

Forum:	Youth Assembly (YA)
Issue:	Addressing the problem of Rising Levels of Academic Stress
Student Officer:	Antigoni Douvou
Position:	Co-Head

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Antigoni Douvou and I have the honour of serving as a Co-Head of this year's PSMUN Youth Assembly. I am fifteen years old and currently attend the 10th Grade at Erasmios Greek-German School in Athens. So far, I have attended seven conferences as a delegate and this will be my first time being a student officer.

The Youth Assembly is a very special committee, in my opinion, since by attending it, you get the chance to embark on the wonderful journey of MUN. Generally, the Youth Assembly introduces the delegates to global sociopolitical matters by acclimating them to approachable topics. This study guide will introduce you to the topic of "Addressing the problem of Rising Levels of Academic Stress", which is the second topic of this year's agenda. For an extended period of time, stress was falsely considered a problem that students could easily surpass. Thankfully, due to recent revelations and studies, society has understood how vital handling this problem is. This Study Guide contains a variety of information regarding the topic so that delegates can acquire a basic understanding of academic stress. For instance, this Guide will expand upon the major contributing countries to the students' stress rates and the UN and other parties whose previous attempts to resolve the problem did not succeed. Last but not least, an outline of possible solutions will be mentioned, so as to help you have a general example of feasible solutions you could think of.

Looking forward to meeting and working with all of you and listening to every individual opinion on this year's Agenda regarding the Youth Assembly. This Study Guide addresses the main points of this topic, however, I highly encourage you to do individual research as well, to acquire a wider perspective of the problem at hand and, as a result, have fruitful and productive debates at the time of the conference. Should you face any problems or have any questions regarding the topic, I strongly suggest you contact me, by emailing me at antigoni.douvou08@gmail.com.

Best Regards,

Antigoni

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that the expanding learning material has benefits in broadening horizons and fostering comprehensive knowledge among students. It has helped many young people discover their callings and understand their interests. However, it is important to consider that this increase in material can lead to more students feeling overwhelmed, particularly when studying topics they are not interested in. Memorizing information for exams adds to the stress levels experienced by pupils. Additionally, some students may have a harder time managing their responsibilities than others, especially in later grades when they face challenging examinations related to their life courses. Furthermore, students of all ages, especially those with learning disabilities, can find it challenging to stay on top of their schoolwork.

Subsequently, a pertinent question arises: what is the crux of the issue? Why are today's students seemingly unprepared to handle the syllabus, and why do pupils feel that their academic performance reflects excessively on their worth and determines their futures? To begin with, it is due to high expectations and a lack of time or resources to meet them while maintaining a healthy lifestyle. An undeniable example is parents projecting their aspirations onto their children, causing not only stress but also contributing to a variety of problems. Older generations, having had more limited access to information, set expectations for newer generations that are often higher than feasible, leading to increased stress levels among students.

On another note, many students struggle to motivate themselves to study. This is a crucial area, as academic motivation is generally considered "not only a predictor of academic achievement and performance but also a regulator of educational activity that directly affects learning quality and psychological well-being."¹

Another aspect of the issue is why the struggles of students remain unacknowledged. During the teenage years, many tend to isolate themselves from their families, seeking comfort and solutions to their problems with friends. Guardians, trying to respect their choices, may misinterpret signs of poor mental well-being as common behavior among youth. Thus, instead of assisting their children, they unintentionally encourage their isolation. Simultaneously, parents may misinterpret their children's academic struggles as a lack of resilience. Particularly in a post-COVID-19 world, where parents' experiences may not resonate with teenagers, finding common ground can be challenging.

¹ Cabras, Cristina, et al. "Gender and Country Differences in Academic Motivation, Coping Strategies, and Academic Burnout in a Sample of Italian and Russian First-Year University Students." *Heliyon*, vol. 9, no. 6, 1 May 2023, pp. e16617–e16617, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16617>.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Stress

“The feeling of uneasiness caused by overwhelming events or a packed schedule, which the person experiencing stress finds difficult to manage. ² Not all stress has a negative effect on students.

Eustress

“Regulated stress which can be helpful to people because it persuades them to stop postponing their responsibilities. ³ This type of stress can urge students to be more organized, devoted to their studies and it can serve as an opportunity for growth.

Anxiety

“The constant sense of worry over the present and future leads to an immoderate propensity and under periods of extreme pressure. Anxiety is a result of cumulative stress, which is the consequence of leaving any obstacles in one’s path unresolved. This is, otherwise, referred to as maladjustment. In extreme cases, physical symptoms may appear.”⁴ In an academic setting, anxiety is usually associated with situations when one’s knowledge or skills are examined⁵. Usually, the performance of said person is negatively affected by the overwhelming sensation⁶, while eliminating their motivation and creativity.

Mental Health

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.”⁷ Mental Health plays a big part in a person’s decision-making process and can affect the way relationships are formed in their life. Poor mental health can lead to a variety of disorders and low self-assertion and self-esteem.

²“Stress Definition & Meaning | Britannica Dictionary.” *Www.britannica.com*, www.britannica.com/dictionary/stress.

³“Definition of EUSTRESS.” *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2018, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eustress.

⁴Merriam-Webster. “ANXIETY.” *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anxiety

⁵ “APA Dictionary of Psychology.” *Dictionary.apa.org*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/performance-anxiety>

⁶“APA Dictionary of Psychology.” *Dictionary.apa.org*, 19 Apr. 2018, <https://dictionary.apa.org/test-anxiety>.

