



PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS OF ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG STUDENTS: REVIEW STUDIES

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Abstract

Stress is a normal phenomenon in everyone's life. It is a state of an individual under exhausting circumstances in different areas of life, i.e. family, school, health, business organization etc. Students specially of senior secondary classes have to undergo the experiences of stress due to the pressure of studies, expectations of parents, teachers, and self, peer pressure, career demands resulting a lot of burden on delicate minds. Therefore it is necessary to understand the causes of academic stress among students; to point out their resources to combat it and thereby enhance their well-being. Numerous variables have been identified to be positively or negatively associated with academic stress of students by empirical researches. Present paper is an attempt to review the studies from 1991 to 2014 related to psychosocial factors of academic stress among students specially the adolescents. From positive psychological perspective, self-efficacy, hope and perceived parenting were considered most relevant variables among others to influence academic stress of students. The review process included research journals, articles, books, dissertations, abstracts, encyclopedia, theses and internet surfing.

Keywords: Students, Academic stress, psychosocial factors, Review



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Introduction

Academic stress and adolescent distress was understood and identified by different researchers in Korea (*Lee & Larson, 1996, 2000*) and Japan (*Hill, 1996; Schoolland, 1990*) Students express their academic stress in the form of depression, behavioral problems and sometimes suicide (*Schoolland 1990*). In a study by *Isralowitz and Ong (1990)*, it was seen that high school students express their distress related to school issues ie. feeling pressure of schoolwork, worrying about the future etc. In a longitudinal study in California *Conner, Pope & Galloway (2009)* found students feeling stressed, overworked and sleep deprived.

It has been found that 10% -30% students experience academic stress which affects their academic performance (*Brackney & Karabenick, 1995*) psychosocial adjustment along with their emotional and physical wellbeing. Students who experience academic stress express their distress in a variety of ways, including in terms of depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms (*Lee & Larson, 1996*).

Hussain, Kumar & Hussain (2008) studied on high school students and found significant negative relationship between academic stress and adjustment.

Malik & Balda, (2006) found academic achievement to be negatively related with stress among high IQ adolescents. Moreover academic performance was found to be negatively related with procrastination, test anxiety, worry and emotionality (*Sud & prabha 2003*).

Rao (2008) found that students of twelfth class from Chennai (India) reported feeling of stress, high rates of depression and very high level of anxiety. Almost all of the students reported stress related with 12th standard. In addition significant differences were found in academic anxiety of male and female students (*Gupta, Mishra and Sharma 2011*), different personality types and private and government school students (*Munjal & Ahmad, 2012*)

In a study on high school students by *Puar (2012)* significant negative correlation between anxiety and academic achievement and significant positive correlation between social maturity and academic achievement was found. *Singh & Upadhyay (2013)* studied personality dimensions as predictors of academic stress and found neuroticism scores to be significantly positively related with academic stress in female but not in male undergraduate students. However no significant relation between academic stress and extraversion scores has been found in any group (male/female).

Suicide is a wrong choice which an individual makes to the experienced stress in the absence of proper guidance to manage it. **CNN_IBN Jan 2010** reports that 95-100 people in India commit suicide everyday-and from these 40% people are in the adolescence age. **TOI March 08 reports that** 5,857 students commit suicide across India due to exam stress. **NCR Bureau reported that** In 2013 alone, 2,471 suicides were committed due to examination failure.

Review of previous researches in India reveal that since long the studies on academic stress were related with adjustment problems (*Hussain 2008*), adolescent distress (*Rao 2008*), gender difference (*Gupta et al. 2011*), personality type (*Munjal & Ahmed 2012; Singh & Upadhyay, 2013*) emphasizing the weaknesses of the students. Recently with the emergence of Positive Psychology a paradigm shift have been seen in the researches related to it. Now Psychologists attempt to emphasize upon the strengths within the students. An effort has been made to explore the concepts from positive psychology like self efficacy, hope and perceived parenting and study their significance in reducing academic stress of students. The present paper presents review of literature related to psychosocial factors of academic stress among adolescents.

