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A STUDY OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG STUDENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that helps student cope with life's challenges, understand their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their communities. It is an essential part of health and well-being that supports our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships, and shape the world we live in. Emotional health is a basic human right. Mental health has become an important topic in today's time as many students are facing difficulties in real life situations. Even before the pandemic, schools and other institutions had to deal with increased demand for care. Stress has become a significant part of human life. Anything that disrupts our comfort or poses a threat constitutes stress. It is difficult for students to avoid academic stress, and it impacts their performance across all study-related activities. Academic stress plays a major role in determining students' mental health. This study was conducted to find out the relationship between study-related stress and mental health among school students. 250 high school students were selected through 'Stratified Random Sampling' from government and private schools in and around Palwal city of Haryana. The results showed that private school students experienced more academic stress than public school students, and private school students had better mental health than other students. It was also found that there was a significant relationship between the mental health of high school students and academic stress. Its results are described in this article.

The number of youth experiencing sadness or despair has been continuously increasing since 2013. In 2023, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 40% of high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, nearly a third of students had poor mental health, and 20% had seriously considered suicide. It was found that female and LGBTQ students were more likely to experience these mental health problems than their peers.

Even though there has been a lot of conversation about it, there is still a lot of need to understand how we look at mental health issues in students. In addition to students developing mental health issues during higher education, there are also a growing number of students who arrive on campus with pre-existing mental health or substance use issues, or who have experienced major trauma in their lives, making them more likely to react to stress. Managing that stress reaction can consume attentional energy—the “bandwidth” needed for academic success—which can harm their physical, emotional, and mental health. Today's millennials are intelligent, hardworking and capable in terms of studies or work. Yet, despite much strength, there are many reasons why Millennials face mental health issues in higher education institutions. This may be especially true for students from historically underrepresented groups—such as first-generation college students, students from underfunded high schools whose first language is not English, students with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities—when experiencing mental health issues. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that helps people cope with life's challenges, understand their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their communities. It is an essential part of health and well-being that supports our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships, and improve the world we live in. Emotional health is a basic human right. On almost every scale, the mental health of students is declining. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is “complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Mental health has become an important role in today's time as many students are facing difficulties in real life situations. Going through college can be a very difficult experience for young people. Due to the heavy burden and expense of studying, many college students struggle with mental health issues such as anxiety, mood problems, and substance abuse problems.

According to several studies (Brown, 2016; Mojtabai et al., 2015; Richardson, 2015), students who experience mental health issues are less likely to complete or pass a course or module, are more likely to drop out of college, and are less likely to get good grades (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Even before the pandemic, schools and other institutions were facing increasing demand for care that far exceeded their capacity. At the same time, it has also become clear that the traditional model of counseling centers is not sufficient to deal with this problem.

The demand for counseling services has grown rapidly over the past ten years, and for good reason. Higher education has now become an option for a large section of the society; Evidence of this is that more students are seeking mental health treatment on campus today than in previous generations. When a person comes to university, there are major changes in his social, family and personal life, which increases the risk of mental problems. For this reason, during this time, the student's mental health—which is an important part of overall health—becomes even more important (Anbari. Z, 2013). According to Kaplan, mental health is a continuous effort to manage one's needs and the needs of a constantly changing environment, as well as to adapt to changing circumstances (F. Ghamari, 2010). A person with poor mental health is unable to move ahead and perform his responsibilities properly. This has a negative impact on the progress, health and development of the society etc. Mentally ill people express their condition in different ways.

Their problems include low self-confidence, poor grades, being socially rejected, difficulty forming relationships with others, and lack of awareness of social norms. All these psychological problems hinder the student's ability to learn. Additionally, the new environment at university, being away from family, lack of interest in the subject of study and lack of access to resources such as financial aid and facilities can also cause psychological distress and poor academic performance.

Today the whole world is witnessing stress and its adverse effects. Bernstein (2008) defines stress as "a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physical process that occurs as a result of a person's efforts. Richlin-Klonsky (2003) reported that "academic performance hinders a student's ability to engage. "Many students reported experiencing high academic stress at predictable times that resulted from preparing for and taking tests, class ranking competitions, and mastering large amounts of curriculum in a relatively short amount of time." Fairbrother (2003) posited that "academic stress." forms of stress which arose due to various reasons such as too many assignments, competition with other students, failures and poor Erkutlu (2006) expressed the view that "the pressure of performing well in an examination or examination and the time allotment makes the academic environment very stressful. The major effect of stress is that it significantly affects the psychological functioning of people's mental health". According to the World Health Organization (2014), mental health is seen as "a state of well-being" in which individuals feel themselves capable, regardless of the normal stresses of life. Galderisi, et al (2015) defined "mental health" as a dynamic state of internal balance that enables individuals to use their abilities in a manner consistent with the universal values of society.

