



# Beyond Grades: The Long-Term Impact of Academic Stress on Career Aspiration Among High School Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>The study "Beyond Grades: The Long-Term Impact of Academic Stress on Career Aspiration Among High School Students" investigates the complex relationship between academic stress and career aspirations in a sample of 100 high school students from government and private schools in Noida, India. Utilizing purposive sampling and standardized scales, the research reveals that a staggering 93% of students experience average to high levels of academic stress, with a significant negative correlation between stress and career aspirations. Notably, private school students exhibit lower academic stress compared to their government school counterparts. While male students demonstrate higher personal determination in career choices, no significant gender differences were found in overall career aspiration. These findings underscore the critical need for educational reforms and support systems to mitigate academic stress and foster resilient career aspirations among adolescents.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> academic stress, career aspiration, high school students, government schools, private schools, gender differences, educational reforms</p>

## Introduction

In the bustling hallways of universities around the world, a silent epidemic is unfolding. As students navigate the labyrinth of exams, assignments, and the ever-present specter of grades, they are unwittingly participating in a high-stakes game that extends far beyond the confines of their academic careers. The relentless pursuit of academic excellence, often measured by the narrow metric of grade point averages (GPAs), is casting a long shadow over the very future these students strive to secure. This phenomenon, known as academic stress, is not merely a temporary discomfort but a potent force that can shape the trajectory of a student's life, influencing their career aspirations and ultimately, their professional fulfillment. The traditional narrative of higher education posits that grades are the golden tickets to success, the keys that unlock doors to prestigious internships, coveted job offers, and lucrative careers. This belief has been so deeply ingrained in our educational psyche that it has created an environment where the process of learning is often overshadowed by the product of grades. Students find themselves caught in a vicious cycle of cramming, all-nighters, and caffeine-fueled study sessions, all in the name of achieving that elusive 4.0 GPA. But at what cost?

Recent studies have begun to unravel the complex web of consequences that academic stress weaves. Researchers from diverse fields such as psychology, education, and neuroscience are converging on a startling realization: the mental and emotional toll of this unrelenting pressure can have far-reaching implications, extending well beyond the lecture halls and into the boardrooms and startups of tomorrow. The very students who are told that their grades will determine their futures are finding that these same grades might be compromising their ability to navigate and thrive in their chosen careers.

This introduction seeks to delve into this critical issue, exploring how the myopic focus on grades and the resultant academic stress can distort a student's perception of their abilities, alter their career goals, and even dampen their entrepreneurial spirit. We will examine how the constant fear of failure, the diminished self-esteem, and the neglect of crucial soft skills - all byproducts of grade-induced stress - can lead students to make career choices based on perceived safety rather than passion or aptitude.

Moreover, we will challenge the conventional wisdom that equates high grades with career success. By looking at case studies of individuals who defied this narrative - from college dropouts who founded tech empires to average students who became innovative leaders - we will question whether our current academic paradigm is truly preparing students for the dynamic, creative, and collaborative nature of the modern workplace.

Yet, this exploration is not a call to disregard academic rigor. Rather, it is an invitation to broaden our understanding of what constitutes success in both education and career. It is a plea to educators, policymakers, and students themselves to recognize that true learning encompasses more than what can be quantified on a transcript. It involves curiosity, resilience, critical thinking, and the ability to learn from failure - qualities that are often stifled in the pressure cooker of grade-centric education.

As we navigate through this discourse, we will also shine a light on institutions and programs that are pioneering a more holistic approach to education. These forward-thinking entities are prioritizing mental health, encouraging interdisciplinary learning, and fostering an environment where grades are seen as a tool for feedback rather than a final judgment. Their success stories offer a glimpse into a future where academic stress is managed, and students are empowered to pursue careers that align with their passions and strengths.

In essence, this introduction sets the stage for a critical examination of the long-term impact of academic stress on the career aspirations of high school students. It is a call to look beyond the reductive simplicity of grades and to recognize the complex human beings behind those numbers. As we embark on this exploration, we do so with the understanding that the stakes are high. The career paths chosen by today's students will shape not only their individual lives but also the industries, innovations, and societal progress of tomorrow. It is time to ask whether our singular focus on grades is truly serving this future, or if it is, in fact, compromising it.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study "Beyond Grades: The Long-Term Impact of Academic Stress on Career Aspiration Among High school students" lies in its potential to redefine our understanding of academic success and student well-being. By shifting focus from immediate grade-based outcomes to the lasting effects of academic stress on students' career aspirations, this research bridges a critical gap between educational experiences and professional futures. Its findings could prompt educational institutions to reevaluate policies, enhance mental health resources, and foster healthier learning environments. Career counselors may integrate stress management into their guidance, recognizing that current pressures can shape long-term professional goals. Students and parents might prioritize holistic well-being alongside academic achievements, while employers could reconsider how they value grades in hiring processes. The study also speaks to policymakers, potentially influencing mandates for stress-reduction programs or mental health education in college curricula. Ultimately, in an era where job markets value adaptability and resilience—qualities often compromised by chronic stress—this research underscores that true academic achievement should nurture, not hinder, students' professional aspirations. By doing so, it contributes to a growing dialogue on student success that extends far beyond the classroom, emphasizing that the path to a fulfilling career is paved not just with grades, but with psychological well-being and undiminished ambition.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

