

EFFESTS OF ACADEMIC STRESS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Academic stress has become a pervasive issue affecting students' performance and well-being in higher education. With increasing academic demands and pressure to meet high expectations, students frequently experience stress that can hinder their academic success. This study explores the impact of academic stress on students' academic performance, aiming to identify key stressors and understand their influence within the context of public sector institutions. The study used a quantitative, descriptive approach. The sample of the study comprised on the 160 (male=86, female =74) students form public sector universities form District Okara. The Hierarchical linear regression analysis reveals that academic stress significantly impairs students' academic outcomes, with family pressure and physical exhaustion emerging as key predictors of reduced performance. Findings indicate that as additional stressors are included, the model's explanatory power improves, collectively accounting for a substantial variance in students' academic performance. These results underscore the detrimental impact of academic stress, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to support students in managing stressors, thereby enhancing their academic success and overall well-being. This study contributes to the understanding of stress-related challenges faced by students in higher education and highlights the importance of creating supportive educational environments to foster resilience and academic achievement.

Keywords: Academic performance, stressor, Education, well-being

Introduction

In the development of any nation, higher education institutions (HEIs) are one of the most fundamental pillars (Abbas et al., 2021). The good performance of HEIs is vital for the well-being of students. (Aafreen et al. 2018). In today's challenging industrial environment, students must be equipped with better knowledge and skills (Aamir et al., 2021). Social media, Academic Quality, Family and the environment, and social relationships can affect the performance of students in this new highly competitive academic environment (Likisa, 2018). Aafreen et al. (2018) identified that college students face multiple sources throughout their academic lives; this is stressful. It has been observed more often that stress decreases the morale of individuals to a great extent (Wang et al., 2021) When people have difficulty juggling internal and external demands, Long-lasting stress, seen in terms of chronicity or more than capability, creates a problem for an individual, impacts their psychological health and can develop to various mental disorders, e.g., depression Schimel pfennig. Depression is a major public health issue worldwide; it presents as continuous sadness and the failure to feel glad or pleased (Aldieri et al., 2021). The disease is rising every day and is now becoming a disorder throughout the world. Depression is the third largest global disease burden, and the WHO (2021) predicted it to be in first place by 2030. Depression presents as an almost empty energy bank, confusing very little to the clarity of focus and in options' radar blindness. They are also budding pillars of society who strive to accomplish their academic goals. On the flip side, depression can considerably hinder their academic accomplishments (Abbas et al., 2021). There are a lot of factors responsible for it, such as family issues, feeling

low to step into the new lifestyle at colleges and educational institutions, and lack of academic performance, which is also attributed to teachers' favoritism. Depressed students are dependably stress-ridden or stressed with academic pressure (Akinola et al., 2019). This is found, for example, in emerging countries with quickly increasing mental illness rates (Álvarez-Huerta et al., 2021), amongst which the prevalence of depression specifically has shown a remarkable rising trend. Depressed people tend to be more negative in their interpretation of situations than non-depressed people. Depression affects the ability of an individual to perform daily life activities and is one important aspect in which this function is mirrored academically (Mihăilescu et al., 2016). Depression is inversely related to focusing on tasks and performing at work or school. People with depressed moods are irritable; most of the time, they experience motivation or apathy and rest at night without feeling refreshed. Depression is also a cognitive disorder in that it disrupts many functions. People can hardly focus, make choices, or even remember things when depressed. It changes how the brain processes, and many people with depression experience memory problems that make them remember everything happening around or in their lives (Mihăilescu et al., 2016). This group exhibits a high prevalence of Depression, yet the association between academic performance and depressive symptoms is not fully understood. The study intends to investigate the influence of depression on undergraduate academic performance with a focus on both outcomes and its occurrence in this generation. The purpose of the present study is to investigate how different forms of academic stress influence students' academic performance. the study differentiates between stress factors and demonstrates their respective power on academic outcomes in students. This research will provide insights for educators on managing academic stress to improve students' academic success

Literature of Review

Stress typically leads to numerous mental and physiological effects in individuals (Ribeiro et al., 2017). These can be environmental factors such as stress or existential emotional responses and, in the most extreme cases, psychological disorders (anxiety, depression) that demand long-term treatment. Excessive stress has also been linked to poor health outcomes and severe course-level performance differentials in students with high stress levels (Abbas et al., 2014; Chawla & Sachdeva, 2018; Yang et al., 2021). University students undergo a significant transition from adolescence to adulthood, considered one of the hardest stages in life (Quince et al., 2012).

