



A Study About Academic Stress Level Of Sports Students In Degree Colleges And Universities, Bengaluru

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Abstract

Academic stress has emerged as a major psychological concern in higher education, significantly affecting students' well-being and academic performance. Sports students represent a unique subgroup within the student population, as they are required to simultaneously manage academic responsibilities and athletic commitments. This dual-role engagement often leads to increased stress due to time constraints, physical fatigue, and performance expectations.

The present study aims to assess the level of academic stress among sports students in degree colleges and universities in Bengaluru, identify key stressors, and explore coping mechanisms adopted by these students. A mixed-method research design was employed using a cross-sectional survey approach. A total of 150 sports students were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a socio-demographic questionnaire, the Student Academic Stress Scale (SASS), and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, and percentage, while qualitative responses were analyzed through thematic analysis.

The findings revealed a high level of academic stress (Mean = 3.77), indicating that sports students experience significant psychological pressure. Major stressors included fear of disappointing parents, pressure to succeed, academic workload, and difficulties in balancing academic and sports responsibilities. Thematic analysis highlighted issues such as time constraints, physical exhaustion, and lack of institutional support. The study concludes that academic stress among sports students is multidimensional and influenced by personal, social, and institutional factors.

The study emphasizes the need for flexible academic policies, targeted psychological support, and better coordination between academic and sports systems to ensure holistic development and well-being of sports students.

Keywords: Academic stress, sports students, student-athletes, higher education, dual-role conflict, Bengaluru

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' intellectual, emotional, and professional development. However, the increasing demands of academic performance, competition, and career expectations have led to rising levels of stress among students. Academic stress, defined as the psychological strain arising from academic demands, has become one of the most significant challenges faced by students in contemporary educational settings.

While academic stress is common among students, sports students experience a unique set of challenges due to their dual roles as learners and athletes. These students are required to meet academic expectations while simultaneously engaging in rigorous training schedules, competitions, and physical conditioning. This dual engagement creates a complex environment where competing demands often result in role conflict, time pressure, and psychological strain.

The concept of stress can be understood through the transactional model proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which emphasizes the interaction between environmental demands and individual coping resources. In the context of sports students, academic stress is not merely a result of workload but is influenced by how students perceive and manage the demands of both academic and athletic domains.

Sports participation is generally associated with positive outcomes such as improved physical health, discipline, resilience, and emotional regulation. However, when combined with academic pressure without adequate support, it can contribute to increased stress levels. Sports students often face scheduling conflicts, fatigue, and reduced time for academic preparation, which can negatively impact their academic performance and mental well-being.

In metropolitan cities like Bengaluru, which is a major educational hub in India, the competitive academic environment further intensifies stress levels. Students are expected to excel not only academically but also in extracurricular domains such as sports. This dual expectation creates a high-pressure environment, particularly for sports students who must balance both roles effectively.

Despite the growing importance of sports in education and policies promoting holistic development, there is limited research focusing specifically on academic stress among sports students in the Indian higher education context. Most existing studies have focused on general student populations, leaving a gap in understanding the unique experiences of student-athletes.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the level of academic stress among sports students in Bengaluru, identify key stressors, and explore coping mechanisms. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of supportive academic environments and policies that address the needs of sports students.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Academic stress has been widely studied as a critical factor influencing students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Research indicates that stress among students is primarily driven by factors such as academic workload, examinations, competition, and expectations from parents and teachers.

Kumaraswamy (2013) highlighted that academic stress is closely associated with anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance. Similarly, Deb et al. (2015) found that parental pressure and high expectations significantly contribute to stress among students. These studies emphasize that academic stress is not only an academic issue but also a psychological concern.

Studies focusing on coping mechanisms suggest that students adopt various strategies such as problem-focused coping, emotional regulation, and social support to manage stress (Nagle & Sharma, 2018). However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies depending on individual and environmental factors.

