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ACADEMIC STRESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN MANAMADURAI, SIVAGANGAI DISTRICT

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Abstract

Every stage of life is unique, but the adolescent age is considered as the midway path from late childhood to early adulthood. The descriptive research study focuses on academic stress, psychological well-being and happiness among adolescent female students from class IX to XII with a sample size of 140 female students of a government school in Manamadurai of Sivagangai district, Tamilnadu, India. A quantitative approach was adopted, employing descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The rural students experience higher academic stress in comparison with the students from urban areas; at the same time, study breaks significantly influence better psychological well-being and happiness. Academic stress negatively correlated with psychological well-being and happiness. Psychological well-being and happiness of the adolescent students were positively correlated. With the help of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), developing an appropriate alternative curriculum and alternative art pedagogy would enhance learning into a joyful journey.

Key Words: *Academic Stress, Psychological Wellbeing, Happiness, Indian Knowledge System*

Introduction

Among each and every stage of human life, the adolescence stage is crucial in constructing the rest of the life. The adolescent stage is significantly influenced by changes occurring in physical, psychological and sexual development. Though puberty is a mile stone in the age of adolescence but influences the thought, emotions and behaviour. The stage of adolescence should be understood in socio, cultural, legal, clinical and educational aspects (Kar, 2015). The stage of adolescence is coined as the stage of "Stress and Storm" by Stanely Hall; the concept re-examined adolescent age as indicating an age of conflict with parents, mood swings and risk-taking behaviour (Arnett, 1999). Thus, the age of adolescence is the midway point between late childhood and early adulthood and is considered a period of turmoil due to developmental and emotional changes.

The technological acceleration and changes in the environment have brought transformative influence in the pedagogical world. During the presiding half-decade, the education system around the globe has witnessed significant changes and has been influenced by the pandemic social situation, especially in the field of education. The conventional methodology of the academic teaching learning process changed into the flipped model and support of artificial intelligence, and teachers performa facilitator role. Though the teaching learning process has reached anew apex, the students as a scholastic face high level of academic stress and invariably affects the psychological wellbeing and the happiness of the students to the greater extent. The joy of learning

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has reduced and led to anguish, anxiety, and mental agony of the students due to change in the teaching learning system. Irrespective of developed or underdeveloped countries, the academic stress of school students affects their life satisfaction. In this context, nurturing the wellbeing and happiness of the students is the most important factor for the holistic development of the student. As a remarkable fact India has largest number of school students subsequently China and United states of America. The adolescent school students' academic stress is multifaceted and connected to the presupposition of the parents, peer pressure, and social and economic aspects. The academic pressure influences the psychological well-being and happiness of the students. The common perspective or belief of society is that there is no significant difference in the happiness of male and female students (Kaur, 2022). This research seeks to investigate the relationship between academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness among the female students in Manamadurai of Sivagangai District, Tamil Nadu.

Review of Literature

Van, (2024) examined the interplay of academic stress, psychological well-being and depression among 400 high school students in the age brackets of 15 to 17 from Vietnam. The findings of the study underscore the other side of the common assumptions by stating that academic stress does not have a significant negative correlation with depression. At the same time, depression did not have a significant negative impact on psychological well-being.

Adu (2022) highlights that overall development and academic excellence depend on the psychological well-being of school students. The study implies that mental health, personal health, and subjective happiness depend upon psychological well-being.

Kaur (2022)conducted a comprehensive study on happiness among 1075 students from six districts in Punjab, and the studies show that there is no significant difference in happiness among male and female students. Regardless of gender, there is no difference in the level of happiness among the school students.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the levels of academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness among female school students in Manamadurai, Sivagangai District.
2. To examine the influence of socio-demographic factors on academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness.
3. To compare the differences in academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness across students from different grade levels (classes IX to XII).
4. To analyse the relationship between academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness among the selected school students.

Methodology

The study of academic stress, psychological well-being and happiness among school students implies a descriptive research study. The study population consists of 210 female students from a girls' school in the Manamadurai area of Sivagangai District, Tamilnadu, India, who are studying in classes 9 to 12. A simple random sampling method was used to select a sample size of 140 students, ensuring equal representation across different grade levels. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, demographic details such as domicile, family income, type of house,

family size, study habits, and other relevant socio-economic factors, followed by a 30-item academic stress scale developed by Kumar.P, 18 item psychological wellbeing scale developed by Carol Ryff and the 29-item scale developed by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire were adopted for the study. This study adopted a quantitative approach, analysing responses using descriptive and inferential statistics. The t-test and ANOVA were used to assess the interplay of academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness based on socio-economic and environmental factors. Post Hoc tests were applied where necessary to identify specific group differences, and person correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between academic stress, psychological well-being, and happiness.