Students' lives are at a stressful stage, and this, along with a loss of social connection and the usual pressure around academic success, according to research, almost 33% of students face mild to severe depression in their academic life, which is higher than the general population (Sarokhani et al., 2013). Individuals from lower social-class backgrounds, specifically students, experience feelings of helplessness more frequently and are subject to depression. Depressed pupils in stressful academic surroundings usually have poor results with low self-esteem and may feel a sense of defeat by believing the world is unjust/unfair to them or their future is not bright (Nguyen et al. 2019). This affects their desire to handle challenging tasks, which affects their academic span of life.

Depression can appear with various symptoms: sleep is deficient, and attention cannot be focused on negative thinking, feelings of guilt are being felt (Mellal et al., 2014). Even though depression is common and affects academic systems, considerable evidence regarding the magnitude of depression disruption on educational performance remains scarce. Another study reported the role of emotional stability and financial stress on exam results, as well as depression leading to poor academic performance (Doyumgaç et al., 2021). The decreased productivity is because depressed students may choose not to attend classes or just avoid

taking assessments and assignments altogether; they are also more likely to fail courses requiring greater effort, which leads them to drop out of college (Awadalla et al., 2020).

More ambiguous is the interplay of anxiety and academic performance. For example, some work suggests that anxiety might enhance performance quality (Alhussain et al., 2020) or makes no association with surer reported the other way round relation between them (Abror et al. For instance, Khan et al. (2022): Despite the level of depression among students being incredibly high, this does not seem to impact their GPA. With these findings being inconsistent across the literature, future research should look to clarify this relationship regarding specific depression or anxiety symptoms and academic outcomes.

Adulthood is typically the age group with a lower prevalence of depression, and depressive disorders are generally assumed to decrease between the age of 18–25. Nonetheless, recent research also showed that rates of severe depression are very high for this age group, too, as one in five university students scores above clinical thresholds (Bisson, 2020; Pascoe et al., 2017); Dumitrache et al. (2018) identified that approximately 30% of high school students suffer from depressive symptoms. The stressors shown by students throughout higher education experiences range from gaps in understanding dense and complex syllabi to high expectations of assignments, often with short deadlines, along with some difficulty attuning their lifestyle when relocating communities (Abbas & Ssajjabbi 2020; Beiter et al., 2015).

Schimelpfening (2020) showed that symptoms of depression may peak at different points during the academic year, and experiences in college predict depressive disorders. In Canadian university data, 42.3% of respondents report serious anxiety and stress; 58.1% consider academic projects to be too hard to do (Hünefeld, Gerstenberg & Hüffmeier, 2020; Imran & Abbas, 2020). Many students in Germany, Bulgaria, and Poland also say they feel immense stress because of their workload, often more than of relationships (Pascoe et al., 2020). Lörz, Netz, and Quast (2016). found that academic workload remains an independent risk factor when controlling demographic characteristics as well as personal history or social support. Those among us struggling with workload often suffer from higher rates of depressive disorders (Bisson, 2017). the broader environmental context among those with limited resources and emphasize stress-related mental health problems triggered by deprivation (Hollingshead & Redlich 2004). Such stressors within the educational environment, which encompass both academic pressure and poor time management skills of students, are important aspects to consider in relation to student mental health.

Depression prevents a person from functioning as well. Mahmoud et al. (2012). evaluated the effect of depression on students' GPAs and found a long-term negative impact of depressive symptomatology on academic success. Depression today is one of the greatest risk factors in the general population, and juveniles are far more vulnerable to this. Depression and anxiety in students cause low grades, unable to concentrate well on things, easily distracted by too many escapist behaviors, having difficulty with social interactions or confrontational situations (Khalid et al., 2016). Depression goes beyond the realm of academics and influences mental health as well as social behavior. While the stigma surrounding mental health has come a substantial way from what it used to be in some more backward times long past, and much improvement is still needed today, one study carried out at Tafila Technical University for anxiety and depression found that males are more likely to suffer from depression. Adults with higher levels of depression symptoms have more negative social encounters but also report feeling isolated from all decent human society (Al-Qaisy, 2011). Steger and Kashdan (2009) sought to explore the positive and negative social interactions experienced daily by individuals with subclinical levels of depressive symptoms, with an emphasis placed on adolescence as particularly important for practicing