⁷“Mental Health.” *World Health Organization*, 17 June 2022, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

Debilitating Effects

The result of an action that renders a person unable to function properly and complete ordinary regular activities; for instance, struggling with basic hygiene or maintaining close relationships with loved ones. Such results can be caused by poor mental or physical wellbeing. An example is debilitating depression, which can overwhelm a person emotionally leading to actions that can keep them from living a balanced lifestyle.⁸⁹ Such effects can manifest themselves in periods where students have to sit for detrimental examinations.

Self-harm

“The practice of deliberately injuring yourself, for example, by cutting yourself as a result of having serious emotional or mental problems”.¹⁰ This is professionally called Nonsuicidal Self-Injury Disorder and such actions can vary from more to less obvious for others to observe. For instance, self-neglect can be considered an as serious form of self-harm, as deliberately putting oneself in danger, bodily hazard, and psychological harm. The reasons why a person can be led to self-harm are numerous. Regarding academic stress, pupils may be led to it due to overwhelming material in combination with personal problems or even bullying.

Academic Buoyancy

The ability of a student to cope with academic setbacks and disappointments, which arise on a regular basis and are considered typical within academic settings. These problems can threaten self-assurance and it is generally expected of students to be able to handle it.¹¹

Cognitive Interference

“The unwanted and often disturbing thoughts that intrude on a person's life.”¹² Cognitive interference can have a great impact on stress, performance, and fitting in, amongst others. Overall, one can tell that cognitive interference should be dealt with since learning how to manage it can be beneficial in a lot of aspects.

⁸“Definition of DEBILITATING.” www.merriam-Webster.com, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/debilitating.

⁹“The Struggle of Debilitating Depression.” *BrightQuest Treatment Centers*, 21 June 2019, www.brightquest.com/blog/the-struggle-of-debilitating-depression/

¹⁰“Self-Harm Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced American Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com.” www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/self-harm

¹¹ “Academic Buoyancy Encyclopedia, Science News & Research Reviews.” *Academic Accelerator*, <https://academic-accelerator.com/encyclopedia/academic-buoyancy>

¹² “APA PsycNet.” *Psycnet.apa.org*, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1996-97348-000>.

Social-Emotional Learning

The procedure of the acquisition of skills, which assist people to be able to apply in situations appropriate behavior and maintain principles and social skills. More specifically, during class, this can be helpful by allowing children to express their feelings, develop empathy, gain self-control and learn to set and maintain boundaries.¹³

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Causes of academic stress

High expectations and family background

Stress has been described as not a specific stimulus but rather a relation between an individual and their environment. It is proven that a person's family background can impact how they handle stressful situations. More precisely, a person's coping strategies develop early in life by observing how their loved ones react to such experiences.

Furthermore, expectations are among the most motivating elements in a student's academic career and, simultaneously, one of the most frequently cited causes of stress among students. In addition to one's own expectations, parental expectations are the initial influential factor in a pupil's life. The projection of a family's own ambitions onto their children can have an immediate impact on the life path they choose. In some households, children may feel an underlying pressure to succeed, fearing disappointment from their parents. This pressure is often felt regardless of explicit statements made by authority figures.

The pressure to meet parental expectations can become extremely overwhelming, especially if it begins at a young age. Some parents may even impose consequences to limit their children's potential distractions and compel them to focus on their studies. However, this is not always as beneficial for the child's mental health as it is for their grades. Constant and frequent enforcement of punishments when demands are not met can lead children to lose interest and, in some cases, develop mental health issues.

Simultaneously, there are families where parents do not set impossible standards, but students tend to impose high expectations on themselves. Therefore, they may have to sacrifice experiences their peers enjoy. These children may be described as perfectionists and do not necessarily require an

¹³"Social-Emotional Learning Definition & Meaning." *Dictionary.com*, www.dictionary.com/browse/social-emotional-learning

external “stepping stone” to pressure themselves to succeed at all costs. Internally, they may struggle with feelings of inadequacy, even if their parents have not openly expressed such opinions. In other cases, students may strive to outperform their peers academically to impress their parents. This dynamic is observable in large families where children may feel overlooked as parents strive to attend to all siblings.

