



Between Deadlines And Distress: Stress And Academic Performance Among College Students

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ABSTRACT

The study was designed to investigate the significant levels of stress experienced by students due to academic pressure, competitive environment and personal challenges which seem to negatively impact their mental health, academic performance and overall well being. For the present research a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach has been used for collecting data from representative sample of students using a validated stress scale questionnaire, exploring factors like academic workload, exam pressure, social relationship, family dynamics and personal factors. Chi- square values calculated were 40.990^a 48.711^a respectively, significant at P<.0001. The results indicate that there is strong association between interest towards courses and burden of academic workload, similarly students feel stressed as deadline nears the submission of projects and presentation of their class assignments. Students faced mental and physical fatigue, emotional drain which reduces their level of performance and induces loss of motivation, feeling of detachment were various issues expressed by the students in one to one interviews.

Keywords: Mental health; Stress; Academic Workload; Emotional Drain.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress can manifest itself in various aspects. Physical problems as include unusual fatigue, sleeping problems, frequent colds, chest pain and nausea. People under stress may behave differently too pacing, eating too much, crying a lot, smoking and drinking more than usual or physically striking out at other by hitting or throwing things .Emotionally, people under stress experience anxiety, depression, fear and irritability as well as anger and frustration . Mental symptoms of stress include problems in concentration, memory and decision making and people under stress often lose their sense of humor (Glenn E. Meyer 2009 Psychology Pearson). Most of the people experience some degree of stress on a daily basis and college students are even more likely to face situation and events that require them to make changes and adapt their behavior assigned reading , papers , studying for test , juggling jobs , are all example of things that can cause a person to experience stress . Some people feel the effects of stress more than other because what is appraised as a threat by one person might appraised as an opportunity by another. For example, think how you and your friend might respond differently to the opportunity to write a 10 page paper for extra credit in the last three weeks of the semester. Stress causing events are called stressors they can come from within a person or from an external source and range from relatively mild to severe (Saundra K. Ciccarelli 2009 Psychology Pearson).

Stress is the term used to describe the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral response to events that are appraised as threatening or challenging.

There are two kinds of stressors those that cause distress which occur when people experience unpleasant stressor and those that cause Eustress which results from positive events that still make demand on a person to adapt or change. Marriage , a job promotion and having baby may all be positive events for the most people but they all require a great deal of change in people's habit, duties and even lifestyle, thereby creating stress. Eustress refers to the stress experienced when positive events require the body to adapt (Hans Selye 1936). In an update of Selye's original definition , researchers now define Eustress as the optimal amount of stress that people need to promote health and well being. The arousal theory is based on the idea that a certain level of stress or arousal is actually necessary for people to feel content (Zuckerman 1994). Many students are aware that experiencing a little anxiety or stress is helpful to them because it motivates them to study.

IMPACT OF ACADEMIC STRESS

For the longest time student population was the least affected by any sort of stress or problems. Stress is now understood as a lifestyle crisis affecting any individual regardless of their development stage (Banerjee & Chatterjee 2016). The only task students were expected to undertake was to study and studying was never perceived as stressful. What proved to be stressful was the expectations parents had for their children which turn into larger burdens that these children could not carry anymore .According to the statistics published by National Crime Records Bureau there is one student every hour that commits suicide (Saha 2017). Adolescents were also reported to be indulging in various risky behaviors such as increased consumption of alcohol and drugs, physical inactivity, poor eating and sleeping pattern (American College Health Association 2009 ; Bennet & Holloway 2014).

What Stress Means to Under Graduate?

Students react to the college in variety of ways . For some students college is stressful because it is an abrupt change from high school. For others separation from home is a source of stress. Although some source of stress is necessary for personal growth to occur, the amount of stress can overwhelm a student and affect the ability to cope. Another source of stress is the difficulty of achieving social intimacy. Fear of academic failure is a definite stressor (Spiel Berger CD1983, Kendall et.al 1965). Stress was more evident in second year medical students and this may be due to greater fear of not attaining their goal of being a doctor (Kumar swami 1989). Several studies reported medical students experience more stress. A major stressor for first year medical students is the amount and complexity of material to be learned. Student experience academic stress, because their entire classmates were superior college students. Fatigue is often cited as a stressor in second year and many researchers describe a hypochondrical phenomenon by which medical students imagine they have the disease they are studying. In the third year medical students begin patient care. Acceptance of death and dying emerges as a key issue in coping with stress.