independence (self-efficacy). Repeated failures in task handling during this time tend to shatter self-confidence apart, with monetary hardships and academic rigor adding fuel and exacerbating anxiety or depression. Muhammed et al. (2018) Examined the association of anxiety, Stress, and personality with learning style among undergraduate medical students · Stress Perceived and developmentally challenged coping in poor urban adolescents. Exam stress affects many of the most well-prepared students, cutting across all disciplines. This fear of examination may cause exam anxiety and tension, which often goes unnoticed but unleashes a financial catastrophe.

Akinsola and Nwajei (2013) conducted a study among 18-19-year-old students and found a significant positive relationship exists between test anxiety due to depression in addition to its negative association with academic performance. Depression among teenagers and adolescents is so common today that it has already been shown to harm academic performance, which can result in low grades and, naturally, an inadequate GPA. They lose interest in academic and extracurricular activities but are unable to put reason behind them, causing feelings of loneliness and sadness without cause.

Methodology

This descriptive study uses a quantitative approach. The target population of the study contains all the undergraduate and graduate male and female students studying in the public sector higher education institutes located in District Okara. Students were selected through non-probability sampling techniques. Structured questionnaires based on a five-point Likert scale were distributed among students.

Table 1.1

Demographic profile of the Respondents

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	86	53.7 %
Female	74	46.2 %
Age		
15-18	24	15.0 %
19-22	48	30.0 %
23-26	48	30.0 %
27-30	24	15.0 %
31 or above	16	10.0 %
Subject		
Social science	104	65.0 %
Natural science	56	35.0 %

Table 1 showed the demographic of the respondents the sample consists of 160 participants, with 53.7% male and 46.2% female students. Age distribution reveals that the majority are young adults, particularly within the 19-22 and 23-26 age ranges, each comprising 30%. Majority of the respondents belongs to social science students while the 35% are from natural sciences.

Table 2
Hierarchical Linear regression for outcome variable academic performance

Items	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
I feel pressured by my family to succeed...	-1.214 (0.18)	-0.788 (0.22)	-1.142 (0.20)	-1.424 (0.22)	-1.229 (0.23)	-0.909 (0.22)
I feel physically exhausted due to my...		-0.664 (0.19)	-1.652 (0.24)	-2.149 (0.28)	-2.25 (0.28)	-2.928 (0.29)
I worry about failing or underperforming...			-1.978 (0.33)	-2.119 (0.32)	-2.372 (0.34)	-2.143 (0.32)
I worry that I won't meet the high...				-0.619 (0.20)	-0.724 (0.20)	-0.823 (0.19)
I often feel overwhelmed by the...					-0.508 (0.21)	-1.558 (0.28)
I find it difficult to cope with the...						-1.598 (0.31)
R	0.456	0.513	0.632	0.658	0.673	0.729
R Square	0.208	0.263	0.399	0.433	0.453	0.531
Adjusted R Square	0.203	0.254	0.388	0.419	0.435	0.513
R Square Change	0.208	0.056	0.136	0.034	0.02	0.078

Note: all regression effects are significant at $p < .05$.

The hierarchical linear regression analysis indicates the impact of academic stress factors on students' performance, with each model (M1 through M6) adding new variables to capture stress-related aspects. Notably, "I feel pressured by my family to succeed" and "I feel physically exhausted" consistently show significant negative effects on performance, with coefficients ranging from -0.664 to -1.652, suggesting these stressors are primary contributors to reduced academic outcomes. As stress variables like fear of failure, high expectations, and feeling overwhelmed are added, the R-squared values increase, from 0.208 in M1 to 0.531 in M6, indicating that academic stress factors collectively explain a substantial 53.1% of the variance in academic performance. This implies that high-stress levels, especially related to family pressure, physical exhaustion, and self-expectations, are significant inhibitors of students' academic success, impacting their confidence, grades, time management, and focus during exams.

