



Impact of Academic Stress on Psychological Capital among Youth

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ABSTRACT

Psychological capital encompasses the positive mental assets of individuals, such as efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, which play a crucial role in their general wellness and achievements. It represents the confidence in one's capacity to tackle obstacles, sustain an optimistic perspective towards the future, and adeptly handle pressures. Comprehending psychological capital provides significant understanding into nurturing individual growth, boosting effectiveness, and cultivating resilience across different facets of life. Academic is a major part of youth life which can also have an impact on their mental health, and positive

psychology. The present study examined the relationship between academic stress and psychological capital among youth. Standardized tools were used to measure the relationship between academic stress and psychological capital. A sample of 150 young adults in the age range of 19-25 years were collected. The results found out negative significant correlation between academic stress and psychological capital. Comprehending and mitigating the impact of academic stress via therapeutic interventions and support networks is crucial for fostering resilience and enhancing the general psychological welfare of youth during their developmental years.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Psychological Capital, Youth, Hope, Optimism, Resilience, Self-Efficacy

Introduction

Youth is a stage of development in life of human with a lot of energy, potential, curiosity. It spans the period from childhood to adulthood and changes like physical changes (height, weight etc.), social changes (friends, relationships etc.), psychological changes (thinking process, cognitive abilities etc.). These young adults enrolled in colleges for educations, prepare themselves for adulthood and the responsibilities that comes along with it. Young people spend much of their lives in educational settings, and their experiences in schools, colleges and universities can shape much of their subsequent lives (Furlong, 2013).

Youth is like a bridge connecting childhood, where you rely on others, to adulthood, where you stand on your own. It's a time to explore, learn, and figure out who you are. In youth, individuals start to explore themselves and the world around them. The self-concept of youth is influenced by variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender, and culture (Thomas, 2003). These individuals try out different interests, hobbies, beliefs, and identities to understand who they

are and what matters to them. During youth, there's a lot of growth in body, mind, and feelings. Teens go through growth spurts, their thinking gets sharper, and they start feeling a lot of different emotions as they deal with new stuff in life.

Academic Stress

“Academic stress is one of the biggest causes of stress, anxiety, and depression among university students. It is very common and it can become quite overwhelming at times (Monash University, 2022).” Students at various educational levels often encounter academic stress, which stems from the demands and expectations of their academic institutions. While a certain level of stress can serve as a motivational factor, an overwhelming or persistent amount of stress can negatively impact both physical and mental well-being, along with academic achievement.

Academic stress often arises from several common factors. Firstly, students may find themselves grappling with a heavy workload, which includes managing challenging courses, completing demanding assignments, and meeting tight deadlines. The pressure to excel in exams and assessments also looms large, triggering anxiety and a fear of failure among students. Additionally, the competitive nature of academia, where individuals feel compelled to vie for top grades and recognition among peers, can significantly contribute to stress and diminish self-esteem. Moreover, struggles with effective time management can exacerbate the situation, leading to procrastination, missed deadlines, and heightened stress levels. Finally, financial concerns, such as the weight of student loans or economic hardships at home, further compound the stress experienced by students as they navigate their academic journey.

Academic stress often manifests through various signs and symptoms that affect students emotionally, physically, and behaviourally. Emotionally, individuals may experience heightened levels of anxiety, worry, frustration, a sense of being overwhelmed, or difficulty

concentrating on tasks. Physically, symptoms can include headaches, stomach-aches, fatigue, insomnia, and changes in appetite. Behaviourally, students may exhibit signs of procrastination, social withdrawal, alterations in eating or sleeping patterns, and find it challenging to make decisions. These indicators collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of academic stress and its impact on students' well-being and daily functioning. Academic-related stress can increase substance use among young people. In a survey study of 128 Grade 11 students attending competitive private schools in the United States, students who reported experiencing high ongoing stress, particularly in relation to academic achievement and the tertiary education admissions process, also reported high rates of drug and alcohol use (Leonard et al., 2015).

