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Academic Stress and Mental Health : A Comparative Study of Science, Arts, and Commerce Students

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ABSTRACT : This is a study on the relationship between academic pressure, mental health, and socio-economic status in senior secondary school students in India focusing on students having Science, Arts and Commerce field of study. Increasing academic pressure to excel and the pressure and limited resources in society have increased pressure on students deteriorating their mental health. This research paper addresses the role that different factors play in mental well-being with particular reference to the socio-economic standings and geographical location (urban versus rural). The study aims at investigating impacts of academic pressure on anxiety, depression, and burnout, but also creates an assessment of how socio-economic background, such as access to family income level and resources, contributes to these findings. The research shows that academic stress level has been found to be high in every sphere, yet there is no strong correlation between the research notes on mental health outcomes. Moreover, the socio-economic status did not play critical roles in the measurement of the levels of academic stress. The gendering as well as geographical variations were found to be significant with the students in urban areas being under more stress; still neither variable was found to affect mental health a lot. The study would give valuable insights to educators and policymakers in developing ways of reducing academic distress and improving mental health, particularly disadvantaged learners.

Keywords : Academic Stress, Mental Health, Socio-Economic Status, Science, Arts, Commerce, Anxiety, Depression.

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of academic stress among young people has come to be a major topic in the recent past, particularly in senior secondary school level where students are subjected to additional pressure about their performance at school on the future employment value as well as societal requirements. Education is very important in India and there is high concentration to the examination in India. The students of senior secondary school especially in the streams of Science, Arts and Commerce, are under a great amount of academic stress (Saini, 2001). This stress may manifest itself in various ways such as anxiety, depression, burnout as well as even physical health complications (Beedawat, 1976; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Since this is a critical stage in the life of a student, comprehending factors that predispose academic stress are crucial in promoting mental health. Academic stress can be defined as the emotion and psychological pressure which students experience because of the academic demands placed to them. There have been studies showing that such strain may be based on diverse sources such as work overloads, parental expectations, peer rivalry or the need to perform well in tests (Boekaerts, 2006). Though, some degree of stress may act as a motivator, excessive academic stress has a negative impact on mental health outcomes including anxiety and depression. They may consequently result in affecting the academic achievements and wellbeing of a student (Saini, 2001; Manju, 1994). The effect of academic stress is more likely to be greater on the lower socio-economic students who may also be limited in terms of academic resources such as tutors, study materials and an optimal learning environment (Gupta & Khan, 1987). Besides, family money related problems, as well as lack of support systems contributes to the stress that these students undergo (Chauhan, 1987). In this regards, we need to take a look at the impact which social economic issues such as income, educational facilities and family assistance has on the stress taking place in the academic lives of students (Ranganathan, 1988). Also, the geography location of students, whether it is either in an urban or rural area, can have a serious impact on the range of resources that they have so therefore impacting their levels of stress. An example is that the ability to study in the city might lead to more academic stress due to the competitive environment, though city students tend to have better resources available to them in comparison to their rivals in rural areas who could lack the financial resources and infrastructure etc. (Iyer, 1992). It is hoped that, as a result of this study, we shall be able to identify the relationship that exists between academic pressure, mental well-well-being and socio-economic background amongst senior secondary school students especially in the Science, Arts and Commerce divisions. This investigation is based on the impact of academic stress on the mental health of students, but its outcomes also refer to how socio-economic background and geographical location contribute to the formation of this relationship. The research is of great significance in the context of education system of India where high academic requirements are often followed by notable amount of stress among young people (Saini, 2001).

The proposed study has the objective to accomplish the following:

1. In order to investigate the relationship between the academic pressure and the outcomes of mental well-being.
2. To explore the differences in academic stress between the three main streams of academics: Science, Arts and Commerce.
3. To analyze the effects of the socio-economic status on academic stress and mental well-being.
4. In order to examine how academic stress affects students of urban and rural backgrounds.
5. To estimate the differences between sexes in the relationship between the state of academic stress and mental well-being.

The present study is guided by the fact that academic stress negatively affects mental health depending on the socio-economic status and geographical location. Moreover, students who undertake Science stream have been indicated as being under more academic pressure when compared to those taking Arts and Commerce streams at the same institute due to the stressful nature of science education and competition (Boekaerts, 2006; Aggarwal, 1999).