Need for the study:-

The Indian Constitution assures that school education is a fundamental right of every child. Due to liberalization and global market, education today has become a service-oriented business sector in the hands of private agencies. Students are pressured by educational institutions to score high marks to increase their market value. There is constant pressure on parents to provide better education to their children to get a job in the global market. As a result, students experience severe stress in their education. There is a disparity in educational awareness between students in private and government schools which will further increase their stress. To excel in the competition and secure seats in higher education, especially in professional courses, students were forced to take extra classes and special coaching. Because of comparison and competition, parents put excessive pressure on children. Students are motivated to study to get a job rather than to understand the subjects. Hence the mental health of students is affected. High school is an important stage, after which students have to choose different subjects in Higher Secondary, where their marks are the only consideration for allotting different streams of study; And hence they are under extreme stress to secure marks in the public examination. In this context, it is important to explore the relationship between academic stress and mental health among high school students.

Hypotheses:-

1. There is a significant relationship between academic stress and mental health among school students
2. Students from government and private schools differ significantly in their academic stress
3. Students from government and private schools significantly differ in their mental health

Research Method

The Present study adopted survey method. The following tools were used to collect the data.

The Academic Stress Scale by Jinadong Sun (2012). It consisted of 16 statements with 5-point responses, measuring five factors of academic stress, such as pressure from study, work load, worry about grades, self-expectations and despondency.

The Positive Mental Health Scale by Vaingankar et al, (2011). This tool consisted of 48 statements with 6 response measuring six dimensions of mental health, such as general coping, emotional support, spirituality, interpersonal skills, personal growth & autonomy and global affect. Both of these scales are highly reliable and validated in the Indian context.

The population of this study consisted of government and private school students in and around Palwal city. 250 school students were selected through stratified random sampling. The above mentioned tools were distributed to the students and the data was collected under personal supervision. Out of the 250 data collected, only 228 were considered for final analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Relationship between Academic Stress and Mental Health of High School Students

Dimensions of Academic Stress/Mental Health	Pressure from Study	Workload	Worry about Grades	Self-Expectation	Despondency	Total	Chi-square
General Coping	10	8	9	7	6	40	Df=20 p-value=.999
Emotional Support	9	8	7	6	5	35	
Spirituality	6	5	7	5	7	30	
Interpersonal Skills	8	9	8	7	8	40	
Personal Growth and Autonomy	12	11	10	12	10	55	
Global Affect	10	9	11	9	11	50	
Total	55	50	52	46	47	250	

Significant at 0.05 levels but $p=.999$ that is not significant.

Table 1 revealed the relationship between academic stress and mental health among students. From the table, it is observed that the academic stress and mental health are significantly correlated with each other. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. It is observed from the table that general coping is negatively correlated with despondency which is clearly indicative that students are frustrated from their academic. This may be due to the pressure from parents as well as school to get higher grades. Emotional support and despondency are negatively correlated which is evident that students did not get proper emotional support from their family and school management. It was found that academic stress and mental health of students positively correlated each other. The result is indicative that students will be mentally healthy when they are more productive in their academic activities. The findings are relevant to the Yerkes Dodson Law (1908) which suggested that there was a relationship between performance and arousal. Increased arousal can help improve performance, but only up to a certain point. At the point when arousal became excessive, performance diminishes (Coon et al., 2007).

Table 2: Academic Stress among Government and Private School Students

Dimensions of Academic Stress	Private (N=125)		Govt.(N=125)		't' Value
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
Pressure from study	18.62	3.24	17.95	3.31	1.62
Work load	17.84	3.46	17.12	3.58	1.62
Worry about grades	19.35	3.18	17.68	3.25	4.10*
Self-Expectation	18.96	3.37	17.52	3.44	3.35*
Despondency	16.48	3.29	16.02	3.36	1.10
Academic Stress Total	91.25	15.54	86.29	15.94	2.49*

* Significant at 0.05 level Significant.

From table 2 it is found from the table that students from government and private schools differ significantly in pressure from study, workload and overall academic stress. Generally in private schools, students are provided with a lot of home works and pressurized to get higher marks. Also, parents of these children invested huge money on their academics and expect their children to get very high marks. So, these children experience pressure from school as well as parents and obviously they could experience higher academic stress. Hussain et al., (2008)&Gosh, (2016) also reported the similar finding.

Table 3: Mental Health of Students from Government and Private Schools

Dimensions of Mental Health	Private (N=125)		Govt.(N=125)		't' Value
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
General Coping	18.42	3.21	18.05	3.35	0.89
Emotional Support	17.86	3.48	17.42	3.61	0.98

Spirituality	16.95	3.12	16.68	3.28	0.66
Interpersonal Skills	19.24	3.05	17.68	3.22	3.93*
Personal Growth and Autonomy	20.16	3.42	18.72	3.58	3.24*
Global Affect	18.35	3.36	17.98	3.41	0.87
Mental Health Total	110	19.64	106.53	20.45	1.45