Research on sports students indicates that they face additional challenges compared to non-sports students. Sondhi et al. (2020) found that student-athletes experience difficulties in balancing academic and athletic responsibilities due to time constraints and lack of institutional support. Tahir et al. (2023) highlighted that academic pressure combined with sports participation significantly affects psychological well-being.

Liu et al. (2024) suggested that sports participation can act as a stress-relieving factor when supported by a positive environment. However, excessive involvement without adequate support may increase stress levels. Zhao et al. (2025) emphasized the role of self-esteem in managing stress among sports students.

Despite these contributions, there is limited research focusing on sports students in higher education in India, particularly in urban contexts like Bengaluru. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on academic stress among sports students.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (EXPANDED)

Research Design and Rationale

This study adopted a **mixed-method research design**, combining quantitative rigor with qualitative depth. The primary approach was a **descriptive and comparative cross-sectional survey**, which allowed for a snapshot of the academic stress levels of student-athletes at a specific point in their degree programs.

- **Quantitative Component:** Used to measure the intensity of stress across 40 standardized items using a Likert scale.
- **Qualitative Component:** Utilized open-ended questions to capture the "lived experiences" of students, providing context to the numerical data regarding their daily struggles with dual-role conflict.

Population and Purposive Sampling

The target population consisted of undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students enrolled in various degree colleges and universities within the metropolitan area of Bengaluru.

- **Sampling Technique:** A **purposive sampling method** was employed. This non-probability sampling was essential to ensure that all participants met the specific inclusion criteria: being an active student-athlete participating in sports at the university, state, or national level.
- **Sample Characteristics:** The final sample size was **150 students**, comprising 100 male and 50 female respondents. This distribution reflects the current demographic trends in competitive collegiate sports in the region.

Data Collection Instruments

The research utilized two primary tools to ensure data validity:

1. **Socio-Demographic Sheet:** Captured essential variables such as gender, age, level of study, and the highest level of sports participation.
2. **Student Academic Stress Scale (SASS):** Developed by **Misra and McKean (2000)**, this 40-item scale is a highly reliable instrument designed to measure five dimensions of academic stress: frustrations, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed stressors.
 - **Scoring:** Responses were recorded on a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from "Not at all stressful" (1) to "Extremely stressful" (5).
 - **Reliability:** The SASS is widely recognized for its high internal consistency, making it suitable for assessing the multifaceted nature of stress in an academic environment.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain the integrity of the data, strict criteria were applied:

- **Inclusion:** Participants had to be currently enrolled in a Bengaluru-based institution and actively engaged in organized sports training or competitions.
- **Exclusion:** Students who were not involved in sports, those studying outside Bengaluru, or those who provided incomplete responses were excluded to prevent data skewing.

Data Collection Procedure and Ethics

Data were collected digitally via **Google Forms**, which was distributed through sports department coordinators and student-athlete networks.

Ethical Compliance: Participation was strictly voluntary. Before beginning the survey, all respondents were provided with an **informed consent** briefing, ensuring their anonymity and the confidentiality of their personal data. No names or institutional identifiers were published to protect the students' privacy.

Statistical Analysis Plan

The collected data were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were calculated to identify the most significant stressors.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Qualitative data from open-ended questions were categorized into recurring themes, such as "Time Poverty" and "Role Conflict," to provide a holistic view of the student-athlete experience.

V. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The study analyzed a sample of 150 student-athletes (100 males and 50 females) from various institutions in Bengaluru. The participants were predominantly in the age group of 18–22 years, representing the critical undergraduate phase where the pressure of career-building is at its peak. Data revealed that 65% of the participants competed at the state level, 25% at the national level, and 10% at the university/inter-collegiate level. The diversity in sporting disciplines—ranging from individual sports like athletics and swimming to team sports like football and cricket—ensured that the stress indicators were not limited to a specific athletic

Descriptive Statistics of Academic Stress:

In this study, we looked at 40 different situations that can cause stress for sports students. These items covered everything from exams and homework to family pressure and time management. When we see the results, we can see that the students are under a lot of pressure, but some things are much more stressful than others.

