

Exploring Perceived Parental Anxiety and Students' Academic Stress at the Secondary School Level in Gujrat: A Diagnostic Study

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Abstract

The current study covered the theme of parental anxiety and academic stress in high school students in Tehsil Gujrat. The levels, patterns, and intensity of their levels were analysed with the help of a quantitative diagnostic methodology. The population was all grade 10 students of the government high schools of District Jhelum, and 500 (250 boys and 250 girls) students were stratified randomly and selected among 20 schools. Parental anxiety and academic stress were measured with two self-constructed questionnaires on a five-point Likert scale. The two instruments were highly valid and reliable, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.921 and 0.901, respectively. The means of finding gender-based differences in response were the data analysis; the data analysis included descriptive statistics, analysis of class intervals, and t-tests. The results showed that most of the parents were found to have moderate to high anxiety, and most students were found to have high academic stress levels. The parents of female students were found to be more anxious than the parents of male students. However, there were no gender differences in student academic stress levels. The results indicate that parental anxiety is a key variable that characterizes the academic climate and may increase the stress level among the students. Schools should also consider creating parent counselling, student-parent-teacher workshops, and parent awareness programs.

Keywords: Parental Anxiety, Academic Stress, Secondary School Students, Diagnostic Study.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental process that influences the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of a person, and academic success is still one of the primary measures of student progress and their future opportunities. Academic success is not only an indicator of acquired knowledge, but also a measure of the capacity of students to use cognitive abilities, problem-solving, and mastered skills in real-life contexts (Al Mlhem, 2018). There is a consensus that the success of individuals not only depends on intellectual capacity but also on a host of psychological and environmental circumstances, such as stress and anxiety, parental support, and school culture (Fadda et al., 2015). Academic stress is considered to be one of the most pronounced obstacles to learning. It is usually described as the strain that students feel when they have greater educational expectations than they can manage. High levels of academic stress negatively affect students' wellbeing, emotional

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stability, and performance (Deb et al., 2015). In a similar way, academic stress that can be evident in testing and performance situations can interfere with memory, concentration, and decision-making. Although mild anxiety can at times act as motivation, in other cases, too much anxiety is closely associated with bad results such as poor academic achievement, burnout, and even dropping out (Pekrun et al., 2004).

Parents play an important role as some of the determinants of academic stress among students. Parental influence, demands, and emotional orientations have a strong influence on the school life of children. Research indicates that positive and nurturing parental engagement instills confidence and resilience in the student. However, in the case of overly anxious and controlling parents, the sense of pressure on the student may escalate to more academic stress. In case students think that their parents are too concerned about grades or future achievements, they might adopt these anxiety feelings, which lead to stress, lowered self-efficacy, and performance problems (Giota & Gustafsson, 2017).

It is especially topical in terms of Asian societies, where the success in school is commonly associated with honor in the family, future employment, and social promotion. Studies indicate that the parental expectations in Asian societies tend to be more rigid than in the Western environment and that they may induce high levels of stress in adolescents (Xu, 2022). Parents in Pakistan would also interpret education as a means of upward mobility, particularly due to low job opportunities and high competition. Parental stress and anxiety are therefore frequently passed onto the children, and an emotionally charged academic atmosphere is generated.

Students at the secondary school level undergo significant academic transitions as they get ready to board examinations, which has a significant effect on their higher education and career prospects. Students are especially vulnerable to academic stress because this stage is characterized by increased work, social changes, and increased expectations of parents and teachers (Shahid & Farhan, 2022). Students in the Gujrat district, in particular, as in much of Pakistan, have to contend with a dearth of educational resources, teacher-focused teaching, and high parental expectations, which further increases stress.

Although the relationship between parental anxiety and student academic stress has been explored in international literature, the empirical evidence in the Pakistani context is scarce. Limited diagnostic literature has been able to examine the role of the perception of parental anxiety by students in increasing stress levels. The comprehension of this linkage is essential in the formulation of context-specific interventions that would foster healthier parent-child academic relationships.

Thus, this paper attempts to investigate the connection between anticipated parental anxiety and academic stress among students in the secondary school in Gujrat. The study will help advance the theory and practice by diagnosing the degree to which students are influenced by their parents on their psychological experiences. Parents can use results to adopt supportive tactics and assist teachers to create stress-management interventions, and policymakers can understand the significance of responding to family-related stressors in school planning.

