps them discover their true potential and develop a sense of purpose. Furthermore, strengthening parent–child communication, reducing excessive academic pressure, and promoting mental health awareness are crucial to ensuring emotional stability and well-being. Teachers and parents should focus on motivating students to learn with joy, not fear, and to balance academic goals with recreation, friendships, and personal growth.

Ultimately, education should aim to create confident, compassionate, and well-rounded individuals who can dream freely and chase those dreams with balance, resilience, and happiness — not at the cost of their peace of mind, but as a celebration of their potential.

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