Stress may also lead to the development of non-communicable diseases, including metabolic syndrome, obesity and reduced insulin sensitivity, resulting from unhealthy lifestyle habits and stress system dysregulation (Pervanidou & Chrousos, 2012). The World Health Organisation states that students must be “healthy and emotionally secure to fully participate in education” (World Health Organisation, 1996). Aside from impairing overall health and well-being, depression and anxiety symptoms can further adversely affect academic achievement (Morales, 2015).

In an observational study of 456 German undergraduate medical students, higher perceived academic-related stress was found to predict poor academic performance (Kotter et al., 2017). Academic-related stress and burnout includes exhaustion, depersonalization, cynicism and inefficacy or reduced accomplishment (Walburg, 2014). In a sample of Finnish students aged 13–17, self-reported depression severity was associated with concentration difficulties, and poorer social relationships, self-learning, poorer academic performance, and worse reading and writing outcomes (Fröjd et al., 2008).

In a study from the United States, over 90% of 9–12th Grade students reported that they have an inadequate number of hours of sleep on most school nights. These young people report that the impact of the loss of sleep is difficulty paying attention, lower grades, higher stress, and trouble getting along with other people. Some students reported problematic coping strategies such as taking sleeping pills, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol to help them sleep (Noland et al., 2009).

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital, often referred to as PsyCap, denotes a “positive psychological state in individuals, comprising four essential elements: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. In combination, the four constructs making up PsyCap were empirically determined to be a second-order, core construct that had a stronger relationship with satisfaction and performance than each of the components by itself” (Luthans et al., 2007). These elements represent constructive psychological assets and attitudes that individuals can nurture and strengthen over time. Together, the four states contribute more than the sum of their parts. In the workplace, individual employees can build psychological capital to enhance their personal performance and employers can build psychological capital to enhance organizational performance across teams and entire workforces (Luthans & Broad, 2022).

Hope: The concept of hope encompasses a yearning for a positive future alongside a defined route to attain it. It transcends mere wishful thoughts, embodying two fundamental components. Firstly, there's goal-directed energy, representing the drive and determination towards a specific objective. This aspect involves a clear understanding of what one aims to accomplish. Secondly, there's pathway thinking, which entails the strategic planning and conviction in the actionable steps required to realize those aspirations. It's about not just

envisioning the destination but also believing in the feasibility of the journey toward it. Together, these elements form the essence of hope, providing individuals with both direction and the confidence to pursue their dreams. Meissner (1973) recent developments in theological reflection and in psychological interest have focused on hope as a central aspect of human experience on many levels of its integration. Theological interest has approached hope as an essential and dynamic element in religious motivation.

Self- Efficacy: Efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to accomplish tasks effectively and overcome challenges, rooted in confidence in their skills and competencies. Self-efficacy pertains to one's belief in their capacity to accomplish particular objectives and surmount obstacles. It transcends mere talent, focusing instead on the assurance in applying one's abilities and expertise to achieve success. Elevated self-efficacy serves several purposes: it instils motivation to confront challenges, enhances perseverance when encountering adversity, and encourages the establishment of ambitious aspirations. This mindset empowers individuals to approach tasks with confidence, knowing they possess the means to navigate complexities and achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

Resilience: According to (APA, n.d.) resilience is the “process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.” Resilience denotes the ability to rebound from adversity, setbacks, or failures, embracing adaptability, stress management, and emerging stronger. Resilience can be likened to a rubber ball that rebounds when dropped – it symbolizes the capacity to adapt and recover from setbacks, failures, and stressful circumstances. This resilience according to Russo et al. (2012) enables individuals to confront challenges with fortitude, learn from experiences, and emerge stronger in the face of

adversity. Resilience is the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning. Cognitive processes, personality traits, and active coping mechanisms, among others, contribute to resilience. These qualities also interact with biological factors to enhance adaptation in the face and aftermath of traumatic events, and confer resilience (Charney, 2004).