Statement of the Problem

A critical issue for us, our parents, and all in the world of education is academic achievement. The stress and anxiety of academic requirements, competitive examinations, and the pressure of parental expectations often put us (usually secondary school students) into high levels of stress and anxiety. A small dose of stress may encourage us to work harder, but an excess of it tends to disorient our focus, memory, and overall performance. Our parents are very influential in our

learning processes, and picking up on their anxiety makes a tremendous contribution to our stress levels. The Pakistani parents, especially in areas such as Gujrat, exert much pressure on parents to excel, and that only adds even more pressure, but very few studies have investigated this relationship at a closer distance. To design interventions that will reduce academic stress, it is important to get a grip on how students perceive parental anxiety. Hence, this research seeks to determine the relation between parental anxiety as perceived and how we feel in secondary school, in the hope that teachers, parents, and policymakers will have actual data to help promote healthier academic development.

Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study:

- a) Investigate levels of parental anxiety about the education of their children.
- b) Determine the degree of academic pressure among the students in secondary school.

Research Questions

- a) What is the level of anxiety among parents of secondary school students?
- b) What is the academic stress among students at the secondary school level?

Review of Literature

Students are the backbone and the life of the education system, and all academic hype is based on their learning and development. Parents, teachers, and friends influence us--but in the case of most of us, the parents are the big lever. We sketch our futures a lot of the time in terms of our parents' expectations. A Collection of studies has closely examined the impact that parental anxiety and the entire academic stress front have on our grades. The support of the teacher, the classroom atmosphere, and the level of education of our parents all play a role. The results are pretty obvious: anxiety and academic stress weigh us down (Kumaraswamy, 2013; Alsulami et al., 2018).

Stress is simply a combination of physical and psychological reactions to complex conditions. A good kick will lift performance when it is moderated, but when it persists, it will kill us. It is the parents who perceive schooling in Pakistan as a hustle in the long term and express much anxiety about our performance, increasing our stress levels in school (Farooq et al., 2011).

The worry about our future, concern for us, and care are where parental anxiety typically originates. When parents make the bar too high, those of us who tend to do well with stress become stressed, but when they have confidence in us and support us, that stress dissolves. Performance can be a sweet spot when the pressure is good, but when it goes overboard, it drives us towards low self-esteem, depression, and harmful levels of anxiety. The most significant cause of stress between us and our parents is exams (Fink, 2000).

Stress is either high or low, which determines the nervousness and work output. Stress-management strategies, in particular, when the parents are present, can ensure that we do not fall into these dangerous stress areas. Scholastic stress is associated with demands such as parent expectations, endless homework, and dreadful exams. It also disrupts our physical, emotional, and social well-being and is often associated with unhealthy eating, drug consumption, and poor grades (Ramachandiran & Dhanapal, 2018; Bennett & Holloway, 2017).

Parental expectations and the educational background of a family actually increase the academic pressure we experience to a great extent. Culture, the level of money, the education level, the level of employment of our parents, and how rich they are, among other things, all influence our level of anxiety and the amount of pressure they exert on us. The idea of academic stress is raised

whenever we perceive a disconnect between what we are required to do and how we believe that we can do it. Some studies indicate that parental anxiety is quite a widespread phenomenon and it compromises our mental well-being and performance (Pizzie & Kraemer, 2019; Stankovska et al., 2018).

We have varying levels of stress, depending on the year, our individualities, and our course of study. The first years are the hardest since we are still acclimated to life on campus (Aihie & Ohanaka, 2019), and seniors experience the pressure of determining what is expected of them in future jobs. There are gender differences everywhere - some studies indicate that girls receive more, others that the guys receive (it is difficult to narrow it down). Science or business students are more likely to experience pressure than humanities students (Deepa & Nambudiri, 2016; Reddy et al., 2018).

Parental stress can even improve our grades when it is just the right amount of it, but excessive stress works against us (Brook & Willoughby, 2015). A healthy environment, engaged parents, and a well-known routine will give us tools to overcome stress and learn to find solutions (Shadach & Ganor-Miller, 2013). Just a little stress and anxiety may motivate us to put more effort into work, but when it turns excessive, our mental well-being and academic performance will suffer (Zappala-Piemme et al., 2023). The stresses of academics emerge as massive workloads, exams, assignments, teacher and parental pressures, inadequate planning, and the kill-or-be-killed atmosphere on campus. Things like hunger, dishevelled sleep, irritability, stomachaches, or a fast heartbeat will be observable (Douma et al., 2011). The secret lies in the fact that it can be controlled through regular workouts, rest, and an effective study plan that will keep your body and mind in good shape (Krispenz et al., 2019).

Stress in academics disturbs our thinking, emotions, and even our physical beings. You will find you can hardly keep your eyes on what you are doing, you are fidgety, your hands wring, or you are chilled, and your heart beat rises. These symptoms may emerge concomitantly and nourish one another as long as the pressure continues to accumulate. Under the impact of stress, you may fall into depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and even a drop in your grades (Dhull & Kumari, 2015).

