

**Research Article**

## **"The Burden of Academics: Exploring the Interplay between Mental Health and Academic Stress among High School Students"**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the relationship between academic stress and mental health among 300 high school students (ages 14-18) in Sri Sathya Sai District, Andhra Pradesh. Utilizing the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), alongside Grade Point Average (GPA) records, we examined the impact of academic pressures on students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between academic stress and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and general stress, indicating that higher levels of academic stress are associated with increased mental health difficulties. Additionally, a negative correlation was observed between academic stress and GPA, suggesting a detrimental effect on academic achievement. Regression analysis confirmed academic stress as a significant predictor of mental health outcomes. This study underscores the critical need for targeted interventions and supportive educational practices to mitigate academic stress and promote the mental well-being of high school students in this region.

**Keywords:** Academic stress, mental health, Psychological well-being, Academic performance, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

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**1. Introduction:**

The adolescent years are a period of significant transition, marked by heightened sensitivity to stress and an increased vulnerability to mental health challenges. Within the educational landscape of Sri Sathya Sai District, high school students are confronted with a unique set of academic pressures, shaped by regional socio-cultural expectations and the increasing demands of modern education. This study seeks to delve into the intricate relationship between academic stress and mental health among these students, aiming to illuminate the extent to which academic pressures contribute to mental health issues, and to understand the specific ways in which these factors interact.

**2. Background and Significance:** Academic stress, stemming from factors like heavy workloads, high-stakes examinations, and competitive academic environments, is a prevalent issue among high school students worldwide. However, the manifestation and impact of this stress can vary significantly across different socio-cultural contexts. In Sri Sathya Sai District, the confluence of traditional values, familial expectations, and contemporary educational demands creates a unique environment that may exacerbate academic stress and its associated mental health consequences.

Understanding this interplay is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it allows for the identification of vulnerable student populations who may be at a higher risk of developing mental health issues due to academic pressures. Secondly, it provides valuable insights for educators, parents, and

policymakers to develop targeted interventions and support systems. Lastly, it contributes to the broader academic discourse on adolescent mental health and the impact of educational environments.

### **3. Need for and Importance of the Study:**

The mental health of adolescents is a critical concern, particularly within the context of their educational environment. High school students face numerous stressors, including academic pressures, social dynamics, and developmental changes, all of which can significantly impact their psychological well-being. This study is crucial for several key reasons:

#### **a. Understanding Demographic Influences on Mental Health:**

1. The data presented indicates an exploration of how demographic factors, specifically gender, location (rural/urban), and family structure (nuclear/joint), influence the mental health of high school students.
2. Identifying potential differences in mental health across these demographic groups is essential for tailoring interventions and support services to meet the specific needs of diverse student populations.
3. For instance, the finding that students from joint families report significantly higher mental health scores underscores the importance of understanding the supportive role of extended family structures in adolescent well-being.

#### **b. Addressing the Prevalence of Mental Health Concerns:**

1. While the provided data focuses on comparative analyses, it implicitly acknowledges the presence of mental health concerns within the student population.
2. Understanding the baseline mental health status of high school students in the region is a fundamental step in addressing potential issues and promoting positive psychological outcomes.
3. This study provides data that can be used to compare to future data, to see if mental health is improving, or worsening.

#### **c. Informing Educational Policies and Practices:**

1. The findings of this study can inform educational policies and practices <sup>1</sup> aimed at promoting student mental health.
2. By identifying factors that contribute to or mitigate mental health challenges, schools and policymakers can develop targeted interventions, such as counseling services, stress management programs, and supportive learning environments.
3. For example, even though rural and urban location was not significant, it is still worth noting, that both groups have similar mental health scores, so both locations need similar care.

#### **d. Contributing to Regional Research:**

1. This research contributes to the limited body of knowledge on adolescent mental health within the specific socio-cultural context of the study region.
2. By providing empirical data on the mental health of high school students, this study can serve as a foundation for future research and interventions.
3. This study provides base line data, which can be used to compare to other studies, in the area, or in similar areas.

This study is essential for understanding the demographic influences on mental health among high school students, informing educational policies, and contributing to regional research. By addressing these critical areas, this research can play a vital role in promoting the psychological well-being of adolescents and fostering a supportive educational environment.

