



A Study on Academic Stress among Senior Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Academic stress is a common issue affecting students' mental health and academic performance. The study explores the levels and sources of academic stress among 30 senior secondary school students (15 adolescent boys and 15 adolescent girls), along with their coping mechanisms. Findings reveal high levels of stress primarily due to exams, tests, and homework, with additional factors such as parental expectations and competition with peers also contributing significantly to the stress experienced by students. Common coping strategies include physical activity, talking to parents or friends, and listening to music. The results highlight the significant impact of academic stress on students' well-being and the need for effective interventions such as stress management workshops and counselling services. Future research should focus on specific sources and impacts of academic stress to develop tailored interventions that enhance student resilience and mental health.

Keywords: Academic stress, student well-being, coping mechanisms, stress management, educational interventions

Introduction

Academic stress refers to the anxiety and pressure associated with schooling and education. It encompasses the stress students feel to perform well in final examinations and involves mental distress related to anticipate academic challenges, failures, and the awareness of potential academic failure. During school, academic stress can manifest in various aspects of a child's environment, including home, school, neighbourhood, and friendships. This stress often arises from the imbalance between academic and social performance, as well as managing time for extracurricular activities. Academic stress is most prevalent among students who struggle to balance their academic activities with family, friends, and social engagements. A student's stress level is significantly influenced by their relationship with teachers, the pressure to excel in exams, the need to complete schoolwork within limited timeframes, and the overall school environment. Participation in co-curricular activities such as debates, quizzes, speeches, music, dance, and arts can help alleviate stress and improve student performance. Continuous tests, grades, the demand for success, and external expectations are the primary sources of stress for senior secondary school students.

Higher secondary school education is a very important turning point in the academic life of the individual. At this stage, the academic performance of the adolescents plays a crucial role in deciding about next higher stage of education, and probably career too (Rosa and Preethi, 2012). Academic stress is a widespread phenomenon across different stages of the educational system and negatively impacts students' physical and social well-being. It also affects learning and performance levels. Various studies highlight its relationship with other school-related problems. Senior secondary school students, in the critical developmental stage of adolescence, are particularly susceptible to academic stress. Reducing academic stress can significantly enhance students' academic achievement. To help students utilize their potential and talents for future success, proper guidance services should be provided to build confidence and facilitate better adjustment within educational institutions, families, and society. Strategies to minimize academic stress among senior secondary school students include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure activities.

Definitions

Stress - Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives.

Academic stress - Academic stress refers to the emotional and physical strain experienced by students as a result of the demands and pressures of academic life. This stress can stem from various sources such as the pressure to perform well academically, the competition for grades and recognition, and the expectations set by peers, family, and society.

Adolescence - It is the transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19.

Objectives of the study

- 1) To determine the level of academic stress among senior secondary school students
- 2) To identify the main sources of academic stress among senior secondary school students
- 3) To identify the common coping mechanisms for academic stress used by the students

Review of Literature

Lin and Chen (1995) noted that academic pressure negatively affected students' intellectual, psychological, and physical development.

Cheng (1999) observed that students studying in schools often experienced stress from high expectations placed on them by teachers, parents, and themselves, which could be quite distressing.

Mathew and Jayan (2006) revealed that both boys and girls experienced similar levels of academic stress, with no significant difference between them. They also used similar coping mechanisms to manage their academic stress.

Agarwal (2011) found that there was no significant difference in academic stress levels between male and female adolescents.

Kumari and Gartia (2012) observed that there was a direct positive correlation between stress levels and academic achievement, which was not influenced by gender.

Sinha (2013) pointed out that adolescents could effectively manage their academic stress through various techniques such as stress relief methods, effective time management, and seeking support from friends and counsellors. Parents also played a crucial role in helping adolescents cope with academic stress by providing support, paying attention to their children's needs, setting realistic expectations, and teaching them resilience skills to overcome challenges.

Jayanthi et al. (2014) observed that the primary sources of academic stress among adolescents were the expectations of parents and teachers. Additionally, they found that adolescent girls had experienced higher levels of academic stress compared to boys.

Porwal and Kumar (2014) aimed to examine academic stress among senior secondary students. The study included 30 participants (15 male and 15 female), all of whom were 12th-grade students studying in Noida. The results indicated a significant difference in academic stress levels between boys and girls. It was revealed that senior secondary boys experienced higher academic stress compared to girls.

