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DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND REACTION AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study identifies the differences in the perception of academic stress reactions among senior secondary school students falling in low and high academic stress groups. For this, Busari's Students' Academic Stress Scale (SASS) was adapted by the investigators. Data was collected from various senior-secondary schools students of Haryana. A sample of 444 senior-secondary school students was drawn randomly from the population. To determine the differences in the perception of academic stress reactions among low and high academic stress group's students, t-test was used via SPSS version 16.0. The findings of the study reveal that senior-secondary schools students of low and high academic stress groups differ significantly in their perceptions of cognitive, affective and behavioral reactions to academic stressors.

KEYWORDS : *Academic Stress, Perception, Reaction to Stressors, Cognitive Reaction, Affective Reaction, Behavioural Reaction .*

INTRODUCTION

Stress is not something strange to our daily life. Today our life is full of different types of stressors. It is the emotional and physical strain caused as a result of our response to what happens around us. Stress is an entirely natural process – it is person's perception of the event that determines their response. Stress can affect anyone – kids, teenagers, adults and elderly. At one point or the other, everybody goes through stress – be it relationship demands, school work, education etc. Everybody has ability, which helps in dealing with everyday life problems and tension. Stress of any type may be harmful for individuals' psychological, physical as-well-as social wellbeing. A long exposure to stressful life causes many difficulties for individual to handle day to day living. Stress is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of daily living – necessary because without some stress we could be listless and stress is relates   to any event (external/internal), thus unavoidable. During the scientific era and the rapid development of technology, people have become increasingly intense. As a result, each and everybody is quite busy and, therefore, stress is a natural outcome of modern era. Apart from this some amount of stress is the platform for individual and also reinforcement for person to progress. It

not only affects our thoughts and feelings but also influence our behavioure.

People react to the same stressor in different ways, few persons deal with the stressors effectively in spite of difficult situations and remain undisturbed and well-adjusted but on the other hand, other became disorganized, maladjusted and displaying the signs of severe emotional disturbances.

Various psychologists tried to define stress from time to time. Humphrey, Yow and Bowden, (2000) defined stress as "any factor, acting internally or externally, which makes adaption to environment difficult and which induces increased effort on the part of the individual to maintain an equilibrium between himself and herself and the external environment". Richlin-Klonsky and Hoe, (2003), defined "stress is a physical and mental response to everyday demands, particularly those associated with change". From the last decade, "stress has become an important topic in academic circle" (Agolla and Ongori, 2009) probably because of the fact that life in general is flooded by many stresses. Adolescents face various types of stress in their life and academic stress is one among them which is responsible for mental health problems in the lives of young children (Rngaswamy, 1982). It has been estimated that 10% to 30% students experience academic related stress that affects their academic performance (Brackney and Karabenick, 1995), psychological adjustment (Philips, 1978) along with their overall emotional and physical well-being. As different academic institutions have different work settings compared to non-academic one would expect the difference in causes, and consequences of stress in the two type set-up (Chang and Lu, 2007).

Academic stress among students have long been investigated and researchers found various stressors as-too much competitions, peer and family pressure, family environment, poor coordination with other students or teachers (Fairbrother and Warn, 2003). Research suggests that there are many sources of academic stress such as - high academic expectations including self, parents, teachers, school administrators, and larger societal origins (Lee and Larson, 2000; Schoolland, 1990; Verma and Gupta, 1990). Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for examination, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). Institutional level stressors are overcrowded classrooms, semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work (Awino and Agolla, 2008). The pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2006). Another source of academic stress is the fear of failure is too a definite stressor (Kolko, 1980). In 2005, Kumar and Jejurkar found that academic factors were responsible for higher level of academic stress.

Thus, various stressors are responsible for students' academic stress. Many studies suggest that academic stress can have serious consequences for students. It was found that stress of examination, and family expectations resulted in a variety of somatic symptoms like stomachaches, fever, headaches, and nausea, in addition to behavioural problems such as aggressiveness, temper tantrums and adjustment difficulties (Verma and Gupta, 1990). Students also experienced various types of psychological problems e.g. tension, anxiety, withdrawal, irritability, and sleeplessness (Verma and Gupta, 1990).