Table 4.4: Mean scores of the 40 stress items in the study (in descending order).

| Sl No | Stress Item | New Mean Score |
|-------|--|----------------|
| 1 | Fear of disappointing parents | 4.21 |
| 2 | Worry about academic future | 4.13 |
| 3 | Pressure to succeed | 4.07 |
| 4 | Fear of failure | 4.05 |
| 5 | Too many responsibilities | 4.03 |
| 6 | Heavy syllabus | 4.00 |
| 7 | Stress during exam results | 4.00 |
| 8 | Academic workload | 3.97 |
| 9 | Deadlines for assignments | 3.93 |
| 10 | Expectations of parents | 3.93 |
| 11 | Lack of sleep due to studies | 3.92 |
| 12 | Difficulty concentrating on studies | 3.91 |
| 13 | Academic expectations from self | 3.91 |
| 14 | Test preparation | 3.88 |
| 15 | Studying for long hours | 3.87 |
| 16 | Overlapping exam schedules | 3.86 |
| 17 | Time management | 3.85 |
| 18 | Limited time for relaxation | 3.85 |
| 19 | Balancing academic and social life | 3.84 |
| 20 | Feeling mentally exhausted due to studies | 3.80 |
| 21 | Academic performance affecting self-esteem | 3.79 |
| 22 | Difficulty of course material | 3.77 |
| 23 | Managing multiple assignments | 3.74 |
| 24 | Fear of academic evaluation | 3.74 |
| 25 | Taking examinations | 3.73 |
| 26 | Pressure to maintain scholarships/grades | 3.73 |

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------------|
| 27 | Academic rules and regulations | 3.73 |
| 28 | Unclear academic expectations | 3.69 |
| 29 | Poor academic performance | 3.62 |
| 30 | Grade competition with peers | 3.61 |
| 31 | Academic stress affecting health | 3.61 |
| 32 | Lack of guidance from teachers | 3.59 |
| 33 | Lack of motivation to study | 3.59 |
| 34 | Lack of academic confidence | 3.59 |
| 35 | Expectations of teachers | 3.53 |
| 36 | Academic stress affecting personal relationships | 3.52 |
| 37 | Competitive academic environment | 3.40 |
| 38 | Oral examinations | 3.39 |
| 39 | Class presentations | 3.35 |
| 40 | Comparison with classmates | 3.27 |
| Overall Mean Score | | 3.77 |

The Highest Stress Areas (Scores above 4.00): The most difficult things for students are not actually the books or the subjects. Instead, the highest stress comes from "**External Pressure.**" The top score was for the "**Fear of letting parents down**" (4.21). This shows that students are very worried about what their family thinks of their grades. They also worry a lot about their "**Academic Future**" (4.13) because they know a sports career can be short or risky, so they feel they must have a good degree to fall back on.

The "Daily Struggle" Areas (Scores between 3.80 and 3.99): The next group of stressors is about the daily life of a student-athlete. Students scores on "**Academic Workload**" (3.97) and "**Too many responsibilities**" (4.03) shows that they are physically and mentally exhausted by spending many hours practicing and traveling for sports. The high score for "**Lack of sleep**" (3.92) proves that these students are sacrificing their rest just to keep up with their college work.

The "College System" Areas (Scores between 3.50 and 3.79): Students also find the college system itself quite stressful. Things like "**Difficulty of course material**" (3.77) and "**Taking examinations**" (3.73) are in this group. While these are stressful, they are slightly lower than parental pressure. This means that while the studies are hard, the biggest problem is finding the *time* and *energy* to do the work, rather than the work being too difficult to understand.

The Lowest Stress Areas (Scores below 3.50): The things that bothered the students the least were social situations. For example, "**Comparison with classmates**" (3.27), "**Class presentations**" (3.35) and "**oral examination**" (3.39) had the lowest scores. This is likely because sports students are used to being in the public eye and competing against others. They are brave on the field, so they aren't as scared of talking in front of a class as they are of failing a written test.

