



Academic Stress and Emotional Exhaustion Among College Students

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Abstract: The current study investigated the relationship between academic stress and emotional exhaustion among undergraduate students using a quantitative, non-experimental correlational design. A total of 104 students participated in the study and 103 valid responses were included in the final analysis. The Academic Stress Scale (Rajendran & Kaliappan, 1991) and the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti, 1999) were administered to gather data. Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS. Reliability analysis showed high internal consistency for the Academic Stress Scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .968$) and acceptable reliability for the Emotional Exhaustion scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .784$). Descriptive results indicated moderate levels of academic stress and emotional exhaustion. Pearson's correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between academic stress and emotional exhaustion ($r = .604$, $p < .001$). The results indicate that higher levels of academic stress are associated with increased emotional exhaustion among undergraduate students.

Keywords: *Emotional Exhaustion, Academic Stress, College Students*

1. Introduction

College life is a crucial stage of development marked by academic challenges, personal growth, and growing independence. During this time, students must juggle various responsibilities, including their studies, social connections, and planning for their future careers. These pressures often lead to significant psychological stress, making academic stress one of the most common issues faced by university students worldwide.

Academic stress is the mental strain caused by academic demands such as heavy coursework, ongoing evaluations, high performance expectations, and competition. While a

moderate amount of stress can boost motivation and productivity, excessive and prolonged stress can harm students' emotional and psychological health. Continuous academic stress has been linked to negative effects like anxiety, tiredness, lower academic achievement, and burnout.

A major aspect of academic burnout is emotional exhaustion, which is a state of feeling emotionally drained due to long-term stress exposure. Students who suffer from emotional exhaustion often feel mentally worn out, physically tired, and disconnected from their studies. These symptoms can hinder focus, decrease motivation, and adversely affect both academic performance and overall well-being.

Research consistently shows a strong link between academic stress and emotional exhaustion in college students. High academic pressure significantly contributes to burnout symptoms, especially emotional exhaustion. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these issues by increasing academic demands, creating uncertainty, and disrupting learning environments.

The connection between academic stress and emotional exhaustion can be explained by stress-response theories, which propose that ongoing stress depletes a person's emotional resources over time. Consequently, students facing prolonged academic stress may become emotionally exhausted, resulting in less engagement, poorer academic results, and reduced psychological health. However, this relationship can also be affected by factors like coping methods, resilience, and social support.

Although there is extensive research on academic stress and burnout, many studies focus on specific groups such as medical or first-year students, which limits how broadly the findings apply. Additionally, differences in cultural and institutional settings emphasize the need for more research across diverse student populations. Therefore, this study aims to explore the link between academic stress and emotional exhaustion among college students to enhance understanding of student mental health and support the development of effective interventions.

2. Literature Review

Academic stress is increasingly recognized as an important factor influencing students' psychological well-being. It typically emerges from academic demands such as heavy coursework, frequent assessments, and high-performance expectations. Previous research has consistently shown that such pressures are closely linked with burnout and emotional exhaustion among university students (Trigueros et al., 2020; Madigan & Curran, 2021). When students are exposed to these stressors over a prolonged period, they may experience

psychological distress, reduced motivation, and difficulties in maintaining academic performance.

Emotional exhaustion, which is considered a central component of academic burnout, refers to a state in which individuals feel emotionally drained due to continuous academic pressure. Studies have found that students with higher levels of academic stress are more likely to report feelings of fatigue, disengagement, and reduced interest in their studies (March-Amengual et al., 2022; Ramos-Vera et al., 2025). This indicates that ongoing academic demands, when not balanced with effective coping strategies, can gradually deplete students' emotional resources.

In addition to academic demands, several psychosocial and contextual factors also contribute to students' stress levels. Research highlights that workload, time pressure, academic competition, and concerns about future career prospects play a significant role in increasing academic stress (Firman et al., 2025; Olson et al., 2025). At the same time, individual factors such as coping strategies, emotional regulation, and resilience influence how students respond to these stressors (Iuga & David, 2024; Gong et al., 2023).

Academic stress has also been associated with various negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and reduced engagement in academic activities. Emotional exhaustion, in particular, appears to act as an important link between academic stress and these adverse outcomes, often resulting in lower academic performance and decreased motivation (Madigan & Curran, 2021; Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2021).

