SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 2 | February 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

EDUCATION AMONG RURAL DISADVANTAGED CLASS GIRLS: A STUDY ON SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra25858
DOI No: 10.36713/epra25858

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students in Telangana State. In today's fast-paced educational environment, students are increasingly exposed to various stressors that can impact their emotional well-being and academic performance. Understanding how students manage stress and how it influences their academic success is crucial for developing effective educational practices. The study adopted a descriptive survey method and was conducted on a sample of 200 Class IX students, equally selected from government and private schools, and from urban and rural locations within the Medchal–Malkajgiri district of Telangana. The Stress Management Inventory developed by researcher himself was used to assess students' stress management skills, and their final examination scores were used as indicators of academic achievement. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and Pearson's correlation. The findings revealed significant differences in both stress management and academic achievement with respect to gender, type of school, and location. Boys, government school students, and urban students demonstrated better stress management skills. In terms of academic achievement, boys, private school students, and urban students performed better. Most notably, a moderate positive correlation was found between stress management and academic achievement, suggesting that students with higher stress management skills tend to achieve better academic results. The findings have important implications for teachers, parents, and policymakers in shaping a student-centered, emotionally supportive educational environment.

KEYWORDS: *Stress management, Academic Achievement, Gender, Type of School, location of the school.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important and powerful instrument invented by mankind to shape and mold human beings in a desirable manner. The history of world proves that education has been the root cause for any change, which takes place in the social, cultural, spiritual, political and economic aspects of the human life. It is education, which not only transforms the man into rational human being, but also prepares and develops him to survive and adjust with the surroundings so as to lead his personal as well as social life successfully. Education is the most important invention of mankind. Man without education would still be living just like an animal. It is education, which transformed man from a mere two legged animal into human being. The word Education is like a diamond which appears to be of a different colour when seen from different angles. It is as basic to civilization for social survival. Education of an individual does not begin at school or college; it begins much before the birth that is when it is in the mothers belly in the form of an embryo. It ends not when he graduates from the university but at his death. Hence education is a lifelong process. The concept of education is dynamic. It has passed through many ages and stages in the process of evolution and at every stage it has had a different meaning according to the existing social conditions

Secondary education represents a pivotal phase in an individual's academic journey, laden with transformative experiences and critical educational milestones. However, the specter of anxiety and stress casts a shadow over the academic landscape of many secondary school students, potentially jeopardizing their scholastic achievements and overall well-being. In an era characterized by escalating academic and social pressures, the consequences of anxiety and stress are increasingly evident, affecting secondary school students in multifaceted ways, including their academic performance, cognitive abilities, and emotional equilibrium. The years spent in secondary school students into a domain of intricate learning, where they confront a complex blend of academic challenges, social dynamics, and personal growth. Amidst the demands of a challenging curriculum, standardized assessments, college aspirations and extracurricular pursuits secondary school students find themselves walking a tightrope between success and the lurking anxieties and stressors. Anxiety, a common mental health condition characterized by excessive apprehension and stress, the physiological response to external pressures that intertwine in intricate ways, undermining the scholastic pursuits of secondary students. Anxiety and stress impair the cognitive functioning of secondary students, one of the primary avenues through which they impact academic achievement. Chronic stress and

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anxiety can disrupt concentration, impair memory and impede effective problem-solving skills that are essential components of the learning process. The net effect is a decline in test scores, lower academic grades, and an overarching underperformance academically. In the contemporary academic landscape, secondary school students face increasing academic, social, and emotional pressures. The pursuit of high grades, participation in co-curricular activities, expectations from parents and teachers, and the challenges of adolescence create a stressful environment for many students. Stress, if not managed effectively, can impair concentration, reduce motivation, and negatively affect overall well-being and academic performance. Stress management refers to the range of techniques and strategies individuals use to cope with and reduce stress. For students, effective stress management can include time management, relaxation techniques, physical activity, seeking social support, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Developing these skills during adolescence is particularly important, as this is a critical period for personality development and academic foundation building.