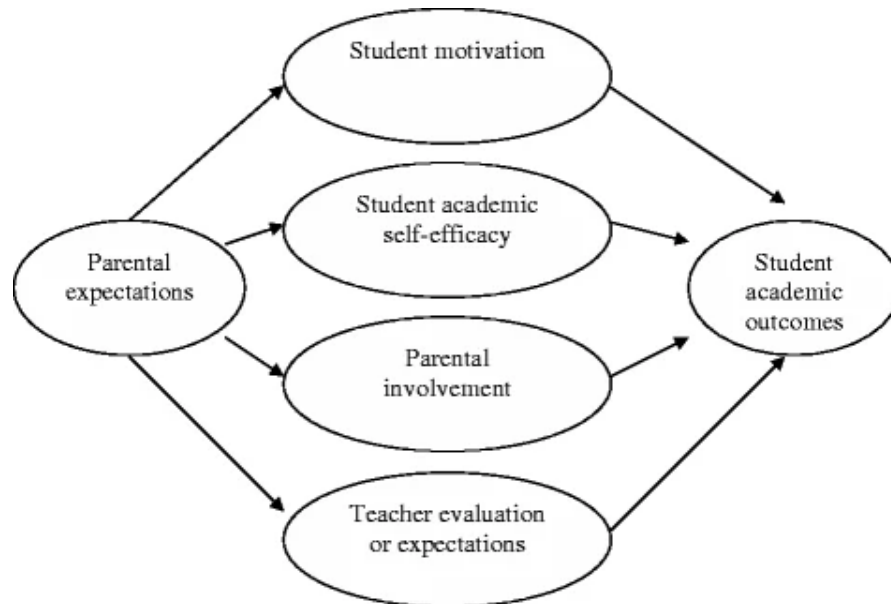


Figure 1: Connection between parental expectations-academic outcomes and what links them¹⁴

Additional distress in students' lives can be caused by their family's financial situation. Students from low-income families tend to be excessively worried. Often, working while attending university becomes a requirement for students aspiring to achieve financial independence. Nevertheless, the limited job market can heighten students' concerns about their futures and whether they will be able to complete their studies.

¹⁴World Health Organization. “Anxiety Disorders.” *Www.who.int*, 27 Sept. 2023, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/anxiety-disorders.

Insecurity about the future

Insecurity about the future and anxiety about one's future can be experienced in the later years of high school. This is the time when pupils begin to ponder what awaits them after graduation. It is also the time when students, as young adults, are called upon to decide what they would like to do in their futures. In some countries, students are required to choose between sciences and humanities at a very young age. After graduation, they are rarely given an opportunity to switch their field of occupation and have little to no chance of finding work in the other stream of study as well. Under such circumstances, the worry of finding a workplace and a master's degree suitable to their preferences exists. All of the above can truly worry a student who is unsure of their true calling.

How Often Do You Find Yourself Stressed Over School Work?

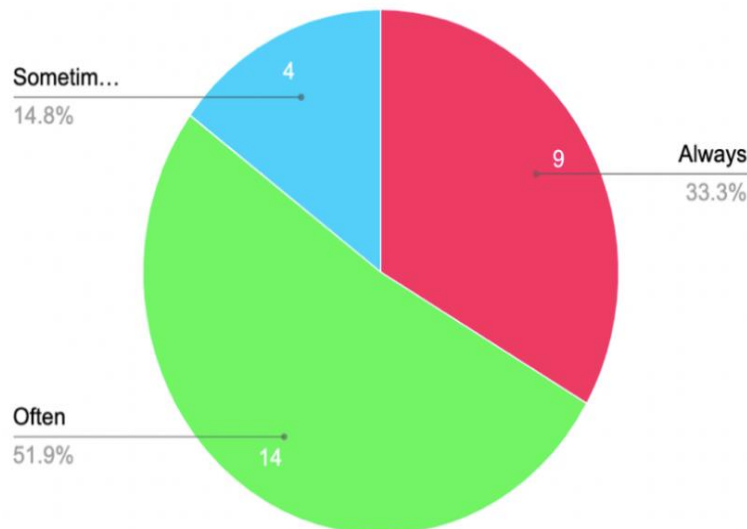


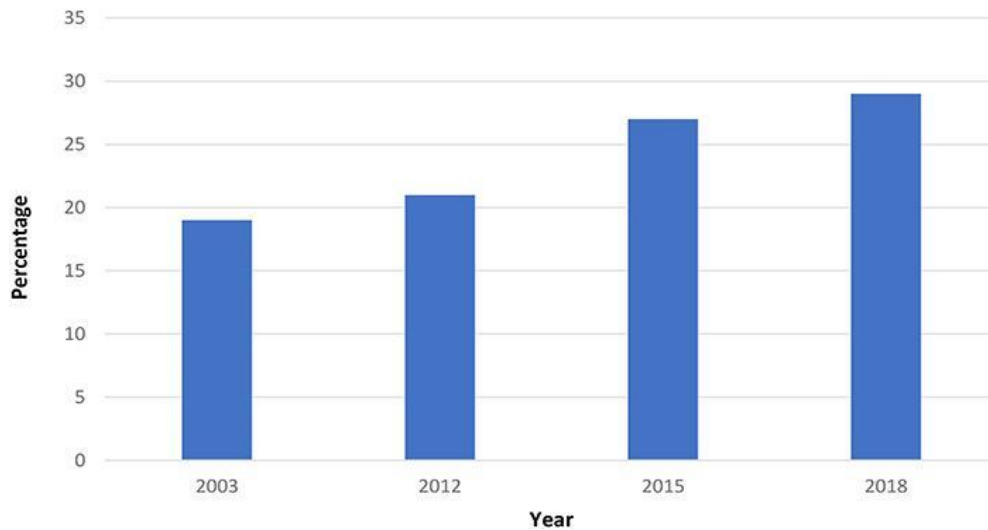
Figure 2: pie on the frequency of students' stress caused by schoolwork¹⁵

The depth and breadth of the curriculum and the feeling of belonging

The depth and breadth of the curriculum, as well as the feeling of belonging, constitute some of the significant challenges students face. One of their primary struggles is the pressure to absorb extensive information across subjects to succeed in examinations. Due to technological advancements and the general progress of societies, experts tend to add more material to the curriculum, making it difficult for students to keep up. Although the intention behind this is to help students adapt more easily in their future lives, this tactic

¹⁵Jewett, Norah. "The Stress Problem in High School Students – BHS Ledger." *The Ledger*, 20 Nov. 2022, <https://bhsledger.org/the-stress-problem-in-high-school-students/>

often results in either superficial and momentary recollection of information or low achievement rates in tests.