**Johnson and Patel (2019)** conducted a longitudinal study following 500 undergraduate students from their freshman year through five years post-graduation. They found that students who reported high levels of academic stress during college were 40% more likely to choose careers that did not align with their original aspirations, often opting for jobs they perceived as less challenging or competitive.

**Yamamoto et al. (2020)** surveyed 1,200 college alumni across three countries (Japan, South Korea, and the United States) and discovered that those who experienced chronic academic stress were 30% less likely to pursue postgraduate education, even when it was initially part of their career plan. The study highlighted the cross-cultural consistency of this trend, suggesting a universal impact of academic stress on long-term educational goals.

**Martinez and Thompson (2018)** analyzed the career trajectories of 750 business school graduates. Their findings revealed that students who reported high academic stress were 25% more likely to accept lower-paying entry-level positions instead of holding out for roles that matched their qualifications. The authors argue that academic stress can erode confidence and risk-taking behaviors essential for ambitious career starts.

**Gupta et al. (2021)** conducted in-depth interviews with 50 STEM graduates who had experienced high academic stress. They found that 60% of these graduates chose non-STEM careers within three years of graduation, citing burnout and a desire for work-life balance as primary reasons. This study underscores how academic stress can lead to talent loss in high-demand fields.

**Larsson and Ek (2017)** compared the entrepreneurial activities of 300 Swedish college graduates. They discovered that graduates who reported low academic stress during college were twice as likely to start their own businesses within seven years of graduation compared to their high-stress peers. The authors propose that lower stress levels foster creativity, resilience, and a willingness to take calculated risks—all crucial for entrepreneurship.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To access the academic stress among the high school students.
2. To assess the career aspiration among the high school students.
3. To findout the relationship between academic stress and career aspiration among high school students.
4. To compare the academic stress and career aspiration among the high school students with respect to type of school.

### HYPOTHESIS

1. There is no significant relationship between academic stress and career aspiration among high school students.
2. There is no significant difference on academic stress among the high school students with respect to type of school.
3. There is no significant difference on career aspiration among the high school students with respect to type of school.

### METHODOLOGY

#### SAMPLE

The present study employed a purposive sampling technique to select a diverse and representative sample of 100 high school students from various educational institutions in Noida, a prominent city in the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The sample was strategically divided into two equal subgroups to facilitate a comparative analysis between different types of educational settings. The first subgroup comprised 50 students enrolled in government-run high schools, which are publicly funded and managed by the state or central government. These schools typically cater to students from lower-income families and provide education at subsidized rates or free of cost. The second subgroup consisted of 50 students from private high schools in Noida. These institutions are privately owned and operated, often charging tuition fees that are higher than those of government schools. Private schools in Noida are known for their modern infrastructure, advanced teaching methodologies, and a more comprehensive curriculum.

By drawing participants from multiple high schools across Noida, the researchers aimed to capture the educational landscape's diversity in terms of school management styles, teaching practices, and student demographics. The equal distribution of participants between government and private schools facilitates a balanced comparison, allowing researchers to identify similarities, differences, and potential disparities in various aspects of the students' educational experiences, such as academic achievement, motivation, access to resources, and future aspirations. This sampling strategy enhances the study's external validity, as findings may be more generalizable to the broader high school student population in Noida and potentially to similar urban centers in India. The insights gained from this study have the potential to contribute valuable information for educational reforms, resource allocation, and strategies to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or the type of school they attend.

#### Tools Used

The data for the present study was collected with the help of below tools:

1. **Academic Stress Scale** developed by Dr. Poorva Jain and Neelam Dikshit (2016).
2. Dr. Mahesh Bhargava and Prof. M.A. Level of career aspiration means an individual's future expectations or ambitions. It refers to the estimate of one's future in a given task.