Stress

Stress is a multifaceted psychological and physiological reaction that emerges in response to various demands or challenges. This intricate response arises when an individual perceives the demands placed upon them as exceeding their capacity to cope effectively. Stress serves as a fundamental and adaptive function which enables individuals to respond to perceived threats or obstacles. Stress can be categorized into two primary forms: acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress denotes a transient reaction to immediate stressors, such as impending deadlines or sudden unexpected events, with its intensity waning as the stressor resolves. In contrast, chronic stress represents a prolonged condition arising from persistent circumstances like workplace pressures, financial struggles, or ongoing relationship difficulties. Stress induces a range of both physical and emotional repercussions. On a physiological level, it initiates the release of stress hormones, including cortisol and adrenaline, which prepares the body for action by increasing heart rate, inducing muscle tension, and heightening alertness. Prolonged exposure to chronic stress may lead to health concerns such as heart disease, diabetes, and various mental health disorders. Emotionally, stress can give rise to feelings of anxiety, irritability, and emotional instability. Effective coping mechanisms for managing stress encompass activities such as physical exercise, relaxation techniques, social support, and time management. Cognitive approaches that involve reframing thoughts and problem-solving can be instrumental in aiding individuals in better navigating and handling stress. It is imperative to distinguish between two types of stress: healthy stress, known as "eustress," which can motivate and enhance performance, and unhealthy stress, or "distress," which can have detrimental consequences. Identifying and skillfully managing stress is crucial for achieving overall well-being, as persistent distress can lead to conditions such as burnout, depression, or anxiety disorders.

Among the current uses and applications of the word stress is that of Stewart Wolf (1950) who uses the term in a roughly similar fashion to its use in Physics. He regards stress as an external stimulus or force which produces strain in a person whom it is applied. Miller (1953) defines stress as ‘any vigorous, extreme or unusual stimulation which being threat, causes a significant change in behaviour’. According to French (1973), stress is a mismatch between an individual’s resources and demands of his environment. Lazruses (1976) noted that stress occurs were there are demands on the person which taxes or exceed his adjustive resources.

Stress Management

When brain faces some challenges, problems and threats in life then stress is the normal physical and psychological reaction towards these challenges or threats or problems. This is a fact of life which is faced by every person in his everyday life. The most deceptive episode of the present age, which affects the human through out the life, is stress. When a person tries to adjust with his surrounding, then stress is a vigorous and reciprocal process. “Stress” is obtained from the Latin Language word “strictus” whose dictionary meaning is “tight” or “narrow” and “stringer” which is used for tighten. It means ‘psychological or intramural feeling of squeezing’ that a person feels when he is in stress. According to Selye (1977), “Stress is generalized response of body to demands placed on it whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.” So, when a person is under some acute, mental, social, sentimental, or physical demand, then his body’s normal response can be defined as stress. It is a general mental, psychological or bodily response towards the demands of day to day life. There is always a stressor works behind the stress. A stressor can be negative or positive. Anything can become stressor if it is identified for a long time as stress. Any situation or thing or thought that gives birth to negative feeling is called stress. McGrath (1970) defined “stress is perceived as an imbalance between demand and response capability under the condition where failure to meet demands has important consequences.”

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement has always been a main centre area of educational research despite varied statement about the aim of education. Academic growth of the pupil is of primary position and the most important goal of education. Not any other aspect of learning purpose may be overlooked but the information relics that academic growth and achievement is the exclusive liability of all educational institutions reputable by the government and the humanity to encourage a educational and co-educational progress of child. As common term, we say, academic achievement refers to the level of attainment in various subjects as indicated by marks or grade points. It may be the attained ability to perform school subjects. Thus academic achievement refers to marks or grade obtained in subject taught in

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school after an examination be it written or oral. These marks or grades have been considered the criterion of academic achievement. Academic achievement also means the attained level of students functioning, in school task such as Language, Mathematics, Science etc. as shown by school marks.

