

Academic Anxiety and Peer Pressure Among Higher Secondary Students

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Abstract

Academic anxiety and peer pressure represent critical intersecting challenges for adolescents in Uttar Pradesh (UP) State, India, yet the joint influence of peer dynamics and emotional regulation on this distress remains underexplored. This study utilized a descriptive correlational survey design to examine the relationship between peer pressure and academic anxiety among a sample of 350 higher secondary school students. Data were gathered using structured, adapted instruments measuring peer pressure, academic anxiety, and emotional dynamics, achieving strong Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients (0.78 and 0.85). Findings revealed an alarming 62.00% of higher secondary students experience high levels of academic anxiety. Pearson product-moment correlation demonstrated a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between peer pressure and academic anxiety ($r = 0.86$, $p = 0.000$). Furthermore, multiple regression analysis established that peer pressure and emotional dynamics jointly accounted for 83% of the total variance in academic anxiety ($R^2 = 0.83$, $F = 854.45$, $p < 0.05$), with peer pressure emerging as a dominant predictor of evaluative stress. These results underscore that adolescent academic distress is driven heavily by interpersonal social comparisons and peer norms alongside intrapersonal emotional coping abilities. The study concludes that institutional interventions must move beyond isolated individual counseling to implement integrated mental health frameworks that simultaneously bolster emotional intelligence and dismantle toxic, competitive peer environments in secondary education.

Keywords: Academic anxiety, peer pressure, emotional regulation, higher secondary education, and multiple regression analysis

Introduction

Academic anxiety and peer pressure constitute a substantial, interrelated mental health epidemic among higher secondary students worldwide. Because of the impending high-stakes board tests, university applications, and identity development, this transitional schooling era functions like a pressure cooker. According to clinical findings provided by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), up to 81.6% of teenagers have exam-related anxiety, which is driven directly by peer competitiveness and familial expectations.[1]

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Academic anxiety is a form of severe dread, concern, or tension that occurs before to, during, or following school duties and examinations. For higher secondary pupils, it transforms routine coursework into an enormous emotional load that damages both health and GPA. According to psychological study published by the American Psychological Association (APA), this form of prolonged stress causes physical and mental weariness, making it difficult to concentrate effectively or recall what you learned.

Anxiety is a common emotional disorder that impairs students' focus, self-esteem, and general academic performance. Peer pressure frequently exacerbates this issue among senior secondary school pupils, whereas emotional intelligence moderates it. Peer pressure effects students' attitudes, motivation, and coping behaviors in educational settings, whereas emotional intelligence governs their capacity to notice, comprehend, and control emotions successfully.

Anxiety is commonly defined as a type of evaluative stress that includes cognitive concern, emotional arousal, and physiological tension, all of which affect focus, working memory, and academic performance. Contemporary research emphasizes the cognitive-affective connection that underpins this worry, finding that intrusive thoughts and anticipatory dread impair students' cognitive efficiency, particularly in high-stakes test settings. Empirical research in secondary school populations consistently show that increased examination anxiety is associated with poorer academic achievements and lower test performance. [2,3]

Anxiety is frequently produced by causes such as fear of failure, unrealistic parental or school expectations, insufficient preparation, negative peer comparison, and poor emotional control, all of which contribute to students' view of exams as threatening rather than evaluative experiences. Psychological theorists like as Charles Spielberger and Irwin Sarason [7] have demonstrated how continuous concern, low academic self-confidence, and high performance pressure can cause cognitive interference, emotional discomfort, and physiological arousal before and during exams. The consequences are frequently academic and psychological, with impaired concentration, decreased working memory efficiency, poor academic performance, avoidance of evaluative situations, low self-esteem, and, in severe cases, broader mental health issues such as stress, sleep disturbance, and depressive symptoms.[3]

In contrast, peer pressure is a significant social aspect that influences students' exam experiences. During adolescence, the need for peer acceptability, social comparison, and group conformity can influence academic attitudes, study habits, and emotional responses to assessment. Negative peer influence, such as unhealthy competitiveness, criticism of underperformance, or group procrastination, can exacerbate test anxiety, whereas helpful peer networks can boost confidence and readiness. Empirical research shows that peer dynamics greatly predict anxiety reactions to academic evaluations.[4,5]

Peer pressure is the direct or indirect impact that a social group has on people of a similar age or position, causing them to modify their views, beliefs, or actions in order to comply to group norms. For upper secondary students negotiating demanding educational contexts, social influence influences everything from study habits and stream selection to lifestyle and self-image. The NCERT mental health recommendations expressly list peer dynamics and examinations as significant structural stresses for teenagers.

Literature review

W. Ma et al. [6] study the roles of academic pressure, anxiety, and depression in the development of social media addiction, with a focus on self-control as a mediator and social support as a moderator. The study discovered that academic pressure, anxiety, and depression directly promote social media addiction while simultaneously diminishing self-control, which mediates the connections. Social support reduces the association between academic pressure and social media addiction, but it does not significantly reduce the link between anxiety and social media addiction. These findings highlight a multifaceted process behind social media addiction and offer useful suggestions for therapeutic techniques in higher education settings.

