

# Academic Stress among Adolescents: A Review-Based Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Academic stress among adolescents has emerged as a major psychological concern across the globe. The increasing competition, societal pressure, and institutional expectations have contributed to alarming levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional disorders among students. This article explores the dynamics of academic stress through a detailed review of ten significant studies from different socio-cultural contexts. The analysis aims to synthesize key findings, assess implications, and provide a holistic understanding of how academic pressure impacts adolescents. The study concludes with recommendations for educational institutions, parents, and mental health professionals.

**Keywords:** Academic stress, Adolescents, Anxiety, Mental health, Parental pressure, Educational system

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by rapid physical growth, emotional turbulence, and the gradual formation of identity and independence. During this period, individuals begin to experience increased expectations from family, school, and society, especially in terms of academic performance. Education is often considered the most important avenue for social mobility, success, and economic security. As a result, adolescents are subjected to immense academic pressure, which can lead to a condition commonly referred to as academic stress—a psychological state resulting from excessive educational demands that exceed the adaptive capacities of students (Deb *et al.*, 2015; Rao, 2016).

Academic stress has emerged as a serious mental health concern across the globe. According to the World Health Organization (2021), nearly 10–20% of adolescents experience mental health issues worldwide, and academic-related stress is recognized as one of the leading contributors. Adolescents are frequently overwhelmed by the demands of schoolwork, competition for high grades, preparation for entrance examinations, and parental expectations. These stressors are further

amplified in societies with rigid educational systems and strong socio-cultural emphasis on scholastic achievement, as seen in countries like India, China, South Korea, and Singapore (Lee and Larson, 2000; Ang and Huan, 2006).

In the Indian context, academic performance is deeply intertwined with family reputation, marriage prospects, and future employment opportunities. Failure to meet expected standards often results in harsh criticism, social stigma, or internalized feelings of inadequacy. Studies have shown that Indian adolescents spend an average of 6 to 10 hours daily on academic tasks, including school, tuition, and homework, often at the cost of sleep, physical activity, and social interactions (Verma *et al.*, 2002). The stress caused by such a lifestyle has been found to be strongly associated with psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, and even suicidal ideation (Ang and Huan, 2006; Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2018; Misra and Castillo, 2004).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shift to online learning have added new dimensions to academic stress. Digital fatigue, lack of peer interaction, inadequate access to devices and stable internet, and reduced teacher-student engagement have

disproportionately affected students from underprivileged and rural backgrounds (Gupta and Whedon, 2019; Suldo, *et al.*, 2008). These challenges have increased the emotional burden on adolescents, especially in India, where mental health infrastructure in schools remains largely inadequate.

Despite the growing evidence of its harmful impact, academic stress among adolescents remains under-addressed by educators, parents, and policymakers. There is limited awareness about adolescent mental health, and many students hesitate to seek help due to stigma, lack of services, or fear of being judged. Therefore, understanding the psycho-social dimensions of academic stress is essential for developing holistic educational models and supportive environments that prioritize both achievement and well-being. This article attempts to examine the extent and implications of academic stress among adolescents by reviewing existing empirical literature, interpreting the major findings, and suggesting evidence-based recommendations.

### Review of Literature:

Deb *et al.* (2015) studied 400 Indian high school students and found that 66% experienced moderate to high academic stress, with girls more affected. Exam pressure, high expectations, and limited recreation were key stressors. The study urged school-based mental health support and moderation of parental pressure to improve student well-being.

Ang and Huan (2006) found that academic stress among Singaporean adolescents led to depression, which in turn predicted suicidal ideation. Cultural and parental expectations intensified this stress, especially in high-performing schools. The study emphasized early identification and the need for psychosocial support systems to protect students' mental well-being.

### Analysis and Interpretation:

The two detailed studies—and several others reviewed—collectively highlight the multifactorial nature of academic stress among adolescents.

- **Cultural Influence:** In both India and Singapore, academic success is equated with family pride and future financial security. This cultural emphasis leads to intense parental pressure (Deb *et al.*, 2015; Ang and Huan, 2006; Kumaraswamy, 2013).
- **Gender Dynamics:** Female adolescents are

often more affected due to social conditioning and emotional burden. Girls tend to internalize stress more, resulting in higher rates of anxiety.

