

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ACADEMIC STRESS WITH AGGRESSION, DEPRESSION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN IRAN

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the relationship of academic stress with aggression, depression and academic performance of college students. Using a random sampling technique, 60 students consist of boys and girls were selected as students having academic stress. The scale for assessing academic stress (Sinha, Sharma and Mahendra, 2001); the Buss-Perry aggression questionnaire (1992); and Beck depression inventory were used for collecting the data. The Pearson's coefficient of correlation showed that academic stress has a simple significant correlation with aggression ($r=.54$), depression ($r=.49$) and academic performance ($r=-.44$) ($p<.1..1$). Further, the analysis of the study shows that academic stress, aggression and depression are able to explain 68% of the variance of academic performance. Also, results show that boys and girls are different in terms of aggression and depression.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Aggression, Depression and Academic Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is any situation that evokes negative thoughts and feelings in a person. The same situation is not evocative or stressful for all people, and all people do not experience the same negative thoughts and feelings when stressed. One model that is useful in understanding stress among students is person–environment model. According to one variation of this model, stressful events can be appraised by an individual as “challenging” or “threatening” (Lazarus 1966). When students appraise their education as a challenge, stress can bring them a sense of competence and an increased capacity to learn. When education is seen as a threat, however, stress can elicit feelings of helplessness and a foreboding sense of loss.

A critical issue concerning stress among students is its effect on learning. The (Yerkes-Dodson Law, 1908; cited in Whitman, 1985) postulates that individuals under low and high stress learn the least and laboratory tests support the notion that excessive stress is harmful to students' performance.

Mechanisms explain why students perform badly under stress include “hyper vigilance” (excessive alertness to a

stressful situation resulting in panic—for example, over studying for an exam) and “premature closure” (quickly choosing a solution to end a stressful situation—for example, rushing through an exam (Whitman, 1985).

Stress is associated with impairment of health and the negative emotional experiences associated with stress are detrimental to quality of life and sense of well being (Sinha, 2000). Out of number of stress faced by adolescents and young adults, academic stress emerges as significant mental health problem in recent years (Rangaswamy, 1995). It has been estimated that 10% to 30% students experience academic related stress that affects their academic performance (Johnson, 1979), psychological adjustment along with their overall emotional and physical well being. Information load, high expectations, academic burden or pressure, unrealistic ambitions, limited opportunities, high competitiveness are some of the important source of stress which creates tension, fear, and anxiety. Poor academic performance, diminished popularity, depression, attention difficulties, somatic complaints, substance abuse are commonly observed problems among the victims of academic

stress without being aware of means to cope with them (Sinha, 2000).

Academic stress is a significant source of stress for many students (Hashim, 2003), covering not only examinations but also other academically related stressors such as fear of logging behind in the homework, writing assignment, working on individual and group projects, time pressure, lack of financial support, concern about academic ability, scheduling classes and required motivation to study (Tyrrel, 1992). For many students, the pursuit of higher education is a time of transition marked by a set of demands germane to the setting. Academic stress is the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual. If a student is unable to cope effectively with academic stress, then serious psycho-social-emotional health consequences may result (Scott, 2008). Some academic stress is normal for students, new stressors may arise because of exposure to new educational concepts for the first time on their life (such as mass media, internet, computer and so on), adjusting to new social setting (for example; change in medium of instruction, changing of residence, migration, peers pressure and shifting from one school to another one) and taking on a larger workload. Too much academic stress can contribute to depression, anxiety and physical illness (including headache, stomach ulcer, urine repetition) which can in turn negatively affect academic performance (Dedejn, 2008).

MacGeorge et al (2009) in their study shows that academic stress is associated with a variety of negative health outcomes such as depression, anxiety and physical illness. They examined the capacity of supportive communication received from friends and family (emotional and informational) to buffer the influence of academic stress on health. Results indicated that the association between academic stress, depression decreased as instrumental support increased. Further, lack of emotional support was negatively associated with depression across the levels of academic stress.