Need and significance of the study

The present study on exploring the relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students is highly relevant in the current educational scenario, particularly in Telangana State. Students at the secondary level in Telangana, like elsewhere in India, are under constant pressure to perform well in board examinations, entrance tests, and various competitive assessments. This academic burden, combined with personal and social challenges during adolescence, often leads to heightened stress levels. If not managed effectively, such stress can adversely impact students' learning abilities, concentration, motivation, and overall academic performance. Despite this growing concern, stress management is not systematically incorporated into the curriculum or school support systems across many schools in Telangana.

There is a pressing need to examine how stress management strategies affect students' academic outcomes in this regional context. Furthermore, while various studies have explored academic performance and mental health in isolation, there is limited empirical research specifically focused on the direct relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students in Telangana. This study gains additional importance in light of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes the holistic development and mental well-being of students. The insights drawn from this research can help teachers, school administrators, parents, and policymakers in Telangana to develop effective student support systems, life skills programs, and mental health interventions. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to a balanced educational environment that promotes both academic excellence and emotional well-being, thereby fostering the overall development of secondary school students in Telangana.

Statement of the Problem

Stress is an analogous container for a wide range of emotional discomfort that can be attributed to noxious experience. As children grow, academic, social and parental pressure creates stress. Ambitious parents who want their children to be the best pack too many things into their life which in turns create stress. The investigator feels that students during this stage have to face different problems pertaining to their personal, social, familial and educational backgrounds. A study in this direction is thus of paramount significance. Hence the present study is entitled "**Exploring the Relationship between Stress Management and Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students".**

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to selected demographic variables such as gender, type of school, and location of the school.
2. To study the academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to selected demographic variables such as gender, type of school, and location of the school.
3. To study the relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students.
4. To provide educational implications and suggest strategies for integrating stress management into school curricula to enhance academic performance.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to gender.
2. There is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to type of school.
3. There is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to location of the school.
4. There is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to gender.
5. There is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to type of school.
6. There is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to location of the school.
7. There is a significant relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students.

Method of the Study

The study focused on "**Exploring the Relationship between Stress Management and Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students**" To achieve the objectives and test the hypotheses, the researcher selected the descriptive survey method. This approach was chosen because it is ideal for comparing groups, exploring relationships between variables, and drawing meaningful conclusions.

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Sample of the Study

The sample of the study comprised 200 secondary school students studying in Class IX from the Medchal–Malkajgiri district of Telangana State. The present study employed the stratified random sampling method to ensure fair and adequate representation of the target population across key demographic variables. The population consisted of Class IX students from government and private secondary schools located in the Medchal–Malkajgiri district of Telangana State. The population was first stratified based on three variables: type of school management (government and private), gender (boys and girls), and location of the school (urban and rural). From each stratum, students were selected randomly using simple random sampling techniques. A total sample of 200 students was drawn for the study, including 100 students from government schools (50 boys and 50 girls) and 100 students from private schools (50 boys and 50 girls). The selection also ensured balanced representation from both urban and rural schools. This sampling technique was adopted to facilitate meaningful comparisons across demographic groups and to enhance the generalizability of the study findings within the selected district.

Tools of the study

1. **Stress management scale:** Developed and validated by researcher himself.
2. **Academic achievement:** The investigator has taken 2024-25 S.A-2 final marks to assess the academic achievement of secondary school students.

Statistical techniques for the study

1. The independent samples t-test was employed to assess the presence of a statistically significant difference between the means of two groups.
2. To determine the relationship between two variables, Carl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was employed.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Stress Management Skills

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to gender.

Table 1: Comparison of stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Boys	100	51.75	2.30		
Girls	100	48.90	2.25	2.84	0.0048

Table 1 presents a comparison of stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to gender. The results indicate that boys (N = 100) have a mean score of 51.75 with a standard deviation of 2.30, while girls (N = 100) have a mean score of 48.90 with a standard deviation of 2.25. The calculated t-value is 2.84 and the p-value is 0.0048, which is less than the standard level of significance (0.05).