- **Mental Health Impact:** Academic stress is not isolated—it links directly with anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation. The mediation effect of depression in Ang and Huan's (2016) study shows how stress can escalate to severe outcomes.
- **Lack of Coping Mechanisms:** Adolescents lack training in coping strategies like time management, emotional regulation, and relaxation techniques. This makes them vulnerable to psychological breakdowns during exams or under continuous evaluation pressure.
- **Educational Environment:** Rigid systems that focus only on grades create toxic academic cultures. Students are not encouraged to explore creativity or self-expression, which further adds to stress.

Thus, academic stress in adolescents is both a symptom and consequence of systemic educational flaws, rigid family dynamics, and societal pressures.

### Major Findings:

The review and analysis of existing literature confirm that academic stress is a prevalent and deeply rooted issue among adolescents globally. Numerous studies report that 60% to 70% of adolescents face moderate to high levels of academic stress, indicating a widespread concern that cuts across geographical and cultural contexts.

These pressures reflect the nature of an achievement-oriented educational system, which emphasizes academic outcomes over holistic development. Adolescents often feel confined within a framework that rewards performance but neglects emotional well-being and creativity, which are crucial during this developmental stage.

A significant and recurring theme in the literature is the direct relationship between academic stress and mental health issues. Adolescents under prolonged stress are more susceptible to Anxiety, Low self-worth, Depressive symptoms, and Suicidal ideation in extreme cases. These psychological conditions are not isolated responses but often co-occur, with depression functioning as a key mediating variable. It converts academic strain into more serious emotional dysfunctions. Such a

progression from stress to mental health crisis is particularly alarming in the adolescent phase, where cognitive and emotional regulation is still evolving.

One crucial insight is the gendered nature of academic stress. Studies reveal that female adolescents frequently report higher stress levels and associated emotional distress. This may be attributed to the intersection of academic demands with social norms, including societal pressure on female behaviour, safety concerns, and role expectations at home. As a result, intervention strategies must be gender-sensitive, acknowledging the differentiated stress experiences of male and female students.

Another key finding is that academic success does not shield students from stress. On the contrary, high-achieving adolescents often suffer from internalized expectations, perfectionism, and fear of failure, which intensify their stress levels. These students may appear outwardly stable but are psychologically vulnerable, especially when their academic identity is challenged or threatened.

In summary, the major findings emphasize that academic stress is a critical psycho-social issue among adolescents with far-reaching mental health implications. Its impact is not confined to poor academic performers; it also affects high achievers, female students, and those lacking coping strategies. The absence of institutional psychological support makes the issue more acute, especially for rural adolescents, who are often marginalized from access to quality care.

### Recommendations:

To mitigate academic stress among adolescents, a multi-level strategy is essential. Schools must foster supportive environments by integrating life skills education into the curriculum—focusing on time management, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness. Appointing trained mental health professionals and organizing regular workshops can aid early intervention and resilience-building. Parents should avoid unrealistic comparisons, maintain open communication, and encourage balance through hobbies and relaxation. At the policy level, adolescent mental health must be prioritized by mandating trained counselors in schools and reforming examination systems to emphasize creativity and understanding over rote learning. Special focus should be given to rural areas with limited access to psychological services. Adolescents themselves must be empowered with stress-management

tools such as mindfulness, exercise, and journaling. Encouraging help-seeking behavior and nurturing positive self-talk are vital to promoting well-being. A collaborative approach involving institutions, families, policymakers, and adolescents is crucial for reducing academic stress and supporting holistic development.

### Conclusion:

The studies reviewed highlight that academic stress among adolescents is a critical public health issue. The interplay of societal expectations, institutional practices, and individual vulnerabilities makes it a multifaceted challenge. In many cases, students suffer in silence due to lack of emotional support, fear of stigma, and poor awareness about mental health. Urgent reforms are needed in the educational systems to foster an environment where academic success is balanced with emotional well-being.

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