

Academic Pressure and Psychological Well-Being Among Adolescents in Rural Odisha: A Study of Nayagarh District

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Abstract:

The Indian education system has undergone significant transformation during recent decades with increasing academic competition, examination pressure, parental expectations, and technological influence. Adolescents, particularly school-going students, face considerable psychological stress due to academic burden and social expectations. The present study investigates the impact of the Indian education system on the mental health of young adolescents in Nayagarh district of Odisha. A descriptive survey method was adopted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 200 adolescent students studying in secondary schools through questionnaires, interviews, observation methods, and mental health rating scales. Statistical techniques such as percentage analysis, mean score analysis, and qualitative thematic interpretation were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that academic stress, examination anxiety, parental pressure, fear of failure, and lack of emotional support significantly influence adolescent mental health. Female students were found to experience comparatively higher emotional stress than male students. Anxiety, sleep disturbances, and emotional instability emerged as common psychological problems among adolescents. The study recommends introducing school counselling services, stress-management education, flexible curriculum design, and parental awareness programmes to promote adolescent mental well-being.

Keywords: Indian education system, adolescent mental health, academic stress, examination anxiety, Odisha, Nayagarh district.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the personality, values, behaviour, and future of adolescents. In India, education is often regarded as the primary pathway toward economic security, employment, and social prestige. However, the modern Indian education system continues to emphasize examination performance, academic achievement, and competitive success to a large extent. Adolescents are expected to perform exceptionally well academically while simultaneously coping with emotional, social, and developmental challenges.

Adolescence is a sensitive transitional stage marked by emotional instability, identity formation, social adjustment, and psychological vulnerability. During this period, excessive academic pressure negatively affects emotional well-being and mental health. Stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, emotional imbalance, and low self-esteem are increasingly observed among school-going adolescents in India.

In rural and semi-urban districts such as Nayagarh district of Odisha, students often face additional challenges including limited educational resources, lack of counselling facilities, socio-economic difficulties, and parental expectations. Although the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes holistic and stress-free learning, its implementation remains inadequate in many rural educational institutions. The present study attempts to examine how the Indian education system influences the mental health of adolescents studying in secondary schools of Nayagarh district and suggests educational reforms for improving psychological well-being among adolescents.

2. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Mental health issues among adolescents are increasing rapidly due to educational pressure, social competition, and parental expectations. Adolescents often experience emotional insecurity, fear of examinations, peer pressure, anxiety, and depression because of excessive academic burden.

The significance of the study lies in the following aspects:

1. It examines the relationship between education and adolescent mental health.
2. It highlights psychological challenges faced by rural adolescents.
3. It contributes to educational psychology and adolescent studies.
4. It creates awareness regarding school mental health support systems.
5. It provides recommendations for educational reforms and counselling services.
6. It supports the objectives of holistic education proposed under NEP 2020.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

“Academic Pressure and Psychological Well-being among Adolescents in Rural Odisha: A Study Conducted in Nayagarh District of Odisha.”

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the impact of the Indian education system on adolescent mental health.
2. To identify major academic stressors among adolescents.
3. To study emotional and psychological problems faced by students.
4. To compare mental stress levels among male and female adolescents.
5. To suggest educational and psychological interventions for improving adolescent mental health.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the Indian education system affect adolescent mental health?
2. What are the major causes of stress among adolescents?
3. Are female adolescents more emotionally stressed than males?
4. What psychological problems are common among adolescents?
5. What educational reforms are necessary for reducing stress among students?

6. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1. There exists significant academic stress among adolescents studying in Nayagarh district.
2. The Indian education system negatively affects adolescent mental health.
3. Female adolescents experience higher emotional stress than male adolescents.
4. Examination pressure and parental expectations are major causes of psychological distress.

7. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

7.1 Hans Selye (1956)

Hans Selye introduced the concept of stress and explained that prolonged stress negatively affects both physical and mental health. His theory is highly relevant for understanding academic stress among adolescents.

7.2 Jean Piaget (1964)

Piaget explained cognitive development during adolescence and emphasized that adolescents experience emotional confusion while adapting to academic and social expectations.