Findings

Age and Grade Level of Education: Less than three-fourths (74.3 percent) of the respondents are 16 years old, more than one-fifth of the respondents (23.6 percent) are 15 years old, and a small portion (2.1 percent) are 17 years old. Regarding grade level, more than one-third of the respondents are in the 11^{th} standard (35.7 percent) and 12^{th}standard (40.0 percent), more than one-tenth (14.3 percent) of the respondents are in the 10^{th} standard, exactly one-tenth (10 percent) of the respondents are in 9^{th} standard indicating that the study primarily focuses on higher secondary school students.

Parental Education and Occupation: Regarding the fathers' education of the respondents, more than half (55.0 percent) of the respondents have completed higher secondary education, and less than one tenth (5.7 percent) have an undergraduate degree. The mothers' education shows that more than two-fifth (45 percent) have higher secondary education, but fewer mothers (1.4 percent) have an education level above under-graduation. In terms of occupation, more than half (51.4 percent) of the respondents' fathers are engaged in the alternative workforce or non-traditional employment, followed by more than one-fourth (28.6 percent) of the respondents' fathers' occupations are business. A smaller portion (15.7 percent) works in private organizations or the government sector (4.3 percent). Mothers are predominantly homemakers (50.7 percent), with a smaller proportion engaged in private sector jobs (11.4 percent), government jobs (10.7 percent), or business (5.7 percent).

Family Income and Domicile: More than half of the respondents (58.6 percent) are from families with earnings of ₹20,001 - ₹30,000 per month, while exactly one-fourth (25 percent) of the respondents belong to families earning less than ₹20,000. The domicile distribution reveals that three-fourth of the respondents (75.0 percent) are from rural areas, and one-fourth (25.0 percent) are from urban backgrounds.

Living Conditions and Family Structure: More than two-thirds (68.6 percent) of the respondents live in owned houses, while others reside in rented (26.4 percent) and very few (2.9 percent) of them dwell in leased houses (2.9 percent). In terms of family structure, more than three-fourth (81.4 percent) of the respondents are from the nuclear family system, and less than two-tenth (18.6 percent) of the respondents are in joint families. The birth order distribution A statistically significant ($F = 3.912$, $df= 3$, $p = 0.010$) difference is observed between the students living in rented houses (106.22 ± 17.63), who have higher academic stress than those who live in their own houses

(99.98 ±15.60) and leased houses (79.90 ± 7.10). The post-hoc analysis indicates a significant difference between students living in rented houses and those in leased houses (p = 0.019). The studies of Liu (2017) contrasted that students living in rented houses experience more academic stress than students living in their own houses.

The sole offspring (no siblings) (111.78 ±18.09) have higher academic stress than the first-born, second and third-born children, with statistically significant differences (F= 8.920, df=3, p=0.000). Further, the post-hoc tests show that only children had significantly higher stress than first-born (p = 0.000), second-born (p = 0.003), and third-born (p = 0.002) students. The studies of children with three members in the family have the highest academic stress (114.62 ±15.65800) than two-member families (90.71±12.30), four-member families (98.66 ± 13.82), (93.37 ± 14.39) five and above family members. However, students with one family member (single parent) and three members in the family face higher academic stress than others. Post-hoc tests reveal significant differences between three-member families and other groups. Students who do not take study breaks (89.49± 9.26) show the lowest academic stress, while those who take a break once an hour have the highest stress (105.89±16.83). The post-hoc tests show that students who do not take breaks between their studies and continuously study have significantly lower stress than those who take breaks once every half hour (p = 0.009) and once an hour (p = 0.004). However, the Pomodoro Techniques of Cirillo (2006) highlight that taking short breaks amidst study improves focus and reduces burnout.

Thus, the study reveals that no significant differences such as age, grade of class, type of family or owning a smartphone impact academic stress, but factors such as domicile, monthly income, type of house, number of family members, and study break habits significantly influence the academic stress. The students from rural areas, single born and three members of families, witness higher academic stress at the same time, students from lower-income families experience less stress. Short breaks don't reduce academic stress, and those who studied studiously without taking a break reported lower stress levels.

