

# The Impact of Academic Stress on Physical, Mental Health, School Dropout and Academic Achievement of Elementary School Students : A Review

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## ABSTRACT

Students in elementary school undergo a variety of continual pressures related to academic demands. With significant changes in physical growth, sexual maturity, cognitive processes, emotional feelings, and interpersonal relationships, the elementary school year is the troublesome developmental stage. Students may become more easily irritated, perplexed, stressed, and develop a pattern of unpredictable conduct as a result of these changes, which could harm their academic performance as well as their overall mental and physical health. Studies have concluded that stress has a negative impact on academic achievement, motivation, and even contributes to a high proportion of school dropouts. The long-term effects of academic stress will reduce the likelihood of long-term employment and cost the government billions of rupees annually. The review summarises the impact of academic stress on student's physical health, mental health and well-being, sleep, school dropout and academic achievement.

**Keywords:** Academic Stress, Elementary School Students, Mental Health, Health and Well-Being

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## I. INTRODUCTION

"Stress has been around and noticed for ages," so it is not a recent occurrence. A person experiences stress as they attempt to cope with or adjust to stressors. Stress is viewed as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physiological process. It is commonly acknowledged that stress has two opposing impacts on people: good stress (eustress) and harmful

stress (distress). Based on whether they see a situation as a challenge or a danger, a person's response to stress will vary.

Stress has become a significant concern in academic settings like schools or universities. The prevalence of psychological issues like anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts become more common as a result of extreme stress. Acute stress, episodic acute stress, and chronic stress are some of the several forms of stress.

Academic stress is the term used to describe the unpleasant psychological circumstances brought on by the educational expectations from parents, teachers, peers, and family members as well as the current educational and examination system. Academic stress is the term used to describe the unpleasant psychological circumstances brought on by the educational expectations of parents, teachers, peers, and family members, as well as the current educational and examination system.

Students in elementary school are exposed to a wide range of stressors and frequently report unbearable stress connected to their education, which can be grouped as everyday annoyances such as homework stress, exam stress, pressure to get good grades and always being good (UNESCO, 2012). In Chandigarh, Verma and Gupta (1990) carried out a survey on 254 schoolchildren aged 12 to 15, findings reported that students indicated a variety of physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, and fevers. They have even complained of behavioural issues such as aggressiveness, temper tantrums and adjustment difficulties. They've been dealing with mental health difficulties like stress, worry, withdrawal, irritability, and insomnia for a long time. Exam stress, homework stress, and high expectations of instructors and parents were among the causes of stress cited by students.

In 2015, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) surveyed 540,000 students from 72 countries. OECD students reported being upset about unsatisfactory grades on average, and 59 percent stated they are frequently concerned about taking a difficult test. According to the OECD, even when students are fully prepared, 55% of students are anxious about exams. When it came to study, 37% of students indicated they felt very stressed, with girls reporting more anxiety than boys on a regular basis. These studies show that students' stress levels are significantly impacted by their academic success and schooling. Studies are currently being conducted to determine the impact of ongoing academic stress on

students' performance and well-being. Therefore, conducting a narrative review on how academic stress affects students' physical health, mental health and well-being, sleep, school dropout and academic achievement is necessary.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. Academic Stress and Physical Health

High academic stress puts students at risk of developing ailments that manifest later in life. According to Stults-Kolehmainen & Sinha (2014), students who experience anxiety during tests are substantially less likely to engage in physical activity, which has been related to a number of potentially associated negative physical health consequences. Stress, in accordance with Pervanidou & Chrousos (2012), can cause harmful lifestyle decisions and the dysregulation of the stress system, which can result in non-communicable diseases such the metabolic syndrome, obesity, and decreased insulin sensitivity. A rise in body weight and an increase in appetite have both been connected to stress (Stephens et al., 1995; Dalman et al., 1993). In light of this, poor lifestyle choices and decreased physical activity due to academic stress might result in chronic non-communicable illnesses.

### B. Academic Stress and Mental Health

Studies on the academic stress of primary school students found a causal link between stress and greater levels of anxiety and poorer well-being (Carter, Garber, Ciesla, & Cole, 2006; Kessler, 1997; Robotham & Julian, 2006). According to the aforementioned OECD study, elementary school students who reported experiencing more academic stress also reported experiencing poorer levels of well-being as determined by psychological, social, cognitive, and physical components (OECD, 2015).

According to a detailed analysis of 13 research, primary school students' self-reported stress levels are linked to lower quality of life and well-being.

Significant mental health problems like anxiety and depression can also be brought on by ongoing stress. Up to 30% of students suffer from depression, while 35% from anxiety. An established reciprocal relationship exists between stress, sadness, and anxiety (Dantzer, 2012; Dantzer, O'Connor, Lawson, & Kelley, 2011; Maes, 2008). According to Kendler et al. (1995), significant stressful life events are one of the greatest indicators of depression. Because of this, the onset of depression among students is typically preceded by intense life stressors (Lewinsohn, Allen, Seeley, & Gotlib, 1999).