7.3 Erik Erikson (1968)

Erikson identified adolescence as the stage of "Identity versus Role Confusion." Excessive educational pressure may lead to insecurity and emotional instability during this stage.

7.4 Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Bronfenbrenner highlighted the influence of family, school, and society on child development. Academic pressure arising from these systems affects adolescent mental health.

7.5 Deb (2010)

Deb reported that Indian students experience severe academic pressure due to competitive examinations and unrealistic parental expectations.

7.6 Malhotra and Patra (2014)

Savita Malhotra reviewed adolescent mental health studies in India and identified academic difficulties, family conflict, and examination stress as major contributors to psychological disorders among adolescents.

7.7 Rachana Parikh et al. (2019)

Parikh conducted a study on stress and coping among urban school-going adolescents in India. The study found that academic pressure, parental expectations, and peer comparison were major stressors affecting adolescents.

7.8 Eliza Rath and Javakrishnan (2019)

The researchers studied behavioural problems among adolescents in Odisha and identified depression, emotional instability, and conduct problems caused by academic pressure and lack of emotional support.

7.9 Devi, Barthakur and Das (2021)

The researchers found high levels of anxiety, insomnia, and emotional distress among government school adolescents, especially female students.

7.10 UNICEF (2021)

UNICEF highlighted that educational stress and fear of academic failure significantly affect adolescent mental well-being in developing countries.

7.11 Rajkumar et al. (2022)

Rajkumar conducted a systematic review on rural adolescent mental health in India and reported increasing prevalence of anxiety and depression among adolescents due to educational stress.

7.12 NCERT (2022)

NCERT emphasized the importance of stress-free, child-centred education and recommended integrating mental health support services in schools.

7.13 IC3 Institute Student Well-being Report (2025)

The report emphasized that academic competition, career uncertainty, and excessive screen time contribute significantly to emotional distress among Indian students.

The review states that, no significant studies have been conducted in the district of Nayagarh in this regard. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this research gap.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

8.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

8.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in rural and semi-urban secondary schools of Nayagarh district of Odisha.

8.3 Population

The population consisted of adolescent students studying in secondary schools of Nayagarh district.

8.4 Sample

A total sample of 200 adolescent students was selected through random sampling techniques.

Category	Number
Male Students	100
Female Students	100
Total	200

8.5 Tools Used

- Structured Questionnaire
- Interview Schedule
- Observation Method
- Academic Stress Scale
- Mental Health Rating Scale

8.6 Sources of Data

Primary Sources

- Questionnaire responses
- Interviews
- Observations

Secondary Sources

- Books
- Journals
- Research articles
- Government reports

8.7 Statistical Techniques Used

- Percentage analysis
- Mean score analysis
- Percentile analysis
- Qualitative thematic interpretation

9. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Level of Academic Stress among Adolescents

Stress Level	Number of Students	Percentage
High Stress	96	48%
Moderate Stress	72	36%
Low Stress	32	16%

Stress Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Total	200	100%

Interpretation

The table reveals that 48% of adolescents experience high academic stress while 36% experience moderate stress. Only 16% experience low stress. This indicates that educational pressure significantly affects adolescent mental health.

Table 2: Major Causes of Mental Stress

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Examination Pressure	78	39%
Parental Expectations	52	26%
Fear of Failure	38	19%
Homework Burden	20	10%
Peer Competition	12	6%

Interpretation

Examination pressure emerged as the most significant cause of psychological stress among adolescents. Parental expectations and fear of failure also contribute significantly to emotional distress.

Table 3: Gender-wise Mean Stress Score

Gender	Mean Score
Male Students	63.4
Female Students	71.8

Interpretation

Female adolescents demonstrated higher mean stress scores compared to male students, indicating greater emotional vulnerability among girls.

Table 4: Psychological Symptoms Experienced by Adolescents

Symptoms	Percentage
Anxiety	44%
Sleep Problems	28%
Depression	18%
Low Self-esteem	10%

Interpretation

Anxiety emerged as the most common psychological problem among adolescents followed by sleep disturbances and depressive symptoms.