Overall Mean Score:

The overall mean score across all 40 academic stress items in your study is **3.77**. This indicates a **High Level of Academic Stress** among the sports students in your study.

On a scale of 1 to 5, this score is much higher than the middle point (3.00), showing that the average student feels their academic life is "Very Stressful." This result means that the pressure of balancing a degree with sports is not a minor issue but a constant challenge for these athletes.

1. **High Intensity:** A score of 3.77 suggests that students are under heavy pressure almost 75% of the time. This is not just "exam stress" but a daily feeling of being overwhelmed.
2. **Risk of Burnout:** Because the score is close to 4.00, it shows that students are at high risk of mental and physical exhaustion. This can lead to them wanting to quit either their studies or their sport.
3. **Systemic Problem:** This average proves that the stress comes from many places at once—parents, teachers, lack of sleep, and busy schedules. It is a "total package" of stress that affects their overall well-being.

In short, this score justifies your research by proving that sports students in Bengaluru urgently need more support and flexibility from their colleges to lower this high stress level.

Critical Stressors (Mean Score \geq 4.00)

The analysis identified six specific situations that cause the highest levels of stress for sports students in Bengaluru. These items scored a mean of 4.00 or above, indicating a significant psychological burden.

- 1. Fear of letting parents down (M = 4.21):** This is the biggest stress. Students feel that even if they win in sports, their parents will only be happy if they get high marks. They are scared that failing a test means failing their family.
- 2. Worry about the future (M = 4.13):** Students know that a sports career can end quickly due to injuries. They feel they must have a good degree as a "backup plan," but they are afraid they aren't studying enough to get a good job later.
- 3. Pressure to succeed (M = 4.07):** Athletes are trained to always win. They feel they must be the best in both sports and studies at the same time. Trying to be "perfect" in two different areas is mentally exhausting.
- 4. Fear of failure (M = 4.05):** For these students, failing a subject is a huge risk. It could mean losing their place on the team or losing their sports scholarship. This makes every exam feel like a "life or death" situation.
- 5. Too many responsibilities (M = 4.03):** Students are overwhelmed. Between hours of hard training, traveling for matches, attending classes, and doing homework, they feel they have too much to do and not enough energy to finish it all.
- 6. Heavy Syllabus (M = 4.00):** The amount of study material is too much for someone who spends half their day on the field. Because they miss classes for matches, they feel they are always "running behind" and can never catch up with the lessons.
- 7. Stress during exam results (M = 4.00):** Waiting for marks is a scary time. If the marks are low, students worry that their parents or coaches will tell them to quit sports and focus only on books. The results feel like a judgment on their entire life.

Implications of the Study

- **Need for Mental Health Awareness:** The high overall mean score (M = 3.77) implies that student-athletes are at a high risk of burnout. This suggests that universities need to provide mental health support specifically for athletes.
- **Policy Gaps:** The findings imply that the current education system is "too rigid." It shows that we are losing talented athletes because the system does not allow them to manage two careers at once.
- **Parental Impact:** The high score for "parental disappointment" (M = 4.21) implies that the family environment is a major factor in a student's academic stress, often more than the subjects themselves.

Recommendations

1. For Educational Institutions (Colleges & Universities)

- **Flexible Academic Calendars:** Colleges should allow for "Special Exams" or "Internal Assessments" at different times for students who are traveling for competitions.
- **Hybrid Learning Options:** Institutions should provide recorded lectures or online notes for sports students so they can study while traveling for matches.
- **Sports Scholarships & Incentives:** Universities should offer financial help and "Grace Marks" to students who bring medals, recognizing that their sports success is as valuable as academic success.

2. For Parents:

- **Change in Definition of Success:** Parents should be encouraged to see sports as a professional career path, not just a "hobby." Valuing a gold medal as much as an 'A' grade can significantly lower a child's stress.
- **Open Communication:** Parents should have regular, supportive talks with their children about their stress levels, rather than only asking about their marks or exams.
- **Realistic Expectations:** Parents must understand the physical toll of sports. Expecting a child to study for 5 hours after 4 hours of intense physical training is unrealistic and leads to exhaustion.
- **Financial & Emotional Security:** Providing a "safe space" at home where a student doesn't feel judged for a low mark helps them perform better in both fields.