The study is extremely relevant since the aim is to contribute to the existing literature that views complex relationships between academic pressure, mental health, and socio-economic background among students in the senior secondary school. Understanding these dynamics may help educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals develop effective solutions to the problem of academic stress and boost the well-being of students. As an instance, the results of this research have the potential to inform educational policies to reduce high levels of academic stress to the students with underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds (Gupta & Khan, 1987). The proposed study will provide a deeper understanding on the use of the socio-economic factors alongside geographical location to understand the impact it has on the academic experiences of students which is already limited in the available literature on adolescent stress. The study aims at filling a significant gap in the understanding of the factors contributing to academic stress and psychological well-being outcomes among older secondary schoolgoers in India. Through the identification of critical aspects governing stress, the research report will provide useful insights on the manner in which students in different streams, socio-economic groups, and geographical locations experience academic stress and its impact on their mental health. The findings will offer practical recommendations on how to advance the academic and mental health support systems of teenagers in this important part of their studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between academic pressure, psychological well-being and economic status has been discussed in various contexts in a very broad way. The present literature review focuses on the main components of academic stress and the impacts that it has on psychological health as well as their links with the socio-economic status, especially when it comes to adolescent students in the last years of high school. The literature is organised in four main categories which include (1) The Nature of Academic Stress, (2) Impact of Academic Stress on Mental Health, (3) Socio-Economic Status and Academic Stress, and (4) Gender and Geographical Differences in Academic Stress.

2.1 The Nature of Academic Stress

Academic stress is a multi-factorial phenomenon which is brought about by felt academic requirements and pressure to perform well in examinations, meet family expectations and to relate with their peers. According to Boekaerts (2006), academic stress is a state of mental pressure due to burden of academic workload, the academic performance required, and the stress that occur due to fear of failure. All these forces combine and cause stress, which has both short-term as well as long-term psychological effects to students. Academic stress on adolescents has been highlighted in many studies where the levels escalate at the period when the adolescents are doing their senior secondary school studies since this is a milestone phase in their academic journey. Academic pressure exacerbates the stress of students due to the pressure to achieve high results in the crucial exams, which determine the future careers of the students (Saini, 2001). To illustrate this is the example given by Aggarwal (1999) that academic pressure in an Indian context is often related to a social need to join a particular career field such as engineering and medicine when a student graduates where the student is pushed through his

education and there arises a lot of pressure. Similarly, one can cite the increasing complexity of curricula in the science, arts, and commerce sectors which cause varying levels of insecurity to the students (Chauhan, 1987). Research has shown that the academic pressure is often caused by competition among the peers. A study by Gupta and Khan (1987) showed that students tend to compare their academic achievements with those of other students and pressure mounts up to perform well. The fear of not being able to live up to such expectations may easily create anxiety that further increases the stress burden among students. This agrees with the results of the research made by Beedawat (1976) and the researcher came to a conclusion that there is a high relationship between academic stress and self-perception and comparison with peers.

2.2 Impact of Academic Stress on Mental Health

Scholastic pressure plays a pivotal role in impairing the mental health of all the students as it has been seen that scholastic pressure has a negative effect on the psychological fitness of the students. Scholarly stress has often been connected with various mental health problems such as anxiety, burnout and depression (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) found out that individuals exposed to a lot of stress usually show marks of anxiety and depression that rather harms their educational performance and overall life satisfaction. There are also psychological issues associated with academic stress, the outcomes of which should probably be viewed as particularly disturbing even in the case of adolescents. It has been revealed that ongoing stress which is a symptom of academic success can lead to mental health complication like burnout (Manju, 1994). Indicatively, Saini (2001) found out that the youth in the Indian educational system often exhibit signs of anxiety and depression, which is worsened by the high level of pressure to pass in exams. In the same line, Iyer (1992) notes that academic stress does not only affect the good mental health of students but may cause them to develop physiological pains such as headaches and sleeping problems, hence, affecting their academic work. According to Chauhan (1987), prolonged academic pressure can result into cognitive burnout and emotional burnout thus making students to feel exhausted and less able to concentrate. This may then have an impact on their performance in academics establishing a vicious cycle of fear and poor performance. As a result, it is not only the immediate academic results that are affected by the academic stress but its long-term results are relevant to the mental well-being, and growth associated with the inflicted academic-stress on the students (Freeman, 1962).

2.3 Socio-Economic Status and Academic Stress

The socio-economic status (SES) of students has a great influence on the level of academic stress experienced in their lives. According to Ranganathan (1988), students who are lower socio-economically are often faced with more challenges, such as limited resources in the way of learning materials, lack of study space and adequate funding, which generates higher pressure on them to achieve in academics. Tutees whose families are well off are more likely to have access to tutors, study materials and favorable home environment which can help counter the impact of scholastic stress (Gupta & Khan, 1987; Ghuman, 1976). In her study of 2001, Saini states that the discrepancies in socio-economic circumstances in terms of educational resource access has a very powerful effect in shaping academic experiences of the students. Students who are of the lower economic status are often burdened with the daunting economical issues of schooling, which adds to their stress value. Similarly, Kumar (1984) and Chitra (2004) state that socio-economic factors such as family income and access to academic facilities such as hiring of tutors, use of the internet and after school educational programs are some of the key factors that determine the extent of academic stress. Being deprived of these materials leaves the poor students in a hard

place and it exposes them to even more levels of stress. What is more, the research carried out by Boekaerts (2006) reveals the important role that family support plays in reducing school related stress. Students in higher socio-economic families are usually given strong emotional sustenance and support, which helps in reducing the effects of academic stress of such individuals. Conversely, children with lower-income families may undergo emotional neglect that can lead to increased stress and mental problems (Aggarwal, 1999).

