

## A Study of Gender Difference in Academic Stress among Higher Secondary School Students of Varanasi

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### Abstract

*Stress is definitely a big word with even bigger impact; however this can be dealt with small changes that we bring in our day to day life. Stress is experienced by managers, financiers, government officials, administrators, politicians, house wives and it is most prevalent amongst students nowadays. Stress is always seen as subjective process and encompasses individual's personal analysis and counter to a threatening event. As far as students are concerned, Academic stress is surely a major part and parcel of today's competitive life. So, this study investigated the difference in level of academic stress with respect to gender to see how male and female students of adolescent age perceive the academic stress. This study comprised a sample of 575 students of class 11<sup>th</sup> studying in CBSE board schools of Varanasi. Data were collected through self administered Academic stress scale constructed by the researcher. Data obtained were analyzed through descriptive statistics and t-test. The result showed that overall there is moderate level of stress found in the sample of study. The study also revealed that male students were more stressed as compared to their female counterparts.*

**Keywords:** *Stress, Academic stress, higher secondary students.*

**Introduction** -The level of competition among people has risen along with advancements made during the scientific period and the rapid growth of knowledge. People are now occupied as a result, and stress is a natural result of this. Even though healthy stress is an important catalyst for personal development, it also pushes people on to make active progress. It impacts not just our thoughts and feelings but also our behavior models. Overstress, however, results in issues and discomfort and can have detrimental impacts on individuals [1] specifically students who are accustomed to lower classes with a rather less

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burdened academics, when move to higher grades and that too in adolescence period of their life, they face many daily life situations which they haven't faced ever earlier. This is when the academic stress actually comes into play. Over burdened syllabus, regular evaluations, school environment and discipline, relation with teachers, peer pressure, competition, future choices and many such other factors start impacting the young minds and they get stressed even sometimes unknowingly. Stress and anxiety in children and teenagers are just as prevalent as in adults. Negligence of parents, high expectations in academic or other performances, abused childhood, growing up tensions and demand for familial responsibility etc. are the main causes of childhood and teen stress.

According to Bernstein et al. (2008), Stress is seen as a damaging emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological process that takes place while a person tries to deal with or respond to stressors [2]. Auerbach and Grambling (1998) reported that stressors are situations that prevent or threaten to prevent a person from going about their daily activities [3]. They considered stress to be an unpleasant mental and physiological state of arousal that people encounter when they are in circumstances that they view as dangerous or harmful to their wellbeing. However, various people interpret stress differently and may have different meanings for different people. People view it as occurrences or circumstances that make them feel tense, under strain, or negatively affected, including rage and worry. It's vital to remember that stress can affect people in both good and bad ways. This suggests that stress may be a typical, adaptive response to danger. Its purpose is to alert people to danger and get them ready to defend themselves. For instance, people are motivated to cope with or avoid things they fear because they pose genuine hazards. Most psychologists claim that mild stress inspires people to work hard and fosters creativity, yet stress can make it harder for people to do complex jobs.

**ACADEMIC STRESS-** The definition of academic stress is the anxiety and stress that comes from schooling and education. There is often a lot of pressure that comes along with pursuing one's education. There is studying, homework, tests, labs, peers, teachers etc. There is the stress of doing all of the work, balancing the time and finding time for extra-curricular activities. Archer and Lamnin (1985) defined academic stress as a stress arising from important factors like writing term papers, text anxiety, poor study skills, excessive academic load and classroom environment, which in the turn forms a major part of general stress in adolescent students [4]. According to Gupta and Khan (1987), academic stress essentially relates to mental distress associated with some anticipated frustration on account of academic failure or even a realization of the possibility of such a failure [5].

Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even an awareness of the possibility of academic failure [6]. During the school years, academic stressors may show in any aspect of the child's environment: home, school, neighborhood, or friendship [7, 8]. Kouzma and Kennedy reported that school-related situations – such as tests, grades, studying, self-imposed need to succeed, as well as that induced by others – are the main sources of stress for high school students [9].

Gender difference in academic stress is often characterized in terms of which gender has higher scores on those aspects. For e.g., women are found to have more academic stress [10] and are often found to be more agreeable than men (Feingold, 1994; Costa et al., 2001 [11,12]). This means that female students on average experience higher level of academic stress and are more nurturing, tender minded and altruistic more often than their male counterpart. However, such a finding does not rule out the fact that men may also experience academic stress and might be nurturing, tender minded and altruistic. It has been observed that the experience of stress in men and women vary widely. This is because women are more likely to identify with the feminine gender role and men with the masculine gender role.