Prabu (2015) aimed to determine the level of academic stress among higher secondary students. The research involved 250 XI standard students from higher secondary schools in Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu (India), selected through simple random sampling. The findings revealed that higher secondary students generally experienced a moderate level of academic stress. Male students reported higher levels of academic stress compared to female students, and urban students experienced more stress than their rural counterparts. Additionally, students in government schools reported less academic stress than those in private schools, and students studying science subjects had higher stress levels than those studying arts subjects. Furthermore, students with literate parents experienced higher levels of academic stress compared to those whose parents were not literate.

Ghosh (2016) conducted a study to examine academic stress among government and private high school students, involving 200 high school students from various schools in Ranchi town. The sample included 100 students from government high schools (both male and female) and 100 students from private high schools (both male and female). The results indicated that academic stress was more prevalent among private school students compared to government school students. Additionally, the findings suggested that female students experienced higher levels of academic stress than their male counterparts.

Kadapatti (2017) aimed to study the prevalence of academic stress among pre-university students. Most of the students were aged 17-18 years. The sample included equal percentages of male and female students from I and II PUC, studying in science, commerce, and arts streams, from both rural and urban areas. The results showed that academic stress was more prevalent among urban respondents than rural respondents. Additionally, female students experienced higher levels of academic stress than male students, possibly because female students had greater aspirations for their future and aimed to become more professional, leading to increased academic stress.

Acosta-Gomez et al. (2018) conducted a study aimed at investigating stress among high school students with a sample of 335 students, aged 15 to 19 years, at ENMS in Guanajuato, Mexico. The findings revealed that approximately two-thirds (66%) of the students reported feeling pressure from their parents to achieve better academic performance. The primary sources of stress for the students were exams, choosing a career path, and family issues. To cope with stress, the students mainly relied on listening to music, talking to someone about their problems, and exercising.

Neeta and Singh (2020) examined the level of academic stress among higher secondary school students. The study involved a total sample of 110 students from 10 higher secondary schools in Gorakhpur district. Data were collected using the Academic Stress Scale. The findings revealed that male participants had more academic stress than female participants. It was also found that there was no significant difference in academic stress between students from government-aided and self-financed schools, as well as between students from rural and urban area schools.

Kumari and Singh (2022) examined the differences in academic stress levels experienced by senior secondary school students based on gender, type of school, and stream of study. The study randomly selected 120 senior secondary school students from various schools in Patna district. The findings revealed that male and female students differed significantly in their academic stress levels, with female students experiencing more academic stress than male students. A significant difference was also found in academic stress levels concerning the type of school, with students from missionary schools experiencing the highest academic stress compared to those from government and private schools. However, no significant difference in academic stress was found among students from the science, arts, and commerce streams.

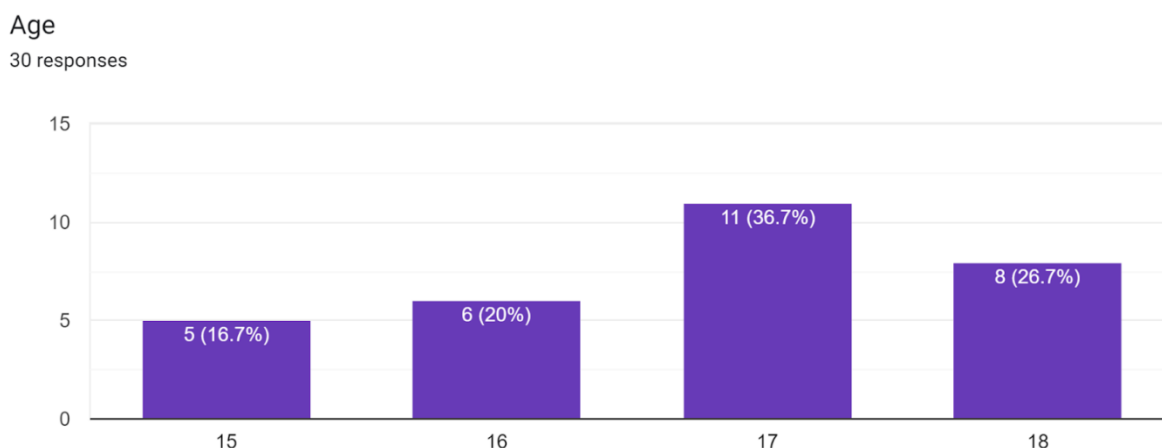
Materials and Methods

- 1) Locale of the Study: The study was conducted in Hisar district, Haryana.
- 2) Selection of School: One private school was selected randomly from the Hisar district.
- 3) Selection of Sample: A total of 30 students enrolled in the selected private school and studying in classes 11th and 12th were chosen. The sample included 15 adolescent boys and 15 adolescent girls. The sample was selected using convenience sampling.
- 4) Data Collection: Data was collected through a questionnaire created using Google Forms. The questionnaire was emailed to the students.