Self-efficacy and academic outcomes

In a study *Anyadubalu, (2010) analyzed* the predictors of English Language performance among middle school students. Results reveal that English language anxiety and general self-efficacy were significant predictors.

Self-efficacy significantly predicted the variability in academic performance and equally, test anxiety proved to be a significant predictor of the variability in academic performance *Onyeizugbo (2010)*. General Self-efficacy measures do not predict college performance (*Lindley and Borgen, 2002*), while academic self-efficacy has been found to predict grades and persistence in college in different studies (*Torres and Solberg 2001; Bong, 2001*). Evidences from several studies consistently reveal that higher self-efficacy expectation contributes significantly to motivation and desired performance in academic settings (*Bandura 1997; Bandura 1993*).

Zimmerman & Schunk, (1989) found in his study that students who are good self-regulators can perform better in academics than students who are poor self-regulators. According to *Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, and Cervone (2004)*, when students have to face peer pressure for indulging in any antisocial behavior, self-regulatory self-efficacy regulate their actions according to personal norms.

Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1993; Pajares and Miller, (1994) have reported that mathematics Self-efficacy is a good predictor of mathematics interest and choice of mathematics related courses.

Several studies conducted in colleges/universities have found that academic self-efficacy had a significant and positive effect on academic achievement (*Bandura. et. al 1996; Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Pastorelli, 1998; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004; Adeyemo, 2007; Bembenutty, 2007; Sharma & Silbereisen, 2007; Majer 2009*). *Robbins et al. (2004)*, in their meta-analysis of 109 early studies, reported that academic self-efficacy beliefs affect academic achievement of college students positively. Self-efficacy has a direct as well as indirect effect on achievement through its influence on goals (*Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994*).

Turner, Chandler, & Heffer (2009) studied with a sample of 264 (172 females and 92 males) undergraduate students also demonstrated that self-efficacy positively and significantly predicted academic performance. *Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz's (2010)* concluded that academic self-efficacy beliefs account for variance in both retention and college academic achievement beyond that explained by more traditional (i.e. , cognitive) academic predictors such as high school performance and standardized test scores.

Results of the study by *Brian D. Brausch 2011* revealed that high school GPA and academic self-efficacy predict performance of undergraduate students significantly.

Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991), in a meta-analysis of 39 academic self-efficacy studies also found that self-efficacy affects academic achievement and persistence of students positively, which had produced approximately 14% and 12% of the variances in academic performance and academic persistence, respectively.

However, there are some contradictory findings have been reported in few empirical studies. For example, more recently *Reynolds and Weigand (2010)* found that self-efficacy was not significantly related to academic achievement (first semester Grade- Point-Average). They explained this inconsistent finding by saying that the reliance on first-semester Grade-Point-Average (GPA) as the sole indicator of academic achievement may have affected the power of academic self-efficacy to predict academic achievement because the effect of academic self-efficacy on academic achievement may be more long term.

Jeffreys (1998) also reported inconsistent findings regarding the relation between self-efficacy and academic achievement of college/university students (i.e. self-efficacy did not predict academic achievement). A possible reason for her odd findings might have been the reliability of the instruments which she employed in her research. Academic Self-efficacy has also an indirect effect on academic achievement through academic aspirations and pro-social behavior (*Bandura. et. al, 1996*).

Carroll, Houghton , Wood et al. (2009) found that academic and self regulatory efficacy had a direct positive effect and an indirect negative effect on academic achievement through delinquency while Academic and social self-efficacy were found to be positively and negative related with academic aspirations and academic achievement respectively.

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) reported that children's academic achievement is influenced by academic aspirations of parents directly or indirectly by influencing their self-efficacy. Findings indicate that those with higher levels of general self-efficacy experience the least level of acculturative stress among international students.

Hope and adjustment of students to academic life:

Snyder and colleagues' (1991) concept of hope has been studied in many contexts, and several positive correlates to this construct have been found. Over the last 15 years, researchers have gained a clearer understanding of the relationships between hope and important aspects of students' lives.

There are different studies done on high school, beginning college students and graduate level students in which Hope has been found to be positively associated with scholastic competence. Hope has been linked to academic benefits in several studies. In the field of education college students' levels of hopefulness and their grade point averages have been found to be positively related (*Chang, 1998; Curry et al. , 1997; Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al. , 1997*).