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Studies have suggested that a stress receptor in the brain regulates metabolic response to the stressful situation in male and female differently. Sitz et al., (2006) commented that women are more optimistic and have a decreased level of perceived stress in relation to their male counterpart [13]. Brougham et al., (2009) conducted a study in order to find out the stress, sex difference and coping strategy of college students and found that female students reported an accelerated level of stress than male students [14]. Calagus (2011) documented that there exists a significant difference between male and female students in regards to perception of stress [15]. A wide difference is observed in the attitude of the student towards the subject, lectures, academic programs and classroom. Akhtar (2012) reported that girls are more thought oriented and as such they experience stress more than boys, while boys are more action oriented in dealing with challenging situation [16]. Similar findings were also found by Busari and Omoponle (2018), Kadapatti (2017), Kiani et al., (2017) [17, 18 19]. Dhakkal (2013) investigated the relationship between gender and academic stress and found no significant gender difference in the level of academic stress [20]. No gender difference was also revealed in the study conducted by Fromel et al., (2020) & Singh and Singh (2014) [21, 22]. Karaman et al., (2019) found life satisfaction, locus of control and gender as significant predictors of academic stress and that female students had higher academic stress than their male counterparts [23]. Therefore, in the present study researcher tried to investigate the level of academic the male and female students of adolescent age studying in class 11<sup>th</sup> and how they differ in perceiving stress.

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### Objectives of the study

1. To find out the level of academic stress of higher secondary students of CBSE schools of Varanasi district.
2. To find out whether there is a significant difference in the level of academic stress of male and female students.

### Hypothesis of the study

1. There is significant mean difference between male and female students with respect to their academic stress.

**Methodology-** Descriptive survey method was used in the present study. Descriptive methodology focuses more on the “what” of the research subject than the “why” of the research subject.

**Sample-** The sample of the study was selected by multistage sampling method which consisted of 575 students studying in class 11<sup>th</sup> of different CBSE schools in Varanasi district.

**Table 1- Distribution of Sample according to Gender**

Sl. No.	Demographic variable	Description	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender	Male	303	52.69
		Female	272	47.31

**Tool Used in the study-** A self constructed Academic stress scale was used in present study which comprised of 47 items distributed under seven different dimensions namely-school

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structure and process, workload, classroom environment, family related difficulties, relationship with teachers, relationship with peer and self and future concerns. The reliability of tool was computed by Cronbach's alpha and it was found to be 0.804.

### **Finding and Interpretation-**

#### **Objective 1: To study the level of Academic stress among higher secondary school students**

The researcher classified the level of academic stress of students into three categories, viz. low level, average level and high level. This classification is based upon the norms developed for interpretation. The three categories and the corresponding limits of scores have been given in the table no. 2.

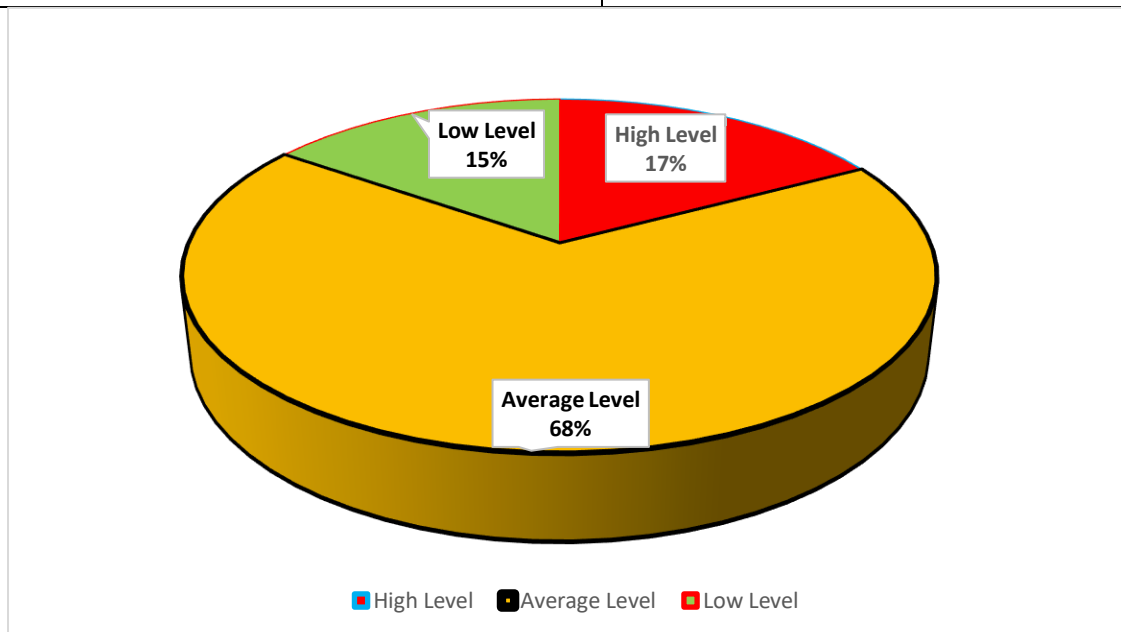
**Table No. 2: Three categories of the level of academic stress and their corresponding limits of score**