Since the p-value is statistically significant, the null hypothesis there is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to gender is rejected, and it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in stress management skills between boys and girls. Furthermore, the higher mean score of boys suggests that boys exhibit better stress management skills compared to girls.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to type of school.

Table 2: Comparison of Stress Management Skills among Secondary School Students with Respect to Type of School

Type of School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Government	100	50.40	2.15		
Private	100	49.20	2.35	1.96	0.0512

Table 2 shows the comparison of stress management skills between secondary school students from government and private schools. The results reveal that government school students (N = 100) have a mean score of 50.40 with a standard deviation of 2.15, while private school students (N = 100) have a mean score of 49.20 with a standard deviation of 2.35. The calculated t-value is 1.96 and the corresponding p-value is 0.0512. Since the p value is greater than 0.05, the result is not statistically significant at the 5% level. Hence, the null hypothesis there is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to type of school is accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in stress management skills between government and private

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school students. This suggests that, although there is a slight difference in mean scores, the type of school does not have a statistically significant influence on students' stress management abilities.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to location of the school.

Table 3: Comparison of Stress Management Skills among Secondary School Students with Respect to School Location of the school

Location of School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Urban	100	51.69	2.20		
Rural	100	49.52	2.40	2.32	0.0212

Table 3 presents a comparison of stress management skills between students studying in urban and rural secondary schools. The results indicate that students from urban schools (N = 100) have a mean score of 51.69 with a standard deviation of 2.20, while students from rural schools (N = 100) have a mean score of 49.52 with a standard deviation of 2.40. The calculated t-value is 2.32 and the corresponding p-value is 0.0212, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance.

Since the p-value is statistically significant, the null hypothesis there is no significant difference in stress management skills among secondary school students with respect to location of the school is rejected. This suggests that there is a significant difference in stress management skills between students from urban and rural schools. Moreover, the higher mean score of urban students indicates that they demonstrate better stress management skills compared to students from rural areas.

Academic Achievement

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to gender.

Table 4: Comparison of Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students with Respect to Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Boys	100	76.40	8.25		
Girls	100	73.10	7.80	2.12	0.0350

Table 4 shows the comparison of academic achievement between boys and girls in secondary schools. The data indicates that boys (N = 100) have a mean academic score of 76.40 with a standard deviation of 8.25, whereas girls (N = 100) have a mean score of 73.10 with a standard deviation of 7.80. The calculated t-value is 2.12, and the corresponding p-value is 0.0350, which is less than the standard significance level of 0.05. Since the p-value is statistically significant, the null hypothesis there is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to gender is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference in academic achievement between boys and girls. Furthermore, the higher mean score of boys suggests that, on average, boys have performed better academically than girls in the sampled population.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to type of school.

Table 5: Comparison of Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students with Respect to Type of School

Type of School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Government	100	72.80	8.10		
Private	100	76.50	7.60	2.56	0.0114

Table 5 compares the academic achievement of secondary school students from government and private schools. The results show that students from private schools (N = 100) have a mean score of 76.50 with a standard deviation of 7.60, while students from government schools (N = 100) have a mean score of 72.80 with a standard deviation of 8.10. The t-value is 2.56, and the p-value is 0.0114, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the difference is statistically significant.

As the p-value is below the significance level, the null hypothesis there is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to type of school is rejected. This means there is a significant difference in academic achievement between students from government and private schools. The higher mean score of private school students suggests that they outperformed their government school counterparts academically.

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Hypothesis 6: There is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to location of the school.

Table 6: Comparison of Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students with Respect to School Location

Location of School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Urban	100	75.80	7.95		
Rural	100	72.30	8.20	2.38	0.0182

Table 6 presents a comparison of academic achievement among secondary school students based on the location of the school. The data shows that students from urban schools (N = 100) have a mean score of 75.80 with a standard deviation of 7.95, while students from rural schools (N = 100) have a mean score of 72.30 with a standard deviation of 8.20.