High levels of hope was found to be positively related to greater reported scholastic and social competence, elevated creativity (*Onwuegbuzie, 1999*), greater problem-solving abilities and actual academic achievements (*Lopez, Bouwkamp, Edwards, & Teramoto Pedrotti, 2000; McDermott & Snyder, 2000;*) and high-hope high school (*Snyder, Harris, et al. , 1991*) and beginning college students (*Snyder et. al. 2002*) have higher overall grade point averages and fewer drop-outs; (*Worrell & Hale, 2001*)

Hope has also been found as a significant predictor of the academic performance for all the educational degrees. (*Mc. Dermott & Snyder 2000; P. Andrews 2010*) and academic achievements of pre high school and high school students (*Lopez, Bouwkamp, Edwards & Pedrotti 2000; Marques, Pais-Ribeiro and Lopez 2007d*)

Rose and Robinson (2007a), studied about academic domain specific hope theory with the researchers like *Campbell & Kwon, 2001; Kwon, 2002; Lopez, Ciarlelli, Coffman, Stone, & Wyatt, 2000*. Their findings indicated that undergraduate final course grades, college GPA, and high school GPA were predicted by domain-specific academic hope beyond the trait hope scale. The findings of *Robinson & Rose, (2007)* indicated that general academic hope predicted college GPA and final course grades in introductory Psychology courses, but Math hope predicted final course grades in Math classes beyond academic hope. These studies provide evidence that measures of hope may have greater predictive validity when matched to the specific academic domains each scale is intended to assess.

There are several researches in which hope has been distinguished from other similar motivational variables in predicting student achievement. *Rose and Robinson (2007b)* found that academic hope was found to predict academic achievement beyond demographics, self-regulation (*Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990*), goal orientation (*Elliot & McGregor, 2001*), and optimism (*Scheier & Carver, 1985*) across an undergraduate population and a working-class, ethnically diverse, high school population.

In a three year longitudinal study by *Liz Day, Hanson, Maltby, Proctor & Wood (2010)* academic achievement was found to be predicted by hope above intelligence, personality, and previous academic achievement. *Onwuegbuzie (1998)* documented an inverse relationship between graduate students' levels of hopefulness and their levels of anxiety. *Alexander and Onwuegbuzie (2007)* indicated that graduate students' levels of hopefulness assisted in predicting their levels of academic procrastination which refers to student's fear of failure including their anxiety and low self-confidence.

Gilman, Dooley, & Florell, (2006) found that hope scores are correlated negatively and significantly with psychological distress and school maladjustment. Findings of the study by *Frehe, (2008)* suggested that students with hopeful thinking when experiencing academic impediments appeared to better manage impediments by not diminishing their overall G. P. A.

It would not be surprising to find that hope is related to many other positive constructs within the realm of personal and social life.

Magaletta and Oliver (1999) found significant and positive relationship between hope and self-efficacy as well as hope and optimism. In addition, hope has been linked with self-esteem (**Snyder et al. , 1997**), self-worth (**Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997**), beliefs about the ability to accomplish goals (**Snyder, Sympson, Michael, & Cheavens, 2000**), and life satisfaction (**Chang,1998**). Studies also have shown that low level of hope predict depression (**Kwon, 2000; Snyder, Hoza, et al. , 1997**) and higher hope has been found to be related to lower levels of depression in children (**Snyder et al. , 1997**).

Valle, Huebner and Suldo (2006) found in their study of adolescents that Hope was working as a moderator or buffer between difficult experiences in life and well-being. People having high hope are more optimistic, they focus on success while pursuing their goals (**Snyder, Hoza, et al. , 1997**). In the similar vein higher hope is associated with greater perceived purpose in life (**Feldman & Snyder, 2005**). In another study low level of negative emotions were found to moderate the relation of self-efficacy, hope and optimism with subjective wellbeing (**Anila, Iqbal and Mohsin(2014)**).