Recent studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have reported a noticeable increase in academic stress among students. Disruptions in learning environments, uncertainty, and increased academic demands have further intensified emotional exhaustion, highlighting the importance of addressing academic stress as a key mental health concern (Ibda et al., 2023).

At the same time, research suggests that certain protective factors can help reduce the impact of academic stress. Social support, resilience, and effective coping strategies have been found to play a crucial role in preventing severe emotional exhaustion (Gong et al., 2023; Iuga & David, 2024). Students who are better able to regulate their emotions and access support systems are more likely to manage academic challenges successfully.

Overall, the existing literature provides strong evidence for a relationship between academic stress and emotional exhaustion among college students. However, many studies have focused on specific groups such as medical or first-year students, which limits the

generalizability of findings. Furthermore, differences in cultural and institutional contexts indicate the need for further research across diverse student populations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, non-experimental correlational research design to examine the relationship between academic stress and emotional exhaustion among college students. This design was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to analyze the association between variables without manipulating them.

3.2 Participants

A total of 104 college students participated in the study, of which 103 valid responses were included in the final analysis. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. The sample consisted of male and female students from different academic years, with ages ranging from 18 to 25 years.

3.3 Measures

Data were collected using two standardized instruments:

Academic Stress Scale (Rajendran & Kaliappan, 1991): This scale consists of 33 items measuring stress related to academic workload, interpersonal factors, and personal concerns. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater academic stress. The scale demonstrated high reliability in the present study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .968$).

Oldenburg Burnout Inventory – Emotional Exhaustion Subscale (Demerouti, 1999): The emotional exhaustion subscale consists of 8 items assessing emotional fatigue related to academic work. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect greater emotional exhaustion. The scale showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .784$).

3.4 Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. The collected data were organized in Excel and subsequently analyzed using SPSS.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the study, and no harm was caused during the research process.

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the scales. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine levels of academic stress and emotional exhaustion. Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to examine the relationship between the two variables, with a significance level set at 0.05.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Reliability Analysis of Study Variables*

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Academic Stress	33	.968
Emotional Exhaustion	8	.784

As shown in Table 1, the Academic Stress Scale demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .968$), while the Emotional Exhaustion scale showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .784$).

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Academic Stress and Emotional Exhaustion*

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Academic Stress	103	100.09	25.315
Emotional Exhaustion	103	22.26	5.341

Table 2 indicates that participants reported moderate levels of academic stress ($M = 100.09$, $SD = 25.315$) and emotional exhaustion ($M = 22.26$, $SD = 5.341$).

Table 3. *Correlation between Academic Stress and Emotional Exhaustion*

Variables	r	p
Academic Stress & Emotional Exhaustion	.604	< .001

As shown in Table 3, a significant positive correlation was found between academic stress and emotional exhaustion ($r = .604$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher academic stress is associated with increased emotional exhaustion.

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate a significant positive relationship between academic stress and emotional exhaustion among college students. These results are consistent with previous research, which suggests that prolonged academic pressure can lead to emotional depletion and burnout (Madigan & Curran, 2021; Gong et al., 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings can be explained using stress-response and burnout theories. Continuous exposure to academic demands without adequate coping mechanisms may gradually exhaust students' emotional resources, resulting in fatigue, reduced motivation, and disengagement from academic activities.

The moderate levels of stress and exhaustion observed in the study suggest that even non-extreme stress can have meaningful psychological effects when experienced over time. This highlights the importance of early identification and management of academic stress within educational settings.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between academic stress and emotional exhaustion among college students and found a significant positive association between the two variables. The findings suggest that sustained academic stress can contribute to emotional exhaustion, which may negatively impact students' well-being and academic performance. These results highlight the importance of addressing academic stress as a critical concern within educational institutions. Implementing effective stress management strategies and providing psychological support can help improve students' emotional health and academic outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the existing literature by reinforcing the role of academic stress as a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion. It also supports theoretical models of stress and burnout by demonstrating how prolonged academic demands can lead to emotional depletion among students.

Practical Implications

Educational institutions should focus on promoting students' mental well-being by implementing stress management programs, counselling services, and workshops on coping strategies and emotional regulation. Creating a supportive academic environment can help reduce stress and prevent burnout.

Limitations

The study used convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The use of self-report measures may also introduce response bias. Additionally, the correlational design does not allow for causal conclusions.

Future Research

Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples to improve generalizability. Longitudinal research designs can help examine the long-term effects of academic stress. Further research may also explore mediating factors such as coping strategies, resilience, and social support.

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