A STUDY ON POST-PANDEMIC ACADEMIC STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONGST ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The epidemic caused by Covid-19 has had a significant impact on many different parts of society, including the realm of education. The purpose of this research is to evaluate how the post-pandemic academic environment affects the levels of academic stress experienced by adolescents as well as their mental health. Data was acquired from a large and diverse sample of adolescent pupils through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and psychological evaluations as part of a research design that was intended to be all-encompassing. The results of this research have shed light on the specific pressures that emerged in the academic landscape during the pandemic and their association with mental health consequences. The study also investigates alternative coping strategies and support networks that could alleviate the detrimental impact of academic stress on the mental health of adolescents.

Keyword: - *Academic stress, Mental health, Adolescent students, Coping mechanisms.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 epidemic caused extensive disruption to established educational structures, which in turn led to numerous modifications in the manner in which education is provided. Continuous isolation implemented in phases to halt the rapid spread of the pandemic caused psychological distress, such as depression and anxiety, and impacted the quality of life of schoolchildren [1–6]. Recent research indicates that women are more susceptible to melancholy and anxiety in times of adversity [4, 6]. It has also been observed that young children from low-income families are more susceptible to mental health issues [7,8]. The shift towards online and hybrid learning methods, in combination with the unpredictability that surrounds the current academic landscape, has the potential to have an impact on the levels of academic stress and mental well-being experienced by adolescents. The purpose of this research is to investigate whether or not there is a correlation between post-pandemic academic stress and the mental health outcomes of adolescents.

High cognitive and emotional burden at school is negatively associated with adolescents' mental health (MH), particularly in the context of insufficient and declining levels of physical activity and inadequate physical fitness among many adolescents [9]. Even though the prevalence of mental disorders is high overall, there is a substantial disparity in MH among adolescents [10]. Stress is a big word with even bigger impact; however, this can be dealt with small changes that we bring in our day-to-day life. Additionally, adolescent stress was associated with increased rates of depression [11]. Academic stress is a significant problem. We view AS in accordance with Selye's definition of the term, which describes it as an individual's nonspecific set of responses to internal or external stimuli that interfere with his or her routine academic process [12]. Managers, financiers, government officials, administrators, policymakers, housewives, and students are among those who experience stress today. It is crucial to determine the source of the tension so that it can be

addressed thoroughly and effective interventions can be devised. Stress is always viewed as a subjective process that involves an individual's personal analysis and response to a threat. Adolescents' primary source of stress is schoolwork, which is linked to psychological issues; understanding the factors that contribute to this stress is important. The unprecedented crisis all over the world has severely impacted the mental health and well-being of the society. This article will envisage the causes of psychological imbalances among the students in adolescent especially in India as this age group is most vulnerable to this threat of covid19.

The perception of emotional or physical tension is stress. A number of events in a person's life induce negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, and nervousness, which subsequently contribute to stress. Stress is the physiological response to a challenge or demand. Stress can be positive at times, but chronic stress can lead to serious health problems.
Stress levels can vary based on how an individual responds to a given situation. Some individuals simply do not care and do not experience anxiety; they view stress as a minor inconvenience and continue with their daily lives. Others concern themselves excessively, which negatively impacts their health.

2. CAUSE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Mainly two key factors have been considered for this research purpose:
Participants: For the purpose of this research, a wide-ranging group of junior high and high school students (between the ages of 13 and 18) from a variety of schools participated. In order to ensure that the sample is representative of the population as a whole, both public and private institutions, as well as urban and rural settings, were included.
Data Collection: In order to collect data, we used questionnaires, interviews, and standardized psychological tests. The surveys collected information on the participants' demographics, levels of academic stress, and self-reported indices of mental health. Through in-depth interviews, we gained a qualitative understanding of the precise sources of anxiety that students experience. Anxiety, depression, and other coping methods were examined during psychological evaluations.