Parenting, academic stress and academic outcomes

Studies conducted with western samples have found that parents may have high expectations for their child's future, hold positive beliefs about their child's abilities, and involve themselves in the education of their children (**Jodl, Michael & Malanchuk, 2001**).

Researchers have found that many parents make financial and social adjustments to their lifestyle in order to advance their child's academic and professional outcomes, or create an environment that promotes academic achievement (**Kim, 1993**).

Moreover Indian parents are found to be greatly involved in their children's education (**Larson, Verma & Dworkin, 2000**),

There are several studies that have examined the key parenting dimensions (i.e., support, behavioral and psychological control, autonomy, pressure and involvement) and their association to academic achievement and self-esteem. **Gray and Steinberg (1999)** found that all dimensions of parenting ie. (support, control and involvement) were significantly related to academic achievement within their multiethnic samples. More specifically, parental behavioral control (i.e., monitoring) was the dimension most strongly related to youth grades.

Bean, Bush et. al. (2003) found supportive behavior of African American mothers to be a significant predictor of self-esteem and academic achievement among adolescents. In addition academic achievement and self-esteem were significantly predicted by behavioral control . The results of several other studies suggest that parental rejection and control are closely associated with anxiety in childhood (**Muris and Mercklbach, 1998**).

Rapee, 2001 found that children may experience low self-efficacy and high anxiety in presence of high control by their parents (**Wood, 2006**). Whereas other researches (e.g. **Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003**) have hypothesized that parental encouragement of children's autonomy and independence may increase children's perceptions of mastery over the environment, which leads to reduced anxiety.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) defined parents involvement in many forms like parenting style, stable and secure environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, contact in school, participation in school events and activities. The findings suggest that parent involvement influence child's achievement positively. Parental involvement has been documented as positively impacting students' Math's proficiency and achievement (**Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sirvani, 2007b**), gains in reading performance (**Powell-Smith et.al. 2000**), as well as performance on standardized tests and academic assessments (**Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2005**). In addition, parental involvement was found to be related to fewer behavior problems in school (**Domina, 2005**), better attendance and class preparation, better course completion (**Simon, 2001**) and lower dropout rates (**Rumberger, 1995**).

Pasternak (2013) studied the relationship between parental discipline and children's school success. They found punishment affects academic achievement of the students negatively, whereas responsiveness to children's requests affects it positively. **Opdenakker and Damme (2005)** indicated that parental pressure and activities like coaching and support to the formal education of their child affect children's achievement positively, although it is less related with parents' socioeconomic status.

Akhtar and Aziz (2011) found that parental pressure affect academic achievement positively while peer pressure affects it negatively especially among female university students. The achievement of male students was not found to be affected by peer and parental pressure, while parent's pressures have a positive effect on the academic achievement of Business Administration students.

Several studies have been conducted to see the impact of parenting styles on academic stress, academic adjustment and performance.

Strage and Brandt's 1999; Turner and Heffer 2005; Turner, Chandler, and Heffer (2009) found that male students who characterized their parents as authoritative had significantly higher academic achievement, as measured by Grade-Point-Average (GPA), compared to their counterparts with authoritarian-directive parents.

In a study by Smith and Renk (2007) gender differences, parenting styles, and academic related stress in college students have been examined. Results indicate that female students who were reared by authoritarian father's experienced higher levels of academic-related stress compared to other parenting styles and gender of parent. While male students' academic stress was not found to be affected by parenting styles and gender of parent. These findings suggest that the gender of an individual influences the impact of parenting styles on academic stress.

Abar, Carter and Winsler,s (2009) studied with a sample of 89 college students found that the authoritative parenting style affect academic achievement positively. In a recent study by *Abesha (2012)* examined the effect of parenting styles, academic self-efficacy and achievement motivation on academic achievement of 2116 undergraduate first year students of Ethiopia. Results of the study explain that parenting styles have a direct positive effect on academic self-efficacy in both the gender. It has also a mediated effect on achievement motivation through academic self-efficacy and thereby effect on academic achievement of female students. Parenting styles also affect directly to the achievement motivation of female students, but not in male students.