Research Methodology

In this research, a quantitative diagnostic design was employed in order to explore the nature of parental anxiety and academic stress among secondary school students. The concept was to evaluate and quantify the intensity of those concerns in a systematic way, identify any patterns, and provide us with hard, objective information on the level of prevalence of these concerns and their implications on academic well-being. The sample consisted of all Grade 10 students in Government High Schools in the District of Jhelum. We used a two-stage, disproportional stratified random sample; we divided schools into girls' and boys' groups and selected 10 schools randomly in each group, i.e., 20 schools in total. We then selected 25 students at random in each of those schools, resulting in a total sample of 500 students; 250 boys and 250 girls who supplied the data.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed two questionnaires to measure parental anxiety and the academic stress of students. The statements incorporated in the survey of students were ten in number, and they tested the impact of academic pressure on grades, mental well-being, learning, social interaction, critical thinking, learning preferences, communication with teachers, and involvement in extracurricular activities. The parent survey was more extensive, including 15 items divided into

five themes, such as concerns of future failure, social pressure, comparing with peer performance, physical health concerns, and board exam stress, on a five-point Likert scale. Fourteen experts in education and psychology were used to check validity, and the results were content validity index (CVI) scores of 0.60 in the parental anxiety tool and 0.62 in the student stress tool, both of which exceed the 0.51 level (Shultz & Whitney, 2005)—internal consistency. Reliability was tested through a pilot study with a total of 50 students and 50 parents and generated Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.921 on the parental anxiety measure and 0.901 on the academic stress measure (Landau & Everitt, 2004).

Data Analysis

Various statistical methods were used in addressing the objectives of the study. Parental anxiety levels and stresses caused by the academic performance of the students were examined by creating equal intervals of classes according to the upper and lower limits of the scores. Also, the t-test was used to compare the differences in academic stress between boys and girls in order to present a statistical foundation for the comparison of gender-based differences in stress levels.

Table 1: Levels of Parental Anxiety of Parents of Students at Secondary Level

Scores Ranges	Description	Mean	Parent's Scores (Percentage)
56-75	High level	4.00	234 (46.75)
35-55	Moderate level	3.30	252 (50.5)
15-34	Low level	2.16	14 (2.75)

The analysis shows that parental anxiety in parents of students in secondary level is majorly moderate to high. Moderate anxiety (50.5) and high anxiety (46.75) were reported by about half and a significant percentage of the parents respectively. Very low anxiety was only seen in a low percentage (2.75%). This implies that a large majority of the parents are greatly worried about the academic results and future of their children that can affect the experience and stress levels of the students themselves.

Table 2: Factor wise Descriptive Statistics of Parental Anxiety of Parents of Students at Secondary Level

Factors	N	Mean	S.D
Future Failure	500	3.67	0.82
Future Social Pressure	500	3.74	0.76
Sub-standard Performance among peer group	500	3.80	0.78
Physical health	500	3.17	0.86
Board Exams	500	3.65	0.63
Overall Parental Anxiety	500	3.58	0.53

Factor-wise analysis of parental anxiety indicates that parents are the most anxious about their children not achieving as well as their peers (mean = 3.80) and next in concern is the parental anxiety pertaining to future social pressure (mean = 3.74) and parental anxiety pertaining to future failure (mean = 3.67). The anxiety in terms of board exams (mean = 3.65) also indicates significant concerns, and anxiety in terms of physical health (mean = 3.17) is comparatively minor. In general, the level of parental anxiety concerning all factors is quite moderate (mean = 3.58, SD = 0.53):

parents are concerned about the academic and social success of their children, which may indirectly cause academic stress in students.

Table 3: Level of academic stress among students at secondary level

Scores Ranges	Description	Mean	Student's Scores (Percentage)
38-51	High level	2.00	299 (59.75)
24-37	Moderate level	3.17	184 (36.75)
10-23	Low level	4.17	17 (3.5)

The assessment of the academic stress of students reveals that most students (59.75) feel a high level of stress and the mean score is 2.00. The proportion of students with moderate academic stress is 36.75% (mean = 3.17) and a low level of academic stress (3.5% mean = 4.17). These results indicate that the problem of academic stress is widespread among students of secondary stages, and most of them have a high level of pressure which may affect their learning, psychological condition, and well-being.