A study of Smith, Kenneth and Sinclair (1998) found that

31% of 12 year and 25% of 11 year old students are reporting symptoms of anxiety, depression and, or stress which fall outside the normal range. Significantly more females than males report these symptoms. Also, results showed that there correlation between stress and depression ($r = .59, p < .05$), stress and anxiety ($r = .67, p < .05$) (in 11 year students). Also in 12 year student results showed that there are correlations between stress and depression ($r = .70, p < .01$), stress and anxiety ($r = .64, p < .01$).

Struthers, Perry and Menec (2000) found that stress was negatively related to academic performance among school children.

Charles (1980) in his study on Basic determination of Academic Achievement showed that the cognitive profile is a basic determinant of an individual's level of academic achievement and an accurately identify specific learning deficits significantly contributing to low academic achievement.

Hinshow (1992) showed that conduct problems (aggression, hostility) affect academic achievement. Aggression and other externalizing behaviors directly affect engagement and learning. For example, children who are aggressive may spend relatively more time misbehaving or disciplined, reducing the amount of time they have to spend engaged in academic work.

Need of the study

Unhappiness at school can be caused by a host of factors such as failure to live up to parental expectations, especially if the parents, consider the child's lack of achievement at school to be due to lack of ambition or applications, believe that they have a little control over their academic success, presence of severe discipline at home as a force to hard study, comparison of the student to his peers from the parents, spending much time for computer games and internet and no enough time for doing homework and study, presence of rigid, violent and strict teachers in schools, That, in turn can be culminate to severe stress, depression, poor academic performance and also drop out. The symptoms of depression begins as the lack of energy, unable to making relationship at

home, refuse of social communications, school truancy and abstain of schooling (Gelder et al,1991). Thus identifying students experience with these variables and addressing these variables in practical setting may help students alleviate their experience of academic related stress and have a less stressful and possibly more fulfilling school career (kimberly & Smith, 2009).

Methodology

Objectives

- To study the relationship between academic stress and aggression.
- To study the relationship between academic stress and depression.
- To study the relationship between academic stress and academic performance.
- To study the simple and multiple relationships among academic stress, aggression and depression with academic performance.
- To comparison of academic stress, aggression, depression and academic performance between the girl and boy students.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between academic stress and aggression.
- There is a significant relationship between academic stress and depression.
- There is a significant relationship between academic stress and academic performance.
- There are multiple relationships among academic stress, aggression and depression with academic performance.
- The girl and boy students are different from the point of academic stress, aggression, depression and academic performance.

Participants

Using a random sampling technique, students in Azad university of Behbahan (in Iran) including boys and girls who had academic stress, selected with distribution of demographic variable like chronological age, and sex. 60 students consists of 30 girls and 30 boys who had high

score in academic stress scale (mean score is 5.06), were selected as samples for the present study.

Procedure

The design of the present study is an ex-post facto design with the following procedure.

- Contacting and obtaining permission from the institution.
- Screening the students for academic stress, depression and aggression using the research tools in the counseling centers.
- Selection of samples for research based on high score on academic stress.
- Administer research tools on the selected samples.
- Obtaining the marks of selected student from the concerned institute.
- After the data Collection, the analyses of data have done by using the appropriate statistical methods.

Instruments

Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS)

A 30-item self-report measure will be used for assess all possible major indicator of academic stress in terms of their presence or absence. This scale is made by Sinha, Sharma and Mahendra (2001) on a random sample of 400 (Male 200, Female 200) school student. SAAS measures five independent factors that are five components of academic stress indicating expression of academic stress through different channels: cognitive, affective, physical, social, interpersonal and motivational. All the items under each factor have fairly high loading ranging from 0.60 to 0.85. The subject has to select one out of two alternative responses (yes and no) for each item of the seal.

The test- re-test reliability of SAAS over the period of one month is 0.88 and split-half reliability is 0.75 indicating adequate reliability of the scale. Internal consistency of the scale is also adequate being in a range of 0.30 and 0.81.