In contrast to the aforementioned findings, *Joshi, Ferris, Otto, and Regan's (2003)* studied with a sample of 199 (152 females and 47 males) White, Hispanic, and Asian college and university students in the U. S. revealed that parenting styles did not have significant effects on academic achievement, as measured by students' self-report Grade-Point-Average (GPA). It was also found in their study that parental (i.e. , both mothers and fathers) involvement and strictness have not significant relationship with academic achievement. However, they found that parental strictness and paternal (i.e. , fathers) involvement were significantly and positively correlated with academic achievement for White students with small amount of variances in academic achievement.

Similarly in another study by *Hickman, Bartholomae, and McKenry (2000)* parenting style and academic achievement were not related. Instead, parenting style was found to be correlated to other factors (i.e., self-esteem and academic adjustment) which can enhance academic success of students.

It is evident from the preceding review, although there are some inconsistencies in research regarding the influences of parenting styles on the academic achievement of adolescents and young adults, the majority of studies have reported the beneficial effects of authoritative parenting style

Following studies highlight the importance of perceived parenting by the children and its impact on child's adjustments in life.

Dusek and Danko (1994) found that when adolescents perceive their parenting to be authoritarian and controlling it create psychological disturbance in them.

Tay EE lin and Tam Cailian (2010) investigated the relationship between parenting styles and stress level among Malaysian adolescents with 140 (13 to 16 year old) adolescents. Results showed that stress level of adolescents was not related to their parenting styles. There was also no gender difference in adolescents' stress level related to family,, peer pressure and school performance.

Wagner Cohen and Brook (1996) also found that experience of warm parenting by both mother and father was beneficial for adolescents as they were more resilient while confronting the stressful situations which was not true in case of harsh discipline provided by the parents.

Wolfradt, Hempel & Miles (2002) revealed that perceived parental psychological pressure has a significant positive correlation with depersonalization and trait anxiety among the adolescents. Moreover perception of parental warmth was found to be positively associated with active coping and it has a negative correlation with trait anxiety. *Khaleque, Rohner, et al. ,(2007)* compared in their study perceived parental acceptance- rejection and psychological adjustment of children in Finland, Pakistan, and the United States. Results of the study reveal that (a) children have experienced parental acceptance more than rejection; (b) perceived parental acceptance have positively relationship with individuals' psychological adjustment.

Sometimes parenting becomes a source of stress for students. The following studies have been conducted to study this phenomenon.

In Malaysia *Melati Sumari & Mariani Md Nor (1998)* concluded that apart from adolescence to adulthood transition pressure, school related issues, peer pressure, family and parenting are among the common stressors. The intensity of academic pressure (*Hui, 2001*) and the adolescent's personality might possibly offset the influences of parenting (*Huan, Yeo, Ang, & Chong, 2006*).

LaRue and Hermann (2008) conducted a study on 120 adolescents and found that students at their young age feel pressurized for grades, money related issues, conflicts with parents and relationship with friends and significant others. These findings explain that family, school and social circles are the three main dimensions of adolescents' stress and they are relevant across cultures.

Tajularipin et.al (2009) conducted a study on 155 teenagers in Malaysia to explore the stress level among urban and rural youths. They made a general conclusion that home stability, parenting styles and parent child relationship contributed to youth's stress level.

Conclusion

In the light of above review of literature it can be concluded that stress is inevitable in student's life, but if they have psychological as well as psychosocial resources, they can meet and challenge their stressors. From the perspective of positive psychology certain variables like self-efficacy, resilience, self-esteem, optimism, hope, are important for building the resources of students. In previous researches an effort has been made to explore the factors that promote or inhibit academic outcome. These researches have outlined that parenting has a key impact on academic achievements of students.

Parenting has never been as tough as it is today. It is an intriguing journey. It is not only the child who grows up, rather the parents too (*Sheshadri and Rao, 2012*). The goal of parenting should be to build up the strengths of the children so that they may not only face the challenges of academic life but also prepare them for adult role taking. In future studies academic stress and academic anxiety can be explored in terms of predictors like self efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience, social support, parenting etc. Path model can be developed by incorporating these variables which might have a potential relationship with academic stress.

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