* Significant at 0.05 level Significant remaining values are not significant

Table 3. Revealed the differences in mental health of students from government and private schools. It is noted that students differ significantly in the dimensions of interpersonal skills, personal growth& autonomy, global affect as well as in the overall mental health. It is witnessed from the practices that most of the private schools focus on training activities to promote academic success, motivation and other social skills. Also, many students from private schools are from upper middle class and also their parents educated. On the other hand, majority of students in government schools are from poor socio economic background and illiterate family, and many of them are first generation learners. these students struggle a lot to fulfill their basic academic activities and these factors would have affected their mental health adversely. This finding is also supported by the finding of Sarita et al., (2015)

Implications:-

The findings of the study indicated the need for understanding academic stress among school students. Periodical training programmers could be organized for school students and parents to sensitize about academic stress and ways to handle it in an efficient way. Teachers can provide interventions to reduce stress among students. Teachers can break the complex tasks into manageable segment which will be easy to do without stress. Relaxation techniques such as meditation and yoga can be provided to students to reduce the stress and being mentally healthy.

The results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between academic achievement (success in studies) and achievement motivation (desire to succeed). This suggests that students who are more motivated to succeed in school have better test scores and better academic performance. Furthermore, there is no direct relationship between academic achievement and mental health; Rather, achievement motivation is related to mental health. This research shows that students have poor mental health, which impacts their motivation levels and, as a result, their academic achievement. Undergraduate students are one of the groups most affected by self-quarantine due to the coronavirus, as they may be experiencing depression and stress, increasing their risk of mental health crises. For undergraduate students, the support they receive from the school community forms a foundation for their deep development. Online classes alone cannot compensate for the lack of interaction with that community. Undergraduate students who are only connected to their school community through online classes at home are at risk for feelings of sadness and anxiety, which can negatively impact their mental health. Therefore, it is not enough to simply address the lack of learning opportunities; It is also important to understand the mental weaknesses that arise due to the absence of community. Additionally, it is important to consider the specific risk factors that contribute to mental health deterioration and how to address them. In particular, undergraduate medical students are at greater risk of deteriorating mental health than other students because they are exposed to disease and social risks during the pandemic, and their work environment is very different from that of the general population.

Academic stress happens when students feel overwhelmed by their studies, the fear of failing, or the pressure to achieve. This stress often comes from high expectations set by parents, teachers, or friends, and sometimes from a student's own drive for perfection.

1. Emotional Impact:

Constant stress can make students feel anxious, depressed, or have low self-esteem. They may start fearing exams, which can lead to panic attacks or constant worrying. Studies have shown that academic-related stress can reduce academic achievement, decrease motivation, and increase the risk of school dropout, leading to mental health problems like depression and anxiety.

2. Cognitive Issues:

Stress makes it harder for students to focus, make decisions, or solve problems. They might struggle to remember things or keep up with their studies.

3. Physical Problems:

Ongoing stress can show up as physical problems like headaches, tiredness, trouble sleeping, or a weaker immune system. An Indian study revealed that 52% of 12th grade HSC students had moderate levels of stress, and almost half (50.5%) had mild physical-psychological health problems (Kale, 2023). Moreover, another study showed that 28% of Indian students reported symptoms of borderline to severe depression, which contributes to increased physical stress and affects their academic performance.

4. Behavioral Changes:

Students under stress may avoid socializing, delay their work, or turn to unhealthy habits like excessive screen time or even substance abuse.

5. Psychological Distress:

Chronic stress frequently crystallizes into clinical depression, generalized anxiety, and sleep disorders.

6. Reduced Capacity:

Severe mental health challenges lower concentration, diminish motivation, and impair cognitive performance.

Wider Impact on Society**Economic Burden:**

Lower graduation rates and reduced prospects for sustainable employment cost governments and economies billions of dollars annually.

Public Health Strain:

Mental health disorders established during adolescence and young adulthood often persist into later life, increasing the long-term demand on healthcare systems.

Loss of Social Capital:

Widespread burnout and diminished well-being reduce community engagement and long-term workforce productivity.

Conclusion and Suggestions:-

Students studying in higher education around the world are being severely affected by mental health problems. It is difficult to pinpoint the causes of the mental health crisis, but current studies suggest that a number of factors put pressure on mental health programs, such as academic pressures, financial constraints, changes in technology, and lifestyle choices. Also worth noting are existing efforts to improve the mental health of students in higher education, such as increased academic support, transition support for students from underrepresented groups, tuition grants, technology seminars, and educational programs aimed at promoting healthy living and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. Nevertheless, much more still needs to be done and can be done. Research shows there is a strong need for more funding for mental health programs – including staff, campus space, and teaching-learning initiatives. This funding should provide both prevention and treatment services for students. Addressing the mental health crisis that affects millions of students around the world must be prioritized in funding for higher education to ensure their safety and well-being. Academic stress is a growing concern that significantly impacts students' mental health in India. From test anxiety and perfectionism to burnout and depression, the effects of stress are pervasive but manageable with the right strategies. By acknowledging stress, adopting healthy habits, and seeking professional support, students can navigate their academic journey with confidence and well-being.

KEYWORDS; Academic Stress, Mental health, impacts, students

