



## HOPE AS A PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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### Abstract

Academic stress is the result of combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to students. Senior secondary students experience academic stress due to excessive burden of studies, expectations from peer, parents, teachers and self, extracurricular activities, choice of appropriate career etc. Hope is the state which promotes the belief in a good outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. It is a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals) (Snyder, 1991). The objective of this paper is to study how hope is related with academic stress among senior secondary students. Sample of 220 twelve class students studying in various private schools was taken. Academic stress scale developed by the researchers and Hope Scale by Snyder et al. (1991) having 12 items were used. The results explain that academic stress and Hope (comprising of pathway and agency thoughts) was significantly and negatively correlated. Hope (total) accounted for 13% variance in academic stress. No gender difference was found in academic stress and Hope. Findings of the study have important implications for counseling the adolescents for managing academic stress.

### Introduction

Stress in children, adolescents and young adults is just as prevalent as in adults. To understand the stressful experiences of adolescents and managing its probable causes is of particular significance, since this is the period of laying foundation for future adult role taking. Students in their adolescence age go through the transitional phase, which is an intermediate of childhood and adulthood. Adolescence may be defined as the period within the lifespan when most of a person's biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered child-like to what is considered adult-like. Therefore at this challenging period of life they require adjustment to changes within the self, in the family, in the peer group and in their roles and responsibilities. Among the different forms of stresses faced by adolescents, academic stress emerges as significant mental health problems in recent years. Rangaswamy (1995). Elkind (1984) reported that the incidence of stress-related problems among teenagers in the United States had increased more than threefold in the last 15 years.

Academic stress is an emotional tension of a student which is expressed or felt by him during his failure to cope with the academic demands and its consequences may be exhibited in the form of major health hazards, physical and mental problems. Academic stress is a mental distress with respect to some apprehended frustration associated with academic failure, apprehension of such failure or even an awareness of the possibility of such failure (Gupta & Khan 1987). In the context of school, academic stress means a pervasive sense of urgency to learn all these things which are related to or prescribed by the school (Shah 1988). "Academic stress is the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual." (Wilks 2008 p 107).

Adolescents appearing in senior secondary board examination have to face so much of stress due to various reasons like fear of falling behind with course work (Tyrrell 1992), time pressure, concern about result (Olpin 1997) fear of fulfillment of parent's expectations etc. Cut throat Competition and survival of the best in jobs also heightens their academic stress. If a student is unable to cope effectively with academic stress, then serious psycho-social-emotional health consequences may result (Tennant, 2002). Mental health professionals in India, however, have identified academic pressure as an acute stress factor that leads to mental distress, and in extreme cases, to suicide.

In 2006, an official record report that 5,857 students or 16 a day committed suicide across India due to exam stress. In New Delhi data collected from two schools on 1,205 adolescents (aged 12-19 years) revealed that, on average, one in seven adolescents had thought about ending their life. It is seen from Banerjee's (2001) report that every year about 25,000 students in the age group of 18 to 20 years commit suicide in the examination month (ie. March to June). They are really worried about their future and desired results in the examinations. Parents are busy in their respective professions and hardly have time to deal with the problems of their wards and children are not getting proper moral support which in turn results the inability to tackle challenges of life. So there is a need to understand adolescents major cause of suicidal attempts ie. Academic stress.

Difference in gender role socialization still prevails in India. Parents tend to have higher aspiration, high academic and professional expectations for their male child. On the other hand, girls may be valued more in terms of feminine roles



and trained for finer pursuits. Parents have lower generalized expectancies for success for girls than boys. Although there are efforts in society for empowerment of females, girls have to undergo pressures of maintaining a balance between expectations of self, society as well as of their parents. Therefore male and female students may differ in their level of academic stress.

