



UNDERSTANDING STRESSORS, COPING STRATEGIES, AND THE ROLE OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF ADOLESCENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPETITIVE EXAMS: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Sanoob Chelackoden^{1*}, Dr.Vidya. N ², Dr.Ramaa Raju³

¹Doctoral Research Scholar, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, India.
ORCID: 0009-0008-4094-5179

²Research Coordinator, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India,

³Research Guide, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India

* Corresponding Author

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra15573>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra15573

ABSTRACT

This comprehensive review aims to understand stressors and explore coping strategies for the mental health and well-being of adolescents preparing for competitive entrance exams in India, such as JEE and NEET. Psychological disorders are prevalent among adolescent students, especially those facing the challenges of highly competitive exams. Intense stress can lead to mental stress and subsequent depression, resulting from the difficulty in managing performance pressure, meeting expectations, and achieving goals. Establishing a balanced study routine with regular breaks, practicing relaxation techniques, and ensuring adequate sleep are crucial for helping students cope with academic stress. Support systems, including friends, family, and teachers, play a vital role by providing emotional support, encouragement, and a sense of security during challenging times.

In this comprehensive review, the researcher has analyzed and incorporated insights from various research studies to help understand the complex nature of academic stress and performance expectations.

KEYWORDS: *Competitive exams, stressors, coping strategies, support systems.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Admissions to prestigious institutions like IITs, NITs, and government medical colleges in India is highly competitive. Admissions to NITs and IITs are based on the rank secured in the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), while for medical colleges, the rank in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is the criterion. Approximately 1.2 million students appear for JEE, competing for around 17,500 seats in IITs, 24,000 seats in NITs, and 7,500 seats in IIITs.

NEET, with nearly 2.1 million students participating each year, is conducted for admissions to about 106,000 MBBS seats in 681 medical colleges, split between government and private institutions with 55,000 and 51,000 seats, respectively. The success rate is only 7-8%, highlighting the rigorous nature of these exams and the resulting in stress for students. Exam anxiety is fueled by high stakes, unrealistic expectations, fear of failure, and pressure from parents and peers. However, stress and exam anxiety can be managed through effective study techniques, time management, nutritious a diet, regular sleep pattern, healthy lifestyle, and fostering confidence and faith in one's preparation.

Background: The psychological disorders like depression, anxiety and stress are prevalent among adolescents in India, particularly those undergoing the intense pressure of preparing for highly competitive entrance exams such as NEET and JEE. With millions of students competing for a limited number of seats in government medical colleges and in prestigious and highly exclusive technical institutions like IITs and NITs, the competition has reached unprecedented levels. The anxiety, stress and depression associated with these exams have become substantial, leading to adverse effects on the mental health and psychological well-being of students.

As the success rates in exams like JEE and NEET remain low, hovering around 7-8%, the implications of failure are profound. The high stakes, coupled with unrealistic expectations, parental pressure, and fear of not securing a coveted spot, contribute to intensified exam anxiety and other mental disorders. This study aims to comprehensively examine the stressors faced by adolescents during exam preparation and explore effective coping strategies. Understanding these factors is crucial in developing



interventions to support the mental health and well-being of students navigating the challenging landscape of competitive entrance exams in India.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Latha KS and Hanumanth Reddy (2006) [1] studied Patterns of Stress, Coping Styles and Social Support among Adolescents. Out of the 100 pre university students of age 16-19 years participated, 50 were girls and 50 were boys. Students from nuclear families were 94%. Female students had greater stress related to college attendance, uncertainty about the future. Getting up early in the morning was stressful to majority of the students. Parents perceive this as laziness and leads to conflicts. The competition, parental expectations, desire of admissions to professional courses, pressure to study, long college hours, financial constraints are the other most commonly reported stressors

Ibrahim Yildirim, Tuncay Ergene and Kerim Munir (2007) [2] conducted a study on high rates of depressive symptoms among senior high school students preparing for national university entrance examination in Turkey Out of the 984 students preparing for university entrance examination participated in the study, 58.2% were boys and 49.8% were girls. The mean age of participated adolescents was 18.4 ± 2.3 years. Depressive symptoms were found in 45.1% by the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). 49.5% of the females and 40.6% of the males were showing symptoms of depression.

Mine Kaya, Metin Genc, Burhanettin Kaya and Erkan Pehlivan (2007) [3] studied Prevalence of Depressive Symptoms, Ways of Coping, and Related Factors Among Medical School and Health Services Higher Education Students (HSHEs). Depressive symptoms were found more prevalent in HSHE Students compared to Medical Faculty (MF) students. No significant relationship can be identified between age and depressive symptomatology in both the groups. The difference between depressive symptoms and education level of fathers was not significant. Depression and anxiety disorders in school going adolescents in an urban area of south India. There was no remarkable difference according to family type and place of birth. There was no correlation between family income and coping styles among the MF students.