According to researcher academic stress was found to be more prominent among the students of professional courses by many research studies this study primarily concentrated on exploring the micro issue of different components academic activity in the professional course work setup. The components of academic, in general, are curriculum and instruction, team work, assessment and placement. Among these components, curriculum and instruction aspects were found to be largely responsible for stress 86% among the management students. A number of researches have been conducted studies which found similar effects of stress on college going students. The basic purpose of these researches was to know the effects of stress on mental health or physical health of college students. Kants.S.Deepa (2019) conducted study on emotional intelligence and academic stress among college student, six degree colleges of Jalandhar city were selected randomly. The analysis of data significantly concluded that the student from science stream experience high stress as compared to student from humanities and commerce stream. Ahluwalia.K. Amardeep and Preet Kamal (2019) conducted a study factor of stress among student of professional institutes. This identify the

age group of 18-24 year student suffering from stress and depression studying in various professional institutes in the state of Punjab .There were 243 boys while 185 were girls data were collected by using a self administrated questionnaire through sampling method from Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh. They have family pressure as well. Some has anxiety issue . Sadana Pooja et.al(2020) conducted study on impact of corona virus disease-19 pandemic on the academic of adolescents of Amritsar city . The recent pandemic caused by novel corona virus has caused countrywide school closure and adoption of online learning platform of adolescents. Students are facing anxiety and uncertainty regarding future. Being a quarantined in homes may impose greater mental and physical burden caused by virus . Chadda Ishu and Kaur Hardeep (2021) conducted study on COVID-19 pandemic on college going students in Amritsar Punjab . Pandemic has major impact upon the health, economy and education worldwide. In India the government as a part of the nationwide lockdown closed all the educational institutions as a consequence of which the teaching – learning examination and placement scenario of students were affected . The adoption of an online learning approach tried to minimize the academic loss and stress on students. However the online teaching transition moved on an untested and unprecedented scale in a very short span of period. R Sharda et.al (2022) study have found the COVID -19 pandemic has triggered one of the biggest crises for human health distressing more than 200 countries worldwide .The petrifying effects of this pandemic have caused significant impact on mental health of public. In the present study a survey based analysis has been done to underline the main factors that are affecting the mental health of youth of Punjab especially a college going students .

Bala Sumita et.al (2023) conducted study from Ludhiana Punjab .This paper study on the information seeking anxiety (ISA) among postgraduate (Master and PHD) student of Punjab Agriculture University Ludhiana. Different kind of problem they face during their research field. Kaur Manveer and Dr Sehgal Rajiv (2023) The study was aimed at evaluating the stress level endured by female college student from Ludhiana district in their first and final year. The sample consisted of 120 female college studying in Ludhiana. It was discovered that female college students in their final year were more stressed than those in their first year. Sharma Rimple and Sharma Pawan (2023) study on a correlational study to assess the relation of anxiety and social phobia with academic performance of student in a selected nursing college Ludhiana Punjab. Kaur Hardeep and Kaur Amanpreet (2024) study was conducted to assess out of 60 students in each class of BSC 1year,2year and 3year. 30 students were suffering from social phobia and some from anxiety issue. The level of stress related to examination among 1st year nursing students studying at Royal institute of nursing Amritsar. These study findings showed that 31% were male and 69% were female. The level of stress among the 1st year nursing students reveals that 4% of the students had severe stress, 49% of them had moderate stress and 47% had mild stress.

2. METHODOLOGY

For the present research to study stress among students, a quantitative , cross-sectional survey approach is been used for collecting data from representative sample of students using a validated stress scale questionnaire, exploring factors like academic workload , exam pressure , social relationship , family dynamics and personal factors. Students from a specific school, university or grade level of Amritsar district were chosen as subjects. Stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different demographic like grade levels and academic .Questionnaire a validated stress scale like the perceived stress scale (PSS) with items covering various stress domains including academic pressure , social stress , family stress and personal well being. Primary data was collected using different method such as questionnaire method, scheduled method, interview method . Data was collected from 10 December 2024 to 10 March 2025.