In contrast with the popular beliefs, the intelligence and the ability are not the singular determinants of the academic achievement (Dweck & Master 2009). In different studies it has been seen that the emotional and social variables also affect academic achievement of the students. Constructs such as self-efficacy, self-regulation and goal orientation are amongst these variables which can be important to consider. On the other hand, the psychological studies have historically been focused on the patient-oriented and pathological aspect (Akin et al. 2004). In the recent years psychological researches have been shifted from investigations of pathology to examination of the positive aspects about human nature. According to Seligman (1998), psychology should be as focused on strength as on weakness, and as concerned with promoting well-being as with resolving pathology. Inspired by positive psychology, the new research approaches has put their own emphasis on the optimal abilities and functions of the human beings (Huebner, Suldo et al. 2004 Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000). During the initial stage of the psychosocial growth, in Erikson's theory, hope is the positive outcome of the crisis of trust against distrust (**Erickson 1963**).

In this regard, **Snyder et al. (1991)** presented a relatively new motivational-cognitive model entitled "theory of hope". This theory which has been accompanied by some variations during the recent years, has introduced the construct of hope which is considered as an important construct in the newly emerged area of positive psychology (**Snyder & Lopez 2002**).

Hope is the state which promotes the belief in a good outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life **Snyder, Irving & Anderson (1991)** define hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)". Hope is cultivated when we have a goal in mind, determination that a goal can be reached, and a plan on how to reach those goals".

A recent definition of hope that has received considerable attention has divided this goal-directed thinking into two components, corresponding to the "will" and the "way" of the old expression "where there's a will, there's a way." First, people believe that they have the capacities to come up with the routes to desired goals. This is called pathways thinking. Second, when people believe that they have the requisite motivations to actually use such routes, this is called agency thinking. To hope is to have both the will (agency) and the ways (pathways) to pursue desired goals.

The relationship between hope and the academic performance has also been studied in different studies, which show that highly hopeful individuals have an effective performance in the educational fields.

In the field of education, researchers have shown a positive relationship between college students' levels of hopefulness and their grade point averages (**Chang, 1998; Curry et al. , 1997**). **Snyder and colleagues (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al. , 1991; Snyder et al. , 1997)** have studied the relationship between grade point average and hope and found similar results.

Hope has also been found as a significant predictor of the academic performance for all the educational degrees. (**Mc. Dermott & Snyder 2000; P. Andrews 2010**) and academic achievements of pre high school and high school students (**Lopez, Bouwkamp, Edwards & Pedrotti 2000**). High levels of hope was found to be positively related to greater reported scholastic and social competence, elevated creativity (**Onwuegbuzie, 1999**), greater problem-solving abilities and actual academic achievements(**Chang, 1998; Lopez, Bouwkamp, Edwards, & TeramotoPedrotti, 2000;** ).

More recently, **Alexander and Onwuegbuzie (2007)** investigated the relationship between graduate students' levels of hopefulness and academic procrastination. Results indicated that graduate students' levels of hopefulness assisted in predicting their levels of academic procrastination specifically, in terms of fear of failure that was operationalized as comprising evaluation anxiety, low self-confidence, and inflated perfectionist standards (**Solomon & Rothblum, 1984**).

Another research (*e.g., Gilman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006*) suggests that hope scores are correlated negatively and significantly with measures of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, indicators of psychological distress and school maladjustment.

Findings of the study by (**Victoria E. Frehe , 2008**) suggested that students with hopeful thinking when experiencing academic impediments(cold/flu/sore throat, sleep difficulties and stress) appeared to better manage impediments by not diminishing their overall G.P.A.



The alarming rate of suicide among adolescents, low self efficacy, undecided goals, and heightened competition in jobs constitutes a concern to parents, teachers, and psychologists. Students at their senior secondary level when confronted with different pressures, might be uncertain about future, may be helpless, may find their resources insufficient and may also lack the needed guidance. Under such circumstances only a ray of hope can provide them motivation to bounce back from negative circumstances. Hope is the expectation of success in the pursuit of desired goals.