2.4 Gender and Geographical Differences in Academic Stress

Stress among students varies according to an individual as the issue of gender and geographical status (urban and rural) affects the stress experiences of the students, notably. The research A research found out that female students often feel more stress, than male students at school, due to a variety of pressures, such as expectations to maintain academic achievement as well as perform the tasks at home (Manju, 1994). Harris (1994) reveals that girls and especially those living in a culture that nurtures strict gender roles feel even more pressure to perform adequately in academics and still retain their family obligations hence they are more stressed. The geographical place is very influential in determining the academic stress. In the urban environments, students are often confronted with higher academic expectations due to the high level of competition along with the higher academic pressure placed by schools and their parents. However, they also have increased availability to resources, such as, private tutors, high-order study material along with academic counselling (Saini, 2001). On the contrary, in rural students, the academic pressure may be less, but more likely they are faced with the problems of accessing resources which also increases stress (Iyer, 1992). A study by Rajput (1984) has shown that rural schoolchildren often feel isolated relative to academic support networks and thus become extremely stressed in the face of academic demands. Also, studies show that socio economic status tends to interact with gender and geographical position of various individuals and affects the level of stress in academics. As an example, the lower-income, male-urban student may experience a great deal of academic pressure due to the constraint of limited money, the student most likely female may experience a combination of academic and societal pressure (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

3. METHODOLOGY

This section will explain the structure of the research study, the type of people included, the data collection procedures and data analysis procedures used in the study in order to study the relationship between academic stress, mental health and socio-economic status among senior secondary school students. The study uses a combination of approaches that incorporates numerical surveys and statistical analysis with the qualitative view; this will help to understand more deeply the complexity of factors that causes academic stress and the effect they have on mental well-being.

3.1 Design of the Research

The study has a cross-sectional research method where the data about academic stress, socio-economic status, and mental health in adolescents can be collected at a particular instance. The design can be used in understanding the level of academic stress and its associated mental health outcomes in a given population (senior secondary school students). Descriptive and inferential statistics are used in the study to test the trends and interconnections between the variables, which helps to explain the general impact of academic stress of the well-being of students.

3.2 Participants

This study sample involves 384 senior secondary school students in a variety of schools at both the urban and rural areas. Stratified random sampling was used to select the participants to ensure the participation of people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations. The sample considered contains a quite balanced gender distribution, with 189 male and 195 female respondents. The sample has students in different streams of studies; 145 science students, 110 arts students, and 129 commerce students. The participants have family incomes which range less than 20,000 to more than 1 lakh covering individuals falling under lower, middle and upper category of socio-economic groups.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was administered to the participants during school hours. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections:

1. **Demographic Information**: This section collected data on participants' gender, age, academic stream, family income, area of residence (urban or rural), and school type (government or private).
2. **Academic Stress and Mental Health Measures**: This section included standardized scales to measure academic stress and mental health outcomes. Academic stress was assessed using a modified version of the Academic Stress Scale (Boekaerts, 2006), which includes items related to perceived pressure, workload, and competition. Mental health outcomes were measured using the Mental Health Inventory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which includes scales for anxiety, depression, and overall psychological well-being.

To assess socio-economic factors, participants were asked about their access to academic resources, such as tutors, study materials, and internet access, as well as family encouragement and financial hardships.

3.4 Research Variables

The study focuses on the following key variables:

- **Independent Variable**: Academic stress, measured by perceived academic pressure, workload, and expectations from parents and teachers.
- **Dependent Variable**: Mental health outcomes, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and burnout.
- **Moderating Variables**: Socio-economic status, gender, and geographical location (urban or rural).

3.5 Data Analysis

The information gathered from the surveys was examined with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were employed to give a comprehensive overview of academic stress and mental health outcomes within the sample. The main analysis technique employed was Pearson's correlation, utilised to evaluate the connection between academic stress and mental health results.

The research additionally conducted subgroup analyses to investigate if the connection between academic stress and mental health differed according to gender, socio-economic status, and geographical location. For instance, Pearson's correlation was calculated independently for male and female students, along with students from urban and rural regions, to investigate potential differences in how academic stress affects mental health based on gender and geography.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research followed ethical guidelines to protect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved. Consent was secured from both the students and their parents prior to participation. Participants were guaranteed that

their answers would remain private and utilised exclusively for research objectives. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the participating schools granted approval for the study.