Table 4: Difference Between Parental Anxiety Level of Parents of Girls' and Boys' Students at Secondary Level

	Male (N=250)		Female (N=250)		M.D	t-test	p-value
	M	S.D	M	S.D			
Future Failure	3.66	0.872	3.67	0.76	-0.01	-.142	.887
Future Social Pressure	3.73	0.868	3.76	0.64	-0.03	-.502	.616
Sub-standard Performance among peer group	3.80	0.847	3.80	0.71	0.00	-.021	.983
Physical health	2.58	0.503	3.75	0.73	-1.17	-13.71	.000**
Board Exams	3.20	0.499	3.83	0.58	-0.63	-11.41	.000**
Overall Parental Anxiety	3.39	0.527	3.76	0.45	-0.37	-7.534	.000**

The t-test makes it clear that there is a significant difference in the overall parental anxiety of parents of boys and girls at the secondary level ($t = -7.534$, $p = .000$). In particular, the level of anxiety about physical health ($t = -13.71$, $p = .000$) and board exams ($t = -11.41$, $p = .000$) were reported to be significantly higher among parents of girls than of boys. Nonetheless, there were no major differences in anxiety about future failure between parents of boys and girls ($t = -.142$, $p = .887$), future social pressure ($t = -.502$, $p = .616$), and sub-standard performance among peers ($t = -.021$, $p = .983$). These data indicate that some factors regarding parental anxiety share are common across genders, though health and academic success are the issues that parents of girls are more worried about.

Table 5: Difference between girls and boys academic stress at secondary level

	Male (N=250)		Female (N=250)		M.D	t-test	p-value
	M	S.D	M	S.D			
Students' Academic Stress	3.77	0.67	3.77	0.65	0.00	-0.045	0.964

T-test outcomes show that the academic stress of boys and girls in the secondary level is not significantly different ($t = -0.045$, $p = 0.964$). Both male and female students indicated that there is no difference in the degree of academic stress (Mean = 3.77), indicating that gender does not affect the overall academic stress of the students in this research.

Findings

The researchers identified that the majority of parents of high school pupils were moderately to highly anxious about the education of their secondary school pupils. This helps family systems theory, explaining the transmission of parental stress to children, and social comparison theory, since a large portion of this anxiety was due to peer performance, social pressure, and the fear of failure in the future. Academic stress, as reported by students themselves, was mainly high, which is consistent with the transactional model of stress and coping, where high demands exceed resources needed to cope with them. Moreover, it is also the result of the Yerkes-Dodson law because there was an extreme range of the strain exerted, which risked poor academic performance and health. Girls and boys also differed on parents' anxiety, with girls having a more anxiety-provoking parent who was concerned about health and board exams. This is combined with the cultural expectancy theory, which is culture-based and protects the interests of women learners. Nonetheless, both boys and girls noted equal levels of stress, which aligns with the equity theory that indicates that when academic demands are equal, the level of stress is also equal between boys and girls.

Discussion

This study shows that the parental anxiety of parents of secondary school students in Tehsil Gujrat is moderate to high as per the performance and future of their children. This is in line with earlier studies, which have indicated that parental anxiety could adversely affect the academic motivation of students and their general well-being (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Likewise, the students participating in the research indicated that they experienced significant academic stress, which can be aligned with the research findings that academic stress can have a negative impact on mental health, cognitive, and social adaptation (Shah et al., 2021). There were gender variations in parental anxiety that were higher among the parents of female students, and no significant gender variations in student academic stress. This confirms previous research that parents tend to have different concerns depending on the gender of the child, although, according to students, academic stress may be similar between the genders (Ahmad & Khan, 2022). Altogether, these findings demonstrate that it is necessary to treat parental anxiety and student stress with the help of supportive interventions to improve academic experiences and mental health outcomes of students.

Conclusion

It concludes that parental anxiety is an issue that is prevalent within families of secondary school students, and the majority of parents are moderately to highly concerned about the education of their children. Peer comparisons, social pressure, and the fear of future failure were associated with such anxiety, whereas the fear of physical health was not so significant. It also concluded that academic stress is a common problem among students, and most of them report having a high level of stress irrespective of sex. Even though there was no gender difference in the stress levels of students, parents of women students were more worried about their health and performance in board exams. Overall, the findings suggest that two primary problems that need to be minimized

to promote healthy learning conditions are parental anxiety and academic stress among the learners.

Recommendations

To lower the anxiety, parents should be organized in schools to undertake workshops and seminars as a way of educating them on realistic academic expectations and healthy ways of supporting their children. Introduce counselling, mindfulness, and stress-relieving strategies to enable the students to manage academic stress. Because parents of girls had greater anxiety, schools should offer exceptional support and instructions to female students and their parents to clarify particular issues. Facilitate frequent communication and collaboration between the teachers and parents to trace the academic performance of the students, decrease panic among parents, and ensure a balanced learning process.

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