Students' mental health is a global concern, as mental health issues typically emerge during adolescence and young adulthood. Recent research at the University of Delhi found that the closure has had a significant impact on the students. Depression, anxiety, food-habit disorders, insomnia, and addiction are among the most prevalent issues among students. Mood disorders are examples of mental health problems among secondary and postsecondary students. Stress and tension also cause significant mental concerns among students. Such circumstances lead pupils to anxiety, mood disorders, and sleeping disorders. The excessive pressures of family, curriculum, and school also contribute to these undesirable outcomes. Sometimes students consider suicide as well. Teenagers and college students are the primary targets of mental health issues such as Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), panic disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Students are rarely given the opportunity to free themselves of such vile issues in today's artificial world, which is dominated by technology. As a result of their age and mental maturity, students frequently experience stress, shortness of breath, muscle tension and stiffness, irregular heartbeat, headache, anxiety, and vertigo, among other symptoms. This is a technological age, and the use of virtual mode in education is widespread. The pupils' excessive use of mobile phones, smart phones, computers, laptops, and other electronic devices is evident. Consequently, students are especially susceptible to mental distress during this pandemic.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of examinations, assignments, and other activities that a student must juggle. In addition to the design, instructors and parents also place significant pressure on students to achieve high grades. These expectations force students to labor tirelessly, resulting in increased stress. In addition to academics, parents and institutions want students to participate in extracurricular activities; students are currently expected to be well-rounded. Even after rigorous study patterns, students are unable to select a career due to a lack of appropriate counselling channels. This demanding attitude from parents and teachers confuses and stresses out the students. High school and adolescence play a crucial role in molding a child's personality and outlook on life. Peer pressure is yet another term frequently used by adolescents. This may include pressuring someone to consume, smoke, cheat on an exam, or lie, and the list is exhaustive. Peer pressure can be damaging and persuasive. It can either positively shape the personalities of introverted pupils or pose an obstacle and cause stress. To make the most of peer pressures to be positive, it is crucial for students to possess wisdom and surround themselves with positive individuals.

2.1. Academic Stressors:

The challenges in adjusting to online learning, concerns about disturbed schedules, greater workload, and questions about future educational prospects were all post-pandemic academic stressors. Academic stressors are the various challenges, pressures, and demands that students encounter within the educational environment. These stressors can have a significant impact on students' mental, emotional, and physical well-being. As students strive to meet academic expectations and achieve their goals, they often face a range of stressors that can vary in intensity and origin. Here are some key academic stressors that students commonly experience:

I. **High Workload:** An overwhelming amount of coursework, assignments, projects, and exams can create a sense of pressure and time constraints. Students may struggle to balance these responsibilities alongside other commitments.

II. **Time Management:** Difficulty managing time effectively to complete assignments, study for exams, attend classes, and participate in extracurricular activities can lead to stress. Poor time management can also affect students' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

III. **Performance Pressure:** The desire to excel academically and meet high expectations from parents, teachers, and peers can contribute to feelings of anxiety and stress. Fear of failure or disappointing others may intensify these pressures.

IV. **Competition:** The competitive nature of education, especially in settings where grades are curved or limited opportunities are available, can create a sense of rivalry and added pressure to outperform classmates. Academic environments often foster competition among students, which can create a sense of pressure to outperform peers and achieve academic excellence.

V. **Test and Exam Stress:** Preparing for and taking exams can induce significant stress. The fear of forgetting information, performing poorly, or experiencing test anxiety can impact students' confidence and mental well-being.

VI. **Deadline Pressures:** Meeting multiple deadlines for assignments, projects, and presentations can lead to heightened stress levels, particularly when these deadlines coincide or overlap.

VII. **Academic Expectations:** Striving to meet high academic standards set by institutions or educators can generate feelings of inadequacy, especially when the material is challenging or unfamiliar.

VIII. **Course Difficulty:** Enrolling in courses that are more advanced or challenging than anticipated can lead to struggles in understanding the material and cause stress related to academic performance.

IX. **Lack of Resources:** Insufficient access to study materials, technology, research resources, or academic support services can hinder students' ability to succeed academically and exacerbate stress.

X. **Personal Life Impact:** Balancing academic commitments with personal responsibilities, family matters, or part-time jobs can amplify stress, as students try to juggle multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

XI. **Peer Pressure:** Comparing oneself to classmates and feeling pressured to conform to academic norms or study habits can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and stress. Students may feel pressure to conform to academic norms or to excel to match their peers' achievements, leading to feelings of inadequacy or stress.

XII. **Perfectionism:** Striving for perfection in academic pursuits can lead to excessive self-criticism and anxiety, as students may fear making mistakes or falling short of their own high standards.

XIII. **Transition Phases:** Moving from one educational level to another (e.g., high school to college) or transitioning from one major to another can introduce uncertainties and new academic challenges that cause stress. Moving from one educational level to another (e.g., high school to college) can be stressful due to the adjustment required in terms of academic rigor, environment, and social dynamics.