Another important aspect is the anxiety students may feel about fitting in with their peers. Regarding higher education, studying away from home can open doors to numerous opportunities in the future, but it is not always emotionally beneficial for students. Feelings of homesickness and the worry of creating a new social network while keeping up with schoolwork can be overwhelming at times, particularly during students' freshman year. This applies even when they enroll in universities close to home. However, students with close relationships both within and without a reasonable distance from their families can adjust to this transformation more easily.

Even before that, during secondary education, there are significant aspects of the social life of children in the school environment that contribute to excessive stress levels. Bullying, being the main cause, can significantly contribute to self-doubt and alienation, depriving students of the sense of belonging. This feeling of alienation in high schools has been the focus of surveys, and in recent years, the number of reported cases appears to have increased. A study conducted by experts at Stanford University states that "...students reported higher levels of in-class satisfaction and socio-emotional adjustment in high social exploration climates."¹⁶

¹⁶Nielsen, H. Dean, and Rudolf H. Moos. "Exploration and Adjustment in High School Classrooms: A Study of Person-Environment Fit." *The Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 72, no. 1, Sept. 1978, pp. 52–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1978.10885119>

Figure 3: Percentages of students who do not feel a sense of school belonging for the years 2003, 2012, 2015, and 2018.¹⁷

Motivation

Procrastination is closely interlinked with academic stress. Typically, individuals experiencing amotivation tend to postpone fulfilling their responsibilities until the last minute. One effective way to break free from the vicious cycle of procrastination is by identifying small motivating incentives in one's daily schedule.

Primary appraisal is closely related to self-efficacy, which refers to one's belief in their ability to perform necessary behaviors to achieve their goals. Self-efficacy has been found to be positively correlated with achievement motivation. For all students to develop an interest in school, their motivations from external sources should transform into internal motivations. However, this may not be feasible for everyone, as each student is fascinated by different topics.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) elaborates on the speculation that every individual aspires to evolve.¹⁸ Furthermore, it is based on the supposition that one can only grow if they desire to do so, for their own benefit, with personal growth as their incentive. SDT (Self-Determination Theory) entails that motivation is composed of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are those whose main incentive is what individuals will gain, while intrinsic motivation revolves around wanting to do something because one finds it enjoyable.

The extrinsic factors can be divided into sub-sections: external regulations, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. Common applications of these categories include reward systems, rebukes, an increased sense of self-achievement, and feelings of obligation to complete certain tasks, respectively. Some are more internal than others, but overall, every sector operates in favor of someone striving to achieve their goals. Typically, extroverted individuals prefer extrinsic motivational tactics, as they

¹⁷Allen, Kelly-Ann. "Do You Feel like You Belong?" *Frontiers for Young Minds*, vol. 8, 18 Aug. 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3389/frym.2020.00099>

¹⁸Deci, Edward L., and Richard M. Ryan. *Handbook of Self-Determination Research*. Google Books, University Rochester Press, 2004, https://books.google.gr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=DcAe2b7L-RgC&oi=fnd&pg=PA3&dq=self+determination+theory&ots=dsDR5G0_h&sig=jVBzI-UVSOmd8tRD2cEfwVIAZ_8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=self%20determination%20theory&f=false

boost their self-assurance. On the other hand, introverts are more often motivated by internal factors.

The result of academic stress

Emotional and cognitive

First and foremost, it is very common for people undergoing acute stress to experience a decreased ability to empathize with and relate to others' problems, which has a negative effect on their relationships. Apart from that, students' self-esteem is reduced, and they become irritable during stressful periods, such as examinations, as they may feel vulnerable, lonely, and mentally unwell. Consequently, it is not uncommon for students to be diagnosed with eating disorders, academic burnout, and depression.

Moreover, another result of stress can be described as "moodiness" in a casual context. Pessimism is a very common occurrence, while poor judgement and constant worrying are highly likely to arise if stress is not dealt with. Racing thoughts have also been proven to be a very common experience among students during examination periods.

Physical

Physical symptoms of stress can be disregarded by students due to the pressure they are experiencing, but they are psychosomatic results of pressure. For example, muscle pain is a common result of consistent stress, as well as headaches and migraines. Another common result of stress worth

mentioning is acne. Under stressful situations, a certain hormone is produced that can lead to oiliness and acne.

