



IMPACT OF COMPETITIVE EXAM ON ANXIETY AND STRESS LEVEL OF STUDENTS STUDYING IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

Dr. Kavita Gupta, *¹, Aanchal Pandit*²

Assistant professor, Mahalakshmi College for Girls, Duhai, Ghaziabad

Student (M.Ed.), Mahalakshmi College for Girls, Duhai, Ghaziabad

Email - *¹. drkavitagupta.kg@gmail.com *² aachalpandit@gmail.com

Abstract: *Little minds are like soil, we can shape them as we like. But nowadays everyone wants these minds to be educated, to become engineers, doctors or scientists. Yes, this is right - hard work is the key to success, hard work and effort are always rewarded with higher scores in competitive exams. Students have to appear in school, college and competitive examinations where they face a lot of anxiety. This is a psychological condition that has a negative impact on the academic development of students. Senior secondary level is an important part for the students. To achieve success, it is mandatory to get a good academic record. This stress becomes an obstacle to achieving this. As a result, the overall exam performance suffers badly. Chronic stress is the first symptom of mental illness because it slows down the brain's metabolism. In our country, issues of test anxiety, academic depression and stress are less discussed. The majority of schools do not provide students with strategies for coping with test anxiety and mental health issues. They even divide the students into groups based on the result of the test they conduct; these techniques place even more stress on the students to maintain their performance standards; not addressing these predicaments could cause serious issues or perhaps lead to students being in a position where they might end their own lives.*

Keywords : *Competitive Exams, Stress, Anxiety, Academic records.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Competitive exam is a method used to select suitable candidates for specific courses. In densely populated nations like ours, millions of candidates strive to pass these tests and secure a place at a reputable university. When examining the educational system in this rapidly developing country, it becomes apparent that students are ill-prepared for the level of complexity these assessments involve. Competitive exams have become a common feature of the education system, particularly in countries like India and China, where they greatly influence academic and professional success. While these exams aim to offer equal opportunities to all students and recognize merit, they often lead to heightened pressure, stress, and anxiety among students, negatively impacting their mental well-being. The intense competition, societal expectations, and institutional pressures to excel in these exams have contributed to a surge in mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and burnout among students.

Considering the significant repercussions of competitive exams, such as heightened stress and anxiety, decreased creativity, increased reliance on memorization, feelings of inferiority due to inability to keep pace with high-achieving peers, fear of failure leading to concerns about admission into desired institutions, and subsequent anxiety about unemployment. Despite growing apprehensions regarding the effects of competitive exams on students' mental well-being, there is a lack of extensive research on this subject.

Understanding the effects of competitive exams on students' mental health is essential, as it significantly influences their long-term well-being and success. Inadequate mental health can result in academic struggles, job dissatisfaction, and a lower quality of life. Additionally, the impact of these exams on students' mental well-being extends beyond the exam period, with stress and anxiety often persisting well after the exams have ended.



2. Review of related Literature:

1. Anxiety and stress "(G Manjula and Vijaylaxmi A.H.M. 2012), (Edmund 1984), (Joost, 2007)". Studies have shown that children can be motivated and sometimes even perform better with a reasonable amount of stress "(Moore, Burrows & Dalziel, 1992)". But when it's used excessively, it can have serious consequences for students.

2. Competitive exams and its impacts on student's mental health (Sahil Prashar & Dr. Birendri 2023) the results of this study show that while competitive exams can have a positive impact on students' mental health, they can also have a negative impact on their mental health. Suicides related to competitive examinations have become a major problem for the country as the number of suicides has increased. Students' mental health suffers as a result of these exams. Academic, parental and schooling, high pressure to perform and parental expectations for success in competitive entrance exams all affect students' mental health.