The analysis of the mean differences between the total scores of psychological well-being and the socio-demographic details of the respondents, by administering a t-test is observed as statistically insignificant (t = 0.795, df=137, p = 0.428), though the mean scores of the rural students (72.50 ± 0.70) is moderately higher than the students from urban areas (70.95 ± 7.70). The studies of Tripathy (2021)suggested that the psychological well-being of urban students is better than that of rural students.

The psychological well-being of the students and type of families have no statistically significant differences (t = -1.330, df=137, p = 0.186), although the students from nuclear families (71.57 ± 10.58) have a lower psychological well-being score compared to those from joint families (74.46 ± 6.76). The psychological well-being of students who own a mobile phone and those who do not have a statistically insignificant result (t = -0.117, df=137, p = 0.907). However, the mean scores of the students who own a mobile phone have lesser psychological well-being (71.93 ± 10.87) than those who do not (72.17 ± 9.80) have a mobile phone. The different ages of the respondents and psychological well-being have no statistically significant results (F = 1.545, df=2, p = 0.217), at the same time the mean scores of the students in the age group of 17 years old (79.21 ± 7.52) have higher psychological well-being than the age groups of 15 years old (73.83±11.51) and 16 years old (71.35 ± 9.50). The psychological well-being of the students is not statistically significant (F = 1.366, df=3, p = 0.256) with the class that they are perusing. The psychological

well-being and the monthly income of the students do not have any significant differences (F = 1.637, df=4, p = 0.168), however, the mean scores of the students from higher family income that is ₹50,001 and above have greater psychological well-being than others. The type of house the students live in and psychological well-being do not have any statistically significant results (F = 2.517, df=4, p = 0.061); the students from a rented house have greater psychological well-being than others. The psychological well-being and the birth orders do not have any significant results (F = 0.404, df=3, p = 0.751), however, the highest psychological well-being scores are among third-born children (74.57± 5.29) than other birth order children. The studies of Chen (2014) find noticeable differences in psychosocial factors influencing singletons and children with siblings.

The number of family members and psychological well-being shows no statistically significant results (F=0.793, df=4, p=0.532), among the mean scores of the students with a single family member or single parent, have higher psychological well-being (74.76±7.68) than others, the mean scores of the students with five and more family members are lower than others (69.96±7.12). A statistically significant result (F = 3.087, df=4, p = 0.018) is observed in the students who take breaks during their study time and the psychological well-being of the respondents. The students who take breaks once an hour report the highest well-being scores (76.25±10.51), whereas those who take breaks once in three hours had the lowest scores (65.70±8.72). The post-hoc results show that students who take breaks once an hour have significantly higher well-being than those who do not take breaks (p = 0.009) and those who take breaks once every three hours (p = 0.004). Thus, Domicile, type of family, mobile ownership, age, class, income, house type, birth order, and family size show no significant impact on psychological well-being, but students taking more frequent breaks (once an hour) report better psychological well-being than those who take fewer breaks. Hence, regular study breaks contribute to better psychological well-being.

The mean differences between the total scores of happiness and socio-demographic details of the respondents. A statistical difference is observed between the happiness of the students from rural areas and the students from urban areas (t=3.722, df=137, p=0.000). The Rural students (120.85 ± 19.80) reported significantly higher happiness levels than urban students (106.85 ± 17.47). The type of families and happiness is not statistically significant (t= -0.261, df=137, p=0.795), however, a slight difference is observed in the mean scores of students from the joint family type (118.25 ± 14.93) and nuclear family type (117.11± 21.19).

The students who have a smartphone and those who do not have any show no significant differences in their happiness level (t=0.576, df=137, p=0.565). The age of the respondents and happiness have statistically significant results (F= 3.695, df=2, p=0.027), further, the post hoc test indicates that students aged 15 years old have greater happiness than the students aged 16 years (p=0.028). The class of the students and the happiness have statistically significant results (F=3.497, df=3, p=0.031), and the post hoc results show that students in class 10^{th} are significantly happier than the students from class 11. The scores of happiness of the students and family income are statistically significant (F = 5.358, df = 4, p = 0.000), and the post-hoc results show that students from families with an income of less than ₹20,000 are significantly less happy than those from families with an income above ₹50,000. The type of house of the students and the total score of happiness show a statistically significant difference (F=3.349, df=3, p=0.021), however, the post-hoc test shows students from the rented house have greater happiness than the students from their own houses (p=0.028). The birth order and number of family members of the students do not

influence happiness, and the statistical same is been proved (F=2.265, df=3, p=0.084), (F=2.092, df=4, p=0.085).