Category	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
High Level	Above 139	192
Average Level	98	139
Low Level	51	Below 98

Further, the researcher made a frequency distribution and presented in table no. 3.

**Table No. 3: Categories of the level of academic stress and their frequencies**

Categories of level of academic stress	Frequencies
High Level	99
Average Level	388
Low Level	88
Total	575



**Fig.1: Percentages of the students falling under each category of the level of Academic stress**

Fig.1 reveals that 68% students have average level of academic stress. So, the level of stress of students is average. Though there are various academic stress-based research studies has been found but these all are related to other variables like academic stress in relation to self-efficacy, academic stress in relation to academic achievement, academic in relation to wellbeing, etc. Few such studies have been found which depicts the level of academic stress of students or teachers. The present research works indicates towards the average level of

academic stress of higher secondary students. Prabu (2015) conducted a study and concluded that moderate level of academic stress exists in higher secondary students [24]. Koshy (2019) also conducted a study in Vadodara among class 10<sup>th</sup> students to assess the level of academic stress and found that 51 % students were having moderate level of stress [25]. These studies are in line with the findings of present study. It is clear from the finding that more than half of the sample (68%) is showing average level of academic stress and 17 percent students are highly stressed. The probable explanation to this condition could be the age they belong to. It is adolescence, which probably causes the moderate level of stress among higher secondary students because adolescences itself is the stage of storm & stress. Students are in a phase where a lot of physical, mental, social and academic changes occur which creates a situation of confusion. And today’s world of social media add some more pressure to it and when it interacts with the academic scenario, it becomes more powerful stressor for adolescents. Therefore a large number of students have somewhat average level of stress which is evident from present study.

**Objective 2:** To find out whether there is a significant difference in the level of academic stress of male and female students.

**Table No. 4: t- test between male and female students regarding Academic Stress**

Dependent variable	Independent Variable	N	Mean	Std, Deviation	t-value	df	p-value
Academic Stress	Male	303	119.78	22.082	2.612	573	.009
	Female	272	115.09	20.757			



Value of computed t-test is 2.612 at df 573 and p-value is =.009 which is lesser than the significant level of significance, i.e., 0.05 in this case. So, there is significant difference between the levels of Academic stress of higher secondary students with respect to gender.