MEAN AND PERCENTILE ANALYSIS

The mean percentile analysis indicates the following:

- Students preparing for board examinations experience higher academic stress.
- Female adolescents demonstrate greater emotional sensitivity and psychological vulnerability.
- Adolescents facing parental pressure show higher anxiety scores.

- Students participating in sports and co-curricular activities exhibit comparatively lower stress levels.
 - Lack of counselling and emotional support negatively affects psychological well-being.
- The findings indicate that educational competition directly influences emotional imbalance and stress among adolescents.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative interviews and observations revealed several emotional and behavioural concerns among adolescents.

Theme 1: Fear of Examination

Many students reported nervousness, sleeplessness, headaches, and fear before examinations.

Student Statements

- “If I get low marks, my parents become disappointed.”
- “I cannot sleep properly before examinations.”

Theme 2: Pressure from Parents

Students reported that parents frequently compare them with academically successful peers.

Student Statement

- “My parents expect me to score above 90% every time.”

Theme 3: Lack of Emotional Support

Students expressed that schools focus more on marks than emotional well-being.

Student Statement

- “Teachers rarely ask about our feelings or stress.”

Theme 4: Career Anxiety

Adolescents expressed fear and uncertainty regarding future careers, employment opportunities, and academic success.

Theme 5: Lack of Recreation

Students reported limited time for sports, hobbies, and relaxation because of tuition classes and homework burden.

12. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Most adolescents experience moderate to high academic stress.
2. Examination pressure is the major cause of psychological distress.
3. Female adolescents are more emotionally stressed than male adolescents.
4. Anxiety and sleep disturbances are common mental health problems.
5. Lack of counselling and emotional support worsens adolescent stress.
6. Parental expectations significantly affect students' mental well-being.
7. The competitive nature of the Indian education system negatively impacts adolescent mental health.
8. Students participating in recreational activities show lower stress levels.
9. Rural schools lack adequate mental health support systems.
10. Fear of failure reduces adolescents' confidence and emotional stability.

13. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the Indian education system continues to emphasize marks, examinations, and competition rather than holistic development. Adolescents in Nayagarh district experience significant psychological pressure because of academic expectations imposed by schools, parents, and society.

The findings support the stress theory proposed by Hans Selye and the developmental theories of Erikson and Bronfenbrenner. The results also align with the observations of Deb, UNICEF, and NCERT regarding examination stress and adolescent anxiety.

The study indicates that educational reforms should focus on emotional well-being, creativity, life skills, counselling support, and child-centred learning approaches.

14. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Educational institutions should introduce counselling and mental health awareness programmes.
2. Teachers should adopt child-friendly and activity-based teaching methods.
3. Examination systems should emphasize holistic evaluation rather than rote memorization.
4. Parents should avoid excessive academic pressure on children.
5. Yoga, meditation, and life-skill education should be integrated into school curriculum.
6. Schools should encourage sports and co-curricular activities.
7. Teachers should receive training in adolescent psychology and counselling.

15. SUGGESTIONS

- Establish counselling centres in rural schools.
- Conduct stress-management workshops for adolescents.
- Reduce excessive homework and examination burden.
- Encourage recreational and creative activities in schools.
- Organize awareness programmes for parents regarding adolescent psychology.
- Introduce peer-support systems in schools.
- Encourage interactive and experiential learning methods.
- Strengthen teacher-student emotional relationships.

16. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study was limited to Nayagarh district only.
2. The sample size was restricted to 200 adolescents.
3. The study focused mainly on secondary school students.
4. Responses may contain subjective bias.
5. Longitudinal mental health changes were not examined.

17. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the Indian education system significantly influences the mental health of adolescents in Nayagarh district of Odisha. Academic competition, examination stress, parental expectations, and fear of failure create emotional pressure among students. Adolescents require supportive educational environments that promote emotional well-being alongside academic achievement.

The findings clearly indicate that mental health should be considered an essential component of education. Schools must move beyond examination-oriented learning and adopt holistic educational practices that nurture emotional, social, and psychological development. Educational reforms focusing on counselling services, mental health awareness, life skills, and stress-free learning are essential for building psychologically healthy adolescents and a progressive society.

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