3. Results and Discussions

Table no. 3.1 to Table no.4.1 indicates the stress related to academics where 50% of the students show financial issues faced by them due high cost of the course and other miscellaneous expenses. Through telephonic surveys and online data collection the percentage of response categories were calculated which indicates that 36% of students frequently feel nervous while delivering class presentations whereas 48% of them do not feel nervous at all. 40% of students are frequently facing examination anxiety whereas 32% of students never feel anxious during exams. 38% always experience academic burden and 32% do not feel this burden. Table no. 3.5 and 3.6 Chi- square values comes out to be 40.990^a and 48.711^a respectively which are significant at $P < .0001$ which indicates that there is strong association between interest towards courses and burden of academic workload, similarly students feel stressed as deadline nears for submission and they need to present their class assignments.

TABLE 3.1. FINANCIAL PROBLEM

FINANCIAL PROBLEM	RESPONSE	PER CENT
NEVER	10	20%
FREQUENT	25	50%
ALWAYS	15	30%

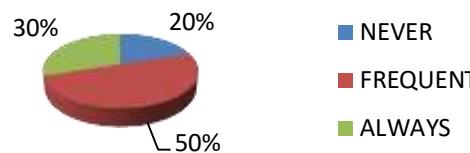


FIGURE 3.1

Table no. 3. 2. FEEL NERVOUS DURING CLASS PRESENTATION

FEEL NERVOUS	RESPONSE	PER CENT
NEVER	18	36%
FREQUENT	24	48%
ALWAYS	8	16%

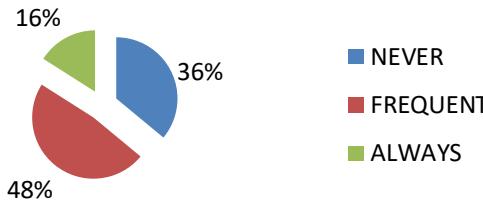


FIGURE 3. 2

Table No.3.3 FEEL ANXIOUS TO SIT IN EXAMINATION

FEEL ANXIETY	RESPONSE	PER CENT
NEVER	16	32%
FREQUENT	20	40%
ALWAYS	14	28%

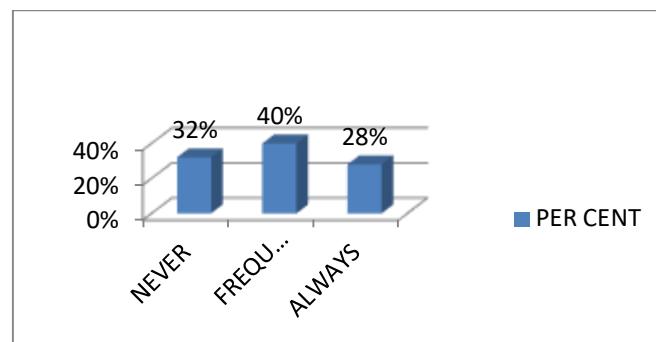


FIGURE 3.3

TABLE 3.4. ACADEMIC WORKLOAD

FEEL BURDEN	RESPONSE	PER CENT
NEVER	16	32%
FREQUENT	15	30%
ALWAYS	19	38%

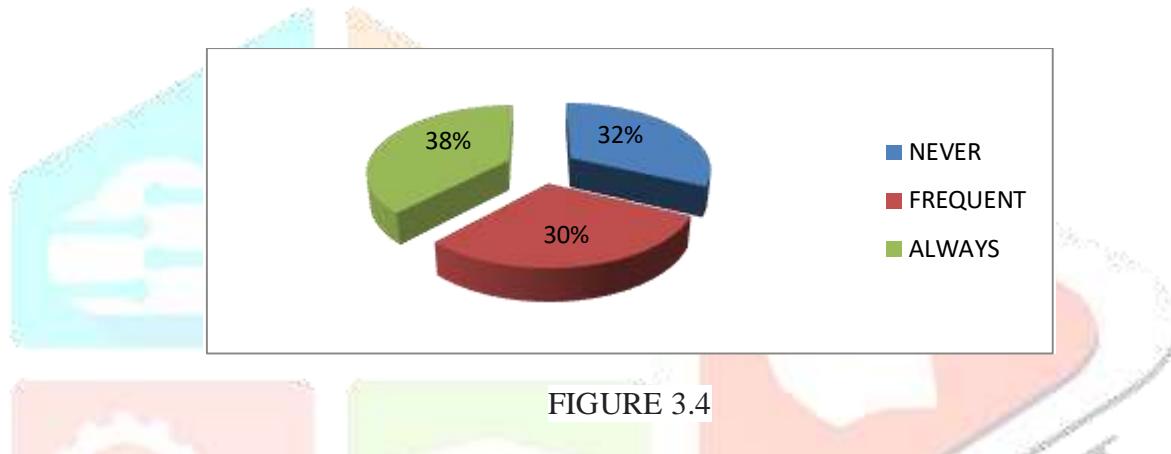


FIGURE 3.4

Table No.3.5 Chi-Square for Academic Workloads	Loss of interest towards never courses	academic workloads			Total
		never	Frequent	Always	
never	Count	7	9	0	16
	Expected Count	2.2	5.1	8.6	16.0
	Count	0	7	8	15
	Expected Count	2.1	4.8	8.1	15.0
	Count	0	0	19	19
	Expected Count	2.7	6.1	10.3	19.0
Total	Count	7	16	27	50
	Expected Count	7.0	16.0	27.0	50.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.990 ^a	4	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	54.604	4	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	33.289	1	<.001
N of Valid Cases	50		

a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.10.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal		
Phi	.905	<.001
Cramer's V	.640	<.001
N of Valid Cases	50	



feel stressed as submission deadline

Table No. 3.6. Chi-Square for feel stressed as submission deadline neared

		Never	frequent	always	Total
I feel nervous delivering the never class presentation	Count	0	4	14	18
	Expected Count	5.8	7.2	5.0	18.0
	Count	9	16	0	25
	Expected Count	8.0	10.0	7.0	25.0
	Count	7	0	0	7
	Expected Count	2.2	2.8	2.0	7.0
Total	Count	16	20	14	50
	Expected Count	16.0	20.0	14.0	50.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	48.711 ^a	4	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	57.016	4	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	33.340	1	<.001