3. Assessment of depression, anxiety and stress among students preparing for various competitive exams Dr.Ashish Srivastava, Dr.Don Ranjan (2018)The present study was conducted in the Department of Community Medicine, NSCB Medical College Jabalpur, and M.P. The study was descriptive and cross sectional and aimed to access the level of depression, anxiety and stress among students preparing for preparing for various competitive engineering and medical entrance examinations. The study was conducted on 400 students from 8 different coaching institutes of Jabalpur. The salient observation of the study was as follows:

1. 19.5% of the total participants were found to have mild depression, 20.3 moderate depressions and 8.8 severe depressions. Severe depression.
2. 19% of the total participants were found to have mild stress, 14.8% moderate stress and 12% severe stress personal stress are among the factors that students face. Extremely competitive severe stress
3. 21% of all participants were found to have mild anxiety, 17.8% moderate anxiety and 27.3% severe anxiety.

3. Objectives of the study :

The specific objectives of the study are-

- To study the impact of competitive exams on anxiety and stress level of students studying in senior secondary schools.
- To analyse the different causes of the effects of competitive examinations on anxiety and stress level of students studying in senior secondary schools.
- To find solutions to reduce the negative effects of competitive exams on anxiety and stress level of students studying in senior secondary schools.

Competitive examinations

Competitive examinations are norm-referenced, high-stakes tests in which candidates are ranked by grade and/or percentile, and then the top candidates are selected. If the examination is open for n positions, the first n candidates in the rankings pass, and the others are rejected. Used as entrance examinations for universities, colleges, such as the Joint Entrance Examination, or secondary schools Types include the Civil Service Examination, which is required for positions in the public sector; the US Foreign Service Examination; and the United Nations Competitive Examination. Competitive examinations are seen as an egalitarian way of selecting worthy candidates without the risk of influence peddling, bias or other concerns.

The impact of competitive exams on students' mental health and its causes: Getting a government job nowadays is very competitive and pressured. Competitive candidates are under a lot of pressure to do well in order to meet their own and their parents' expectations. As the level of competition for government jobs increases, candidates to feel increasingly anxious. Stress has a detrimental effect on candidates' minds and bodies. Several professions in Indian society, such as the civil service, medicine and engineering, are seen as status symbols and held in high esteem. These professions are often associated with a higher standard of living and income. Most Indian parents believe that certain professions are associated with stability, while others are not. In Indian society, admission to a prestigious institution is seen as one of the most important indicators of one's worth. There is also a lack of knowledge about the different career options available to students.



In Indian society, getting into a prestigious institution is considered one of the most important indicators of one's worth. There is also a lack of information about the different career options available to students.

In recent years, there has been an increase in suicide and depression among Indian students. The struggles to get into a prestigious educational institution and a lack of jobs have been suggested as possible explanations. The pressure imposed on students by their families and educational institutions is another factor that causes physiological stress.

In addition, students are concerned about the competitive climate of coaching institutes. Students are usually stressed by exams, both board and competitive. Their coaching institutions don't offer much help in preparing for board exams. This is particularly difficult for students who are not academically successful. As a result of being looked down upon by their peers, they develop an inferiority complex.

Competitive candidates work hard and study longer. When it comes to qualification standards, there are long gestation periods and many unknowns. As a result, students often go through a cycle of hope and despair. They are under great pressure to and find it difficult to concentrate during the preparation period. They may be suffering from a variety of illnesses. Students may also have physical and emotional health problems that can have long-term effects. They have different health problems as a result of their demanding and gruelling practice. Students become increasingly stressed as a result of increased competition and pressure to perform. This is particularly true for students studying for competitive exams.