Optimism: Optimism embodies a positive perspective on life and the future, anticipating favourable outcomes and trusting in one's efforts to lead to success and fulfilment. This is usually referred to in psychology as dispositional optimism. Optimism embodies a predominantly favourable perspective on life, anticipating positive outcomes and opportunities on the horizon. Optimistic individuals demonstrate a tendency to perceive the glass as half full, even amidst challenging circumstances, emphasizing the bright side of life's experiences. They actively direct their attention towards the positive aspects of life, nurturing an outlook characterized by hope and gratitude. "Optimism is a trait that predisposes one to look at the brighter side of things, and as a result, have an expectation that good things will happen in the future. It involves a general belief or expectancy that one will experience good outcomes, or that the future holds positive prospects" (Peterson, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

To study the relationship between academic stress and psychological capital among youth.

Hypothesis

There will be a negative correlation between the Academic stress and psychological capital among youth.

Sample

A total of 150 individuals participated from across Delhi in the study, aged from 19-25 years.

Measures

- **Academic Performance scale** as given by McGregory et al. (2015), consists of 8 questions each rated five-point scale with response options ranging from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree. This scale used to measure the academic stress among youth.
- **12 items PsyCap questionnaire (PCQ12)** developed by Luthans et al. (2007), consists of 12 questions and the scale consists of 4 sub dimensions; Efficacy, Hope Resilience, Optimism. Each rated on 6-point scales from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaire were filled through google forms; each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Result**Table 1***N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Academic performance scale	Efficacy	Hope	Resilience	Optimism
N	150	150	150	150	150
Mean	25.4	11.3	14.5	7.33	7.53
Standard eviation	4.76	4.55	5.47	2.81	3.32

Table (1) provides descriptive statistics for five variables: Academic performance scale, Efficacy, Hope, Resilience, and Optimism. These variables were measured among a sample of 150 individuals.

Table 2

Correlation of Academic performance scale, psychological capital with their respective sub dimensions

	Academic Stress	Efficacy	Hope	Resilience	Optimism
Academic Stress	—				
Efficacy	-0.113	—			
Hope	-0.087	0.767 ***	—		
Resilience	-0.185 *	0.757 ***	0.737 ***	—	

Optimism	-0.095	0.784 ***	0.768 ***	0.814 ***	—
<i>Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001</i>					

Table (2) shows the relationships between the variables: Academic performance scale used to measure academic stress, Efficacy, Hope, Resilience, and Optimism. Each cell in the matrix displays the correlation coefficient between two variables. In addition, the notation at the bottom of the table indicates the level of statistical significance for each correlation coefficient: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The aim of the present study to investigate the impact of academic stress on psychological capital among youth aged 19-25. The result found out that Academic performance scale used to measure the academic stress had a negative correlation with Resilience ($r = -0.185$, $p < .05$). Efficacy is positively correlated with Hope ($r = 0.767$, $p < .001$), Resilience ($r = 0.757$, $p < .001$), Optimism ($r = 0.784$, $p < .001$). Hope is positively correlated with Resilience ($r = 0.737$, $p < .001$), Optimism ($r = 0.768$, $p < .001$). It suggests that higher hope is linked with higher resilience. Resilience is positively correlated with Optimism ($r = 0.814$, $p < .001$).

The result showed that there is a negative correlation between academic stress and psychological capital among youth. The results suggest that increased academic stress decreases resilience (a subdimension of psychological capital). The study confirms the other studies showing negative relation between academic stress and psychological capital. Kaur and Amin (2017) investigated the relationship between psychological capital and stress in school students. The findings indicated a notable negative correlation between stress levels and

psychological capital among these students. Furthermore, a significant variance in psychological capital and its components, such as efficacy, hope, and resilience, was observed among students.

Conclusion

The research was aimed to study the impact of academic stress on psychological capital among youth. Standardized tools were used to measure the academic stress and psychological capital. A total sample of 150 in the age range of 19-25 years were collected. The results found that there is a negative correlation between academic stress and psychological capital.

The sample consisted of only 150 participants; therefore, we cannot generalize the findings to a larger group. The data was collected through an online medium, therefore extraneous distractions like noise, temperature, comfort, and seriousness of the respondents could not be observed or controlled. The sample consisted of youth, aged 19-25 years, therefore we cannot generalize the findings to all age groups.

Apart from the limitations the research provides a valuable information in the context of Academic stress and psychological capital. People with higher academic stress should seek help from therapist. It is important to address academic related stress as soon as possible for better mental, physical, and social well-being, living and to achieve great academic success.

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