N of Valid Cases	50		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.96.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.905	<.001
	Cramer's V	.640	<.001
N of Valid Cases		50	

Conclusions

The above stated results indicate that stress among students usually arise from exams, class assignments, competition, time constraints or high expectation, leading to anxiety and burnout. It happens due to heavy workload, time management issues, uncertainty about the future, worrying about career prospects, college admission, feeling unsupported by teachers. Through the telephonic surveys and online data collected some of the factors were evident which give stress to students in their daily performances. Poor financial support, stress during class presentations, examination anxiety, burnouts due to academic workload. Stress effects when students perceive their coursework assignment, exam pressure, projects submission etc. as unmanageable, leading to stress, burnout and reduced productivity. Mental overload, Physical fatigue, Emotional drain, reduced performance and loss of motivation. Sometimes feeling detached or indifferent toward studies due to burnout. It is found that students have academic stress such as heavy coursework, exams, competition and fear of failure. The result of the study shows that they find difficulty adjusting themselves into new environment.

Implications

1. Most of the college going students has health issues as physical stress increase the risk of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance and constant fatigue.
2. Unmanaged stress in college can lead to chronic health issues for example constant fatigue and headache. Sometimes it lead to long term mental health disorder.
3. Many students reported increased anxiety and difficulty concentrating in virtual setting.
4. The pandemic worsened stress levels due to online learning challenges, isolation and health concerns

Future Directions

1. Management should organize sports, yoga camp in college/university. Teacher/professor should motivate students to participate in co-curricular activities and develop healthy behavior as management of time, consume balanced diet and indulge in physical exercise.
2. Teachers should devote time to students and organize extensive educational activities in campus like debate, quiz and guide the students about educational opportunities beyond college campus.
3. Faculty should adopt students' friendly teaching –learning methods that activate achievement motivation in students.
4. To manage stress among student's proper guidance and counseling should be advised.
5. More accessible mental health services and stress reduction programs should be there.
6. Faculties should be trained to recognize signs of distress among students.

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