Stress among college students

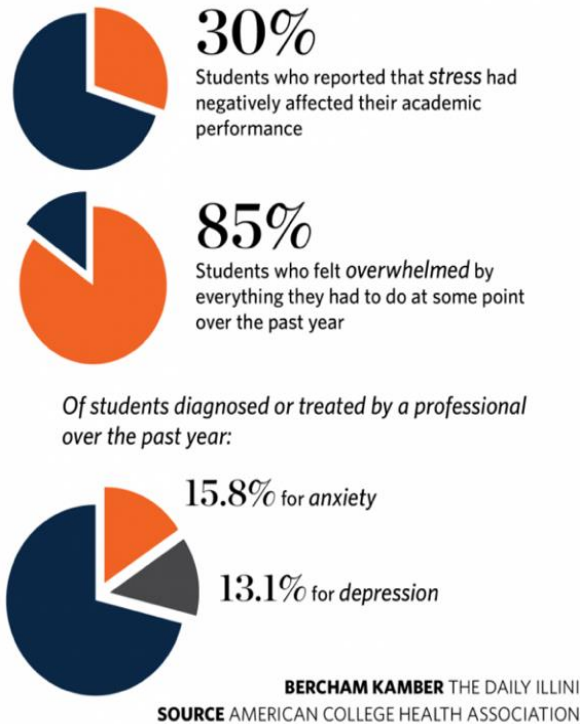


Figure 5: stress rates among college students¹⁹

Under pressing circumstances, the digestive system reacts as well. The liver works excessively by generating extra blood sugar to preserve energy levels. However, this can be a problem if the stress persists for long periods, as beyond a certain point, the body may not be able to continue handling the extra glucose. Consequently, the risk of developing diabetes is greatly increased, and the digestion process is slowed down. Simultaneously, muscles experience tension, and the respiratory and cardiovascular systems are not left unaffected.

The immune system faces a lot of complications during stressful periods, too. In the beginning, “stress can cause the immune system to produce an inflammatory response, which can be temporarily beneficial for fighting germs”²⁰, hence benefiting it. However, after an extended period, it weakens.

¹⁹Kelman, Ike. “Stress and the Dangers of Homework — Science Leadership Academy @ Center City.” *Scienceleadership.org*, 25 Mar. 2021, <https://scienceleadership.org/blog/stress-and-the-dangers-of-homework>

²⁰ University of Maryland Medical System. “How Does Stress Affect the Immune System?” *UMMS Health*, 10 Nov. 2020, <https://health.umms.org/2020/11/10/stress-immune-system/>

The hormones being released eventually decrease the body's resistance to foreign bacteria. Therefore, the person becomes vulnerable and prone to diseases and illnesses.

Behavioural

Apart from the physical and emotional indications, many individuals can undergo behavioural changes during periods of high pressure because the central nervous and endocrine systems are affected. For instance, there may be dietary changes, as well as increased consumption of alcohol, smoking, and the use of unprescribed medication. Fidgeting, nail-biting, and isolation have also been correlated with nervousness, along with angry outbursts.

The use of over-the-counter medication has been associated with stress and anxiety. Some medications may be used to address issues such as the inability to concentrate, changes in one's sleep schedule, or a lack of energy. All of these reasons behind the use of these drugs are behavioural results of academic stress. Additionally, studies have reported that immense amounts of stress are common among students who are physically inactive for long periods of time. This is due to the fact that when a person is exercising, certain hormones are produced which boost motivation and wellness. Specifically, serotonin helps students combat stressful situations and feelings of tiredness.

Academic stress among different social groups

Introvert-Extrovert spectrum

The relationship between self-efficacy and academic adjustment verifies that pupils who believe in themselves and their abilities have adopted a positive mindset, and overall feel optimistic about their future and tend to perform better academically. Consequently, a student's personality type is greatly linked to their academic accomplishments due to their sense of self-worth and self-assurance.

Introverts, those who generally avoid social interactions and prefer keeping to themselves, have shown higher anxiety levels caused by academic factors. Most of the time, the suppression of stress in individuals with introverted characteristics can lead to mental and physical problems, as their tolerance for distress is lower than that of an extrovert. A notable example is socially isolated female students with introverted traits presenting more severe cases of stress-induced acne than their extroverted counterparts. Regarding their motivation, introverted personalities seem to derive theirs from internal challenges—by themselves, for themselves—resulting in subjective satisfaction.

On the contrary, extroverts—individuals who enjoy socializing and are typically described as confident—have shown resilience to academic stress through sufficient preparation. This type of student is more inclined to welcome challenging situations, where stress can arise, as they see them as opportunities for praise and prove their capabilities. As far as motivation is concerned, extroverted individuals thrive on external motivating factors, such as validation and acknowledgment. Their ideal setting for focus is a collaborative one.

Differences among genders

Women and men have different responses to pressure due to societal expectations and gender roles. Understanding how each gender manages stressful situations is important to provide effective solutions inclusive for all students who may suffer from such stress.

Females are more likely to internalize their feelings, yet, they are also more likely to seek professional help. On the other hand, men often downplay the seriousness of their struggles, increasing the likelihood of developing depression, while women are more prone to higher anxiety levels. Scientists have concluded that females may have a higher genetic predisposition to mental health issues, but men are often better at diverting their attention from stressors than confronting them. Regarding non-binary individuals, studies conducted post the COVID-19 crisis have reported that they experience an additional amount of academic stress compared to their gender-conforming classmates.

Students who belong to minorities

While a significant part of society is working to eliminate discriminatory behaviors against people from different countries, with different beliefs or sexual orientations, or those with disabilities, there are still many reported incidents of discrimination. Unfortunately, this often occurs in the school environment, impacting students belonging to those minorities. The struggle to fit in makes the learning experience more difficult and stressful than it would be if they felt included in the environment and more confident. Additionally, it is common for these students to avoid reaching out for help regarding their mental well-being, increasing the likelihood of developing depression.

A survey conducted in the USA after the COVID-19 quarantines revealed that students belonging to minority and vulnerable groups did not experience a significant increase in stress levels. Experts speculate that this might be due to their familiarity with adverse circumstances, making them more resilient to them.