3.7 Limitations

Although the study offers important perspectives on the connection between academic stress and mental health in adolescents, there are specific limitations to keep in mind:

- Cross-sectional Design: This study design provides a snapshot of data at a single moment, which complicates the ability to determine causality between academic stress and mental health outcomes.
- Self-Reported Data: The dependence on self-reported questionnaires can result in response biases, as participants might exaggerate or downplay their experiences of stress or mental health symptoms.
- Geographical Limitation: The study sample consists solely of senior secondary school students from urban and rural areas within a particular region, which may not adequately reflect the wider adolescent population.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Participants

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	189	49.2
Female	195	50.8
Academic Stream		
Science	145	37.8
Arts	110	28.6
Commerce	129	33.6
Area of Residence		
Urban	203	52.9
Rural	181	47.1
School Type		
Government	181	47.1
Private	203	52.9
Family Income Level		
Less than ₹20,000	116	30.2
₹20,000 - ₹50,000	90	23.4
₹50,000 - ₹1 lakh	86	22.4
More than ₹1 lakh	92	24.0
Study Hours per Day		
Less than 1 hour	95	24.7
1 to 2 hours	96	25.0
3 to 4 hours	92	24.0
More than 4 hours	101	26.3

The demographic profile of the respondents provides essential insights into their gender, academic backgrounds, living locations, types of schools attended, family income brackets, and study practices. A total of 384 senior secondary school students took part in this study, showcasing a fairly even gender distribution: 189 male students (49.2%) and 195 female students (50.8%). The sample included students from various academic streams: Science (145 students, 37.8%), Arts (110 students, 28.6%), and Commerce (129 students, 33.6%). The students hailed from both urban (52.9%) and rural (47.1%) regions, providing a rich tapestry of geographical diversity. In terms of school type, 47.1% of students were in government schools, whereas 52.9% were in private institutions. A significant share of families (30.2%) reported a monthly income below ₹20,000, while 23.4% fell within the ₹20,000 to ₹50,000 range, and 22.4% earned between ₹50,000 and ₹1 lakh. A lesser segment (24.0%) reported family incomes surpassing ₹1 lakh. Students exhibited diverse study habits: 24.7% engaged in less than 1 hour of study daily, 25.0% committed 1 to 2 hours, 24.0% focused on 3 to 4 hours, while 26.3% devoted over 4 hours to their studies each day.

4.2 Socio-Economic and Academic Information

Table 4.2: Socio-Economic and Academic Information

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Access to Tutors		
Yes	204	53.1
No	180	46.9
Family Faces Financial Hardships		
Yes	190	49.5
No	194	50.5
Availability of Study Resources		
Yes	195	50.8
No	189	49.2
Family Encouragement		
Yes, Strongly	127	33.1
Yes, Moderately	129	33.6
No, Not at all	128	33.3
Urban vs Rural Stress		
Yes	201	52.3
No	183	47.7
Science vs Arts Stress		
Yes	189	49.2
No	195	50.8
Socio-Economic Effect on Stress		
Yes	203	52.9
No	181	47.1

Table 4.2 offers a glimpse into the socio-economic and academic elements influencing the participants. It shows that slightly more than half (53.1%) of the students had access to tutors, whereas 46.9% did not. Nearly half of

the students, 49.5%, indicated that their families experienced financial difficulties, while the other half, 50.5%, stated that their families did not encounter these issues. Half of the students, specifically 50.8%, had access to study resources, whereas 49.2% did not have such access. Students experienced different levels of family support: 33.1% indicated they received strong support, 33.6% noted moderate support, while 33.3% reported a lack of support entirely. Concerning the impact of geographical location on stress levels, 52.3% of students in urban settings indicated experiencing higher stress compared to 47.7% of those in rural areas. A comparable pattern was noted among Science and Arts students, where 49.2% of Science students reported feeling more stressed in contrast to 50.8% of Arts students. Ultimately, more than half of the participants (52.9%) recognised that socio-economic factors had a substantial impact on their academic stress, underscoring the crucial influence of financial and social resources on adolescents' stress levels.

4.3 Relationship Between Academic Stress and Mental Health in Different Streams

Of this section, the aim is to get information on the correlation between the aspect of academic stress and mental health in the three academic streams- namely Science, Arts and Commerce. As the academic streams are likely to introduce individual pressure and require, it is critical to examine whether the academic stress in different groups is somehow diverse and how it, in turn, is affecting the state of minds. Initial descriptives of the total academic stress and mental health in both academic streams are followed by using analyses of correlations to determine the correlation in both of the streams. This critique is important in determining certain levels in which the stress might be high in academic life, and whether stresses are related to mental issues in certain streams. To know whether there is any difference in stream regarding academic stress and mental health, the relationship between academic stress and mental health is evaluated in the Science stream, Arts stream, and Commerce stream individually. As an example, the stress experienced by Science students could be based on the very high academic requirements and competition of their studies whereas other students on the Arts and Commerce side could have different kind of stress based on subject contents and career expectations. Through addressing such variations, the research paper strives to provide understanding on whether there exist a higher level of academic stress in particular streams and the relation with the mental health in different academic courses. The section is crucial in realizing the different effect of academic stress among students with different educational backgrounds.

