

# Depression and Suicidal Ideation as a Consequence of Academic Stress among Adolescent Students

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## Abstract

Many factors contribute to the stress being experienced by students but one common cause of academic stress in India is School. Such stress comes from too much homework, unsatisfactory academic performance, preparation for tests, lack of interest in a particular subject, and teacher's punishment. Stress from high expectations of teachers, parents, and self is usually an agony for students studying in schools<sup>1</sup>.

**Objectives:** The study was conducted (i) to assess the level of academic stress and its consequences of academic stress among adolescent students (ii) to find the association between depression and demographic characteristics of adolescent students and (iii) to find out the correlation between academic stress and its consequence among adolescent students.

**Material and Methods:** 1204 adolescent students studying in schools of Belagavi city were selected by using stratified cluster sampling technique and were assessed for academic stress by using ESSA scale. The adolescents were assessed for depression and suicidal ideation by using Kutchers depression scale appropriate statistical methods were used to interpret the data. **Results:** The results shown that the mean of the sample on the total academic stress score was 49.38 (SD=13.00) and 273 (i.e.22.67%) reported high level of academic stress. The depression assessment shown that 381 students (i.e. 31.64%), 625 (i.e. 51.91%) and 198 (i.e. 16.45%) have mild, moderate and severe levels of depression respectively and the scores have shown that among N=1204 students 1021 students (i.e. 84.80%) have responded No and 183 students (i.e. 15.20%) have responded Yes for the suicidal ideation. **Conclusion:** The academic stress among students causes depression and suicidal ideation among adolescent and knowing and handling this stress may prevent adolescents from having difficult situations.

**Key words:** Academic stress, Depression, Suicidal ideation, Adolescent students and consequences.

## Introduction

Academic stress is mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even unawareness to the possibility of such

failure. Students have to face many academic demands for example - school examination, answering questions in the class, showing progress in school subjects, understanding what the teacher is teaching, competing with other class mates, fulfilling teachers and parents academic expectations. These demands may tax or exceed available resources of the students. As a consequence, they can be under stress and depression<sup>2</sup>.

Academic concerns pervade the lives of students, interrupting aspects of their daily routine. Students are pressured to perform, pressured to fit in, pressured to commit, and pressured to live up to the expectations of others. They even set goals for themselves that are sometimes impossible to achieve<sup>3</sup>.

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Most teenagers respond to stressful events in their lives by doing something relaxing, trying positive and self-reliant problem-solving or seeking friendship and support from others. But for others, the events pile up and the stressors are too great. In the Minnesota study teens who reported that they had made a suicide attempt had five additional “bad” events on their list: parents’ divorce, loss of a close friend, and change to a new school, failing grades and personal illness or injury. It is significant that the young people who showed high degrees of depression and who had made suicide attempts reported over five of these “bad” events in the past six months, more than twice as many as the rest of the group.<sup>4</sup>

For ages, it was a popular notion that children do not suffer from depression. Teenagers with depression were more often than not labelled as being just “difficult” or “moody”. It is only recently that the world is awakening to the fact that up to 20% of world’s children and adolescents suffer from disabling mental illnesses including depression. WHO has included depression as one of the priority mental disorders in childhood and adolescents<sup>5</sup>. It is seen from Banerjee’s report that every year about 25,000 students in the age group of 16 to 20 years commit suicide in the examination month (i.e. March to June). They are really worried about their future and desired results in the examinations<sup>6</sup>.

Since the family, school and peer group form the major socializing influences on adolescents, the expectations or demands they make may convert into stressors. Hence, it is important to analyze the determinants that resulted in academic stress.

Thus identifying the determinants of academic stress and addressing the consequences like substance abuse, depression and suicidal ideation among school going adolescents in school setting may help students alleviate their experience of academic related stress and have less stressful and possibly more fulfilling school carrier.

### Methodology

This cross sectional study involves the school going adolescent boys and girls of 13 to 19 years of age from rural and urban areas of Belagavi. The data was collected with the permission of district education office where the list of schools were obtained and then according to sampling criteria 12 schools were selected from north, south, east and west zones of Belagavi city and the head of the institutes of selected schools were approached for

the permission to conduct the studies. The students were informed one day prior to the study and their ascent was obtained for the participation I the study.

The sample size was determined by considering all the variables like Academic stress, Depression, Substance abuse and suicidal ideation among adolescent students and among which the highest sample size was considered for the study the calculated sample size was 1160 and 1204 students were undertaken for the final study.

**Sampling technique:** Stratified Cluster Sampling

Schools of Belagavi city will be classified in to East, West, North and South zones, from each group cluster schools will be selected by using simple random method and the age group of 13 to 19 years adolescents will be selected from class VIII, IX, X, XI, and XII. The required numbers of Samples will be drawn using simple random with proportion to school strength. “Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents” was used to estimate the level of perceived academic stress. In present study as per the previous literatures reviewed depression and suicidal ideation were considered as consequences of academic stress and they were assessed by using The Kutcher Adolescent Depression Scale (KADS).