Results and Discussion

1) Age

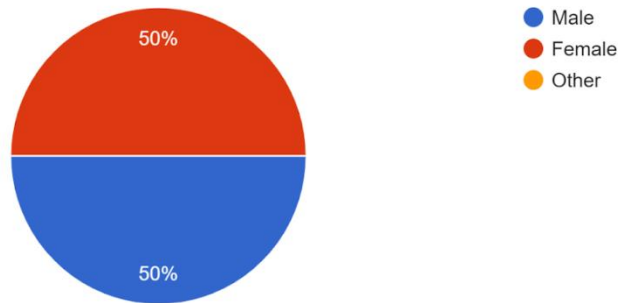
The following bar graph represented the age distribution of 30 respondents, ranging from 15 to 18 years old. The 15-year-old age group had 5 respondents, the 16-year-old age group had 6 respondents, the 17-year-old age group had 11 respondents, and the 18-year-old age group had 8 respondents.



2) Gender

The following pie chart displayed the gender distribution of 30 respondents, indicating an equal split between males and females, with each gender representing 50% of the total respondents.

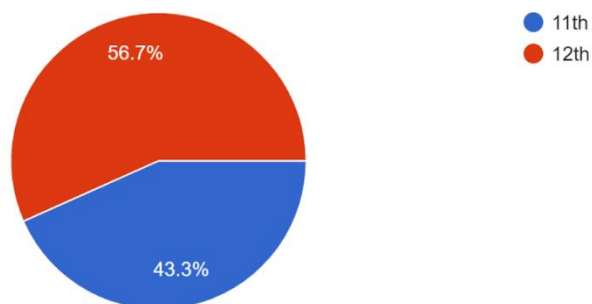
Gender
30 responses



3) Class/Grade

The following pie chart illustrated the distribution of respondents across different classes/grades. Among the 30 respondents, 43.3% were in the 11th grade, while 56.7% were in the 12th grade.

Class/Grade
30 responses

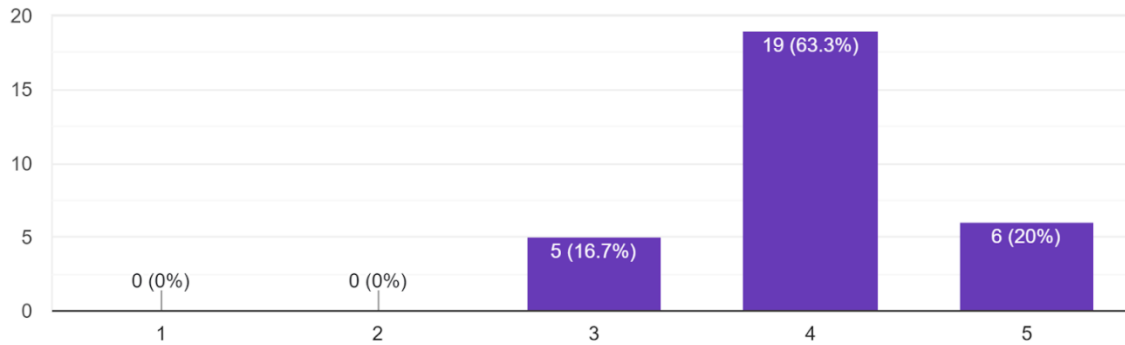


4) Level of academic stress

The following bar graph indicated that majority of respondents reported high levels of academic stress among the 30 respondents. Specifically, 63.3% (19 respondents) experienced high stress, while 20% (6 respondents) reported very high stress. A moderate level of stress was reported by 16.7% (5 respondents).

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your overall level of academic stress.

30 responses

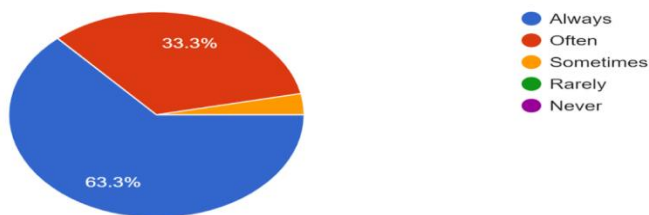


5) Stress about schoolwork and exams

The following pie chart indicated that approximately 63.3% of the 30 respondents consistently felt stressed about schoolwork and exams.

