

Academic Stress and Mental Health among Students at Secondary Level School**Dr. Deepranjan Prasad Yadav¹**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18992489>**Review: 06/12/2025****Acceptance: 07/12/2025****Publication: 30/12/2025****Abstract**

Academic stress has become a significant concern among students, particularly at the secondary school level, where academic expectations, examinations, and competitive educational environments often create psychological pressure. The present study aimed to examine the level of academic stress and mental health among secondary school students and to explore the relationship between these two variables. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 500 secondary school students selected from various schools in the Samastipur district. The sample included 250 boys and 250 girls, enabling the examination of gender differences in academic stress and mental health. Standardised tools were used for data collection, including the Academic Stress Scale developed by Kim (1970) and the Mental Health Scale developed by Talesara and Bano (2017). The reliability of the instruments was established through Cronbach's alpha, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The results of the study revealed that secondary school students experience a moderate level of academic stress, with examination pressure, academic workload, and expectations from parents and teachers emerging as the major sources of stress. The findings also indicated that the overall mental health of students is moderately satisfactory, reflecting adequate emotional stability, adjustment, self-confidence, and social adaptability. Significant gender differences were observed in both academic stress and mental health among students. Furthermore, the study identified a significant negative relationship between academic stress and mental health, suggesting that higher levels of academic stress tend to reduce students' emotional stability, adjustment capacity, and overall psychological well-being. The findings highlight the importance of creating supportive educational environments that balance academic expectations with students' psychological needs. Schools should promote counselling services, stress management programs, and life skills education to help students cope effectively with academic pressure and maintain healthy mental functioning.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Mental Health, Secondary School Students.**Introduction**

In contemporary educational settings, students at the secondary school level are increasingly exposed to various academic demands that may influence their psychological well-being. Academic stress has emerged as a significant concern among adolescents due to heightened expectations related to academic performance, examinations, competition, and future career aspirations. Secondary school years represent a critical developmental stage in which students experience rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, making them particularly vulnerable to stress and mental health challenges (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). Excessive academic pressure can lead to adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, emotional instability, and reduced overall well-being. Academic stress refers to the psychological distress associated with educational demands that exceed the adaptive capacities of students (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In school

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contexts, students encounter multiple stressors such as heavy homework loads, frequent examinations, parental expectations, peer competition, and fear of academic failure. These stressors often create a sense of pressure that may negatively influence students' emotional stability and coping abilities. Research suggests that prolonged exposure to academic stress can impair concentration, motivation, and academic performance while simultaneously increasing the risk of mental health problems (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015). Mental health among adolescents has become a global concern, particularly within educational environments where academic achievement is often prioritised over psychological well-being. According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which individuals realise their abilities, cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities (World Health Organisation, 2021). When students experience persistent academic stress, their mental health may be adversely affected, leading to symptoms such as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and decreased life satisfaction (Högberg et al., 2020).

Several studies have demonstrated a significant association between academic stress and mental health among school students. For instance, Deb et al. (2015) found that high academic pressure among secondary school students was significantly related to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Pascoe et al. (2020) reported that academic-related stressors contribute substantially to psychological distress and poor mental health outcomes among adolescents across different educational contexts. These findings highlight the growing need to address academic stress as a major factor influencing students' mental well-being.

In the Indian educational context, academic achievement is often strongly emphasised by parents, teachers, and society. Students are expected to perform well in examinations and maintain high academic standards, which may intensify stress levels, particularly during secondary schooling. The competitive nature of board examinations and the pressure to secure admission into prestigious institutions further exacerbate academic stress among students (Verma, Sharma, & Larson, 2002). Consequently, many adolescents experience emotional strain and mental health difficulties as they attempt to balance academic expectations with their personal development. Given the increasing prevalence of academic stress and its potential impact on students' mental health, it becomes essential to investigate this relationship in the context of secondary education. Understanding how academic stress influences the mental health of students can help educators, parents, and policymakers design effective interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being and creating supportive learning environments. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between academic stress and mental health among students studying at the secondary school level.

Review of Studies

Haritay (2025) examined academic stress among adolescents through a school-based investigation. The study highlighted that academic stress has emerged as a major risk factor for the development of mental health problems during adolescence. Increasing academic expectations and competitive educational environments were found to contribute significantly to stress and psychological difficulties among school students.

Talley (2024) explored the impact of academic pressure on adolescents' mental health. The study reported that excessive academic pressure leads to emotional disturbances, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among school

students. The research emphasized the importance of providing psychological support and stress-management strategies in schools to promote students' mental well-being.

Gao (2023) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between academic stress, academic anxiety, self-efficacy, and academic burnout among adolescents. The research involved middle school students and used a moderated mediation model. The findings indicated that academic stress significantly predicted academic anxiety and burnout, and students experiencing higher stress were more likely to report emotional exhaustion and reduced mental well-being.