### C. Academic Stress and Sleep

According to the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, many children do not get the recommended amount of sleep, and as a result, inadequate sleep can cause serious health problems in school-age children (Owens, 2014). Stress is a factor that affects students' ability to sleep well (Curcio, Ferrara, & De, 2006). In a study of 384 students, Noland et al. confirmed that stress interferes with adequate sleep. In the United States, students in grades 6 through 12 reported obtaining less than the recommended amount of sleep on the majority of school nights. As a result of their lack of sleep, these students have difficulty concentrating, worse academic performance, increased stress, and interpersonal difficulties. Sleep quality and quantity have been shown to be directly related to students' capacity to study and academic achievement, according to Curcio et al. (2006). Lack of sleep is frequently associated with poor academic performance. As a result, students' learning and well-being are significantly impacted by stress-related sleep disruption, both in terms of quality and quantity.

### D. Academic Stress and School Dropout

According to Lamb and Huo (2017), dropping out of school is associated with a lifelong decline in earning potential and job stability. In comparison to people with higher levels of education, those with lower

levels of education report having worse mental health and more illnesses (Bhan et al., 2016). Walburg (2014) examined how burnout and stress might hinder academic development by increasing the risk that students will leave school. This was particularly true for students who had more trying living circumstances, as well as for students who did not ask their parents or other family members for support and students from varied ethnic origins (Hess & Copeland, 2001). The intergenerational challenges of unemployment, poverty, and lower academic success have also been connected to early school dropout (Black, 2007; Lamb & Huo, 2017; Muir, Family, Maguire, Slack-Smith, & Murray, 2003). Graduating from high school and being academically successful enhance employability, reduce reliance on welfare, and raise the likelihood of continuing education (Noble, Wyatt, McGrath, Roffey, & Rowling, 2008). As a result, the chance of long-term employment, enough income, and self-sufficiency rises (Noble et al., 2008), possibly saving governments hundreds of millions of dollars annually (Lamb & Huo, 2017).

### E. Academic Stress and Academic Achievement

In order to effectively engage in school, students must be in good physical and mental health, according to the World Health Organisation (2004). In addition to affecting a student's overall health and wellness, depressive symptoms, poor sleep, and school dropout can all negatively impact their academic performance. Reschly et al. (2008) came to the conclusion through a study that top-performing females said their fear of making mistakes interferes with their test performance. Academically performing students report being much more stressed than those in the top quarter. Even when they are well-prepared, 63 percent of students in the last quarter of scientific performance report feeling nervous about tests, compared to 46 percent of kids in the top quarter. This demonstrates how lower academic achievement and higher levels of perceived stress are related.

Self-reported depressed symptoms were shown to be associated with poor academic performance among Hawaiian school students (Kessler, 2012; McArdle, Hamagami, Chang, & Hishinuma, 2014), as well as student alienation (Liu, 2015; Liu & Lu, 2011; Shinto, 1998). Shinto (1998) investigated 495 Japanese junior secondary school students, self-reported academic-related stress was inversely correlated with academic motivation and feelings of self-growth. In 83 teenagers between the ages of 14 to 21, Humensky et al. (2010) found a correlation between self-reported depressive symptoms and concentration issues as well as difficulty completing schoolwork. Fröjd et al., (2008) reported depression intensity was associated with focus problems, worse social connections, self-learning, lower academic accomplishment, and inferior reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities among 13–17-year-old Finnish adolescents. These studies demonstrate that academic stress is a significant factor influencing school students' academic achievement. Higher reported stress levels among students are associated with greater academic difficulty.

### III.DISCUSSION

The current narrative review across cultures indicates considerable levels of academic-related stress among students. Academic stress affects students' physical and mental health, which results in a range of academic problems. With effective stress-management techniques, we can assist students in coping with stress in their formative years. Because early adolescence and early adulthood are crucial years for setting numerous long-term health-related behaviours and patterns, both favourable and harmful (Sawyer et al., 2012).

School students' mental health may be improved by improving assistance in the educational environment. Perry et al. (2017) conducted a cluster randomized control experiment with 540 students from 10 government schools in Sydney and discovered that a

gamified online cognitive behaviour therapy intervention was successful in lowering depressed symptoms. An online intervention that is given before a stressful event might lessen its effects on the possibility of developing depression.

According to the OECD, educational settings are where students learn the social and emotional skills necessary for them to be resilient and succeed. Educational institutions can try to reduce the stress that students experience by offering courses that have been shown to reduce stress and enhance stress management and coping. The efficacy of certain stress management courses offered in schools for teaching students how to cope with stress is not addressed in the present study. However, studies have shown a direct and beneficial relationship between improving students' stress-coping skills and academic achievement (Hanson & Austin, 2002, Perry et al., 2017; Weare & Grey, 2003).

Stress management and coping skills courses in schools have been found to lower stress symptoms and improve coping abilities in students, according to a meta-analysis of 19 randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental research (Kraag, Zeegers, Kok, Hosman, & Abu-Saad, 2006). Schools offer access to many children from different backgrounds, so introducing stress management and coping skills training at the population level would help people build healthy coping mechanisms to deal with life's inevitable problems.

It is important to recognize and address the obstacles and enablers to stress management programme implementation in schools. This will result in significant health, economic, and social benefits for a large number of students, their families, and the community. Exhaustive studies from several countries show that academic-related stress experienced by students in school is cross-cultural, pervasive, and a worldwide problem. This study illustrated both the potential advantages of practicing stress-management measures as well as a variety of negative effects of academic-related stress.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This narrative study reveals that academic stress is a significant concern for children who are enrolled in school. Persistent educational stress has been found to have a detrimental influence on students' physical health, mental health, learning capacity, sleep quantity and quality, academic performance, achievement of education and employment. Enhancing students' capacity for stress management is a crucial objective for transformation.

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