How frequently do you feel stressed about schoolwork and exams?

30 responses

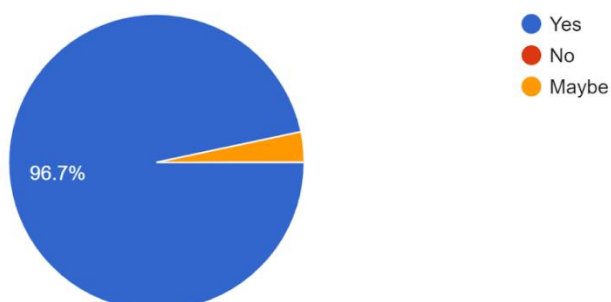


6) Pressure to achieve high grades

The following pie chart depicted that approximately 96.7% of the 30 respondents felt pressured to achieve high grades.

Do you feel pressure to achieve high grades?

30 responses

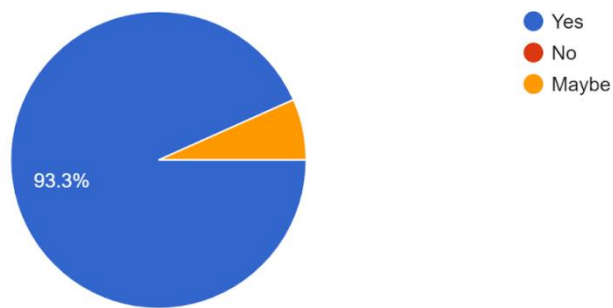


7) Influence of grade level on academic stress

The following pie chart indicated that 93.3% of the 30 respondents believed that their grade level influenced their academic stress.

Do you think your grade level influences your level of academic stress?

30 responses

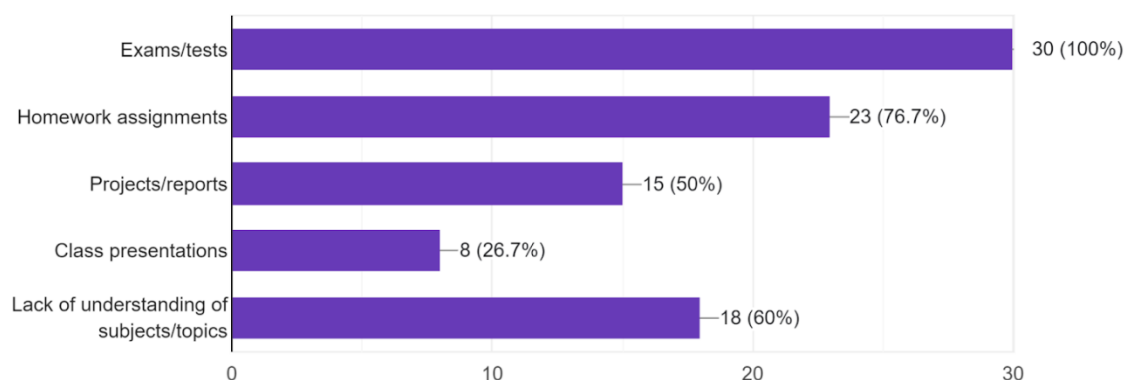


8) Most stressful academic activities

The following bar graph indicated that all 30 respondents were stressed about examinations and tests, 76.7% (23 respondents) were stressed about homework assignments, 60% (18 respondents) were concerned about a lack of understanding of subjects/topics, 50% (15 respondents) were worried about projects/reports, and 26.7% (8 respondents) felt stressed about class presentations among the 30 respondents.

Which of the following academic activities stress you the most? (Select all that apply)

