

## **Addressing the Mounting Academic Pressures of Indian Students: The Need of the Hour**

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**ABSTRACT:** The modern education landscape has become increasingly competitive, with students facing immense pressure to excel academically. The pursuit of mastery in subjects and securing coveted spots in top courses has created a culture of stress and anxiety. Educational institutions, once havens for joyful learning, have transformed into breeding grounds for pressure and negativity. The emphasis on achieving all-India ranks and securing top positions has led to a high-stakes environment where the cost of failure can be overwhelming. Academic pressure, fueled by parental expectations, educational institutions, and societal demands, has become a significant concern.

This article explores the multifaceted nature of academic pressure, its causes, and its far-reaching effects on students' physical and mental well-being, as well as their social connections. By examining the root causes and consequences of academic pressure, we can identify effective strategies to mitigate its impact and promote a healthier learning environment. Key areas of focus understand academic pressure and its causes, examining the effects of academic pressure on students' physical and mental health, investigating the impact of academic pressure on social connections and identifying effective coping strategies to deal with academic pressure. By shedding light on the complex issue of academic pressure, this article aims to spark a conversation about the need for a more balanced and supportive approach to education.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's competitive social environment, academic performance and excellence have become the ultimate benchmarks of success. Students in India, in particular, face immense pressure to excel, starting from the beginning of the academic year in June. The daily grind of attending educational institutions, managing heavy bags filled with study materials, and juggling compulsory extra-curricular activities, along with extra coaching for competitive exams, takes a toll on their physical and mental energy. The rise of newer streams of courses has led to an unconscious competition among students to secure coveted spots, master subjects, and emerge successfully. The ability to meet the rising competition has become a crucial factor in judging a student's performance, beyond just academic achievements. Unfortunately, many educational institutions have transformed into stress-inducing environments, exacerbating anxiety and negative attitudes.

The proliferation of career-oriented courses and increasing parental awareness about educational options has created a "Perform or Perish" condition for children. Even illiterate parents and middle-class families are now aware of top-ranked institutes and competitive exams like IIT, IIM, JEE, and NEET, and expect their children to succeed against all odds. The pressure to succeed is relentless, with students expected to work tirelessly from dawn till dusk to achieve reasonable success. However, the reality is that not everyone can win, and failure to meet expectations can lead to burnout, depression, and even suicidal ideation. The pursuit of all-India ranks and top positions is important, but at what cost? The cost of failure can be far higher than the potential benefits of success. In a densely populated country like India, success rarely comes easily, and hard work is often not enough.

This article aims to understand the causes of academic pressure, its effects on students, and offer measures to cope with these pressures. By understanding the root causes and consequences of academic pressure, we can work towards creating a more supportive and balanced educational environment.

Key Concepts are Academic performance, rising competition, Parental pressures, Perform or perish, Parent/teacher-student conflict and Coping strategies. By exploring these concepts, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex issue of academic pressure and work towards finding solutions to mitigate its impact.

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### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Kamryn Talley (2024)** described that academic pressure leads to emotional changes which in turn will result in mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression and burnout. It empowers educators to promote a safe learning environment where students do not feel pressure to be perfect but feel comfortable to make mistakes and grow.

**Michael Vallejo (2023)** concluded that academic pressure considerably affects adolescents' problem behavior leading to parent-child conflict while also affecting subjective well-being. This may lead to deviant behavior such as disruptions in sleep cycles, experimenting with sexual activity and substance use. Too much academic pressure may also lead to detrimental effects on students' relationships developing a highly competitive nature and causing friction with peers. Isolating oneself to strive for academic excellence may end in loneliness.

**Thomas Steare (2023)** academic pressure is the common risk factor that has the potential to create adolescent mental health issues. If this association is causal, modifying academic pressure through interventions at an individual, school or policy-level will reduce the increasing incidences of an adolescent's mental health problems, and have wide health and social benefits.