### **4. Objectives of the Study:**

1. To assess the overall mental health of high school students in the study population.
2. To examine if there is a statistically significant difference in mental health scores between male and female high school students.
3. To examine if there is a statistically significant difference in mental health scores between rural and urban high school students.

4. To examine if there is a statistically significant difference in mental health scores between high school students from nuclear families and those from joint families.

**5. Hypotheses:**

1. There is no significant difference in mental health scores between male and female high school students.
2. There is no significant difference in mental health scores between rural and urban high school students.
3. There is no significant difference in mental health scores between high school students from nuclear families and those from joint families.

**6. Methodology:**

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the relationship between academic stress and mental health. A sample of 300 high school students, aged 14-18, was recruited from various schools within Sri Sathya Sai District, ensuring representation across different socio-economic backgrounds and educational levels. This widely used instrument measures the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. This scale assesses the degree to which individuals perceive situations in their lives as stressful, specifically focusing on academic-related stressors. Grade Point Average (GPA) was collected to quantify academic performance, allowing for an examination of how stress and mental health relate to academic outcomes.

Participants completed the DASS-21 and PSS questionnaires during designated class periods, ensuring a standardized administration process. GPA data was obtained from school records with informed consent from students and their guardians.

**7. Data Analysis:**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the levels of academic stress and mental health symptoms within the sample. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between academic stress, depression, anxiety, stress, and GPA. Regression analysis was employed to determine the extent to which academic stress predicts mental health outcomes and academic achievement.

**Hypothesis 1, 2 & 3:** There is no significant difference in mental health scores between male, female and Rural, Urban and nuclear and Joint family secondary school students.

**Table-1**

**Mental Health Awareness among Students Based on Demographical Variables**

Variable	Categories	N	Mean	SD	't' Value
Gender	Male	150	88.70	13.1	1.53 <sup>NS</sup>
	Female	150	90.3	11.3	
Resident	Rural	150	89.20	11.50	0.87 <sup>NS</sup>
	Urban	150	90.10	12.90	
Type of Family	Joint	75	88.60	12.20	2.43 <sup>**</sup>
	Nuclear	225	91.30	11.80	

**Results and Findings:** The independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences in mental health scores between male and female students ( $t = 1.53$ , NS) or between students from rural and urban locations ( $t = 0.87$ , NS); however, a significant difference was observed based on family type ( $t = 2.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with students from nuclear families reporting significantly higher mean mental health scores ( $M = 91.30$ ,  $SD = 11.80$ ) compared to those from joint families ( $M = 88.60$ ,  $SD = 12.20$ ), indicating that family structure, but not gender or location, had a notable impact on the studied population's mental health.

The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between academic stress and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and general stress. This indicates that students experiencing higher levels of academic stress also reported greater mental health difficulties. Furthermore, a negative correlation was observed between academic stress and GPA, suggesting that increased stress is associated with lower academic performance.

Regression analysis confirmed that academic stress is a significant predictor of mental health outcomes, accounting for a substantial portion of the variance in depression, anxiety, and stress scores. These findings underscore the detrimental impact of academic pressures on students' mental well-being.

The results of this study align with existing research highlighting the negative association between academic stress and mental health. The high prevalence of stress-related mental health issues among high school students in Sri Sathya Sai District underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions.

Several factors may contribute to this relationship. The intense academic demands, coupled with the pressure to succeed, can lead to cognitive overload, emotional strain, and decreased motivation. Furthermore, the socio-cultural context of the region, with its emphasis on academic achievement and familial expectations, may exacerbate these pressures.

#### **8. Recommendations of the Study:**

1. Schools should implement comprehensive stress management programs that equip students with coping strategies.
2. Counseling services should be made readily available to provide students with emotional support.
3. Educators and parents should foster a supportive and understanding environment that minimizes academic pressures.
4. Educational policies should be reviewed to promote a balanced approach to academic achievement, prioritizing students' mental well-being.

#### **9. Conclusion:**

This study provides compelling evidence of the significant impact of academic stress on the mental health of high school students in Sri Sathya Sai District. By highlighting the intricate relationship between these factors, this research underscores the need for proactive interventions and a holistic approach to student well-being. Addressing academic stress is not only essential for improving students' mental health but also for enhancing their academic performance and overall quality of life.

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