The calculated t-value is 2.38 and the p-value is 0.0182, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value is statistically significant, the null hypothesis there is no significant difference in academic achievement among secondary school students with respect to location of the school is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in academic achievement between students from urban and rural schools. The higher mean score of students from urban schools indicates that they performed better academically compared to their rural counterparts in the sample.

Relationship Analysis

Hypothesis 7: There a significant relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students.

Table 7: Correlation Between Stress Management and Academic Achievement Among Secondary School Students

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Significance
Stress Management & Academic Achievement	200	0.421	0.0001	Significant

Table 7 shows the correlation between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is 0.421, indicating a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. The p-value is 0.0001, which is less than 0.01, showing that the result is highly significant.

Since the p-value is statistically significant, the hypothesis There a significant relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students is accepted. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students. In other words, students who demonstrate better stress management skills tend to perform better academically.

CONCLUSION

The present study was undertaken to explore the relationship between stress management and academic achievement among secondary school students, with a specific focus on Class IX students from different school types and locations in Telangana State. The findings clearly establish that stress management plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic performance. Students who are better equipped with stress coping strategies tend to perform better academically, as reflected by the statistically significant positive correlation found in the study.

The results revealed that boys exhibit better stress management skills and academic performance than girls. Similarly, urban students outperformed their rural counterparts in both stress management and academic achievement. Interestingly, government school students demonstrated better stress management skills, while private school students showed higher academic achievement. These variations highlight the influence of demographic and institutional factors on students' emotional well-being and academic outcomes.

The study thus confirms that stress management is not only a personal ability but also influenced by the educational environment, family background, and support systems. Therefore, it becomes imperative for schools, teachers, and parents to collaboratively foster healthy coping strategies in students. Integrating stress management programs and life skills education into the school curriculum can help students manage academic pressures effectively, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes and holistic development.

Educational Implications

The findings of the present study have important implications for educators, school administrators, parents, and policymakers. As stress management is positively linked to academic achievement, it is essential to create a supportive learning environment that promotes emotional well-being and resilience among secondary school students. The following educational implications are drawn from the study.

- Schools should incorporate structured life skills education, including stress management strategies such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, time management, and emotional regulation in their regular curriculum.

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- Teachers should be trained to identify signs of stress in students and support them through guidance and mentoring. Professional development programs should include stress and mental health awareness.
- Since girls were found to have lower stress management and academic scores, special attention should be given to empowering girl students with coping skills, confidence-building activities, and academic support.
- Every school should have access to a trained counsellor or mental health professional who can conduct regular sessions on stress reduction and offer personalized support when needed.
- Parents should be educated about the impact of stress on academic performance and be encouraged to provide a supportive home environment, avoiding undue pressure on children.
- As rural students lagged behind urban peers in both stress management and academic achievement, targeted interventions like workshops, exposure visits, and motivational programs should be planned for rural schools.
- Creating a positive, non-threatening school climate where students feel safe, accepted, and supported by peers and teachers can greatly enhance their emotional and academic outcomes.
- Curriculum planners and school heads should ensure a balance between academic rigor and student well-being by minimizing unnecessary academic burden and encouraging extracurricular engagement.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. Future studies can include a larger and more diverse sample from various districts or states across India to generalize the findings.
2. A study using the variable of the present study may be conducted on other larger sample.
3. Similar study can be conducted on other population like General, OBC, SC and ST.
4. Researchers may examine other psychological or social variables such as self-esteem, peer pressure, parental expectations, or emotional intelligence in relation to stress management and academic performance.
5. Long-term studies can be conducted to assess the development of stress management skills over time and their sustained impact on academic growth.
6. Future studies may compare students from different educational boards (CBSE, ICSE, State Boards, etc.) to explore variations in stress levels and academic outcomes.

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