**Editorial, The Lancet (2023)** divulged that academic pressure can include "fear of failure, concerns about the future, chronic stress about workload and exams, worries about parental expectations, and competition with peers for grades".

**Sargunjit Kaur (2018)** felt that academic pressure can derive from a desire for perfection, parental pressure, sports commitments or a heavy class load. Nervous breakdowns, panic attacks, burnouts and depression are on the rise among teens and young adults. No matter the goals or situations, just about everyone struggles with a tremendous amount of stress and pressure.

**Jerrell C. Cassady (2002)** found that cognitive explanations of performance deficits encountered by students with increased levels of test anxiety. It is particularly appearing that students may experience cognitive interference while preparing for examinations, taking examinations, or both. Any interference during preparation by the students may result in limiting the ability to retrieve key information during the test.

#### **What is academic pressure?**

Academic pressure refers to the stress and burden that students experience due to expectations from parents, educational institutions, and society. It affects their emotional and mental well-being, causing anxiety, tension, and discomfort. These pressures often originate at a young age and can persist throughout a student's academic life. Parents and educators significantly contribute to academic pressures by emphasizing Achieving high grades (100% marks), Securing top ranks, Preparing for competitive exams through parallel coaching, Gaining admission to prestigious educational institutions, Succeeding in placement drives and Winning competitions. The constant anticipation and push for the next milestone can create an overwhelming environment for students. This pressure can have long-lasting effects on their mental health and overall well-being.

#### **What are the symptoms of a student under academic pressures?**

Academic pressure can be a silent struggle, often going unnoticed until it starts to affect a student's well-being. The symptoms can manifest in various ways, making it essential for parents, educators, and peers to be aware of the signs. Here are some common symptoms of academic pressure:

##### **Behavioral Symptoms**

- Increased competitiveness
- Overemphasis on grades
- Poor tolerance
- Deviant behaviors
- Angry outbursts for small incidents
- Constant refusal to socialize
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities

##### **Physical Symptoms**

- Disturbed appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Using stimulants like caffeine or cigarettes

##### **Emotional Symptoms**

- Experiencing anxiety
- Psychological aggression

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- Inadequate relaxation
- Constant stress and tension

### Academic Symptoms

- Constant reading and working
- Obsessive focus on academic performance

By recognizing these symptoms, we can provide support and help students manage academic pressure, promoting a healthier and more balanced approach to education.

### What causes academic pressures?

Academic pressures arise from a combination of factors, including parental expectations, educational system demands, and personal aspirations. Some key reasons contributing to academic pressures include:

#### External Factors

- Parental pressure: High expectations and constant pushing to excel
- Educational system demands: Focus on exams, marks, and ranks rather than overall development
- Pressure from relatives and social environment: Emphasis on achieving success and meeting expectations
- External environmental factors: Admission into top institutions, career prospects, and skill development

#### Personal Factors

- Desire for perfection
- Obsession with ranks, grades, and medals
- Poor time management and organization
- Procrastination
- Self-imposed pressure: Family culture emphasizing performance

#### Societal Factors

- Increased competition
- Social comparisons: Comparing oneself to peers
- Changing performance standards
- Textbook-oriented education and memorization
- Regular tests, assessments, and exams
- Other Factors
- Distractions: Cricket, cinema, social media, and festivals
- Not feeling prepared for academic demands

These factors can interact with each other, creating a complex web of pressures that affect students' academic experiences and well-being.

### What are the effects of academic pressures?

While a moderate level of academic pressure can be beneficial for students, excessive pressure can have detrimental effects on their physical and mental health, as well as their social connections.