Hypothesis 1:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and mental health of adolescents in the science stream.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health of adolescents in the science stream.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Mental Health (Science Stream)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic Stress	30.1379	4.03564	145
Mental Health	30.0690	4.93521	145

Table 4.3 offers the descriptive statistics on academic stress and mental health of adolescents in the science stream. Mean score of academic stress among science students is 30.1379 at a standard deviation of 4.03564,

which is slightly above the general score of academic stress in this study. The average mental health rating of the science group is 30.0690, and the standard deviation is 4.93521 and supports the same range of mental health outcomes as compared to the rest of adolescent respondents. These values imply that the level of academic stress is relatively high within science students, yet the scores on mental health reflect a wide array of mental well-being results, which may be an indicator of different individual experiences that the students may pursue within this academic track which is arduous.

Table 4.3(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Mental Health (Science Stream)

Correlations			
		Academic Stress	Mental Health
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	-.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.428
	N	145	145
Mental Health	Pearson Correlation	-.066	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.428	
	N	145	145

Table 4.3(a) indicates the relationship that exists between the academic stress and mental health among the students pursuing a science stream. Pearson product-moment correlation is -0. 066 and is a very weak negative relationship between the two variables. The p-value of 0.428 is quite beyond the 0.05 standard, which implies that the correlation is statistically insignificant. This implies that academic stress has no strong effect on their mental health to students studying in science stream. The weak negative correlation may indicate that, with the increase of academic stress, the mental health outcomes may be a bit better than without the promotion of academic stress, but it is not significant enough to be called a definite trend.

Interpretation: Above hypothesis, which is an academic stress and mental health in science stream, is also tested. The correlation between the two variables, according to the data, is negative and, at that, very weak with Pearson correlation of -0.066 and p-value of 0.428 and once again, statistically irrelevant. This way, the null hypothesis is accepted, which implies that the effect of academic stress on the mental health of adolescents in the science-stream is not significant. There is a negative relationship which, despite its existence, is too weak to find support to the hypothesis of a significant effect.

Hypothesis 2:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and mental health of adolescents in the arts stream.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health of adolescents in the arts stream.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Mental Health (Arts Stream)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N

Academic Stress	29.4818	4.32770	110
Mental Health	29.1455	4.15930	110

The descriptive statistics of academic stress and mental health among adolescents under the arts stream are revealed in Table 4.4. The average score of the academic stress value of arts students is 29.4818 and their standard deviation is 4.32770 which is not excessively high as compared to the science stream. Arts students indicate a slightly varying mental health score of 29.1455 which standard deviation of 4.15930. The mentioned numbers indicate that the academic pressure and mental well-being issues, just to an extent, are not as problematic as among the students with the science orientation, but the disparities between the two industries are not particularly significant.

Table 4.4(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Mental Health (Arts Stream)

Correlations			
		Academic Stress	Mental Health
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	-.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.558
	N	110	110
Mental Health	Pearson Correlation	-.056	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.558	
	N	110	110

The results in Table 4.4(a) indicate the relationship between mental health and academic stress among the arts students. The Pearson correlation coefficient = -0.056 showing there is very weak relation between mental health and academic stress. This is not a statistically significant correlation as its p-value of 0.558 exceeds the value of 0.05. This means that among the arts students, a positive correlation exists between the academic stress and the mental health. Although there is a bit of variance in the percentages of the academic stress that arts students displayed, these data indicate that academic stress is not a large component in the mental health outcomes of these students.

Interpretation: Above Hypothesis actually explored the connection between academic stress and mental health among the adolescents in a stream of arts. The null hypothesis was that, there is no significant relation between academic stress and mental health on study of students in this stream. The outcomes impressed a Pearson correlation value of -0.056 and a p-value of 0.558. This implies an extremely weak and negative correlation and the correlation is not significant. That is why, the null hypothesis is accepted and we can say that academic stress influence on mental health of students in the arts stream is not significant.

4.4 Relationship Between Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status

In this part, the researcher discusses the connection between academic stress and socio-economic status of the adolescents by trying to discover how socio-economic conditions like family income, the presence of tutors, and learning facilities contribute to academic stress in adolescents. Descriptive data are given first to present a picture of the social- economic background of the participants, second, to look at the connection between social-economic status and academic stress, correlation analyses are going to be conducted. The experiment also

examines the instance of academic stress among students of lower backgrounds than those having higher backgrounds. These results of the analysis are important to learn how social-economic inequality may intensify the academic stress and affect the mental health of adolescents. Through the consideration of the soci-economic background of the adolescents and their school stress, it can be seen that the interaction of the outside variables like income and access to the available resources of the adolescent and the internal variables like stress and mental status of adolescent is very complex. It investigates whether students having limited resources will be more inclined to experience increased academic stress as compared to other students experiencing financial hardships. The significance of this analysis is that it could be used to develop policies that would alleviate the differences in the educational experiences of disadvantaged students, especially those growing under poor backgrounds, and enable creation of better environments that could allow such students to excel not only academically but also psychologically.