Exams are used to assess a student's academic performance. As a result, students studying for competitive exams face increased academic pressure. Academic stress affects people from all walks of life and from a wide range of countries, ethnicities and backgrounds. Academic performance is influenced by two main factors: parental expectations and the fear of failing exams. Academic stress is a major concern for secondary and tertiary students. Students' learning ability, academic performance, educational and employment outcomes sleep quality and quantity, physical health, mental health and substance use outcomes have all been shown to be negatively affected by persistent educational stress. Both family and psychological stress are associated with academic stress.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness among students studying for exams. Anxiety disorders occur when anxiety interferes with daily activities, limiting your ability to function and causing a lot of stress and anxiety. Anxiety disorders are characterised by a wide range of symptoms, including

- Feeling stressed
- Feeling irritable
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling anxious
- Feel dizzy
- Shortness of breath
- Irregular heartbeat

Exam anxiety has also been linked to psychological problems. According to a recent UNESCO study, students studying for competitive exams are under a lot of stress, which can lead to anxiety and mental tension.

From time to time, candidates for competitive examinations have been observed to be depressed. This can lead to other symptoms, including suicidal thoughts. Depression is a common but serious mental illness that makes people feel hopeless and powerless, as if they are cut off from the rest of the world. Candidates may experience symptoms such as-

- Sadness
- Changes in hunger or weight
- Loss of social interest
- Tiredness, loss of energy



- Unable to sleep well
- Guilt or anger about past failures
- Feeling angry or frustrated for no obvious reason

It affects their lives. It makes it difficult to work, study, sleep and eat.

There is a need for a comprehensive study of suicide in specific demographic groups of competitive exam candidates in order to provide reliable suggestions for suicide prevention.

4. Challenges in Higher Education and Examination System in India : Higher education means tertiary education, which is after 12 years of schooling. It includes graduate, postgraduate and other doctoral programmes.

India is home to some of the largest higher education institutions worldwide. It comprises over 1000 universities and over 42,000 colleges. In recent years, with the combined efforts of public and private players, Indian higher education has grown impressively. The knowledge and skills of the students should be properly assessed to evaluate the performance, but the present examination system focuses only on the knowledge of the students. They are encouraged to read books and the examination is completely based on bookish knowledge.

The higher education and examination system in India faces challenges such as **Disparities in access:** There are disparities in access to quality education, with urban areas often having better resources than rural areas.

Overemphasis on rote learning: The system has been criticised for its emphasis on rote learning rather than fostering critical thinking and practical skills.

Exam-centric culture: The focus on high-stakes exams creates a stressful environment, sometimes leading to mental health problems among students.

Quality of Institutions: While some institutions excel, there are concerns about the overall quality of education in many colleges and universities.

Employability gap: There's a gap between the academic curriculum and the needs of industry, which affects the employability of graduates.

Lack of research culture: The research ecosystem needs improvement, with a greater emphasis on innovation and research output.

Efforts are being made to address these issues, but comprehensive reform is an ongoing necessity.

5. Solutions to reduce the negative effects of competitive exams :

Shift towards a holistic model of education is crucial. The curriculum should move beyond rote learning to include competency-based learning. This would equip students with practical skills, making them better equipped for both higher education and employment. In addition, extracurricular activities, arts and sports should be integrated into the education system to promote a more balanced and holistic development.

Addressing mental health is of paramount importance. Establishing robust counselling services in schools can provide students with the support they need to cope with stress and make informed decisions. In addition, educating parents about the potential harmful effects of excessive pressure on students is essential. Parental awareness can contribute to a supportive home environment and encourage a balanced approach to education.

To counter the negative effects of competitive examinations, there should be a move towards more flexible methods of assessment. Continuous assessment, project work and practical demonstrations can be viable alternatives to the traditional exam-centred approach. This shift would not only reduce the stress associated with exams, but also promote a deeper understanding of subjects.

Comprehensive careers guidance programmes are essential. Students should have access to information about different career paths so that they can make informed choices. This would reduce anxiety about future uncertainties and empower students to pursue fields that match their interests and skills



Inclusive education is another key component. The recognition and accommodation of different learning styles and paces can minimise students' fear of failure. The creation of an inclusive environment can ensure that every student feels supported and valued. By creating an inclusive environment, educational institutions can ensure that every student feels supported and valued.

Teacher training is fundamental to implementing these changes. Teachers should be trained to create a positive learning environment, to address the mental health needs of students and to adapt teaching methods to different abilities. Well-prepared teachers have a key role to play in the creation of a nurturing educational atmosphere.