#### Physical Effects

- Loss of appetite
- Frequent headaches
- Poor sleep quality
- Reduced physical activity
- Fatigue
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Non-suicidal self-harm
- Non-communicable diseases

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### Mental Effects

- Higher levels of anxiety
- Depression
- Self-doubt about intelligence
- Fear of making mistakes
- Fear of assessment and poor rank
- Substance use
- Increased stress levels
- Burnout
- Depersonalization leading to poor concentration
- Suicidal ideation

### Social Effects

- Parent-child conflict
- Violation of disciplinary norms
- Strained relationships with outsiders
- Disruptions in relationships with teachers
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Arrogant behavior due to excessive competitiveness
- Increased risk of school/college dropout
- Friction with friends and relatives
- Substance addiction

These effects highlight the need for a balanced approach to education, prioritizing students' overall well-being and providing support to manage academic pressures.

### Strategies for dealing with Academic Pressure:

Academic pressure is a significant concern that can have negative effects on students' well-being. To address this, students, parents, and teachers can use the following strategies:

#### For Students

1. Form a study group to improve in weak areas
2. Study in alternative environments, like libraries, to avoid distractions
3. Prioritize a balance between mental health and academic accomplishments
4. Plan ahead for assignments and projects to avoid last-minute stress
5. Avoid comparing yourself to peers
6. Regularly check your mental and physical health to combat stress
7. Maintain healthy habits, including good sleep, eating, and exercise routines
8. Balance academics with leisure activities, rest, and relaxation
9. Remember that good health and happiness are more important than academic achievement
10. Avoid cheating, as it can worsen the situation

#### For Parents and Teachers

1. Create a supportive classroom environment that accepts imperfection
2. Educate students on effective time management
3. Develop harmonious relationships with students
4. Foster strong, healthy relationships and offer psychological support
5. Promote students' strengths and positive attitudes
6. Remind students that education is just one aspect of success
7. Control emotions and use proper language when interacting with students

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8. Encourage humor and laughter to reduce stress

### Key Insights

Academic pressure can be managed with the right strategies and mindset. Clarity on goals and priorities can help reduce academic pressure. Students, parents, and teachers must work together to create a supportive environment. A student's mindset and willingness to manage pressure play a crucial role in their success.

The strategies outlined above can help minimize academic pressures, if not completely eradicate them. Parents and teachers play a crucial role in supporting students, but ultimately, it is the student's mindset and willingness that counts most in managing academic pressures. Success is subjective, and individuals have different definitions of achievement. While some may measure success by financial security or fame, others may prioritize happiness and personal growth. It's essential to recognize that not everyone can be ranked number one, and that's okay. As Ratan Tata aptly puts it, "None can destroy iron, but its own rust can. Likewise, none can destroy a person but his own mindset can." Having clarity on one's vision, priority, and mission is vital to achieving success and reducing academic pressures. Ama's quote, "When an eggshell is cracked from outside it is broken, when it is cracked from the inside it is reborn," highlights the importance of internal motivation and resilience in overcoming challenges. By adopting the right mindset and strategies, students can better navigate academic pressures and achieve their goals. By implementing these strategies, students can better manage academic pressure and achieve a healthier balance between academics and overall well-being.

### CONCLUSION

In today's complex social landscape, success is influenced by a multitude of factors, including education, skill sets, opportunities, and more. While academic excellence can certainly boost one's chances of success, it is not the sole determining factor. Other essential qualities such as courtesy, discipline, moral values, physical and mental well-being, family bonds, and tolerance also play a significant role in achieving a fulfilling life. The current education system often prioritizes academic achievement above all else, creating undue pressure on students. However, it's essential to recognize that life encompasses more than just competition and rankings. The experiences and memories forged during formative years are invaluable and cannot be replicated later in life. Rather than pushing students solely towards academic excellence, parents, teachers, and students themselves should strive for a more balanced approach. By acknowledging the importance of overall development and well-being, we can work towards creating a more supportive and nurturing environment for students to thrive. Ultimately, life is about living, learning, and growing, not just competing and being ranked. By shifting our focus towards a more holistic approach, we can benefit students and help them lead more fulfilling lives.

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