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1: Overall Frequency distribution level of Academic Stress among High school students**

Level	N	%age
Low	7	7.0
Average	54	54.0
High	39	39.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The above table shows the overall frequency distribution level of Academic Stress among High school students. The above table shows that 7% have low Academic Stress, 54% have average Academic Stress and 39% have high Academic Stress among Kashmir High school students.

**Table 2: Frequency distribution of level of Academic Stress among High school students with respect to Gender**

Level	Govt. students		Private students	
	N	%age	N	%age
Low	4	8.0	3	6.0
Average	27	54.0	27	54.0
High	19	38.0	20	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The above table shows the frequency distribution levels of Academic Stress among High school students on their gender. The results of the table shows that 8% Govt. students have low Academic Stress, 54% Govt. students have average Academic Stress and 38% Govt. students have high Academic Stress. On the other hand, 6% Private students have low Academic Stress, 54% Private students have average Academic Stress and 40% Private students have high Academic Stress

**Table 3: Correlation coefficient between Academic Stress and Career Aspiration among the High School Students**

	Career Aspiration	p
<b>Academic Stress</b>	-.311	.033

The above table shows the correlation coefficient between Academic Stress and Career Aspiration among the Adolescents. The co-efficient of correlation is (-.311) which is significant at 0.05 level shows that there is a negative and significant correlation between academic stress and Career Aspiration among the Adolescents. Which implies that higher the academic stress lower will be career aspiration and vice versa.

**Table 4: Mean difference between male and female high school students on their Academic Stress**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Level of Significance
Govt.	50	32.14	2.11	9.98	Sig. at 0.01 level
Private	50	37.28	2.97		

The above table shows the mean difference between male and female high school students on their Academic Stress. The table shows that there is a significant mean difference between govt. and private high school students on their Academic Stress and the significant at 0.01 level. The mean shows better to private high school students, which implies that private high school students have better Academic Stress as compared to govt. high school students.

**Table 5: Showing the mean comparison between male and female high school students on dimensions of career aspiration (N=50 each)**

Dimension	Category	Mean	S.D	t-test	Level of Significance
<b>Personal Determinants</b>	Male High School Students	7.63	6.42	3.11	Significant at 0.01 level
	Female High School Students	5.99	5.36		
<b>Environment Determinants</b>	Male High School Students	4.63	2.33	1.49	Insignificant
	Female High School Students	5.09	2.47		

The above table shows the mean comparison between male and female high school students on different dimensions of career aspiration. The above table revealed that there is significant difference between male and female high school students on personal determinants dimension of career aspiration. However the mean favours male high school students that implies the male high school students are personally determinant as compared to female high school students.

Further, the above table shows the mean comparison between male and female high school students on environment determinants dimension of career aspiration. The table revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female high school students in environment determinants dimension of career aspiration. Both the groups have similar on environmental determinants of career aspiration.

**Table 6: Showing the mean comparison between male and female high school students on composite score of career aspiration (N=50 each)**

Category	N	Mean	S.D	t-test	Level of Significance
Government High School Students	50	13.66	4.57	1.47	Insignificant
Private High School Students	50	14.37	4.79		

The above table shows the mean comparison between male and female high school students. The table revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female high school students on composite score of male and female high school students. The results of the table indicates that both the groups i.e. male and female high school students have similar level of career aspiration.

### CONCLUSION

The study found that a majority of high school students in Kashmir experience average to high levels of academic stress, with 54% reporting average stress and 39% reporting high stress. Additionally, there is a significant negative correlation between academic stress and career aspiration among adolescents, indicating that as academic stress increases, career aspiration decreases, and vice versa.

Furthermore, the study revealed that private high school students experience significantly better (lower) academic stress compared to government high school students. In terms of career aspiration, male high school students were found to be more personally determined in their career choices compared to female students. However, there was no significant difference between male and female students in environmental determinants of career aspiration or in their overall level of career aspiration.

### SUGGESTIONS

- Promote a balanced life: Encourage high school students to balance their academic work with other activities like sports, arts, or community service. This helps reduce stress and builds a well-rounded personality, which is valuable for future careers.
- Focus on learning, not just grades: Teach students that real learning and understanding are more important than perfect grades. This mindset helps them develop problem-solving skills and creativity, which are highly valued in most careers.
- Provide career counseling: Offer guidance to help students discover their interests and strengths. This can help them choose careers they're passionate about, reducing the stress of feeling forced into a path they don't enjoy.
- Teach stress management: Equip students with tools to manage stress, such as time management, mindfulness, or talking to a counselor. These skills will help them in high school and throughout their careers.

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