Singla, B., and Ahmad, M. [7] investigated the levels of academic anxiety and ER among teenagers who had just moved schools, as well as the potential gender differences and connections between ER components and academic anxiety. The findings revealed low but statistically significant gender differences, as well as low significant correlations between boys and girls in terms of total ER, CR, ES, and academic anxiety. A substantial positive association was found between ER and ES. Adolescents of all genders have comparable ER and academic anxiety difficulties during school changes. These findings emphasize the necessity of early, focused treatments to promote emotional well-being and academic adjustment during this critical time period.

Angelini, G., et al. [8] investigated the link between parental influence in job choices, depressive symptoms, career decision self-efficacy, school anxiety, school engagement, and school burnout. The study found that parental influence affects depression symptoms both directly and indirectly ($R^2 = 0.394$). These findings have important implications for student counseling interventions and parental training programs targeted at lowering depression symptoms associated with parental engagement in teenagers' vocational decision-making.

Jiang, C., et al. [9] investigate the relationship between competitive school atmosphere and problematic Internet usage, with a particular emphasis on the serial mediating effects of academic anxiety and school alienation. The empirical findings demonstrated a substantial serial mediation pathway: a competitive school atmosphere raised academic anxiety, which in turn exacerbated school alienation, eventually leading to more problematic Internet use. Their research increases our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that relate competitive school atmosphere to problematic Internet usage among adolescents, as well as providing useful insights for policy and practice in the digital era.

Ansari, H., and Mishra, S. [10] study how emotional maturity related to academic anxiety among senior secondary school pupils. The study found a significant negative link between emotional maturity and academic anxiety, with a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.687$ and a p-value less than 0.01, indicating that more emotional maturity leads to lower academic anxiety. The study discovered gender inequalities, with female students reporting increased academic anxiety (average score of 68.45) and male students reporting an average score of 61.32. The findings have significant implications for educational treatments aimed at improving emotional abilities, as this method helps to reduce academic stress.

Ouyang, H., et al. [11] present a thorough explanation of the link between academic stress and academic anxiety among Chinese college students, focusing on the mediating function of cognitive appraisals and the moderating effect of academic self-efficacy. The findings revealed that academic stress was positively related to academic anxiety. Threat appraisal significantly moderated this association, while challenge appraisal did not. Their findings broaden the contextual application of social cognition theory and give more specific practical consequences for higher education. Institutions may, for example, boost stress-management and resilience programs, implement cognitive restructuring tools to diminish threat-based interpretations of academic demands, and balance efforts to improve self-efficacy with instruction on managing expectations and emotions.

Kai, C., et al. [12] investigate the complicated link between artificial intelligence anxiety and generative AI adoption intention in higher education. The findings show that AI anxiety has a significant "double-edged sword" effect on generative AI adoption intention: AI job displacement anxiety completely inhibits the core variables of technology acceptance; on the other hand, AI sociotechnical blindness anxiety not only promotes effort expectancy and adoption intention but also negatively affects performance expectation.

Objective

The primary goal of this study is to look at peer pressure as a predictor of academic anxiety among higher secondary school students in UP State. The study's specific objectives are to: determine the level of academic anxiety among higher secondary school students; determine the relationship between peer pressure and academic anxiety among higher secondary school students; and investigate the role of peer pressure in academic anxiety among higher secondary school students.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between peer pressure and academic anxiety among higher secondary school students UP State.

H₀₂: There is no significant contribution of peer pressure to the prediction of academic anxiety among higher secondary school students.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive correlational survey technique to look into the hypothesized relationships between peer pressure and academic anxiety in higher secondary school pupils. This approach was perfect since it enabled systematic data collection from a large sample at a precise point in time without the manipulation of variables. The sample size for this study was 350. A standardized questionnaire was utilized to collect data on peer pressure and academic anxiety, with responses graded on a four-point scale. Peer pressure aspects were adapted from Clasen and Brown's inventory [13] to reflect Nigerian school realities. Anxiety was measured using Spielberger's modified test anxiety scale. [14] Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency dependability; coefficients of .75, .77, and .85 were considered reliable. The collected data was categorized and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics: frequencies and percentages characterized variable levels,

Pearson correlation investigated correlations between variables, and multiple regression evaluated their combined predictive contributions to academic anxiety. All hypotheses were evaluated at a significance level of 0.05, and the results were interpreted in light of the study objectives and current literature.