Coping mechanisms to academic stress

Healthy coping strategies

As mentioned earlier, individuals manage their emotions and actions differently in distressing situations. There are many healthy ways to cope with the pressure of academic challenges, and it is crucial to teach new generations how to navigate these challenges and confront their problems productively.

One beneficial strategy is problem-focused coping. In brief, this type of coping involves an individual attempting to control the situation they are in, finding a solution by themselves, and seeking help only when necessary. Acquiring time management skills and instrumental social support is part of this method. However, not all people are naturally inclined to take matters into their own hands, and having a pessimistic approach can become an obstacle.

Moreover, although academic buoyancy is a useful skill, being able to define where buoyancy ends and where apathy and indifference begin is imperative for the mental well-being of students. When an individual faces failure, they often need encouragement to overcome the disappointment and try again with more persistence. This is particularly pertinent in a tertiary academic setting because perseverance is crucial for obtaining a degree.

Thus, academic buoyancy is of utmost importance because one should learn as many lessons from a letdown as possible and, then, surpass it. However, indifference is the complete opposite since students who do not care about academic achievement are disinterested in gaining new knowledge. Even if they make mistakes, they do not think about them or try to correct them.

Unhealthy coping mechanisms

Rumination, more commonly known as overthinking, is a toxic mindset. Many young people have “repetitive thinking or dwelling on negative feelings and distress and their causes and consequences²¹.” Thus, overthinking can lead to feelings of hopelessness and depression, representing one end of the scale if academic buoyancy is the other.

²¹“Psychiatry.org - Rumination: A Cycle of Negative Thinking.” *Www.psychiatry.org*, 5 Mar. 2020, www.psychiatry.org/News-room/APA-Blogs/Rumination-A-Cycle-of-Negative-Thinking#:~:text=Rumination%20involves%20repetitive%20thinking%20or.

The what-ifs in life are unavoidable, and since no one is perfect, there is no way of avoiding mistakes. Questions such as "What if I had studied more?" and "What if I had paid more attention in class?" are perfectly understandable because regret is a significant part of life. Nonetheless, one should not let themselves get caught up in these inquiries, as becoming engrossed in one's mistakes can become excruciating, achieving nothing through rumination.

A defensive mechanism many unwillingly enforce is self-handicapping; willingly putting obstacles in one's path to have an excuse if things take a downturn and protect their ego. A common example is students drinking caffeine late in the evening, making it difficult to sleep properly before a test. This self-sabotage is rooted in an individual's self-doubt about their ability to do well on the exam. Perfectionists, narcissists, and people who suffer from depression and anxiety often use this method.

Moreover, in this modern day and age, in efforts to cope with the stress and anxiety that come with being a student, some may feel the need to do something drastic about it. Unknowingly or knowingly, they resort to actions that harm their mental and physical well-being. In greater detail, a reason could be to relieve emotional agony or to feel like they are regaining control of their lives. Some people may use self-harming methods as a way to "punish" themselves or as a result of intrusive thoughts. Regardless of the reason, individuals suffering should be offered appropriate help and support to stop harming themselves.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

The United States of America (USA)

The United States of America has a reputable education system, where students from Grades 3 to 8 must undergo national examinations. However, the USA has been identified as the country with the highest number of stressed students, and the overall rate of mental health problems among youth has increased. Worth mentioning is that 51% of university students who participated in a 2023 poll reported feeling constantly distressed. The feeling of worry was reportedly one of the top reasons for students contemplating abandoning their course of study. Regarding younger students, another study has shown that "50% of middle school students reported feeling stressed over academics all the time, while 75% of high school students felt the same".²² The American Psychological Association has published multiple detailed articles aiming to ameliorate the situation. These articles are targeted at parents and

²²Zauderer, Steven . "47 Student Stress Statistics (High School/College)." www.crossrivertherapy.com, 11 Jan. 2023, www.crossrivertherapy.com/student-stress-statistics.

teachers to help them gain better insight into students' difficulties and enable them to provide assistance.

India

The education system in India is centered on memorizing study material, requiring students to dedicate long hours daily to studying for successful examination responses. While this approach can be effective for expanding knowledge, it leaves limited time for pupils to socialize and relax. Additionally, teachers, in an effort to cover the extensive syllabus, often overlook whether the entire class has comprehended the lessons. The school atmosphere is highly competitive from an early stage in children's lives, given the country's rising population and limited opportunities for higher education.

Over the years, parents and teachers have linked a child's sense of self-worth with their academic performance rather than considering their character and personality qualities and faults. This approach is extremely harmful to adolescent mental health and can lead teenagers to focus their entire young and adult lives on being competitive and hostile towards others to feel good about themselves. Fortunately, students suffering from mental illness in India are referred to institutions that can offer them proper help.

Furthermore, the Indian government has been actively trying to eliminate mental health issues among secondary school students through the School Mental Health Program (SMHP)²³, launched in 1982. In brief, this initiative endorses three basic pillars: providing health to the mentally ill, aiding in their recovery, and destigmatizing mental health. Despite these efforts, the action plan has been recently overlooked. This neglect needs to be reviewed, and SMHP should be enforced more vigorously. According to the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) conducted in 2015-16, the prevalence of mental disorders among children aged 13-17 was 7.3% in both genders.²⁴

Switzerland

The Swiss educational system has been recognized as one of the best in Europe. Specifically, it is decentralized, meaning that the syllabus and overall educational standards vary depending on a student's place of residence. This decentralization is beneficial for the youth, as the local district determines what they need to learn,

²³"Vikaspedia Domains." *Vikaspedia.in*, 2020, <https://vikaspedia.in/health/mental-health/national-mental-health-programme#>.