For dealing with academic stress students should not only have belief in their capacities to come up with the routes to desired goals but also the required motivation to actually use such routes. Therefore hope has been used as a probable predictor of academic stress in the present research. Research questions for present study are (a) What is the level of Hope and Academic Stress among senior secondary students? (b) Is there any gender difference in the level of Hope and academic stress? (c) How hope is related with Academic stress? (c) Can Hope predict academic stress of adolescents?

### Objectives

- To examine the gender difference in academic stress and hope level of adolescent students.
- To find out the relationship between academic stress and hope.
- To explore hope as a predictor of academic stress.

### Hypotheses

Based on previous researches it was hypothesized that

1. There will be gender difference in level of academic stress.
2. There will be gender difference in level of hope.
3. There will be a negative correlation between academic stress and hope.
4. Hope will predict academic stress.

### Method

**Design** :Correlational

### Participants

Two hundred twenty 12th class students approaching their board examinations were the participants of the present study. They were incidentally selected from different schools of Luck now. The students were from CBSE & ISC Boards. The age range of respondents was from 16 to 18 years.

### Variables: Criterion Variable

Academic Stress: "Academic stress is the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual." (*Wilks 2008 p 107*). In the present study academic stress understood in terms of excessive workload of studies, pressure to perform well in board and competitive examinations and meeting the expectations of parents, teachers and others experienced by senior secondary students.

### Predictor Variables

**Hope** : *Snyder, Irving & Anderson (1991, as cited in Snyder, 2000, p.8)* define hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)".

**Pathway**: Pathway thoughts refer to the routes we take to achieve our desired goals and the individual's perceived ability to produce these routes (*Snyder, 2000*).

**Agency**: It refers to the motivation that propels individuals to initiate and sustain movement towards their goals.

**Background Variable**:Gender

### Measures

- For assessing academic stress researchers have developed a scale which has 46 items. Responses are made on 5 point scale for each item ranging from always, often, sometimes, rarely to never. Some of the items in the scale were negative (01234) and rests of the items are positive (4,3,2,1,0). Reliability of the scale was measured with split half method which is .81. The scores of the academic stress scale were correlated with academic hope scale (*Snyder et al 1991*) and correlation was -.307 ( $p < .01$ ). The significant negative correlation with academic hope validates the academic stress scale.
- For measuring Hope level of respondents Adult Trait Hope Scale developed by (*Snyder et al. 1991*) was used. This scale measures dispositional hope in adults aged over 15 years. It is a self report scale that contains twelve questions,



four questions each tap agency thoughts, and pathways thoughts while the other four are the distracter items. The scale has been found to be having (a) internal consistency (overall alpha from .74 to .88; agency alphas of .70 to .88; and pathways alphas of .63 to .86);(b) test-retest reliabilities ranging from .85 for three weeks to .82 for ten weeks and; (c) concurrent and discriminant validities (Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991).

This scale has been used on different samples of Indian population eg. Students of professional course (Singh et.al.2013) on psychosomatics (Dixit 2012).

**Procedure**

All the participants were administered the scales in groups. Students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity by the researcher, prior to the dissemination of the scales. It was explained to them in a congenial atmosphere that the researchers did not intend to test their capabilities and their filling up of questionnaires had nothing to do with school grades. No response is right or wrong. Participants completed the scales approximately in 15 minutes in the presence of researcher.

**Results**

**Table-1 Descriptive statistics of Academic stress and Hope**

Variables	No. of Items	Scale-Range	Scale Mean	Obtained Range	Obtained Mean	S. D.
Academic Stress	46	0-184	92	18-134	78.80	23.409
Hope Pathway	4	4-32	18	12-32	24.74	4.736
Hope Agency	4	4-32	18	8-32	24.30	4.373
Hope Total	8	8-64	36	23-64	49.05	7.926

In Table- 1 when we compare the obtained mean of academic stress with scale mean it is less than scale mean while the obtained mean of Hope pathway and Hope Agency is greater than their scale mean respectively.