`It is very much clear from the above discussion that many factors contribute to the stress experienced by the students and the consequences of stress are varied and some of them are very harmful. Erkutlu and Chafra (2006), for example, an individual becomes disorganized and disoriented. He/she may be less able to cope up with stress or, causing situations.

The purpose of the present study was to determine the differences in the perception of three categories of reaction i.e. cognitive, affective and behavioural appraisal, which describes reaction to

stressors.

OBJECTIVES-
The objectives of the study are:
1.To study the differences in perception of low and high academic stress groups with regard to cognitive reaction.
2.To study the differences in perception of low and high academic stress groups with regard to affective reaction.
3.To study the differences in perception of low and high academic stress groups with regard to behavioural reaction.

HYPOTHESES-
The hypotheses of the study are:
1.There is no significant difference in the perception of low and high academic stress groups with regard to cognitive reaction.
2.There is no significant difference in the perception of low and high academic stress groups with regard to affective reaction.
3. There is no significant difference in the perception of low and high academic stress groups with regard to behavioural reaction.

METHODOLOGY
Sample : A sample of 444 senior- secondary school students from various schools of Haryana was randomly drawn from the population. All the senior-secondary school students those who volunteered to participate were included in the sample. The selected subjects ranging in age from 14 to 18 years with the mean age of 16 years. To realize the main objective of the study, selected subjects were tested on Students Academic Stress Scale (SASS) and on the basis of their total scores on this scale; subjects were further divided into low and high academic stress groups. Subjects having the scores on this scale, below 27% constituted the low academic stress group and it consisted of 120 subjects. On the other hand subjects scoring above 27% constituted the high academic stress group that consists of 120 subjects.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:
The investigator adapted A.O. Busari's Students Academic Stress Scale for the collection of data. This scale is a paper-pencil test consisting of 37 items. All the items are written in the form of statements. The scale consists of three subscales: cognitive reaction subscale describes the respondent's ability to analyze and think about stressed situations and the students's ability to use the effective strategies to reduce stress. Affective reaction subscale measures the students' feelings of fear, anxiety, worries, anger, guilt and grief. Behavioural reaction subscale describes the behavioural patterns like crying, drug-use, smoking, aggression, and irritability

Results : The obtained results are shown in tables below:

Table-1
Comparison of Low High Academic Stress Groups on Cognitive Reaction

Groups	Means	SDs	t-ratio	Level of significance
Low Academic Stress Group (N =120)	29.698	5.882	2.14	0.05
High Academic Stress Group (N=120)	28.342	3.691		
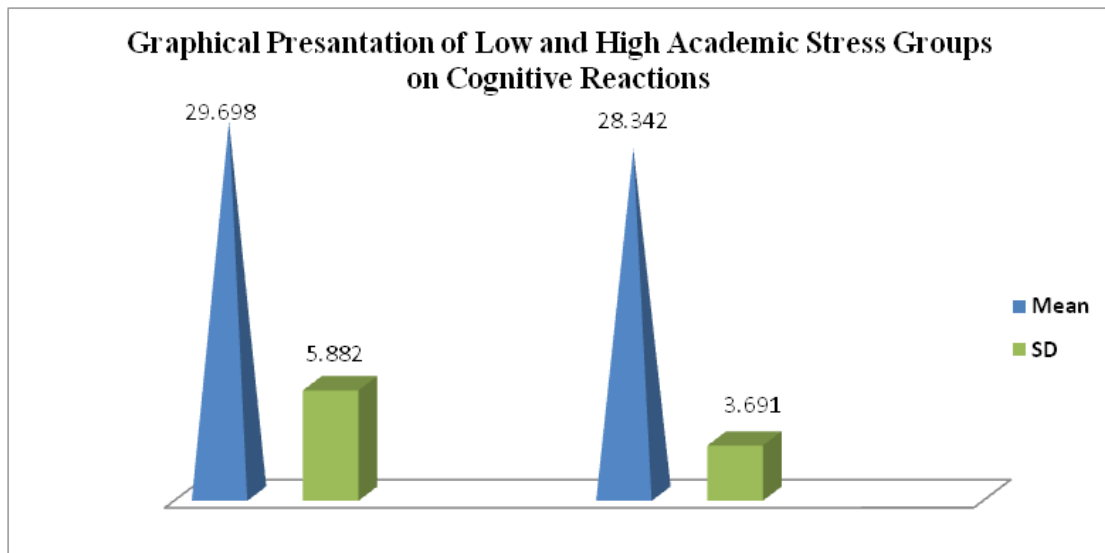
It can be observed from the above table (Table 1) that mean scores of low and high academic stress groups on the cognitive rea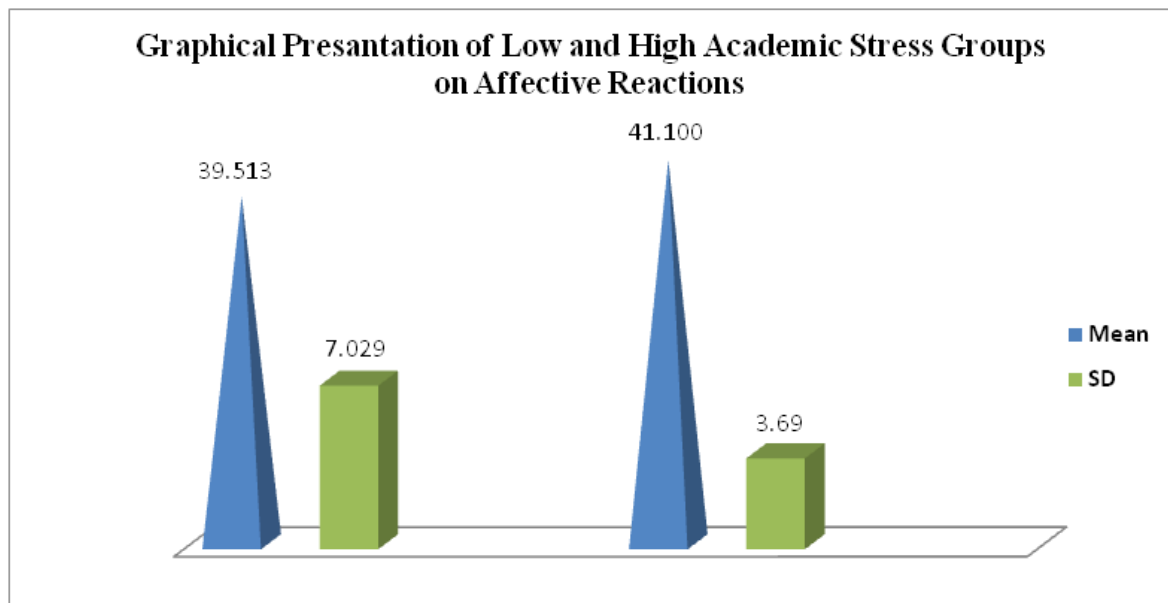ction are 29.698 and 28.342 with the respective standard deviations of 5.882 and 3.691. The obtained t-ratio equals to be 2.14 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. It posits that subjects belonging to the two comparable groups differsignificantly on the cognitive reaction to academic stressors. It posits that low academic stress group subjects feel more trouble in remembering, feel trouble in studying effectively, overwhelmed by the demands of study, feel worry about marks as compared to high academic stress group subjects. This finding can be rationalizedwith the inference that cognitive reaction of high academic stress groups students might have been determined by some other type of academic stress factors. The obtained results also supported by the findings of the study conducted by Agolla and Ongori, 2009. Hypothesis 1is rejected.