30 responses



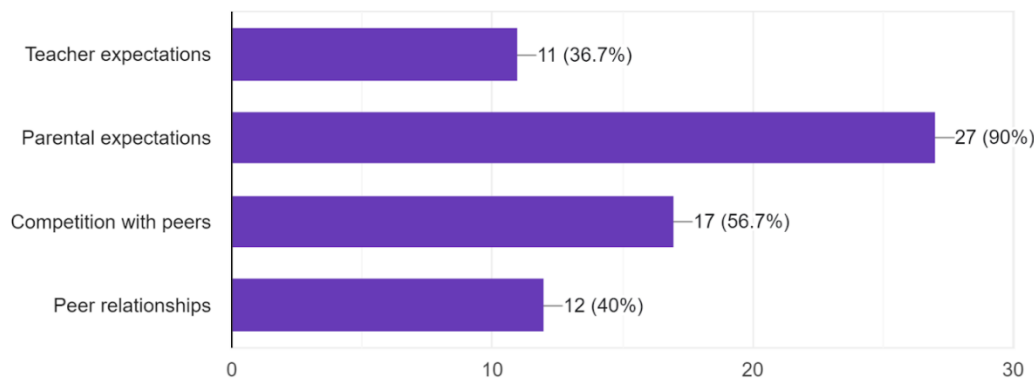
9) Stress from external school factors

The following bar graph illustrated that among 30 respondents, 90% (27 respondents) were stressed by parental expectations, 56.7% (17 respondents) felt pressure from peer competition, 40% (12 respondents)

were concerned about peer relationships, and 36.7% (11 respondents) experienced stress due to teacher expectations.

Do you experience stress due to external factors related to school? (Select all that apply)

30 responses

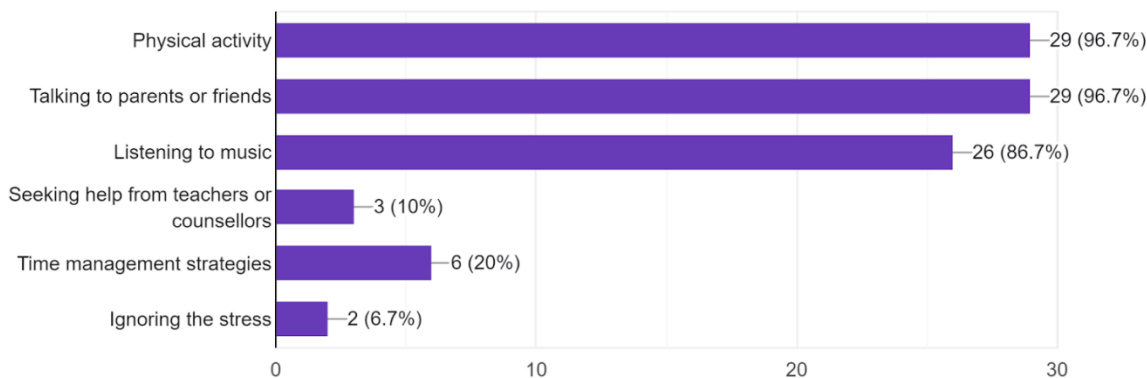


10) Typical coping strategies for academic stress

The following bar graph indicated that among 30 respondents, 96.7% (29 respondents) coped with academic stress by engaging in physical activity and talking to parents or friends, while 86.7% (26 respondents) listened to music. Additionally, 20% (6 respondents) used time management strategies, and 10% (3 respondents) sought help from teachers or counsellors as coping mechanisms.

How do you typically cope with academic stress? (Select all that apply)

30 responses



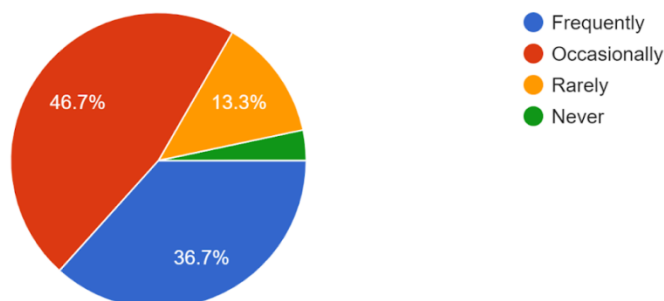
Research Through Innovation

11) Physical symptoms due to academic stress

The following pie chart showed that 46.7% of the 30 respondents occasionally experienced headaches, fatigue, and sleep issues due to academic stress.

Have you ever experienced physical symptoms due to academic stress (e.g., headaches, insomnia, fatigue)?

30 responses

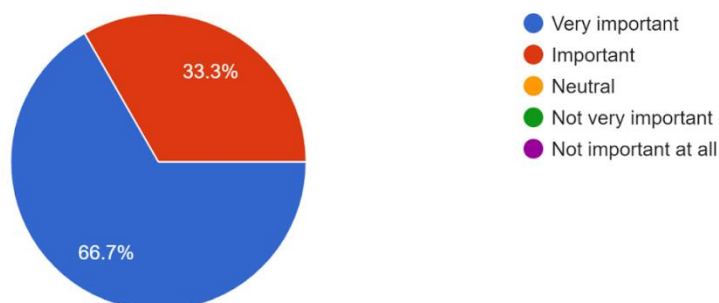


12) Importance of high grades

The following pie chart indicated that 66.7% of the 30 respondents believed that high grades were very important in achieving future aspirations.