**Table-2 t- test between male and female students**

	Variables	Mean (Male)	Mean (Female)	t	Sig.
1	Academic Stress	79.98	77.61	.751	NS
2	Hope Pathway	25.29	24.18	1.745	NS
3	Hope Agency	24.28	24.33	.077	NS
4	Hope Total	49.57	48.52	.987	NS

The results of above table explain that there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of academic stress and hope. Therefore our first and second hypotheses “There will be a difference in male and female students in their level of academic stress, there will be a difference in male and female students in their level of hope.” are rejected.

**Table-3 Correlation coefficients between hope and academic stress**

S. N.	Hope	Correlation coefficients
A	Hope Pathway	-0.30**
B	Hope Agency	-0.33**
C	Hope Total	-0.36**

**Table-4 Hope as predictor of academic stress**

Predictor	β	Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R square	R Square Change	F-Value	P
(All facets of hope )							
(Model $Y_1 = a + \beta_3 X_3$ )							
X3	-1.070	.362	0.131	.127	.131	32.905	0.000
<b>Constant</b>				<b>154.632</b>			

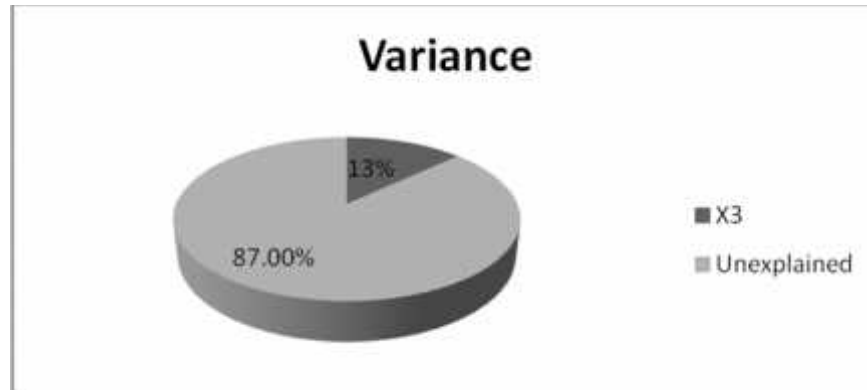


Figure-1 : Hope as predictor of academic stress

In Table-4 when all the predictor variables of hope were entered into the regression equation, only the variable of hope total survived and passed the criteria probability to enter. Pie diagram (in figure-4) also explains the predicted and unexplained variation in academic stress by hope. The results prove fourth hypothesis that “Hope will predict academic stress”.

The coefficient of determination is 0.131; therefore, about 13.1% of the variation in the academic stress is explained by Hope total. Regression model is good, but there are certainly others variables which have effect on the academic stress and are not the part of this piece of research.

### Discussion

In the present study no significant difference was found in the level of pathway, agency and hope total across gender, which gets support by the findings of *Hasnain Wazid and Hasan (2014)* who found no significant difference in young Asamese males and females on Optimism and Hope. This could be due to influence of modernization and equality in Indian adolescents. Modernization means influence of literacy rate, medical facilities, parenting, family environment, information technology, and media due to which males and females get equal opportunity to decide the appropriate goal for their life and find different pathways and motivation to achieve those goals. This could also be the reason of insignificant difference of academic stress between male and female students. The findings also get support by *Busari (2012)*, who found no significant difference between male and female respondents in their perceptions of academic stressors.

The result of coefficient of correlation (Table-3) between hope and academic stress depict that hope (sum of agency and pathway thinking) is significantly and negatively correlated with academic stress, which proves our third hypothesis stating that, “There will be a negative correlation between academic stress and hope”. The findings are in line with other researches for example, *Snyder et al. (1997)* , *Kwon (2000)* in which higher hope has been found to be related to lower level of depression in children.