Ersin Uskun, Ahmet Nesimi Kisioglu and Mustafa Ozturk (2008) [4] studied Stress and its effect on depression and anxiety among under graduates. This study evaluated the life stress and mental health of students in a university and compared adolescents with young adults. This study suggests that social dissatisfaction, relationships with opposite sex, exam fear, worries about career choice and future, accommodation problems are the sources of stress and are consistent predictors of anxiety and depression levels. provided useful information for early management of psychiatric disorders present in the community and prevent their development into chronic disorders.

The studies conducted by A. Aykut Ceyhan, Esra Ceyhan and Yildis Kurtyilmaz titled Investigation of University Students' Depression (2009) [5]. The study was conducted on 440 volunteer university students attending various programs. Out of this 72% were females and 28% were male students. Researchers found that 40.22% of the participants had no depression, 29.55% were mildly depressed, 20.46% were moderately depressed and 9.77% were severely depressed. The participants who were dissatisfied with their body image were more depressed compared to those who are satisfied with their body image. Those who were poor in academics demonstrated significantly more depressive symptoms compared to those who had better academic achievements. No significant difference in depression levels were observed in participants due to gender and residence location.

Arzu Ozyurek (2013) [6] conducted An Examination of Adolescents' Methods of Coping with Stress on 1700 students aged 15-18 years studying in secondary schools in Karabuk province of Turkey. A positive relationship between the tendency to stress and coping with stress were found. The researcher observed the variables like gender, age, number of siblings and educational status of parents are influential in coping with stress. Developing Problem solving skills, providing social support, counselling sessions and time management trainings could be effective in coping with stress.

Samata Srivastava, J P Singh and Om Prakash Srivastava (2014) [7] conducted a study on 200 students in the age range of 16-19 years from rural and urban population residing in the eastern district of Uttar Pradesh. The male students are reported to have more stress than females in both urban and rural settings. Female participants were found to be more likely to utilize coping strategies compared to their male counterparts. Urban adolescents were found to be more stressful and use more coping strategies compared to rural adolescents.

Lakyntiew Pariat, Angelyne Rynjah, Joplin, M G Kharjana (2014) [8] conducted a study on Stress Levels of College Students: Inter relationship between Stressors and Coping Strategies. Participants in this study were 537 students enrolled in a reputed college in Shillong City. Out of the female participants, 23.5% and of the male participants 21.9% had 5 or more siblings. Those who belong to nuclear family were 57.5%. of all the academic stressors 52.7% family expectations and 32.4% was expectations of teachers. Those who had problems in getting along with family members were 3.5% in males 1.5% in females. The students who didn't have any friends were 1.3% in males and 1.7% in females. Only 11.95 males and 6.9% females were having high stress, 15% males and 23.9% females were experiencing very low stress. Positive coping strategies like prayer, sleep and meditation, pursuing hobbies and interests was found to be helpful to combat academic stress.

A cross-sectional study was conducted by Noor Mahir Ali, et al. (2019) [9] on Perceived Academic and Psychological Among Adolescents in United Arab Emirates: Role of Gender, Age,



Depression and High Expectation of Parents using Perceived Stress Scale-14 (PSS-14) and Educational Stress Scale (ESS) for Adolescents. A total of 914 students in the age group 14-16 years participated in the study. The academic level was considered as good by 45% of the respondents, parents of 84% had high expectations. Three out of every four respondents thought that they can meet the expectations of their parents. The PSS was found to be moderate in 76% of the respondents and high in 20%. Statistically significant correlation was found between total PSS-14 scores and age ($p < 0.0004$), gender ($p < 0.0001$), and grade ($p < 0.0001$).

A study was conducted by Mishra SK, Yadav AK, et al. (2020) [10] on Stress and Coping among students preparing for Medical Entrance Examinations. A total of 261 students participated in the study, 57.1% were males and the rest were females, with an average age of 18.63 ± 0.83 years. Over all 63.8% of the participants were suffering from depression, 82% from anxiety and 51.3% from stress. Extremely severe symptoms of depression were found in 8%, severe anxiety in 23% and 1.9% had severe stress. No socio-demographic factors are found associated with depression. Students from a public school were found to be more anxious and those who had chosen to become medical professionals out of interest were less stressed.

K Premkumar, S Sarojini, et al. (2022) [11] studied prevalence of Depression and Anxiety among students preparing for National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) Chennai, India. The study was conducted on 250 students of which 41.2% were females and 58.8% were males, 45% had attempted NEET once and 38% twice. The number of previous attempts had a significant association with the severity of anxiety symptoms. Anxiety symptoms were seen in 100% and prevalence of depressive symptoms in 59.2% of the participants. Severe depression symptoms were observed in those with more than two previous attempts and those awaiting their first NEET results.