Discussion

The results of this hierarchical linear regression analysis provide important insights into the impact of academic stress on student performance. This study found that academic stress, particularly when associated with factors like family expectations, physical exhaustion, fear of failure, high personal expectations, and feelings of being overwhelmed, significantly affects students' academic outcomes. These findings emphasize that academic stress does not operate as an isolated factor but rather as a cumulative influence on student performance. As each model in the analysis added new stress variables, the predictive power of the model improved, which reinforces the idea that academic stress is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon impacting students' lives in significant ways.

Family pressure emerged as a particularly influential factor, consistently showing a significant negative relationship with academic performance. This aligns with research that suggests family expectations can generate stress, anxiety, and lower motivation, especially when students perceive that their achievements will impact family reputation or expectations (Büber & Başay, 2023). The study is contrary of the results of the study

Physical exhaustion, another prominent stress factor, was shown to have a substantial impact on performance. Physical and mental fatigue has been documented as a hindrance to cognitive functions like attention and retention, which are essential for academic tasks (Kim & Suh, 2020). The persistence of these two variables throughout the models indicates that family pressure and physical exhaustion are primary contributors to the detrimental effects of academic stress.

As additional stress-related factors were introduced in later models, their influence became clear. For instance, fear of failure had a noticeable negative impact, supporting findings that associate academic settings with increased anxiety and self-doubt, particularly in highly competitive environments (Genc, 2022). This anxiety may impair students' ability to perform to their potential, as the fear of not meeting expectations can lead to avoidance behaviors or excessive stress. Similarly, high self-expectations contribute to students' stress levels. Perfectionism and self-imposed standards can lead to burnout and reduce academic engagement, further impacting grades and academic success (Lee & Anderman, 2020).

The inclusion of variables like feeling overwhelmed and difficulty coping in later models highlighted the cumulative effect of stress. This aligns with the stress appraisal theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which suggests that stressors are amplified when an individual perceives them as uncontrollable or overwhelming. For students, dealing with multiple stressors simultaneously can be challenging, creating a compounding effect on academic performance. This interaction between stressors, particularly when they are experienced together, points to the need for a comprehensive approach in addressing academic stress in higher education. Universities could benefit from implementing support programs, stress management workshops, and counseling services to alleviate the negative impact of these stressors (Jones & Thompson, 2021).

The overall findings from this study suggest that high levels of academic stress, compounded by family expectations, personal goals, physical fatigue, and feelings of inadequacy, significantly impede students' academic outcomes. Addressing these stressors through

university initiatives that include counseling, family engagement, and stress reduction programs can promote a supportive environment, thereby improving both academic performance and student well-being. These interventions are essential in helping students manage stress effectively, build resilience, and foster a more balanced academic life.

Conclusion

This study reveals that academic stress has a considerable negative impact on students' performance. Factors such as family pressure, physical exhaustion, fear of failure, and high self-imposed expectations are substantial stressors that hinder academic outcomes. Students experiencing higher levels of stress often struggle with maintaining focus, managing time effectively, and meeting academic demands. The hierarchical regression analysis demonstrates that as more stress-related variables are introduced, the explanatory power of the model improves significantly, showed that these combined factors account for a substantial portion of the variance in students' academic performance. This highlights the importance of addressing and managing academic stressors, as they not only affect students' ability to perform well but also undermine their confidence and motivation in their educational pursuits.

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Annexure

1. Please indicate how much you agree with each statement below regarding academic stress. (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I worry that I won't meet the high standards set by my teachers.					
I often feel pressured to perform well academically.					
I am frequently concerned about my grades and future academic success.					
I find it difficult to cope with the workload from my classes.					
I often feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework and assignments					
I worry about failing or underperforming in exams.					
I feel pressured by my family to succeed in my studies.					
I feel physically exhausted due to my academic workload.					

2. Please rate how much you agree with each statement related to your academic performance. (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel confident in my academic abilities.					
I consistently achieve the grades I aim for.					
I find it easy to keep up with the academic demands of my courses.					
I can manage my study time effectively.					
My academic stress levels affect my ability to concentrate in class.					
Academic stress affects my performance during exams and assignments.					