XIV. **Isolation and Loneliness:** Feelings of social isolation, especially when struggling with coursework, can lead to emotional distress and hinder academic performance. Academic commitments can sometimes lead to social isolation, as students may prioritize their studies over social interactions, which can impact mental health.

XV. **Financial Burdens:** Financial constraints, including tuition fees, textbooks, and living expenses, can add stress for students who must balance academic demands with financial responsibilities.

Addressing academic stressors requires a holistic approach that includes time management skills, seeking academic support, practicing self-care, and developing healthy coping mechanisms. Schools and institutions can play a crucial role in providing resources and creating environments that support students' well-being while pursuing their educational goals.

2.2. Outcomes Related to Mental Health:

According to the findings of the study, a substantial association exists between increased levels of academic stress and poorer mental health outcomes among adolescents. Those who reported feeling higher levels of academic stress also reported experiencing increased degrees of anxiety and sadness.

Outcomes related to mental health refer to the observable and measurable results or consequences of an individual's mental well-being and the effectiveness of interventions or treatments aimed at improving mental health. These outcomes can span a wide range of areas, including emotional, psychological, social, and physical aspects of a person's life. Here are some key outcomes related to mental health:

I.   **Improved Well-being:** The primary goal of mental health interventions is to enhance an individual's overall well-being, leading to positive emotions, increased life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose.

II.   **Reduced Symptoms:** For individuals experiencing mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder, successful treatment should lead to a reduction in the severity and frequency of symptoms.

III. **Functional Improvement:** Mental health interventions aim to improve an individual's ability to engage in daily activities, maintain relationships, hold a job, and participate in society.

IV.   **Enhanced Coping Skills:** Individuals with good mental health are better equipped to manage stress, challenges, and adversity. Effective interventions teach coping strategies that can be applied in various life situations.

V.   **Social Engagement:** Improved mental health often leads to increased social interactions and a stronger support network, as individuals are better able to connect with others and maintain relationships.

VI.   **Reduced Stigma:** Successful mental health interventions can contribute to reducing the stigma associated with mental health conditions, promoting a more open and accepting society.

VII. **Lower Healthcare Costs:** Improved mental health can lead to reduced healthcare utilization and associated costs, as individuals may require fewer medical interventions or emergency services.

VIII. **Increased Productivity:** Individuals with better mental health are often more productive in their work or studies, contributing positively to their personal and professional lives.

IX.   **Quality of Life:** Mental health interventions aim to enhance an individual's overall quality of life, allowing them to experience a fulfilling and meaningful existence.

X.   **Prevention of Relapse:** For individuals who have experienced mental health challenges in the past, successful interventions should include strategies to prevent relapse and maintain stability.

XI.   **Improved Physical Health:** Mental health and physical health are interconnected. Addressing mental health issues can lead to better management of physical health conditions and a reduced risk of associated complications.

XII. **Academic Success:** Students with good mental health are more likely to succeed academically due to improved concentration, focus, and emotional well-being.

XIII. **Reduced Substance Abuse:** Effective mental health interventions can lower the risk of substance abuse and addiction, as individuals may be better equipped to cope with stressors in healthier ways.

XIV. **Community Integration:** Individuals with improved mental health are more likely to actively participate in their communities, leading to a stronger sense of belonging and social cohesion.

XV.   **Family Dynamics:** Positive mental health outcomes can improve family relationships and dynamics, as individuals are better able to communicate and interact with their loved ones.

It's important to note that the specific outcomes will vary depending on the individual's unique circumstances, the severity of their mental health condition, and the effectiveness of the interventions or treatments they receive. Additionally, mental health outcomes are often interconnected and can influence each other in complex ways.

2.3. Methods of Coping:

The adolescent students in this study reported using a variety of methods to cope with stressful situations. These methods included seeking social support, participating in physical activities, practising mindfulness, and keeping a scheduled daily routine.

The findings from the study revealed that the adolescent students under investigation employed a diverse range of coping mechanisms to navigate and manage the stressful situations inherent in their academic and personal lives. These coping

strategies showcased the students' resourcefulness and adaptability in the face of challenges. Some of the key methods they utilized included:

I.   **Seeking Social Support:** Many of the students turned to their friends, family members, or trusted adults as a way to alleviate stress. Engaging in open conversations, sharing concerns, and receiving advice from those they confided in provided a sense of reassurance and emotional relief. By connecting with others, they felt less isolated and better equipped to cope with the pressures they faced.