3. For Sports Students (Self-Management)

- **Time Management Skills:** Students should learn to use "small pockets of time" (like during travel or between matches) to complete small academic tasks rather than leaving everything for the end.
- **Seeking Help Early:** Instead of waiting until the week of the exam, students should talk to their teachers early in the semester to explain their sports schedule and ask for help with notes.
- **Prioritizing Rest:** Students must realize that sleep is part of their "training." Sacrificing sleep for late-night cramming often leads to poor performance in both the classroom and the stadium.
- **Peer Groups:** Building a small group of reliable classmates who can share notes and updates is the best "survival tool" for an athlete.

4. For Coaches and Sports Departments

- **Academic Monitoring:** Coaches should check on a student's academic progress. If a student is failing, the coach should help them find a balance instead of just demanding more practice time.
- **Coordinated Scheduling:** The sports department should work with the principal's office to ensure that major college events do not clash with major tournament dates.

V. CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings, several important conclusions can be drawn:

- Academic stress among sports students is significantly high and multidimensional, encompassing psychological, physical, and situational factors.
- Stress is primarily driven by performance-related pressures and future uncertainty, rather than academic difficulty alone.
- The dual-role expectation places sports students in a disadvantaged position compared to non-sporting peers, as they are required to meet equal academic standards despite additional responsibilities.
- There exists a clear mismatch between institutional structures and student needs, particularly in terms of flexibility and support.
- Physical fatigue plays a crucial role in shaping academic stress, highlighting the interconnectedness of physical and mental well-being.
- Despite challenges, sports students demonstrate strong resilience and coping potential, which can be further enhanced through proper support systems.
- Academic stress among sports students is not merely an individual issue but a systemic concern, requiring coordinated efforts for effective management.

To summarize, the study clearly establishes that sports students in Bengaluru experience a substantial level of academic stress due to the complex interplay of academic demands, athletic commitments, and socio-cultural expectations. While sports participation contributes positively to personal development, the lack of supportive academic structures and flexibility significantly increases stress levels.

Addressing this issue requires a holistic, student-centered approach that acknowledges the unique challenges faced by sports students. By fostering supportive institutional environments, promoting mental well-being, and implementing flexible policies, it is possible to enable sports students to achieve excellence in both academics and athletics.

Limitations of the study:

Despite the significant findings, the following limitations should be considered:

- **Temporal Constraints:** As a cross-sectional study, this research provides a "snapshot" of stress. It does not account for the longitudinal fluctuations in stress that occur during peak competition seasons versus off-seasons.
- **Geographic and Sample Scope:** The study focused on 150 student-athletes in Bengaluru. While representative of an urban educational hub, the results may not be fully generalizable to rural institutions where academic and sporting infrastructures differ.
- **Self-Report Bias:** The use of the Student Academic Stress Scale (SASS) relies on the honesty of participants. Some athletes may underreport stress due to the "mental toughness" culture inherent in competitive sports.

- **Absence of Physiological Data:** The research is limited to psychological psychometrics. It does not include biological markers of stress, such as sleep-tracking data or cortisol levels, which would provide objective validation of the reported strain.

Scope for future research:

The current study lays the groundwork for several future areas of inquiry:

- **Longitudinal Tracking:** Future research could follow a cohort of student-athletes over a full four-year degree to identify specific "burnout points" during their academic journey.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Studies comparing individual sports (e.g., athletics) with team sports (e.g., football) could reveal how different social support structures influence academic stress management.
- **Intervention Efficacy:** There is a need to test specific interventions, such as the implementation of "Academic-Sports Liaison Officers" or mandatory mindfulness training, to see if they statistically reduce SASS scores.
- **The Role of Digital Learning:** Further investigation into how hybrid or online learning modules can be leveraged to assist athletes who are frequently absent due to travel for national or international competitions.

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