Table-2
Comparison of Low High Academic Stress Groups on Affective Reaction

Groups	Means	SDs	t-ratio	Level of significance
Low Academic Stress Group (N =120)	39.513	7.029	-2.154	0.05
High Academic Stress Group (N=120)	41.100	3.952		

Graphical Presantation of Low and High Academic Stress Groups on Affective Reactions

Above table reveal that mean scores of low and high academic stress group on affective reaction are 39.513 and 41.100 with the respective standard deviations of 7.029 and 3.952. The obtained t-ratio equals to be -2.154 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. It depicts that high academic stress group subjects scored higher on the affective reaction to academic stressors. The reaction to stressors considered to be related to affective category are :feel like crying, not emotionally stable, emotions stops me from studying, experience grief and depression often. The obtained results also supported by the findings of the study conducted by Wilks, 2008. Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Table-3
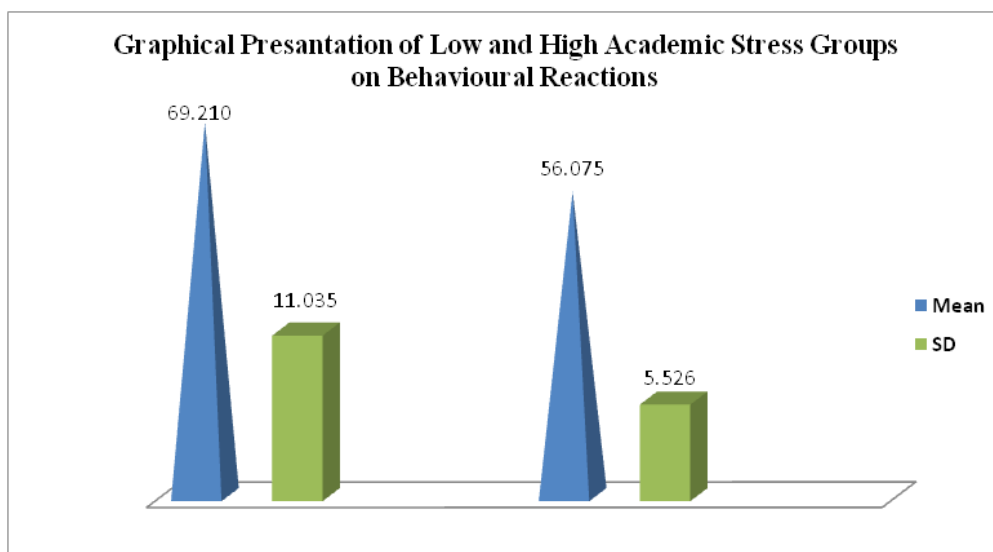Comparison of Low High Academic Stress Groups on Behavioural Reaction

Groups	Means	SDs	t-ratio	Level of significance
Low Academic Stress Group (N =120)	69.210	11.035	11.649	0.01
High Academic Stress Group (N=120)	56.075	5.526		

Graphical Presantation of Low and High Academic Stress Groups on Behavioural Reactions

It can be observed from the above table that mean scores of low and high academic stress groups on behavioural reaction to stressors are 69.210 and 56.075 with the respective SDs of 11.035 and 5.526. The obtained t-ratio equals to be 11.649 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. On behavioural reaction to stressors, low academic group subjects scores significantly higher mean scores as compared to high academic stress group subjects. Reaction to stressors considered to be related to behavioural components were; not attending classes, abuse others, use alcohol or drug to enable me study well, irritable towards others, miss too many of my lectures.This finding can be rationalized with the inference that behavioural reaction of high academic stress groups students might have been determined by some other type of academic stress factors. The obtained results also supported by the findings of the study conducted by Agolla and Ongori, 2009. Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

CONCLUSION:

The results of the study show that low academic stress group respondents scored significantly higher mean scores on the cognitive and behavioural reaction to stressors, but high academic stressor group respondents scored higher on the affective reaction to stressors. The study provided significant information regarding the senior-secondary school students' perception of three categories (cognitive, affective and behavioural) of reactions to academic stressors. The findings have wider implications for

teachers, parents and educationists. Although, more studies should still be conducted on the subject matter to be able to thoroughly understand academic stress as it affects students, so that better intervention programmes be developed.

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