Students generally experience stress and anxiety for a variety of reasons. As exams approach, the combined effect of all these factors can lead to nervousness. Some useful tips may prove to be simple and helpful in helping students to perform better and remain calm and stress-free during exams.

Start preparing early: Preparing early gives enough time to break down the tasks into manageable chunks. It allows you to set a realistic timetable so that the workload feels less overwhelming. By spreading your efforts over a longer period, you reduce the pressure of cramming at the last minute and ensure a deeper understanding of the material. Seventy-five per cent of students who started preparing at least six months before an exam felt less stressed than those who started later, according to a survey by India Today.

Stay positive

Staying positive is crucial for students during exam time as they face a lot of pressure from society and family. Academic success is very important in India and students have a lot of pressure.

Manage your time

Time management is crucial when preparing for exams. Students today often face the challenge of balancing their studies with other activities such as coaching, extracurricular activities and family commitments. It is therefore important for them to plan their day in advance and prioritise their tasks accordingly.

Take breaks

Students often study for long periods without taking proper breaks, which can lead to burnout and reduced productivity. It is important for them to take regular breaks, ideally every hour, to refresh their minds and avoid mental exhaustion. Activities such as listening to music, taking a short walk or doing some light stretching can be used during these breaks.

Get enough sleep

Sleep is very important for academic performance and general health. Students often sacrifice sleep to study for exams, which can have a negative impact on their mental and physical health. It is recommended that every child gets at least 6 to 7 hours of sleep every night to ensure that their mind functions optimally.

Organise yourself

Students should be particularly organised in the management of their study materials such as: books, notes and textbooks. Therefore, it is important for them to keep their study material easily accessible. They can ensure that they can find what they need quickly and easily by using tools such as: folders, organisers and digital notes, etc.

6. Conclusion: It is crucial to investigate the impact of competitive exams on students' mental health. It has long-term implications for their overall wellbeing and future success. The pressure on students who sit for competitive examinations in India is immense. Students are expected to perform at the highest level and failing to do so becomes personal. Students are expected to do their best and any failure is seen as a personal failure. Anxiety, stress and depression can result from this pressure.

Several factors contribute to the pressure on students to take competitive exams. One factor is the high value placed on education in India. Education is the key to success; students are expected to excel in their studies. Another factor is the limited number of places available in good colleges and universities. This means that students have to do their best to succeed, and there is a lot of competition for these places. There can be a number of negative consequences of this pressure on students. It can lead to anxiety, stress and depression. It can also lead to the pressure of competitive exams.



It is important to support students. Support can be in the form of counselling and support groups, or it can be in the form of teaching.

It is also important to teach students how to cope with stress and anxiety. One important thing is to support students. This can be done through counselling and support groups. It is also important to teach students how to manage stress and anxiety. Pupils should also be encouraged to take breaks from studying and engage in activities they enjoy.

The pressure on students to take competitive exams is a serious problem. It is important to take steps to help students cope with this pressure. By supporting students and teaching them how to manage stress, we can help them succeed in their studies and lead happy and healthy lives.

REFERENCES:

1. Saima, R. & Qadir, B. (2011). A study of factors affecting students' performance in examination at university level. *Procedia- social and behavioral science*, 15, pp. 2042- 2047
2. Kumari, R. 2012. Relationship between Stress and Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students
3. Mental health and competitive examinations'. *EDUINDEX News*, 24 Sept. 2020.
<https://eduindex.org/2020/09/24/mental-health-and-competitive-exams>
4. Hardaha, R. (18 January 2020). "JEE Main Result 2020: Unable to qualify for JEE Exam, 21-Year-Old Boy Hangs Himself to Death'. *Indian TV News, India TV news*.
<https://www.indiatvnews.com/education/news-jee-main-result-2020-dhanbad-boycommits-suicide-hangs-self-580886>