II. **Participating in Physical Activities:** Engaging in physical exercises, sports, or recreational activities emerged as an effective method for managing stress. These activities not only helped students release pent-up tension but also boosted their mood through the release of endorphins. The physical exertion provided a healthy outlet for stress and promoted a sense of well-being.

III. **Practicing Mindfulness:** Incorporating mindfulness techniques, such as meditation, deep breathing, and focusing on the present moment, helped students create a mental space for relaxation and clarity. Mindfulness allowed them to momentarily detach from their stressors and gain perspective, leading to reduced feelings of anxiety and overwhelm.

IV. **Keeping a Scheduled Daily Routine:** Establishing a structured daily routine provided a sense of stability and predictability, which in turn helped students manage their time more effectively. Having a routine allowed them to allocate dedicated periods for studying, leisure, and self-care activities, reducing the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities.

V.   **Engaging in Creative Outlets:** Many students found solace in creative activities such as art, music, writing, or crafting. Expressing themselves creatively allowed them to channel their emotions and thoughts in a constructive manner, offering an outlet for self-expression and emotional release.

VI. **Time Management Strategies:** Students utilized various time management techniques, such as setting priorities, breaking tasks into smaller chunks, and using planning tools, to enhance their productivity and reduce the feeling of being swamped by workload. These strategies helped them approach tasks systematically and maintain a better work-life balance.

VII. **Utilizing Academic Resources:** Leveraging available academic resources, such as tutoring, study groups, or online learning platforms, enabled students to better comprehend complex subjects and receive support from peers or educators. This approach increased their confidence in handling academic challenges.

VIII. **Engaging in Hobbies:** Pursuing hobbies and interests outside of academics provided an avenue for students to recharge mentally. Whether it was playing a musical instrument, cooking, or engaging in a hobby they were passionate about, these activities offered a break from stressors and contributed to their overall well-being.

IX. **Limiting Technology Use:** Some students recognized the need to disconnect from digital devices and social media to reduce stress. They acknowledged that excessive screen time could contribute to feelings of comparison, information overload, and decreased focus, and therefore consciously limited their technology use.

X.   **Setting Realistic Expectations:** By setting attainable goals and manageable expectations for themselves, students prevented undue pressure and self-imposed stress. Adjusting their outlook allowed them to maintain a healthier perspective on their academic and personal pursuits.

In conclusion, the methods of coping employed by the adolescent students showcased their capacity for resilience and adaptive strategies to manage the complexities of academic and personal life. By drawing upon a combination of social support, physical activities, mindfulness, routine, creative expression, time management, and other coping mechanisms, these students demonstrated their ability to navigate challenges while maintaining their well-being. These findings underscore the importance of equipping students with a diverse toolkit of coping strategies to effectively manage the stressors that arise during their academic journey.

3. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings shed light on the enormous impact that post-pandemic academic stress has on the mental health of students in their teenage years. The shift towards online education, along with the obstacles that come along with it, has brought a fresh perspective to the existing academic pressures. It is absolutely necessary for educational institutions to acknowledge these stressors and put into place support mechanisms in order to reduce the detrimental effects that these stressors have on mental well-being.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of taking a holistic approach to education that takes into account both the academic and mental health elements of students. The provision of resources for the management of stress, the

offering of emotional support, and the development of resiliency in adolescents should be a primary concern for schools and teachers. Alterations to the policies that are in place at the institution level, such as those that encourage flexibility and provide mental health services, could also contribute to the reduction of the stress that is associated with academic work.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

Adolescent students are facing new problems as a result of the post-pandemic academic climate, which is having an impact on both their levels of academic stress and their mental health. This study highlights how important it is to address these difficulties through the implementation of focused interventions and support systems, which will ultimately lead to the creation of a healthier and more productive learning environment.

The research has some flaws, such as the fact that it relied on self-report data and may have had some response biases. In the future, studies may use longitudinal designs to track the changes in academic stress and mental health over a prolonged period of time. In addition, qualitative research could go into greater depth into the individual experiences and coping strategies being investigated.

This research makes a contribution to our understanding of the changing educational landscape and the ways in which it affects the well-being of students by conducting in-depth research on the relationship between post-pandemic academic stress and the mental health of adolescents.

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