²⁴Raman, Vijaya, and Shanti Thomas. "School Mental Health Programme in India—Issues and Possible Practical Solutions." *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, vol. 45, no. 3, 17 Apr. 2023, pp. 283–288, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176231165033>.

focusing on the community's needs and weaknesses, thereby improving the economy. Additionally, only 5% of families opt for private schools, as public education is not only free but also of high quality. Primary school is mandatory, and after graduation, secondary school is required for three out of six years. During high school, students receive specialized training based on their future path, ensuring they are not burdened with excessive information but study what interests them.

Although there are cases of academic stress, which need to be addressed, student surveys have reported increased stress due to examinations and challenges in balancing school and work, particularly among university students.²⁵ This period, when young people must take on new responsibilities, can be challenging. Therefore, a national campaign is underway to improve student mental well-being.

China

Chinese education is highly competitive, with students expected to complete challenging tasks. Despite being free, mandatory education lasts for nine years, during which students primarily learn through listening, note-taking, and reading textbooks. This lack of diverse activities can impede better comprehension of the syllabus, adding an extra burden to students. High parental expectations further pressure children, leading to a risk of academic burnout and sleep disorders. A competitive atmosphere among peers exacerbates the stress.

Recognizing the problem, the Chinese government, through the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, has mandated teachers to support struggling students, and mental health assessments are conducted for students between grades 4 to 12. A report by the Chinese Academy of Science estimated that 24.6% of the country's adolescents suffer from depression, with nearly a hundred thousand underage students committing suicide annually. Despite efforts to reform the education system in 2001, the transition was rushed, and the test-focused approach persisted, resulting in backlash.

South Africa

As a Less Economically Developed Country (LEDC), South Africa, while having the fourth-best education system in Africa, faces numerous challenges. Approximately 18% of government funds are invested in the system's development, yet overcrowded classrooms, sanitation issues, unqualified teachers, limited study materials, and violence on school grounds contribute to academic stress and anxiety among

²⁵swissinfo.ch, S. W. I. "Swiss Students "Becoming More Stressed Out."" *SWI Swissinfo.ch*, 26 Jan. 2020, www.swissinfo.ch/eng/society/anxiety-and-burnout_swiss-students--becoming-more-stressed-out-/45506904

students.²⁶ Unfortunately, mental health problems are not widely perceived as serious illnesses in South African society, leading to downplaying and marginalization. The country is currently prioritizing addressing issues like violence and inadequately prepared teachers.

The World Health Organisation (WHO)

The World Health Organization serves as the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system, aiming for the highest possible level of health for all people, including mental health. WHO actively addresses anxiety disorders in its reports, taking a stand on preventing suicides and providing support to survivors.

American Academy Of Child And Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

Established in 1953, the AACAP is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting mentally healthy children, adolescents, and families through research, training, advocacy, prevention, collaborative diagnosis, and treatment. With about 6,500 psychiatrists, the AACAP focuses on meeting the needs of young adults and children, investing in research concerning their mental health.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1936	The term “stress” is coined by Hans Selye.
1966	The “Psychological Stress and Coping Process” report written by R. Lazarus is published.
1985	The “Self-determination theory” report is published by R. Ryan and E. Deci.
21 June 2014	The UN report “Social Inclusion of Youth with Mental Health Condition” is published.
18 December 2019	UNGA Resolution 74/121 is adopted in the 74 th General Assembly on youth programs and policies.
11 March 2020	COVID-19 is declared a Global Pandemic by the WHO.
22 June 2023	The CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7 Treaty is signed by State parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

²⁶“Africa’s Top 10 Countries with the Best Education Systems.” *Businessday NG*, 12 Oct. 2023, <https://businessday.ng/news/article/africas-top-10-countries-with-the-best-education-systems/#:~:text=Seychelles%20is%20the%20best%20Dranked>

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

“Social Inclusion of Youth with Mental Health Condition”

The “Social Inclusion of Youth with Mental Health Condition” was published on 21 June 2014 by the United Nations. This report highlights the stigma that surrounds mental health problems and how it has caused young people to be unable to receive much-needed help and support. Its main goals are to raise awareness on the aforementioned and overall, this report endorses open dialogues on the issue of the youth being socially excluded because of their poor mental wellbeing.

CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7 Treaty

On 22nd of June 2023, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child brought into the spotlight through the CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7 Treaty the fact that Grammar Schools in the UK increase the academic stress pupils feel for two main reasons. In short, in order to attend Grammar Schools, students have to sit for a demanding examination and only a limited number of the top students is granted a position. The preparation process apart from being time consuming can also take a mental toll on young children. In addition, students in primary school are unable to handle the unnecessary pressure of entrance exams at such a young age. Another point made is that all students should have the same treatment regarding their level of education and it is unfair to offer different opportunities to students, based on the type of school they attend. Furthermore, the cited article²⁷ focuses on the fact that usually, students in grammar schools are more privileged, and at the moment discrimination is encouraged against less economically and socially comfortable families.