When the pattern of distribution of SAAS scores of all the subjects as analyzed, the mean score was 5.06 with standard deviation of 2.78.

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)

Developed by Beck et al in (1961) and reviewed several times since then. BDI is a 21-item self report measure to identify presence of severity of different symptoms of depression it is widely used tool with well proven psychometric properties reliability: Test-retest reliability has been studied in the case of 38 patients who were given the BDI on two occasions. It was discovered that the changes in BDI scores tended to parallel changes in the clinical reading of the depth of depression, indicating a consistent relationship between BDI scores and patient's clinical state. The reliability figures here were above .90. Internal consistency studies demonstrate a correlation coefficient of .86 for the test items, and the spearman-brown correlation for the reliability of the BDI yielded a coefficient of .93. Content validity would seem to be quite high since the BDI appears to evaluate well a wide variety of symptoms and attitudes, associated with depression. One study addressing concurrent validity demonstrated a correlation of .77 between the inventory and psychiatric rating using university students as subjects. Beck reports similar studies in which coefficient of 0.65 and 0.67 were obtained in comparing results of the BDI with psychiatric ratings of patients (Linda, 1982).

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire

The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ; Buss & Perry, 1992) represents a revision of the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory (BDHI), including revisions of the response format and item content to improve clarity. Although, as with the Buss-Durkee scale, items for a 6 prior subscales were initially included in this measure, item-level factor analyses across three samples confirmed the presence of only 4 factors, involving Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger, and Hostility. Items which were included in a planned Resentment subscale appeared to load with Hostility (confirming the relationship between Suspicion and Resentment seen in the original Buss-Durkee), and the items from a planned Indirect Aggression subscale appeared to be distributed across the other factors. 29-items, 5-point scale from 1 (extremely uncharacteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristic of me).

Internal consistency for total score is ranged from .72 to .89. Retest reliability for the BPAQ over nine weeks is satisfactory (correlations ranged from .72 to .80).

Construct validity for the Buss-Perry scale is supported, to some extent, by their relative associations with other self-report measures of personality traits.

Results and Discussion

To assess the simple relationships between the variables the Pearson's coefficient of correlation were used.

Hypotheses 1

The coefficient of correlation between academic stress and aggression in total sample was (.54) that is statistically significant ($p < .01$; $N=60$). Further, results show that the coefficient of correlation between academic stress and aggression in the girls ($r=.56$; $n=30$; $p < .01$) and in the boys ($r=.51$; $n=30$; $p < .01$) that are significant (Table 1).

Hypotheses 2

The coefficient of correlation between academic stress and depression in total sample ($r=.49$; $N=60$; $p < .01$), in girls ($r=.61$; $n=30$; $p < .01$), and in boys ($r=.38$; $n=30$; $p < .05$) which are statistically significant.

Hypotheses 3

Results showed a negative significant correlation between academic stress and academic performance in total sample ($r=-.44$; $N=60$; $p < .01$); in girls ($r=-.845$; $n=30$; $p < .01$); and in boys ($r=.40$; $n=30$; $p < .01$). This means that increased stress can lead to poor academic achievement.

Hypotheses 4

Multiple coefficients of correlation were used for the assessment of this hypothesis. In this way, variables such as academic stress, aggression and depression as predictor

Variables	Academic stress			Aggression			Depression			Academic performance		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Academic stress	1	1	1	.51	.56	.54	.38	.61	.49	-.40	-.45	-.44
Aggression	.51	.56	.54	1	1	1	.84	.82	.84	-.67	-.84	-.73
Depression	.38	.61	.49	.84	.82	.84	1	1	1	-.71	-.82	-.76
Academic performance	-.40	-.45	-.44	-.67	-.84	-.73	-.71	-.82	-.76	1	1	1

Table 1. Coefficient of Correlations Between the Variables

Enter model groups	Multiple coefficient of correlation	R- Square	Adjusted R-Square	Standard error of estimation
female	.88	.77	.74	.73
male	.73	.53	.47	1.10
total	.82	.68	.66	.98

Table 2. Multiple Coefficient of Correlation

variables and academic performance as a criterion variable were entered with the enter method into regression equation. The multiple coefficient of correlation between the variables in total sample ($R = .82$) and R-Square to explanation of variance of academic performance was ($R^2 = .68$) that implies 68 percent of variance of academic performance is able to be explained on the basis of predictor variables.