Hypothesis 3:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (All Adolescents)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic Stress	30.0599	4.30423	384
Socioeconomic status	1.47	.500	384

Table 4.5 also shows the descriptive parameters of academic stress and socio- economic status which are given of all the adolescents. Academic stress score is 30.0599 with a standard deviation of point 4.30423 and this means that the spread of academic stress levels among the adolescents in this study is moderate. The socio-economic status, ranged between 1-3 has a mean of 1.47 and standard deviation of 0.500, which implies that the socio-economic status of the participants is more slanted towards the lower middle class group. The given data will serve as a glimpse of an overview of the overall socio-economic status and stressors related to academics among the adolescent participants of the study under consideration.

Table 4.5(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (All Adolescents)

Correlations			
		Academic Stress	Socioeconomic status
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.903
	N	384	384
Socioeconomic status	Pearson Correlation	.006	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.903	

	N	384	384

The results of the correlation conducted between academic stress and socioeconomic status are provided in Table 4.5(a) in regards to all adolescents. The Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.006 which shows a very weak positive connection between both the variables. This correlation is not statistically significant with a significance level of 0.903 that is well beyond the 0.05 significance level that indicates significance. This implies that, among all adolescents there is no meaningful relations between the degree of academic stress and the socio-economic status. Although socio-economic status has the potential of influencing a myriad of things in the life of a student, it has no critical impact on the level of academic stress of the adolescent in this study.

Interpretation: The hypothesis was to perform an analytical study of the connection between academic stress and socio-economic status in all adolescents. The null hypothesis was based on the idea that these two variables do not have a significant relationship with each other. The statistical results corresponded to Pearson correlation 0.006 and p-value 0.903, which is rather close to zero and insignificant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is recognized and it means that socio-economic status does not affect academic stress among adolescents in general quite significantly. This implies that social-economic status is not the major determinant behind the extent of academic stress that adolescents experience.

Hypothesis 4:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of boys.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of boys.

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Boys)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic Stress	30.4180	4.29248	189
Socioeconomic status	1.43	.497	189

The descriptive statistics of the academic stress and socio-economic status among male adolescents are provided in Table 4.6. The average academic stress score is 30.4180 with standard deviation of 4.29248 and this means that boys with the present study exhibit a rather high academic stress score. The boys socio-economic status score has a mean of 1.43 and a standard deviation of 0.497 implying that the boys in the study are mostly of a lower to middle social-economic rank. These numbers aid in setting the background within which boys find themselves stressed academically and are fundamental towards comprehending the manner in which the socio-economic situations might complicate with an increase in stress levels.

Table 4.6(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Boys)

Correlations			
		Academic Stress	Socioeconomic status
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	-.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.271
	N	189	189

Socioeconomic status	Pearson Correlation	-.080	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.271	
	N	189	189

The correlation between academic stress and socio-economic status of males adolescents was given in Table 4.6(a). The Correlation Coefficient, Pearson is -0.080 which reveals that the relationship between academic stress and the socio-economic status of the boys is very weak in a negative direction. The p value of 0.271 is quite above the value of 0.05 which is a measure of statistical significance and this would indicate that this sort of relationship is not statistically significant. Thus, the evidence shows that, in regard to boys, the socio-economic status does not play a major role in determining the amount of stress they experience at school. This insignificant and not strong correlation indicates that there are other variables that can play a bigger role in determining the level of academic stress experienced by boys.

Interpretation: Above Hypothesis was concerned especially with the interaction between academic stress and the socio-economic status in boys. The null hypothesis indicated that between these variables there was no significant relationship. Pearson correlation of -0.080 and p-value 0.271 showed that the correlation is not significant and is thus weak so the null hypothesis is accepted. This observation means that in the case of boys, the socio-economic status does not play any significant role with regard to determining the extent of academic stress among them.

Hypothesis 5:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of girls.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of girls.

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Girls)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic Stress	29.7128	4.29812	195
Socioeconomic status	1.51	.501	195

Table 4.7 shows the descriptive statistics of academic stress and socio-economic status in female adolescents. The mean score of academic stress from the girls is 29.7128 with a standard deviation of 4.29812 which implies that the girls in this study have slightly lower levels of academic stress than that of boys. The goal socio-economic status score of girls is 1.51 with standard deviation of 0.501 which means that girls of this study have a lower to middle socio-economic background just like the male participants of the study. These figures indicate the academic pressure levels by the female adolescents and the socio-economic status experienced by them.

Table 4.7(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Girls)

Correlations			
		Academic Stress	Socioeconomic status
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	.102

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.158
	N	195	195
Socioeconomic status	Pearson Correlation	.102	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.158	
	N	195	195

Table 4.7(a) indicates the relationship of academic stress and social-economic status among female adolescents. The correlation coefficient is Pearson = 0.102 and the relation is very weak but positive in between academic stress and socio-economic status among girls. But the p-value 0.158 is larger than 0.05 to indicate that the correlation is not significant. Such finding suggests that socio-economic status has no significant influence on the level of academic stress in girls. There is weak positive correlation but not substantial enough to show it as statistically significant, which means that there are other variables involved in causing the academic pressure on girls than socio-economic status.

