

Perceived Parental Pressure and Academic Stress Among School Students Aged 16-18 Years in Thanjavur, Tamilnadu

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Abstract: *Academic expectations can be an important part of adolescent development, but students may experience these expectations as pressure. This study examined perceived parental pressure and academic stress among school students aged 16–18 years in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, and assessed the association between the two variables. A quantitative, descriptive-correlational, cross-sectional design was used. Convenience sampling yielded 61 consenting students. Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire containing a 20-item perceived parental-pressure measure and a 30-item academic-stress measure. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson's product-moment correlation were used. The mean perceived parental-pressure score was 52.31 (SD = 17.07), and the mean academic-stress score was 85.62 (SD = 22.59). Internal consistency was high in this sample ($\alpha = .95$ and $.96$, respectively). Perceived parental pressure was positively associated with academic stress, $r = .38$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [.14, .57]. Students reporting greater perceived parental pressure tended to report greater academic stress. Because the study was cross-sectional and used a convenience sample, the findings do not establish causation and should not be generalised to all adolescents. The results highlight the value of realistic academic expectations, supportive family communication, and accessible school-based student support.*

Keywords: perceived parental pressure, academic stress, adolescents, school students, Thanjavur

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of educational, social, and personal change. Students aged 16–18 years may face examinations, decisions about higher education, and expectations concerning future careers. Parents can provide valuable encouragement and guidance during this stage. However, when expectations are experienced as excessive, restrictive, or difficult to meet, students may perceive parental involvement as pressure. The impact of expectations is likely to depend not only on what parents intend, but also on how young people interpret and experience those expectations.

Academic stress refers to tension and strain associated with learning and educational demands. It may be reflected in examination-related worry, fear of failure, concerns about results, difficulty concentrating or remembering information, sleep disruption, and perceived difficulty managing schoolwork. Such experiences vary between students and do not, by themselves, indicate a clinical disorder. Understanding the factors associated with academic stress can help families and schools identify ways to support students' educational experiences and well-being.

Previous research in India has examined parental academic pressure and student stress. Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) investigated academic stress and parental pressure among higher secondary students in Kolkata and reported an association between these experiences. Research on adolescents preparing for competitive examinations has also drawn attention to the academic demands and expectations experienced by students (Pienyu et al., 2024). A systematic review by Steare et al. (2023) further considered links between academic pressure and adolescent mental-health problems. Findings from different populations and instruments cannot be assumed to apply identically to every

setting, which supports the value of context-specific research.

The present study focused on school students aged 16–18 years in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. It aimed to describe perceived parental pressure and academic stress and to examine whether the variables were significantly related. The research hypothesis proposed a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived parental pressure and academic stress.

2. Methodology

Research Design and Participants

A quantitative descriptive-correlational design with a cross-sectional approach was adopted. No intervention was administered and no variable was manipulated. Convenience sampling was used to recruit eligible, willing school students aged 16–18 years. Of 62 response records, one without recorded consent was excluded; the final analytical sample comprised 61 consenting participants. The mean age was 16.92 years (SD = 0.92). There were 28 participants aged 16, 10 aged 17, and 23 aged 18 years.

Measures and Procedure

Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire. Perceived parental pressure was measured using a selected, modified 20-item questionnaire addressing parental expectations, academic demands, restrictions, comparisons, and reactions to achievement. Academic stress was measured using a 30-item questionnaire covering examination concerns, results-related tension, concentration and memory difficulties, homework, fear of failure, and related academic experiences. Items were scored on five-point response formats, and total scores were calculated by summing the item scores. The possible total-score ranges were 20–100 for perceived parental pressure and 30–150 for

academic stress. The study used total scores for the main analysis.

Data Analysis and Ethics

Frequencies and percentages summarised selected item responses; means and standard deviations described total scores. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson's product-moment correlation with a two-tailed significance test was used to examine the relationship between the total scores, and a 95% confidence interval was considered. Only responses with recorded consent were retained, and direct identifiers were not used in the statistical analysis. The measures' reliability estimates are specific to this sample and do not, by themselves, establish validity.