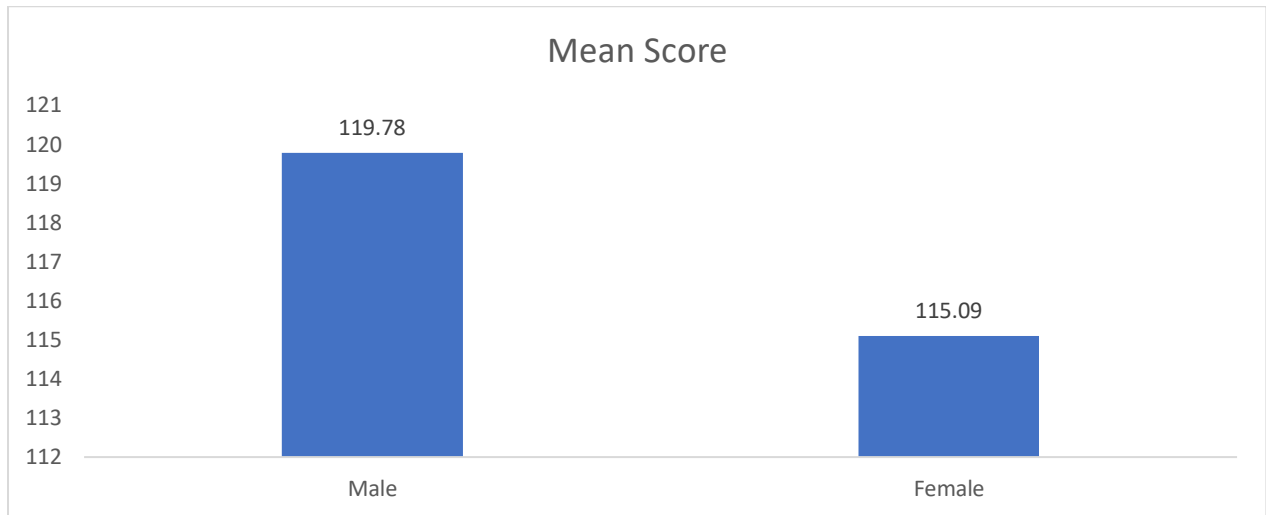


Fig.2: Graph showing difference in mean score of male and female students on academic stress level.

Graph shows that mean score of male students is 119.78 which is greater than the mean score of female counterparts i.e 115.09. It means level of academic stress of female higher secondary students is lesser than the level of academic stress of male secondary students. However, when male and female students were categorized on the basis of level of academic stress it was found that 21 % females were showing high level of stress whereas only 13.9 percent of males were highly stressed. Similarly 11.8 % female students were in low stress but 18.5 % males were showing low level of stress (Table No.5). But when we look into the mean score, male students are found to be more stressed than females.

**Table no. 5 : Gender wise level of Academic Stress of higher secondary students**

Gender	Level of Academic Stress	Frequency	Percentage
Male	High	42	13.9
	Average	205	67.7
	Low	56	18.5
	Total	303	100.0
Female	High	57	21.0
	Average	183	67.3
	Low	32	11.8
	Total	272	100.0

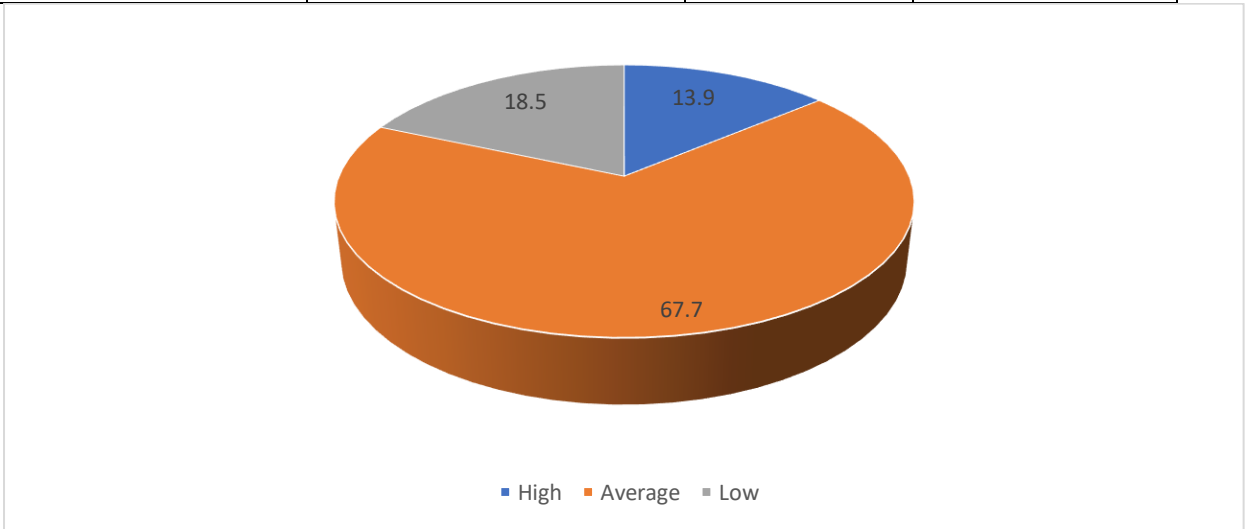


Fig. 3: Pie -chart depicting the Level of Academic stress of male secondary students