Results

Table 1: Levels of Academic Anxiety among higher Secondary School Students

Levels	Scoring Range	n	%
Low	20-40	43	12.29
Average	41-60	90	25.71
High	61-80	217	62.00
Total		350	100.00

The table shows that 43 individuals had scores ranging from 20 to 40, indicating mild academic anxiety, while 90 people had scores ranging from 41 to 60, indicating moderate academic anxiety. While 217 participants' scores ranged between 61 and 80, indicating considerable academic anxiety. Because the majority of the participants 217 (62.00%) reported high academic anxiety, it can be concluded from the above that secondary school students who participated in this study are experiencing high academic anxiety.

Null hypotheses were developed and evaluated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) statistics and Multiple Regression Analysis with a 0.05 threshold of significance. In light of this, the findings of the tested hypotheses are reported as follows:

H01: There is no significant relationship between peer pressure and academic anxiety among secondary school students.

Table 2: PPMC (r) Statistics Showing Relationship between Peer Pressure and Academic Anxiety

Variables	n	Mean	Sd	df	R	Sig.	Result
Peer pressure	350	29.05	2.76	348	0.86	0.000	Rejected
Academic anxiety	350	30.47	2.46				

Table 2 indicates a statistically significant r-value of 0.86 ($p = 0.000 < .05$) with 348 degrees of freedom (df). The null hypothesis is rejected since the threshold for significance is less than 0.05. This suggests that there is a strong link between peer pressure and academic anxiety among higher secondary school pupils.

H02: There is no significant contribution of peer pressure to the prediction of academic anxiety among higher secondary school students.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Table Showing the Contributions of Peer Pressure to Academic Anxiety

Anova	Sum of square	df	Mean square	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std error	F	Sig.
Regression	1862.98	2	931.47	0.92	0.83	0.83	1.05	854.45	.000
Residual	410.98	347	1.08						
Total	2273.96	349							

Table 3 shows that R value = 0.92, R² = 0.83, and Adjusted R² = 0.83, with a standard error of estimate of 1.05. This demonstrates that peer pressure explained 83% of the variation in academic anxiety among higher secondary school pupils. The ANOVA table demonstrates that F. computed = 854.45 is statistically significant at the 0.05 critical area. This suggests that peer pressure played a substantial role in the prediction of academic anxiety among higher secondary school pupils.

Findings

The data revealed that academic anxiety was high among the majority of respondents, implying that academic-related stress is a widespread and severe problem among higher secondary school students. This high level of anxiety indicates that academics are frequently seen as dangerous, high-stakes activities with serious academic and social implications. The findings confirm previous research indicating that secondary school children typically suffer severe concern, physiological arousal, and cognitive interference during test times due to fear of failure, parental expectations, and institutional emphasis on performance outcomes.[15,16] This conclusion implies that academic anxiety has evolved into a systemic issue rather than a single psychological problem impacting a limited set of pupils. The first hypothesis investigated found a substantial and significant link between peer pressure and academic anxiety, with a particularly high correlation coefficient. This research suggests that when peer pressure grows, so does academic anxiety among higher secondary school pupils. This substantial link shows that peer dynamics might exacerbate anxiety thru processes such as academic comparison, fear of unfavorable peer judgment, competitive standards, and shared negative narratives about academics. This finding is consistent with social learning and social comparison theories, which explain how adolescents internalize peer attitudes and behaviors, such as stress reactions to academic pressures.[16,17] The intensity of this link reveals peer pressure as a powerful social stressor in the school setting, capable of exacerbating exam-related anxiety beyond individual emotional capacity. Peer pressure was also shown to play a statistically significant role in academic anxiety, with the factors accounting for a considerable percentage of the variation. This research shows that academic anxiety among higher secondary school students is best understood as a combination of intrapersonal variables and interpersonal

social impacts (peer pressure). A high coefficient of determination shows that emotional and social elements work together to shape students' anxiety during exams. This finding lends credence to integrative theories of academic stress, which focus on the combination of individual psychological resources and contextual constraints in predicting emotional consequences.[18,19] Furthermore, a study of the relative contributions of the independent factors found that peer pressure was the strongest predictor of academic anxiety. This finding is consistent with empirical research showing that teenagers' stress reactions are frequently socially motivated, particularly in high-pressure academic situations.[20,21] The result is that therapies that focus exclusively on strengthening individual coping abilities may be ineffective unless peer-group dynamics are also addressed. Overall, the study's findings provide solid empirical evidence that academic anxiety is common among higher secondary school students and is heavily impacted by peer pressure.

Conclusion

This study's findings indicated that academic anxiety continues to be a common psychological concern among higher secondary school pupils. Many adolescents demonstrate high anxiety levels in conjunction with somewhat strong peer pressure impacts, suggesting that emotional coping abilities are frequently insufficient to counteract significant academic and social demands. The study also found substantial correlations between peer pressure and academic anxiety, with factors jointly predicting anxiety levels while peer pressure emerged as the strongest predictor. The importance of social comparison and peer dynamics in shaping students' academic stress is highlighted, as is the need for integrated interventions that strengthen emotional regulation skills while addressing peer-related academic pressures in order to promote students' psychological well-being and academic adjustment.

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