The study breaks significantly influence the happiness of the students (F= 4.812, df=4, p=0.01), and the post-hoc results show that students who take breaks once an hour are significantly happier than those who don't take rest (p=0.014). In contrast, the studies of Yeom (2022) state that adolescents who have better leisure activities experience better happiness, which results in reduced academic stress and better connection to school activities. When academic stress hinders the performance of the students, the state of happiness promotes a smooth school transition. The crux of the findings reveals that rural students are happier than students from urban areas; at the same time, age and class intervals influence the happiness of the students. Higher family income is associated with greater happiness. Students living in rented houses are happier than those in their own houses. Frequent short breaks improve happiness, and birth order and family size do not significantly affect happiness.

A moderate positive correlation is observed between academic stress and happiness(r = 0.555, p = 0.000), thus, academic stress increases, and happiness also increases, which may indicate that students who experience academic stress find it as eustress, which leads to happiness in a sense of accomplishment. The psychological well-being and happiness moderately correlate (0.415, p=0.000). The studies of Heizomi (2015) underscore a strong correlation between happiness and psychological well-being among adolescent school students, which results in better school performance and significant life achievement and stated, "mental integrity is often evidenced by happiness".

Suggestions and Social Work Implications

In the fast-growing academic world, the common perception is to make a student more successful in all the walks of life rather than creating a significant development in physical, emotional and social dimensions. The school teachers commonly focus on academic upliftment of students rather than psychosocial factors, since the academic year of a school is planned in such a way to enhance successful students in academic aspects. Mandating the appointment of qualified school social workers or school counsellors identifies the symptoms and causes of stress and provides a supportive environment to the students rather than the teachers. As like as the initiative by the Tamilnadu state government of providing police wellbeing training (holistic training for the police officer, family members and their children), the government should take the initiative to train the teachers of all the grades to understand the stress and importance of relaxation and mindfulness practices. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), such as pranayama, yoga and meditation, can be inculcated as daily practice. The studies of Naidu (2014) witness the cognitive benefits of OM chanting and yoga, enhance the psychological wellbeing and reduce the academic stress. As a social work implication, the mental health organisation and civil society organisation can provide community-based mental health programmes, and a collaborative approach of the school social workers, educators and parents can support the students in enhancing their emotions and academics. Incorporating alternate pedagogical approaches and alternate art therapy enhances the joy of learning.

Conclusion

The domicile of the respondents and academic stress play a crucial role; notably, the students from the rural area experience higher stress levels than the students from the urban area. At the same time, students from the lower income group experience less stress than the students from the affluent higher income group. Factors such as monthly family income, type of house, number of family members, and study break habits also impact academic stress. Students who are living in rented houses, sole offspring, and students from three-member families report higher stress levels. Contrary to common perception, students who do not take study breaks exhibit lower academic stress than those who take frequent breaks.

In terms of psychological well-being, the results indicate that domicile of the respondents, such as type of family, mobile ownership, age, class, income, house type, birth order, and family size do not significantly impact psychological well-being. The findings of Cheng (2025) infer that apart from social factors, quality sleep habits enhance lower academic stress and better psychological well-being of the adolescents. However, students who take study breaks once an hour report better psychological well-being, suggesting that regular breaks may contribute positively to mental health and academic enhancement.

In common parlance, there is a perception that students from urban backgrounds enjoy the accessibility of urban infrastructure and amenities, which remains better happiness than the students from the rural background. The study reflects that student from a rural background report significantly higher happiness than urban students. It is evident that when students escalate to higher levels of classes or grades, they naturally face higher levels of stress, and this affects their happiness. the study also substantiates that student aged 15 years and those in grade ten exhibit greater happiness levels compared to their older age students. Thus, academic pressure, social pressure and peer pressure may be the reason for the higher academic stress and lower happiness level. The students from families with higher income experience greater happiness than students from lower income families, which underscores that the income of the family either directly or indirectly influences the happiness of the students. Interestingly, students from rented houses report higher happiness levels than those living in their own or leased houses.

Academic stress is significantly influenced by socioeconomic and environmental factors at the same time, psychological well-being remains largely unaffected. However, study break patterns influence psychological well-being. Happiness remains and is shaped by socioeconomic and environmental factors. The findings highlight a holistic intervention to support students from different backgrounds, ensuring a balanced academic and personal life experience.

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