To determining the significance of R-Square analyze of variance were used. Since the proportion of observed F (39.38) with the degree of freedom (3, 56) is more than its critical value, the R-Square and sum up the regression is statistically significant ($p < .01$). Further, results show that there is a multiple correlation between the academic stress, aggression, depression and academic performance in girls ($R = .88$; $R^2 = .77$; DF : 3, 26; $F = 28.73$; $p < .01$), and boy student ($R = .73$; $R^2 = .53$; DF : 3, 26; $F = 11.77$; $p < .01$) (Table 3).

Hypothesis 5

To assessment of differences among the variables in two groups independent t-test were used. Results showed that two groups are different in terms of aggression ($t = 3.45$; $df.58$; $p < .01$) and depression ($t = 3.23$; $df.58$; $p < .01$).

Further, for more confidence, multivariate analysis of variance were obtained findings like t-test.

Conclusion

Sex	Model	Sum of squares	DF	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Female	regression	46.03	3	15.34	28.73	$P < .01$
	residual	13.88	26	.534		
	total	59.92	29			
Male	regression	35.33	3	11.77	9.70	$P < .01$
	residual	31.57	26	1.214		
	total	66.90	29			
Total	regression	113.52	3	37.38	39.38	$P < .01$
	residual	53.81	56	.961		
	total	167.33	59			

Table 3. Analysis of Variance

In present study the relationship of academic stress with aggression, depression and academic performance has were investigated. The results of this study are discussed in terms of two axis: (1) the simple and multiple correlations among the variables. (2) The comparison of variables between the boys and girls.

Axis 1

The pearson's coefficient of correlation showed that academic stress has a simple significant correlation to aggression, depression and academic performance. Further, the analyses of regression indicate that academic stress, aggression and depression have a multiple correlation with academic performance. These findings are conforming previous studies for example; Johnson, 1979; Sinha, 2000; Smith, 1998; Struthers, 2000; and Hindshow, 1992.

An explanation to this finding is that the students having academic stress usually use poor coping strategies which impress negatively their coping ways to stressful situations. The negative experience of situation will frustrate the person to getting his goals and may in turn lead to low self-efficacy that appears as depression, feeling of helplessness, spells of anger and violence. The consequence of these states can lead to low academic performance and drop out. Also, chronic stress releases the high level of cortisol that affect negatively the

Variables	Gender	Statistics				
		Mean	SD	DF	t	sig
Academic stress	Female	18.03	4.93	58	.882	N.S
	Male	17	4.11			
Aggression	Female	32.63	12.50	58	3.45	$P < .01$
	Male	42.80	10.22			
Depression	Female	29.87	7.69	58	3.23	$P < .01$
	Male	22.70	9.85			
Academic performance	Female	14.67	1.88	58	1.40	N.S
	Male	14.06	1.44			

Table 4. Independent t-test

Variables	Sum of squares	Df hypothesis	Df error	Mean squares	F	sig
Academic stress	16.017	1	58	16.017	.78	N.S
Aggression	1550.72	1	58	1550.72	11.89	$.01$
Depression	770.72	1	58	770.72	10.45	$.002$
Academic performance	5.46	1	58	5.46	1.95	N.S

Table 5. Multivariate Analysis of Variance

hippocampus that is important in memory and learning. Therefore, high levels of cortisol can decrease the hippocampus cells and result in reduced memory and poor performance.

Axis 2

The independent t-test and also multivariate analyses of variance showed that there is a significant difference between boys and girls in terms of aggression and depression.