The results are consistent with several other researches. High level of hope was found to be positively related to college students G. P. A. (*Snyder et al. 1991, Chang 1998, Curry et al. 1997*) greater problem solving abilities and actual academic achievements (*Lopez, Bouwkamp, Edwards, & TeramotoPedrotti, 2000*). In addition high-hope school (*Snyder, Harris, et al. , 1991*) and beginning college students (*Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams, & Wiklund, 2002*) have been found to achieve higher overall grade point averages and fewer drop-outs (*Worrell & Hale, 2001*) was reported among them.

Researchers have found hope to be associated with higher competency in numerous life areas e. g. (a) academics (*Snyder et al. 1997*) (b) use of adaptive coping methods, (*Irving, Snyder and Crowson 1998*) (c) more flexible and positive thoughts (*Snyder et al. 1996, Snyder & Mc. Cullough 2000*) and (d) more positive appraisal of stressful events (*Affleck & Tennen, 1996*).

If we see separately the results of correlation between pathway thinking and academic stress it was also found to be negatively associated ( $p < .01$ ). The results are in line with *Singh et al. (2013)* who have found pathway thinking to be positively correlated with psychological wellbeing among students of professional courses. *Gibson and Parker (2003)* also found hope to be significantly and positively related to psychological well-being. Pathways thoughts reflect a person’s perceived capacity to produce cognitive routes to desired goals (*Snyder, 1994*). Hopeful person produce many paths or routes to accomplish their goals. The greater the paths produced by the person, the greater will be the perceived likelihood of success in attaining the goal and the possibility of positive affect experienced by the person.



As far as agency thinking is concerned, it was also found to be negatively associated with academic stress ( $p < .01$ ). The findings get support from the study of Singh et al. 2013. In their study agency component of hope was found to predict depression with 12.9% variance. A study on college sample suggests that lack of goal directed energy (i.e. agency), rather than planning to meet goals (i.e. pathways), is a more important contributing factor to depression (Wong & Lim, 2009; Arnau, Rosen, Finch, Rhudy & Fortunato, 2007). Recent findings indicate that pathway is important component of wellbeing and agency is an important component of ill-being (depression) (Singh et al. 2013). These findings also get support from a recent study by Hasnain, Wazid & Hasan (2014) who have found hope as the better predictor (than optimism and happiness) of psychological wellbeing among young Assamese males.

In the present study hope total (sum of pathway and agency thinking) was found to be a significant predictor which accounted for 13% variance in academic stress. The findings of a longitudinal study by Liz Day et al. (2010) also suggested that hope uniquely predicts objective academic achievement above intelligence, personality and previous academic achievement.

Although the pathway and agency scores were also entered in the regression equation, no prediction from these variables was found. Only the sum of pathway and agency scores i.e. the hope total predicted academic stress significantly. The probable reason of this finding may be that pathways and agency thoughts are iterative as well as additive over the course of a given sequence of goal directed cognitions (Snyder, Harris et. al 1991).

Therefore the findings of the present study highlighting hope comprising of pathway and agency thinking as significant predictor of academic stress supported by Snyder's (Snyder et al. 1991) hope theory by demonstrating that agency and pathways are distinct construct and each is an important factor in relating to positive and negative aspect of wellbeing.

### Conclusion

The obtained finding having significant negative correlation of hope with academic stress and total hope has been found to be the predictors of academic stress have important implications. Both pathway and agency are important factor in relating to positive and negative aspect of wellbeing. For dealing successfully with academic demands students not only need different pathways to their goals but also need to sustain their motivation to follow those routes. That is only hope in its entirety can predict academic stress. Since adolescents spend a major part of their time in school environment, educational facilities are ideal settings for providing interventions programs that promote hope. At school level different discussions or workshops with school personnel about the general school climate can lead to the generation of specific strategies for facilitating a hopeful environment.

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