Interpretation: In Above Hypothesis, the correlation between the socio-economic status and academic stress within the girl was tested. The null hypothesis once more was that there is no significant relationship between the two. The correlation here was Pearson, and it was 0.102 with a corresponding p-value of 0.158. Although the correlation is weakly positive, the p-value is much greater than the default value of significance (0.05), i.e. the result would not be significant. Thus, the null hypothesis will be accepted, which implies that the traditional impact of socio-economic status on the academic stress of adolescent girls is irrelevant.

Hypothesis 6:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents in rural areas.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents in rural areas.

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Rural Areas)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic Stress	29.8670	4.50160	203
Socioeconomic status	1.46	.500	203

The table Table 4.8 offers the descriptive data of the variables academic stress and socio-economic status among the rural population. Mean score of academic stress among adolescents in the rural background is 29.8670 with a standard deviation of 4.50160 which shows that academic stress is of moderate level among adolescents of the rural background. The average of socio-economic status category stands at 1.46 with standard deviation of 0.500 indicating that most of the rural adolescents belong to lower-middle socio economic background. These figures make it clear that the academic stress exists on a substantial level, and the socio-economic status is rather homogeneous within this group, which is the background of deeper research on the nature of their relations.

Table 4.8(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Rural Areas)

Correlations

		Academic Stress	Socioeconomic status
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.839
	N	203	203
Socioeconomic status	Pearson Correlation	.014	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.839	
	N	203	203

The Table 4.8(a) shows the relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents living in rural areas. The Pearson correlation coefficient value is 0.014 which shows that association between academic stress and socio-economic status is very weak and positive. The p-value of 0.839 is much higher than the standard of 0.05 in determining a statistical relationship, hence this is an insignificant relationship. The data, therefore, indicates that the socio-economic status in the rural setting has no significant correlation in the determination of the academic-related stress in the adolescents of that environment. This poor relationship means that socio-economic status alone may not be the most important factor which contributes to academic stress in rural setting.

Interpretation: Above Hypothesis targeted the adolescents in the rural regions checking the relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status in the regions. The null hypothesis that any significant relationship would not occur was forecasted. The result of two correlation values of 0.014 and a p-value of 0.839 support the fact that the relationship is very weak and it is not statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis is then accepted implying that the socio-economic status does not cause significant academic stress among the rural adolescents.

Hypothesis 7:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents in urban areas.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status of adolescents in urban areas.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Urban Areas)

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Academic Stress	30.2762	4.07307	181
Socioeconomic status	1.48	.501	181

The descriptive statistics of the urban areas on academic stress and socio-economic status were done in Table 4.9. The average academic stress measure among the adolescents in urban areas is 30.2762 with standard deviation standing at 4.07307, hence indicating that academic stress is a little bit high in the urban areas than in the rural areas. The average social-economic status is at 1.48 with a standard deviation of 0.501 and it shows that most teenagers in the urban setting, just like their counterparts in rural areas, do not belong to the upper ends of the socio-economic tripes but rather, are composed of the lower to middle tier. These figures form the platform to analysis of the relationship between academic stress and socio-economic status in the urban context.

Table 4.9(a): Correlations Between Academic Stress and Socio-Economic Status (Urban Areas)

Correlations			
		Academic Stress	Socioeconomic status
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	-.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.941
	N	181	181
Socioeconomic status	Pearson Correlation	-.006	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.941	
	N	181	181

The results of correlation of academic stress and socio-economic status in an urban area are as shown in Table 4.9(a). As the Pearson correlation coefficient turns out to -0.006, the relationship between the two variables is insignificant, then, it is negative. The correlation p-value is 0.941, located much beyond the level of significance 0.05, so the correlation is not statistically significant. This finding indicates that there is no significant correlation between socio-economic status and academic stress in the urban settings. Thus, even though urban areas might be known to be more expensive to live in and even experience greater stress exposure, socio-economic status seems not to be influential in the formation of academic stress among adolescents in the sample. The poor correlation also suggests that it is possible that other cause of the academic stress in urban places other than the socio-economic background, other factors to consider include academic expectations, peer pressure and the competitive character of the schooling system.

Interpretation: This hypothesis focused on the nature of how academic stress relates to the socio-economic status in urban adolescents. The null hypothesis set was that there was no substantial between-relationship between these factors. The correlation that was established was of -0.006 with p-value of 0.941, which is practically zero and therefore statistically insignificant. So, the conclusion is that the null hypothesis can be accepted and it may be stated that socio-economic status does not have any significant role in academic stress of adolescents in the city environment.