One of the greatest risk factors for depression is simply being female. Women are at least twice as likely to experience all types of depressed states as are men. One possible explanation is that while women in general receive more social support than do men, they are also expected to offer more support. Because support-giving often involves them in the problems and stressors experienced by others, women may on average experience more stress than men (Paykel, 1991).

Gender differences in aggression have frequently been reported, such that men and boys show more aggression than women and girls, especially in terms of physical aggression (Burtun, Hafetz & Henninger, 2007). The difference in male violence is usually ascribed to inherited biology—mainly to adult males having 20 times as much testosterone as females.

A number of theoretical papers and some empirical evidence suggest that men, in response to stress, tend to externalize their negative affect, including in terms of aggressive acting out, whereas women show more internalizing feelings (Ogle, Maier-Katkin, & Bernard, 1995; Burns & Katkin, 1993; Taylor et al., 2000). Women also tend to choose distraction rather than rumination as a way of cognitively dealing with anger-inducing situations, whereas men tend to ruminate more about their anger (Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Frodi, 1978). Research also indicates that female participants tend to inhibit the expressions of negative emotions (Tobin et al., 2000), and men are more likely to express these outwardly, particularly anger (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992).

In general, this study indicated that within the studied population, a lot of them showed academic related

stress. This can result from lack of resources for managing stress and anxiety to demanding homework and tasks related to the university. Some factors which led to academic stress were: too much assignment, parent's expectations, explanatory exams, time pressures especially during the exams, mixed classes (boys and girls) and fear of embarrassing and blaming in front of classmates, and climate conditions (the warm weather in the spring that makes students upset in the exam's sessions).

Weaknesses and suggestions

The correlational nature of this study precludes making any causal conclusions. Therefore, several explanations of these findings can be proposed. For example, there is the possibility that depressive symptoms and aggressive behaviors may cause academic stress. Alternatively, academic stress may cause depression and aggression, i.e. students who are performing poorly may, as a result of the accompanying stress, be less able to manage and control their aggressive behavior.

Another limitation is that this study is carried out on a small sample of a large population. The results should be considered in context, and not be generalized to other segments of population without further investigations. In particular, similar studies should be conducted on a greater sample.

Here are some practical suggestions

Universities should include stress management techniques (e.g. problem-solving training, time-management training) especially for freshmen students that emphasizes the use of cognitive components to deal with academic stress.

Also, students can practice the following methods to manage their stress.

Exercise: exercise has been proven to have a beneficial effect on a person's mental and physical state. For many people exercise is an extremely effective stress buster.

Assertiveness: don't say yes to everything. If you can't do something well, or if something is not your responsibility, try to seek ways of not agreeing to do them.

Nutrition: eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Make sure you

have a healthy and balanced diet.

Time: make sure you set aside some time each day for yourself. Use that time to organize your life, relax, and pursue your own interests.

Breathing: there some effective breathing techniques which will slow down your system and help you relax. You can engage in deep, regular breaths from your diaphragm for a minimum of 2 minutes when exposed to a stressor or before entering into a situation that induces stress.

Distraction: when exposed with stress you can focus on visual, auditory, or tactile stimulation to distract from a stressor or stress response.

Talk: talk to your family, friends, and teachers. Express your thoughts and worries.

Self-help books: can help you to manage and control your stress.

Relaxation techniques: Meditation and massage have been known to greatly help people with stress.

Thought stopping technique: We all have internal conversations with ourselves every day. We all have a critical inner voice that can nag us and make us anxious, feel inferior and stop us from getting what we want out of life. It can make us feel bad about ourselves and may take the form of doubting ourselves, for example: "I never get things right", "I will never pass my exams". Thoughts like these can cause much anxiety. You can either just says "STOP" to yourself, or you can learn replace them with reassuring and more helpful, realistic statement like "I won't fail if I work a little harder. It will be fine".

Seek professional help: If the stress is affecting the way you function, go and see a counselor or therapist. Heightened stress for prolonged periods can be bad for your physical and mental health.

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