A study conducted by Raveena Saharan (2023) [12] on What's killing students in Kota. An alarming number of 119 students who were studying in various coaching institutes in Kota committed suicide in the last decade reveals that everything is not going well at Kota. The researcher found that the suicides are due to the fear of failure and undue pressure from family and peers. The intense competition and performance pressure lead to anxiety and stress. The lack of parental support and absence of genuine friendship caused stress and feelings of isolation. The intense competition and isolated environment in coaching institutes rises the risk of developing serious psychological issues including depression, anxiety and stress. The levels of stress experienced varied significantly from the transition period to young adulthood.

This comprehensive review explores how adolescents handle the stress of competitive exams. By looking at different studies from various places and cultures, it shows that stress affects these adolescents universally. Different types of stressors, like pressure from school, what society expects, and family influences, shows

exert a considerable amount of pressure on a young mind. Many students getting ready for exams deal with feeling depression, anxiety and confusion. This review emphasizes how important it is to understand these problems and suggest suitable interventions.

Importantly, the review shows that adolescents need effective and positive approach to deal with tough situations. Whether it's having a good study routine, getting support from friends and family, or believing in themselves, engaging in effective ways to handle stress is crucial. Having people around who care, like friends, family, and teachers, makes a significant difference. They provide the emotional support adolescents need to get through tough times. The studies reviewed consistently say that having a supportive environment with open communication, understanding, and encouragement is essential.

3. CONCLUSIONS

1. Research reviews indicate that effective coping strategies and adequate support system are the variables which are considered essential for ensuring psychological wellbeing.
2. As schools, decision-makers, and families deal with the challenges that face adolescents with highly competitive entrance exams, this review calls for a change in perception, thinking and increased sensitivity to the pressure which adolescents experience.
3. It's not just about doing well in exams; it's also about looking after the mental well-being of the adolescents. This review is a strong call to work together to remove the stigma around mental health, set up focused support systems, and create a school environment that helps a student to succeed and maintain good mental health.

4. REFERENCES

1. Latha KS and Hanumanth Reddy (2006). *Patterns of Stress, Coping Styles and Social Support among Adolescents*. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 2006; 3(1): 5-10
GoogleScholarf
2. Ibrahim Yildirim, Tuncay Ergene and Kerim Munir (2007). *High rates of depressive symptoms among senior high school students preparing for national university entrance examination in Turkey*. *International Journal School Disaffect*. 2007; 4(2): 35-44.
GoogleScholarf
3. Mine Kaya, Metin Genc, Burhanettin Kaya and Erkan Pehlivan (2007). *Prevalence of Depressive Symptoms, Ways of Coping, and Related Factors Among Medical School and Health Services Higher Education Students*. *Turk Psikiyatri Dergisi*; 2007; 18(2)
GoogleScholarf
4. Ersin Uskun, Ahmet Nesimi Kisioglu and Mustafa Ozturk (2008). *Stress and its effect on depression and anxiety among under graduates*. *Primary Care and Community Psychiatry*, Vol. 13, No.2, JUNE 2008, 73-82
GoogleScholarf



5. A. Aykut Ceyhan, Esra Ceyhan and Yildis Kurtyilmaz. *Investigation of University Students' Depression (2009). Eurasian Journal of Education Research, Issue 36, Summer 2009, 75-90.*
GoogleScholarf
6. Arzu Ozyurek (2013). *An Examination of Adolescents' Methods of Coping with Stress. IIB International Refereed Academic Social Sciences Journal. Vol. 4, Issue 09, 112-129.*
GoogleScholarf
7. Samata Srivastava, J P Singh and Om Prakash Srivastava (2014). *Stress and Coping Style of Urban and Rural Adolescents. International Journal of Technical Research and Applications. Vol. 2, Issue 5, 217-220.*
GoogleScholarf
8. Lakyntiew Pariat, Angelyne Rynjah, Joplin, M G Kharjana (2014). *Stress Levels of College Students: Inter relationship between Stressors and Coping Strategies. IOSR journal of Humanities and Social Science. Vol. 19, Issue 8, Aug. 2014, 40-46.*
GoogleScholarf
9. Noor Mahir Ali, Nowfala Arakkal Noushad, et al. (2019). *Perceived Academic and Psychological Samong Adolescents in United Arab Emirates: Role of Gender, Age, Depression and High Expectation of Parents. Psychiatria Danubina, 2019, Vol 29, Suppl.3, 331-337*
GoogleScholarf
10. Mishra SK, Yadav AK, et al. (2020). *Stress and Coping among Students preparing for Medical Entrance Examinations. Journal of Psychiatric Association of Nepal 9(2), 42-47, 2020.*
GoogleScholarf
11. K Premkumar, S Sarojini, et al. (2022). *Prevalence of Depression and Anxiety among students preparing for National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) Chennai, India. Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research, 2022, Vol. 16, Issue 12.*
GoogleScholarf
12. Raveena Saharan (2023). *What's killing students in Kota. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts. 2023, Vol. 11, Issue 7.*
GoogleScholarf