5. DISCUSSION

The inter-relatedness between academic stress, mental well-being and socio-economic status is quite complex, with the results of the present research reflecting the previous researches. Academic stress among students of senior secondary schools in India is becoming a cause of serious concern, and studies have stressed that it happens to have an emotional and psychological impact on the young people (Saini, 2001). Research investigations have revealed that academic stress does not only occur as a result of perceived demands of school work, but it is also enhanced by external factors such as parental demands, societal expectations, and peer rivalry among others (Beedawat, 1976; Boekaerts, 2006). This paper shows that these factors play a great role in helping to increase the level of stress among students in different education courses and more so in the Science stream because of its challenging academic program and competitive environment which often cause students to get into a state of enhanced pressure. In previous studies like those of Aggarwal (1999) and Gupta & Khan (1987), it is emphasized that academic stress is most often the result of extrinsic factors, which in the case of a student in a country like

India could be the pressure of living to the expectations of the society or the pressure to maintain a certain academic level due to the high prized value of the education in this country.

Based on research, it has been very clear on the relationship between academic stress and mental health complications such as anxiety and depression. Findings on this research show that academic stress is a significant contributor to the issue of mental health among senior secondary students, particularly, in anxiety and depression (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Saini, 2001). Previous research by Manju (1994) and Iyer (1992) relate academic pressures to mental problems, which further limits academic performance leading to vicious circle of stress and poor performance. The results of the current research show that the students who studied in the stream called Science, that is typified by considerably high academic requirements, suggested slightly greater degrees of academic stress. However, the correlation between academic stress and mental health outcomes within the Science stream was low and insignificant, which means that the stress encountered by these students could be alleviated by such factors as personal coping skills or peer support systems. Interestingly, similar observations could also be founded in the Arts and Commerce streams whereby the students reported to have moderate levels of stress though the association with the mental health outcomes was also weak. What this means is that stress-mental health relationship may not be clear or strong as it has always been perceived (Chauhan, 1987; Rajput, 1984).

The results of the study show that on the issue of socio-economic status (SES) level of academic stress does vary accordingly to the SES; but, also, there is an unexpected low association between academic stress and SES. These discoveries raise doubts concerning some of the suppositions of earlier researches (Gupta & Khan, 1987; Ghuman, 1976) that suggested the stronger affiliation between low SES and greater academic worry. The present study indicated that though socio-economic factors like where tutors, study materials and family support were important, they did not make any significant contribution to the academic stress experienced by the students regardless of their social and economic status (Ranganathan, 1988; Saini, 2001). This shows that academic stress might be influenced by numerous and complex factors, other than the socio-economic status such as personality characteristics, personal goals and school culture (Lazarus, 1966; Manju, 1994). It should be noted that lower socio-economic students also face unique challenges that may add more stress, such as financial stress and limited access to educational assistance, which cannot be represented through SES alone. The results of this study complement the researches done by Kumar (1984) and Chitra (2004), by pointing out that the effect of social-economic level is pronounced but not absolute as the role played by all other factors; social, personal and environmental should be considered instead.

Two factors that have emerged as important factors that influence academic stress include gender and geographical location with urban students reporting to be more stressed compared to students in the rural regions of the country (Iyer, 1992; Saini, 2001). The same pattern may be attributed to the competitive and high-expectation school environments typical of urban schools, wherein the motivation to be exemplary is often even stronger. The research results however show a weak relationship between the level of academic stress and the socio-economic status in both rural and urban areas. It suggests that there are other agents that possibly play a very critical role in the stress of students (Harris, 1994; Gupta & Khan, 1987): these are community support, peer influence and local educational policies. Also gender differences in academic stress were noted, whereby females students often reported that they were more stressed by a range of demands by the society including the need to combine success at school with the need to complete chores at home (Manju, 1994; Chauhan, 1987). This

research correlates with that of Harris (1994) and that by Patel (1977) that indicated that gendered anticipations in the scholarly activities bring about the growth of the stress level in teenage girls. The statistics showed a slight increase in the rate of stress in girls compared to boys; but this variation was not that statistically significant. This highlights the fact that there exist disparities between the genders, and yet this may not be eminent as some research studies project (Freeman, 1962; Gakhar, 1985).

6. CONCLUSION

The article contributes to the growing body of knowledge concerning academic stress as it provides an in-depth understanding of how socio-economic status and mental health interact with geographical location to determine the amount of stress experienced by students in India. This paper highlights the importance of considering both individual and situational factors when it comes to addressing academic stress in institutions of learning since the intertwining nature of this relationship is complex and multifaceted. According to this research, the reduction of academic pressure should include not only lower academic rates but also the encouragement of nurturing conditions at home or in educational facilities where healthy coping styles will be encouraged, namely among students with disadvantaged backgrounds. Further research would benefit by examining the usefulness of school culture, friendship and personal coping mechanisms in reducing the negative effects of school pressure.

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