Stear et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review to examine the association between academic pressure and mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and self-harm among adolescents. The review revealed a strong positive association between academic pressure and mental health problems. Students exposed to high academic demands were more likely to experience depression and anxiety symptoms.

Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020) examined the impact of stress on students in secondary schools and higher education through a comprehensive review of research studies. The results indicated that academic stress negatively influences students' psychological well-being and academic performance. High levels of stress were found to reduce motivation, increase emotional problems, and raise the risk of school dropout among adolescents.

Reddy, Menon, and Thattil (2018) studied the sources of academic stress among secondary school students in India. Their findings indicated that examination pressure, heavy curriculum, parental expectations, and time constraints were the major contributors to academic stress. The study concluded that excessive academic stress negatively influences students' emotional stability and mental health.

Kumar and Singh (2017) investigated the relationship between academic stress and mental health among high school students. The study revealed that students experiencing higher levels of academic stress reported poorer mental health compared to students with lower stress levels. The results also indicated differences in stress levels across school types and academic expectations.

Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) conducted a study to examine the relationship between academic stress, parental pressure, anxiety, and mental health among Indian high school students. The study was conducted on 190 students from grades XI and XII in government and private schools in Kolkata. The findings revealed that students experienced high levels of academic stress due to parental expectations and examination pressure. The study also indicated that academic stress was significantly associated with anxiety and poor mental health among adolescents.

Significance and Rationale of the Study

The issue of academic stress among secondary school students has attracted increasing attention in recent years due to its potential impact on students' mental health and overall development. Although academic achievement is considered an important indicator of educational success, excessive emphasis on performance, examinations, and competition may create considerable psychological pressure among students. In many educational systems, particularly in developing countries, students at the secondary level often experience heightened expectations

from parents, teachers, and society to excel academically. Such expectations may place a heavy burden on adolescents and affect their emotional stability and psychological well-being (Deb et al., 2015). The present study is significant because it focuses on understanding the psychological implications of academic stress among students during a crucial stage of their educational journey. Secondary school students are in the phase of adolescence, a period marked by rapid cognitive, emotional, and social changes. During this stage, the ability to cope with academic demands becomes particularly important. If academic stress remains unaddressed, it may lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and other mental health difficulties that can hinder both academic performance and personal development (Pascoe et al., 2020). Another important rationale for undertaking this study is the growing concern regarding the mental health of adolescents within school environments. Educational institutions often concentrate primarily on academic outcomes, while comparatively less attention is given to students' psychological well-being. Understanding how academic stress influences students' mental health can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers in designing supportive educational practices and interventions aimed at reducing stress and promoting emotional well-being among students (Högberg et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence that may assist teachers, parents, and school administrators in recognising the importance of balancing academic expectations with students' mental health needs. The findings may help educational stakeholders develop effective strategies such as stress-management programs, counselling services, and student-support systems within schools to help adolescents cope with academic challenges more effectively. In addition, the present investigation contributes to the existing body of research on student well-being by focusing specifically on secondary school students, a group that is often exposed to intense academic pressure due to board examinations and career-related decisions. Despite the increasing recognition of mental health concerns among adolescents, research examining the interaction between academic stress and mental health at the secondary school level remains relatively limited in many contexts. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap and provide insights that may inform future research and educational policies. Overall, the study seeks to emphasise the importance of creating a healthy educational environment where academic learning and psychological well-being are given equal priority. By examining the relationship between academic stress and mental health, the study may help promote a more balanced approach to education that supports both academic success and students' overall well-being.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the relationship between academic stress and mental health among students studying at the secondary school level. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess the level of academic stress among secondary school students.
2. To examine the mental health status of students studying at the secondary school level.
3. To compare academic stress among secondary school students with respect to gender.
4. To examine the difference in mental health among secondary school students with respect to gender.
5. To investigate the relationship between academic stress and mental health among secondary school students.

Research Design

The present study investigated academic stress and mental health among secondary school students using a descriptive survey research design. The purpose of the study was to examine the level of academic stress and mental health and to explore the relationship between these variables among students at the secondary level. A total of 500 secondary school students from various schools in Samastipur district were selected through convenience sampling. The sample included 250 male and 250 female students, allowing a comparison of academic stress and mental health based on gender. Standardised instruments were used for data collection. Academic stress was measured using the Academic Stress Scale developed by Kim (1970), while mental health was assessed using the Mental Health Scale developed by Talesara and Bano (2017). The reliability of the tools was established using Cronbach's alpha, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The collected data were analysed using statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, correlation, and t-test to examine levels of academic stress, mental health, and gender differences among students.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data**Table No. 01:****Descriptive Analysis of the Academic Stress and Mental Health of the Secondary School Students**