RESOLUTION 74/121

This specific resolution was adopted in the 74th General Assembly and its overall aim is to protect the youth all over the world and ensure their fundamental human rights, such as education, are respected. The 11th clause tries to tackle the issue of mental health by promoting psychosocial support and raising awareness with the goal of empowering and assisting the new generation by destigmatizing mental health conditions and offering them the support they require. More specifically, it states “promote and improve the mental health and well-being of young people, including by scaling up comprehensive and integrated services for the prevention of mental disorders and other mental health conditions, including suicide prevention, as well as treatment for young people with mental disorders and other mental health conditions

²⁷Bartley, Joanne. “United Nations Committee Says the UK Should Phase out Grammar Schools.” *Comprehensive Future*, 14 June 2023, <https://comprehensivefuture.org.uk/united-nations-committee-says-the-uk-should-phase-out-grammar-schools/>

[...] providing psychosocial support, including resilience training, while raising awareness of mental health issues and tackling stigma”.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Courses

It is a fact that many students suppress feelings of anxiety and stress. Thus, a feasible solution would be for Member States to add to their school curriculum mandatory classes, which would familiarize students with SEL, which essentially is the development of a set of skills regarding the regulation of their emotions and their social life. This, along with other similar courses, could contribute to preventing the youth from procrastinating and instead help them learn how to confront stressful situations. That way, their grades and participation would be ameliorated, as would their relationships with other students. This could also be beneficial since, through SEL activities, one can practice empathy and self-management among other skills, which can be useful traits to have for their future life and career.

Responsible for these courses should be personnel who have attended related seminars, perhaps provided by third parties, such as relevant NGOs. These people should be able to address the questions posed by the children and teach them how to use their new skills inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps governments could also include some sort of reward system for children who pay attention and enforce their skillset, in order for the pupils to be encouraged to further reflect on their behavior and assess the ways they are coping with academic stress.

Seminars for parents and teachers

As highlighted earlier, many adults who interact with students on a daily basis are incapable of recognizing and separating normal mannerisms from stress-induced behavior. Hence, obligatory seminars should be created for them to be educated on the symptoms of severe stress. They could also be offered the opportunity to learn how to productively encourage the kids to study. Teachers with related backgrounds and social workers could be requested to contribute to teaching these seminars along with child and teen psychologists, in order to ensure that all aspects of this topic are mentioned. Of course, governments should ensure that all personnel are qualified and third-party specialists attend these seminars as well so that misinformation is prevented. When reflecting on this make sure to consider that not every parent can be physically present at these seminars and, thus, both online and physical attendance could be accommodating for parents with hectic work schedules.

Assessment of the curriculum

It is very important to listen to what students try to convey. Consequently, as many

have proposed, the review of their syllabuses is vital. Requesting from governments to have third-party specialists review the curriculum and remove unnecessary parts and instead replace them with classes that would prepare them for their future as responsible adults who would not acquire tests, similar to home economics classes and social studies. Through this implementation, students could receive knowledge without the worry of having to remember it for examinations, making learning it more enjoyable and laid-back.

Meetings with school-assigned psychologists

The appointment of psychologists by schools, with whom all students would have at least two mandatory meetings per month, could change the way pupils handle their feelings drastically. Some of these consultations could be individual and others inside the classroom, so that students could participate at the same time. That could raise their awareness on the fact that their peers experience similar feelings. Discussing with professionals how they are handling their studies and how they are spending their free time, while remaining healthy mentally and physically, could also help ameliorate the situation dramatically. In these meetings, safe environment should be created where sharing agonizing experiences is not a taboo topic. Moreover, these psychologists could enforce Cognitive Behavioural Therapy which boosts discussions among students for them to understand all of the above better and helps engaging parties to cope with their problems through positive changes in the way they act and think in order to make them more productive and set feasible and healthy goals for their futures. That way reaching out for help is endorsed without any fear of judgement.

Establishment of NGOs and hotlines

Many teens who may not feel comfortable examining what they are feeling with people in their lives, could greatly benefit from free-of-cost hotlines. The number should be memorable and highly displayed, especially in places frequented by young people. Therefore, by having governments create these national hotlines for pupils of all ages, they can be assisted in regard to their comprehension so that they can take action against feeling overwhelmed. These phones could be answered by volunteers of all ages who have attended workshops by their supervisors, namely certified psychologists and social workers.

Gradeless school

Many students feel anxiety due to the density of being graded. Changing the school evaluation system and enforcing a gradeless one, so that students do not focus on the marks, could help minimize that worry. Instead, students would pay attention to accepting everything they can from their studies and actually learning, and not pressuring themselves to study for the marks.

However, the above does not mean no grades will be used. A gradeless school system implies that instead of academic grading or a 20-point scale grading system, rubric assessment will be encouraged. Rubrics provide students with specific feedback, which articulate the causes of one’s grading better. Teachers working with gradeless systems are more able to convey to students their mistakes and how to improve. Thus, students are encouraged to try harder, instead of being allowed to focus solely on the grade they receive. In time, the pupils’ growth and development will be more obvious, and the criticism they are offered more constructive. “The gradeless classroom is fundamentally open, dialogic, and intersubjective”.²⁸

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²⁸ <https://www.teachersgoinggradeless.com/blog/how-i-go-gradeless>

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