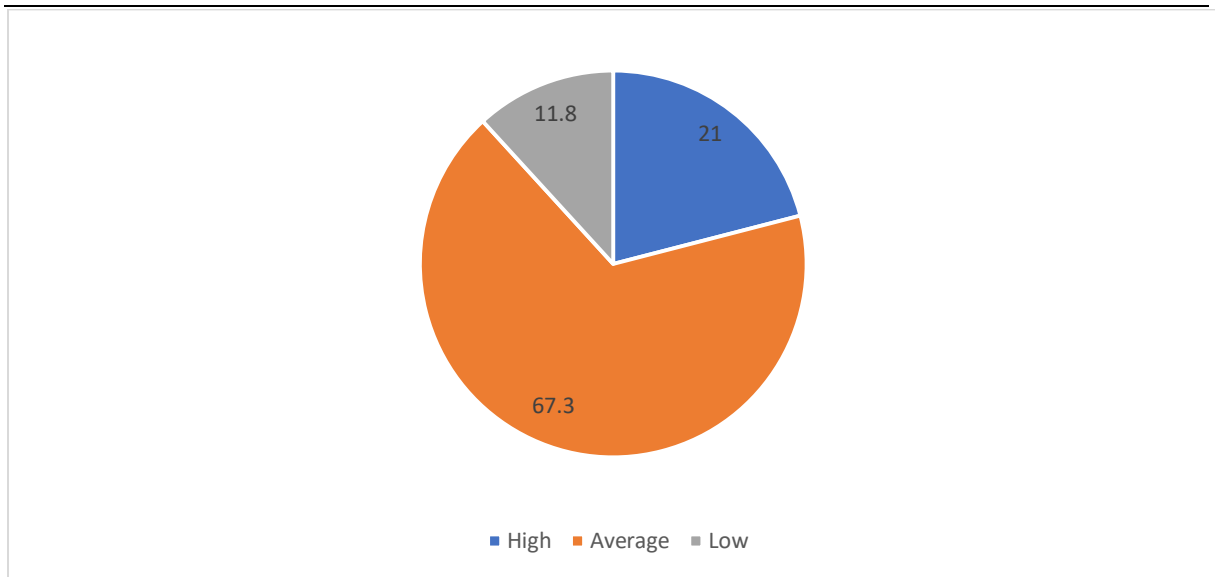


Fig.4 : Pie Chart depicting the Level of Academic Stress of female secondary students

Present finding is in accordance with the findings of Chen, Wong, Ran and Gilson (2009) who found that male students show high stress, low psychological well being and they use lesser positive coping strategies [1]. Sitz and Poche (2006) found out that women displayed more optimism than men and have lower levels of perceived stress compared to men [13]. A study by Vijaya and Karunakaran (2013) also found that most boys showed high and moderate levels of stress compared to girls [26]. Calagus (2011) documented that there exists a significant difference between male and female students in regards to perception of stress [15]. However many studies also have reported that there is no significant difference found in the level of academic stress on the basis of gender (Dhakkal (2013); Fromel et al. (2020); Singh and Singh (2014) [20, 21, 22]. It is an established fact that male and female react to stressors differently both psychologically and biologically.

The probable explanation of present study where males have shown higher level of academic stress, could be that since the students are of adolescent age and there are some preconceived notions in the society like “boys should study science” and it is the male who has to earn in future and look after the needs of family, ‘A boy never cries like a girl’ and many more like

this. Many trending social media videos and memes also put such things in the confused minds of adolescent boys and make them to identify with the pre-described gender roles. This poses great pressure on them to be in the race and match up with others and ultimately results in higher stress. However the same could happen to females also and many previous studies have reported this but this study has been carried out in the oldest and traditional city Varanasi which still follows old values so it is quite possible that female students may not have shown their stress response and hid it.

**Conclusion:** This study reveals two important finding that there is present a moderate level of academic stress among higher secondary school students and Male students have high stress as compared to the female students. So it may be concluded on the basis of above findings that there is an urgent need of preparing a conducive academic environment where students understand the stressor, react to the stressor with appropriate coping strategy and try to minimize their stress level. This could not happen until the school, teachers and parents consider this issue very serious and try to overcome it collectively. A combined effort will surely help our young minds and let them have only eustress i.e. the good stress which constantly motivates them to go forward.

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