### Statistical Analysis

To assess the relative influence of factors on educational stress, all variables were included in multiple logistic regression models to assess the relationship between the academic stress scores with its components and consequences i.e. substance use, depression and suicidal ideation. Stepwise linear regression was used to assess the influence of variables on academic stress levels of the students. Data were analysed by using the statistic software 20.00version. The statistical significance was set at 5%, level of significance (p<0.05).

### Results

**Table 1: Levels of academic stress of adolescents (n =1204)**

Levels of academic stress	No of adolescents	No of adolescents
Low level	286	23.75
Average level	645	53.57
High level	273	22.67
Total	1204	100.00

One of the main objectives of the study was to assess the level of academic stress among adolescents of age group 13-19. The total no.of participants who reported the questionnaire i.e. Educational stress scale for adolescents (ESSA) where N=1204. The mean of the sample on the total academic stress score was 49.38 (SD=13.00).The table revealed that 286 (i.e. 23.75%), 645 (i.e. 53.57%) & 273 (i.e.22.67%) reported low level, average level & High level of academic stress respectively. [ $<Q1$ = Low,  $Q1-Q3$  = Average and  $>Q3$  = High where  $Q1$  was considered as 44 &  $Q3$  was 58].

Findings related consequences of academic stress among adolescent students

**Table 2: Levels of depression among adolescent students (n =1204)**

Levels of depression	No of adolescents	No of adolescents
Mild depression	381	31.64
Moderate depression	625	51.91
Severe depression	198	16.45
Total	1204	100.00

The depression scores have been assessed by using Kutcher’s depression scale for adolescents. The results shown that 381 students (i.e. 31.64%), 625 (i.e. 51.91%) and 198 (i.e. 16.45%) have mild, moderate and severe levels of depression respectfully.

**Table 3: Levels of suicidal ideation of adolescents**

Levels of suicidal ideation	No of adolescents	No of adolescents
No	1021	84.80
Yes	183	15.20
Total	1204	100.00

Mean-0.25 & SD 0.67

One item was added along with depression questionnaires separately to assess the suicidal ideation among the adolescent students, the scores have shown that among N=1204 students 1021 students (i.e. 84.80%) have responded No and 183 students (i.e. 15.20%) have responded Yes for the suicidal ideation with Mean score of 0.25 & SD 0.67.

**Findings related to correlation between academic stress scores and its consequences**

**Table 4: Correlation between academic stress and its components with depression scores by Karl Pearson’s correlation method**

Variables	Correlation between depression scores with			
	n	r-value	t-value	p-value
Total academic stress	1204	0.3514	13.0117	0.0001*
Pressure from study stress	1204	0.2824	10.2045	0.0001*
study work load stress	1204	0.1698	5.9728	0.0001*
Worry about grades stress	1204	0.2091	7.4138	0.0001*
Self exp stress	1204	0.3108	11.3379	0.0001*
Study despondency stress	1204	0.3333	12.2570	0.0001*
Suicidal ideation	1204	0.3929	14.8123	0.0001*

\*p<0.05

The table 4 represents correlation between depression scores with academic stress and its components. The table clearly shows that a significant and positive correlation was observed between depression scores and total scores of academic stress of adolescents ( $r= 0.3514$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) at 5% level of significance. It means that depression scores increases (decreases) with increase (decrease) in academic stress scores. In other words the depression and academic stress scores are depending on each other.

A significant and positive correlation was observed between depression scores and Pressure from study a component of academic stress of adolescents ( $r=0.2824$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) at 5% level of significance. It means that depression scores increases (decreases) with increase (decrease) in Pressure from study. In other words the depression and Pressure from study a component of academic stress scores are depending on each other.

A significant and positive correlation was observed between depression scores and study work load stress a component of academic stress of adolescents ( $r=0.1698$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) at 5% level of significance. It means that depression scores increases (decreases) with increase (decrease) in study work load stress. In other words the depression and study work load stress a component of academic stress scores are depending on each other.

Similarly A significant and positive correlation was observed between depression scores other components of academic stress i.e. Worry about grades stress ( $r=0.2091$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), Self exp stress ( $r=0.3108$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), Study despondency stress ( $r=0.3333$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and suicidal ideation scores ( $r=0.3929$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) of adolescents at 5% level of significance.

### Interpretation and conclusion

This study was conducted to assess the academic stress and its consequences among adolescent students of 13 to 19 years of age group. Very few studies have been conducted on this area and in present study it was assessed that the depression and the suicidal ideation are the consequences of academic stress among the students. The findings of the study suggested that academic stress is directly proportional to depression and suicide among adolescent students hence the proper management of academic stress can prevent such consequences among adolescent students. The stress management programmes are very useful and also the findings can be utilized by policy makers to make changes in the educational system in India.

**Conflict of Interest:** “The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.”

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**Ethical Clearance** – Ethical clearance has been obtained by institutional review board

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