How important are high grades to you in achieving your future aspirations?

30 responses

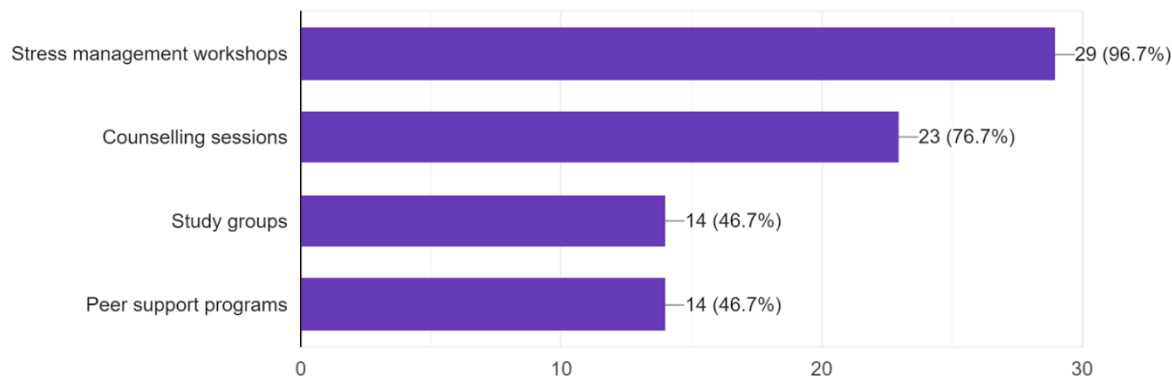


13) Desired school support/resources to manage academic stress

The following bar graph indicated that among 30 respondents, 96.7% (29 respondents) expressed a desire for stress management workshops, while 76.7% (23 respondents) preferred counselling sessions. Additionally, 46.7% (14 respondents) favored study groups and peer support programs to cope with academic stress.

What additional support or resources would you like to see at school to help manage academic stress? (Select all that apply)

30 responses



Results:

1) Academic Stress Levels:

- 63.3% of respondents reported high levels of academic stress, with 20% experiencing very high stress.
- A moderate level of stress was reported by 16.7% of respondents.

2) Primary Sources of Stress:

- Examinations and tests were universally stressful for all respondents.
- Homework assignments were a significant stressor for 76.7% of participants.
- Additional factors such as parental expectations and competition with peers also contributed significantly to the stress experienced by students.

3) Coping Mechanisms:

- Physical activity and talking to parents or friends were the most commonly used coping mechanisms (96.7%).
- Listening to music was beneficial for 86.7% of respondents.
- Time management techniques were employed by 20% of participants.

Discussion:

1) Impact of Academic Stress:

- The high prevalence of stress among students highlights the need for effective support systems.
- Academic stress significantly affects students' psychological well-being and academic performance.

2) Support and Interventions:

- Recommendations include implementing stress management workshops and counselling services.
- Promoting a balanced approach to academic achievement and fostering supportive environments are crucial.
- Schools should foster supportive environments that encourage open communication and provide resources for coping with academic pressures.

- Long-term strategies should focus on creating resilience among students, ensuring they can manage stress effectively throughout their academic journey.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive findings from the study involving 30 respondents, it is evident that academic stress represents a significant and pervasive challenge among students. The study reveals that the majority of respondents experience high levels of stress, primarily due to examinations, tests, and homework assignments. Additionally, factors such as parental expectations and competition with peers also contribute significantly to academic stress. In coping with these stressors, the most commonly preferred mechanisms among respondents include physical activity, talking to parents or friends, and listening to music. These results underscore the profound impact that academic responsibilities have on students' psychological well-being and overall academic performance. Implementing strategies like stress management workshops, counselling services, and a balanced academic approach is crucial. Future research should investigate deeper into the specific causes and effects of academic stress to develop targeted interventions that enhance students' resilience and mental well-being.

Limitations of the study

- **Small Sample Size:** The study only involved 30 respondents, which may not represent all students.
- **Reliance on Self-Reports:** Data was based on what participants reported, which could be influenced by how they perceive themselves or remember experiences.
- **Cross-sectional Design:** The study looked at data at one point in time, so it can't show cause and effect relationships between factors.
- **Specific Focus:** The study focused on a particular group or setting, so findings may not apply to all students or different educational environments.

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