3. Results

The mean perceived parental-pressure score was 52.31 (SD = 17.07), equivalent to a mean item score of 2.62. The mean academic-stress score was 85.62 (SD = 22.59), equivalent to a mean item score of 2.85. These descriptive values summarise responses in the participating sample; they should not be interpreted as low, moderate, or high severity categories because verified cut-offs were not available for the versions used.

Measure	Items	Mean (SD)	Cronbach's α
Perceived parental pressure	20	52.31 (17.07)	.95
Academic stress	30	85.62 (22.59)	.96

At item level, 35 students (57.4%) endorsed the statement that they must be successful at school, and 28 (45.9%) endorsed the statement concerning very high parental expectations. For academic stress, 30 students (49.2%) reported feeling tense about results after examinations, 28 (45.9%) reported difficulty remembering, and 27 (44.3%) reported a lack of concentration in class. These percentages describe selected responses in this sample and are not population prevalence estimates.

Pearson's correlation showed a statistically significant positive association between perceived parental pressure and academic stress, $r = .38$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [.14, .57]. The confidence interval did not include zero, and the p value was below .05. Therefore, the hypothesis proposing a positive relationship was supported. The association was moderate in size; it indicates that higher parental-pressure scores tended to accompany higher academic-stress scores, but does not show that one variable caused the other.

4. Discussion

The main finding was a positive association between perceived parental pressure and academic stress among the 61 participating students. Students who reported greater pressure around academic expectations, restrictions, or achievement appeared more likely to report stress-related academic experiences. This pattern is consistent with the concern raised in earlier Indian research, including Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015), that students' perceptions of parental academic pressure may be related to academic stress. Research involving adolescents preparing for competitive entrance examinations has likewise highlighted the

relevance of academic demands and perceived parental pressure (Pienyu et al., 2024). The present results add a focused description from students aged 16–18 years in Thanjavur, although differences in sampling and measurement prevent direct comparison of score levels across studies.

The item responses provide further context for the overall association. More than half of the sample endorsed the statement about needing to be successful at school, while nearly half reported very high parental expectations. Examination-result tension was the most frequently endorsed academic-stress item among those highlighted. Difficulty remembering and lack of concentration were also reported by substantial proportions of participants. These responses suggest that pressure and stress may be experienced through both family expectations and students' day-to-day academic functioning. They should not be interpreted as diagnoses or as evidence that all parental expectations are harmful.

Parents play an important role in supporting educational progress. The practical implication is not to remove parental involvement, but to encourage expectations that are realistic, flexible, and responsive to a young person's abilities and circumstances. Listening without immediate criticism, recognising effort and improvement, allowing reasonable non-academic activities, and discussing academic difficulties constructively may help preserve support while reducing the possibility that guidance is experienced as pressure. Teachers and school counsellors may help students develop study plans, time-management skills, examination coping strategies, and confidence in seeking help. These are possible applications of the findings; the present study did not test the effectiveness of any intervention.

Several limitations are important. The sample was small and selected through convenience sampling, so it may not represent the wider population of students in Thanjavur or elsewhere. The cross-sectional design measured the variables at one point in time and cannot establish temporal order or causation. Both measures relied on self-report, which may be influenced by interpretation or response tendencies. The parental-pressure measure was a selected modified questionnaire, and further assessment of its validity in different populations would be valuable. The study also did not collect wider demographic and contextual information, such as gender, school type, socioeconomic circumstances, parental education, coping resources, or academic performance. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, include multiple schools, and consider longitudinal designs and additional variables such as parental warmth, autonomy support, coping strategies, and school climate.

5. Conclusion

Among the school students aged 16–18 years who participated in this study in Thanjavur, perceived parental pressure was significantly and positively associated with academic stress ($r = .38$, $p = .003$). The results support the research hypothesis within this sample and suggest that students' experiences of parental expectations are relevant to

understanding academic stress. The findings do not establish causation and should be interpreted in light of the sample and measurement limitations. Supportive communication, balanced expectations, and accessible school-based guidance are reasonable areas for attention, while further research is needed to determine how broadly the findings apply.

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