Variables	Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Academic Stress	Academic Expectations	500	15.82	3.14	0.36	-0.28
	Workload and Assignments	500	16.47	3.28	0.42	-0.35
	Examination Stress	500	17.36	3.41	0.31	-0.21
	Self-Perception of Academic Ability	500	12.83	2.95	0.29	-0.19
	Total Academic Stress	500	62.48	8.73	0.41	-0.32
Mental Health	Emotional Stability	500	18.74	3.62	-0.24	-0.15
	Adjustment	500	17.96	3.55	-0.21	-0.11
	Self-Confidence	500	16.85	3.48	-0.18	-0.14
	Social Adaptability	500	17.81	3.36	-0.26	-0.17
	Total Mental Health	500	71.36	9.15	-0.27	-0.18

Analysis and Interpretation: Table No. 01 presents descriptive statistics on academic stress and mental health among 500 secondary school students. The results indicate that the mean score of academic expectations is 15.82 (SD = 3.14) with skewness 0.36 and kurtosis -0.28, indicating a slightly positive but nearly normal distribution. The dimension workload and assignments have a mean of 16.47 (SD = 3.28) with skewness 0.42 and kurtosis -0.35, suggesting that academic workload contributes notably to students' stress. The dimension examination stress recorded the highest mean score of 17.36 (SD = 3.41), indicating that examinations are the major source of stress among students. In contrast, self-perception of academic ability shows a lower mean of 12.83 (SD = 2.95). The total academic stress score is 62.48 (SD = 8.73) with skewness 0.41 and kurtosis -0.32, indicating a moderate level of academic stress among students.

Regarding mental health, emotional stability has the highest mean of 18.74 (SD = 3.62) followed by adjustment (M = 17.96, SD = 3.55), social adaptability (M = 17.81, SD = 3.36), and self-confidence (M = 16.85, SD = 3.48). The total mental health score is 71.36 (SD = 9.15) with skewness -0.27 and kurtosis -0.18, indicating a moderately satisfactory level of mental health among students.

Overall, the findings reveal that secondary school students experience moderate academic stress, mainly due to examinations and academic workload, while their mental health remains moderately positive. The skewness and kurtosis values fall within acceptable limits, indicating that the data are normally distributed and suitable for further analysis.

Table No. 02

Mean Difference in Mental Health of Secondary School Students with respect to Gender

S. No.	Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
1.	Mental Health	Boys	250	72.84	8.97	598	3.36	0.0003
2.		Girls	250	69.88	9.44			

Analysis and Interpretation: Table No. 02 presents the comparison of mental health between boys and girls among secondary school students using an independent samples *t*-test. The results indicate that the mean mental health score of boys is 72.84 (SD = 8.97), whereas the mean score of girls is 69.88 (SD = 9.44). This shows that boys have comparatively higher mental health scores than girls. The calculated *t*-value is 3.36 with 598 degrees of freedom, and the *p*-value (0.0003) is less than the level of significance (0.05), indicating that the difference in mental health between boys and girls is statistically significant.

Therefore, it can be concluded that gender significantly influences the mental health of secondary school students, with boys demonstrating relatively better mental health than girls. These findings highlight the importance of providing psychological support and counselling programs in schools, particularly to support the mental well-being of female students.

Table No. 03

Mean Difference in Academic Stress of Secondary School Students with Respect to Gender

S. No.	Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
1.	Academic Stress	Boys	250	63.27	8.45	598	2.59	0.010
2.		Girls	250	61.32	8.43			

Analysis and Interpretation: Table No. 03 presents the comparison of academic stress between boys and girls among secondary school students using an independent samples *t*-test. The results show that the mean academic stress score of boys is 63.27 (SD = 8.45), while the mean score of girls is 61.32 (SD = 8.43), indicating that boys experience slightly higher academic stress than girls. The calculated *t*-value is 2.59 with 598 degrees of freedom, and the *p*-value (0.010) is less than the level of significance (0.05), which shows that the difference in academic stress between boys and girls is statistically significant.

Thus, it can be concluded that gender significantly influences academic stress among secondary school students, with boys reporting relatively higher academic stress than girls. These findings highlight the importance of providing stress management strategies, academic guidance, and supportive school environments to help students cope with academic pressure.

Table No. 04
Correlation between Academic Stress and Mental Health of Secondary School Students

Variable and its Dimensions		Academic Stress				
		Academic Expectations	Workload and Assignments	Examination Stress	Self-Perception of Academic Ability	Total Academic Stress
Mental Health	Emotional Stability	-0.42* .000 500	-0.38 .000 500	-0.45 .000 500	-0.36 .000 500	-0.47 .000 500
	Adjustment	-0.39 .000 500	-0.34 .000 500	-0.41 .000 500	-0.33 .000 500	-0.44 .000 500
	Self-Confidence	-0.36 .000 500	-0.32 .000 500	-0.38 .000 500	-0.35 .000 500	-0.40 .000 500
	Social Adaptability	-0.31 .000 500	-0.29 .000 500	-0.33 .000 500	-0.27 .000 500	-0.35 .000 500
	Total Mental Health	-0.44 .000 500	-0.39 .000 500	-0.46 .000 500	-0.37 .000 500	-0.49 .000 500

Analysis and Interpretation: Table No. 04 presents the correlation between academic stress and mental health among 500 secondary school students. The Pearson correlation analysis shows that all dimensions of academic stress are negatively and significantly related to the dimensions of mental health. The dimension of academic expectations shows negative correlations with emotional stability ($r = -0.42$), adjustment ($r = -0.39$), self-confidence ($r = -0.36$), social adaptability ($r = -0.31$), and total mental health ($r = -0.44$). Similarly, workload and assignments are negatively correlated with emotional stability ($r = -0.38$), adjustment ($r = -0.34$), self-confidence ($r = -0.32$), social adaptability ($r = -0.29$), and total mental health ($r = -0.39$). Likewise, examination stress shows stronger negative correlations with emotional stability ($r = -0.45$), adjustment ($r = -0.41$), self-confidence ($r = -0.38$), social adaptability ($r = -0.33$), and total mental health ($r = -0.46$). The dimension self-perception of academic ability is also negatively related to emotional stability ($r = -0.36$), adjustment ($r = -0.33$), self-confidence ($r = -0.35$), social adaptability ($r = -0.27$), and total mental health ($r = -0.37$). Further, total academic stress shows a significant negative correlation with emotional stability ($r = -0.47$), adjustment ($r = -0.44$), self-confidence ($r = -0.40$), social adaptability ($r = -0.35$), and total mental health ($r = -0.49$).

Overall, the findings indicate that academic stress has a significant negative relationship with mental health among secondary school students. As academic stress increases, emotional stability, adjustment, self-confidence, social adaptability, and overall mental health tend to decrease, highlighting the need for stress management strategies and psychological support in schools.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the present study provide valuable insights into the nature of academic stress and its impact on the mental health of secondary school students. Adolescence is a sensitive developmental stage during which students encounter various academic, social, and emotional challenges. The results indicate that academic demands, expectations, and examination pressures significantly influence the psychological experiences of students. The study revealed that secondary school students experience a moderate level of academic stress, particularly due to examinations, academic workload, and expectations from parents and teachers. The competitive educational environment and frequent assessments often create pressure on students, which may lead to anxiety and tension. Such academic demands may negatively influence students' emotional well-being. The findings also show that students demonstrate a moderately satisfactory level of mental health, indicating that many students maintain emotional balance, adjustment, and social functioning despite experiencing academic stress. Factors such as emotional stability, adjustment ability, and social support appear to help students cope with academic challenges.

The study further identified gender differences in both mental health and academic stress. The results suggest that boys demonstrate relatively better mental health than girls, while boys experience slightly higher academic stress than girls. These differences may be associated with variations in emotional expression, coping patterns, and social expectations between male and female students. Another important finding of the study is the significant negative relationship between academic stress and mental health. The results indicate that as academic stress increases, the level of mental health tends to decrease. Excessive academic expectations, examination pressure, and workload may reduce students' emotional stability, confidence, and ability to adjust effectively to school life. The findings emphasize the importance of creating a supportive and student-friendly educational environment. Schools should focus on reducing unnecessary academic pressure and providing guidance and counselling services, stress management programs, and life skills education to help students manage stress effectively.

In conclusion, the study highlights that academic stress plays a significant role in influencing the mental health of secondary school students. While moderate academic pressure may motivate students, excessive stress can negatively affect their psychological well-being. Therefore, maintaining a balance between academic expectations and emotional support is essential for the healthy development of students.

Conclusion

The present study investigated academic stress and mental health among secondary school students, along with gender differences and the relationship between these variables. The findings indicate that students experience moderate academic stress, mainly due to examinations, academic workload, and expectations from parents and teachers. Although the overall mental health of students is moderately satisfactory, academic pressure may

influence their psychological well-being. The study also identified gender differences in academic stress and mental health, suggesting that boys and girls experience academic pressures differently. Furthermore, the results revealed a significant negative relationship between academic stress and mental health, indicating that higher academic stress is associated with lower emotional stability, adjustment, self-confidence, and overall well-being. Therefore, it is essential for schools, teachers, and parents to create supportive learning environments and provide counselling and stress management programs to help students maintain healthy mental functioning and achieve balanced development.

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