

The Impact of Academic Workload on Stress Levels and Work-Life Balance among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract- Academic workload has become a crucial problem encountered by the undergraduate students enrolled at universities all around the world. The tasks of university students; these include writing essays, making presentations, appearing for tests, doing group projects, conducting lab experiments, and doing research within a certain period of time. Even though it is important for the intellectual development and performance of the students to do such academic tasks, it can also negatively affect the psychological well-being of the students. This research seeks to identify how academic workload affects the stress levels and work-life balance of students. The sources of students' stress consist of rigorous courses, examination pressure, difficulty in time management, high expectations of teachers and parents, and involvement in the labor market. The effects of stress on the academic achievement of students, their social behavior, motivational states, sleep, and mental health status will be discussed. Three sociological perspectives, Functionalism, Conflict theory, and Symbolic interactionism, are utilized in studying the topic. To gather data related to the topic under study, a survey questionnaire approach has been used. Furthermore, six research studies regarding academic stress and work-life balance have been analyzed. It is revealed from the results that the major source of stress among students is the rigorous academic workload. Academic pressure affected their health, particularly during examinations, according to most of the students. The findings of this study reveal that universities should provide counseling, flexible support system, stress management techniques, and psychological programs for their students. It is, therefore, important for the students to know how to organize their time and deal with stressful situations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a very significant factor in the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Universities play a significant part in the education of students who will later use their acquired skills and knowledge in different aspects of their professional, personal, and social lives. University education ensures that

students get knowledge, skills, communication ability, and analytical thinking which help them perform well in life after graduation. Nevertheless, even though there are great advantages of higher education, university students experience numerous difficulties. The major problem faced by many undergraduate students is academic workload. Academic workload refers to the number of academic tasks that students must complete in a particular period. Students are supposed to attend classes, write assignments, make presentations, engage in discussions, conduct research work, participate in exams, and study on their own. It is a widespread case in universities when students have to cope with several courses at once. While academic activities aim at improving students' learning and performance, heavy workload leads to high levels of stress and psychological pressure among college students. The academic stress arises from an individual's inability to meet academic challenges and cope with academic pressures. The stress results from challenging circumstances which surpass a person's coping capacity. The problem of academic stress has gained more attention in recent years as many students have started experiencing anxiety, fatigue, depression, exhaustion, and loss of motivation due to heavy academic burden. Sometimes, academic stress can affect students' concentration, academic performance, health, and social interaction. The next key aspect associated with academic workload is work-life balance. The work-life balance concerns an individual's capacity to coordinate his or her academic commitments with personal life, family, leisure activities, and other aspects. The lives of college students are characterized by various challenges regarding management of their academic obligations and other activities because of the complex college curriculum. They devote several hours to studying and writing papers and, thus, lack

sufficient time for recreation, hobbies, socialization, and spending time with their families. The academic duties and part-time jobs present more challenges for college students. Hard economic times force most college students to work when pursuing their studies. Therefore, such students experience increased pressure and difficulty maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Lack of balance between one's academic obligations and personal activities might result in such issues as emotional exhaustion, insomnia, and psychological problems. The introduction of technology and online learning systems has also affected the academic life of students. Although technological advancement makes it easier to access education and learning more flexible, it also creates additional pressure in terms of academic workload since students are always occupied with academic tasks through electronic mails, homework submissions, online classes, and computer assignments. This research project seeks to investigate the influence of academic burden on stress levels and work-life balance of undergraduate students. The research paper will identify the reasons behind academic stress, explore the consequences of academic stress on students, evaluate previous research papers, apply sociological concepts, and provide suggestions.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

It should be stated that nowadays, academic workload has become an acute problem facing many students at the university. Students are supposed not only to perform several academic activities but also have high academic results. Many students have to undergo different kinds of pressure from their teachers, family, friends, and even from society as a whole. The problem becomes obvious when students cannot deal with all requirements made to them. It is known that academic overload can have a very negative effect on a person leading to the emergence of such psychological problems stress, anxiety, fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and lack of motivation. Students are unable to find a balance between all their obligations related to their academic work and other factors of their lives, which include personal matters, social contacts, family, and even work. It appears that many students state that academic pressure affects their mental state

negatively, which is demonstrated by such symptoms as poor sleep, poor concentration, headaches, and even depression. Moreover, constant stress leads to burnout and academic disengagement among students. Unfortunately, even being aware of problems associated with students' psychological state, universities still pay much attention to academic results rather than students' psychological condition. This study aims to examine how workload impacts stress and work-life balance for undergraduate students and find out any solution that might alleviate the problems associated with academic stress.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the influence of academic workload on the stress levels and work-life balance of undergraduate students?

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the current research study include:

1. The analysis of the impact of academic workload on the stress levels of undergraduate students.
2. Identifying the main reasons causing academic stress in educational institutions.
3. Conducting an analysis of the effect of academic workload on students' work-life balance.
4. Using sociological theories to understand academic stress.
5. Conducting a study of the experiences of students through questionnaire surveys and focus groups.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant due to the rising issue of academic stress in higher education institutions across the globe. The study will contribute towards the existing body of knowledge on the impact of workload on undergraduates' emotional, social, psychological, and academic aspects. This study will prove useful for the students, in particular, as it will increase their consciousness regarding stress management and maintaining the balance between

work and personal lives. It will also help students realize the importance of employing good coping strategies and time management techniques. The study will also be of great value for universities and teachers as it highlights the significance of having academic and counseling services for students. Moreover, the study will benefit sociological knowledge as it applies various theories and concepts associated with education, social pressures, inequality, and interaction.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various researchers have carried out studies on the impact of academic workload and stress on students' well-being. The previous research has helped gain significant insight into the effect of academic workload on the students.

Study 1

This study was done by entity "people", "Robotham David", "British educational researcher" focusing on university students' stress levels, and one of the causes of stress is said to be academic workload. This study has revealed that university students undergo stress from examinations, time limits, and competing for good grades. This research further stated that when university students do not manage their time well, they end up getting emotional exhaustion and anxiety. Robotham stressed the need for the provision of academic counseling and stress programs in universities.

Study 2

The research carried out by "entity people," "Misra Ranjita", "Researcher in student stress studies" explored stress and coping methods of undergraduate students. According to this study, those students who lacked proper coping techniques had greater levels of academic stress. It was also observed that many students faced problems in managing academics along with their social interactions and other personal matters. Academic stress was also associated with poor sleeping pattern, lack of concentration and disturbed emotional state.

Study 3

In the study carried out by "entity people", "Wilcox Paula", "Higher education researcher", the emphasis

was laid upon the role of social support system in adjusting with the academic stresses. The results indicated that the students who maintained healthy relationships with their families and friends had less problems coping with academic pressures.

Study 4

The research carried out by entity "people", "Kember David", "Educational researcher" was on workload and learning experience in universities. It was found that the high workload made the students unsatisfied with university education as it decreased their motivation. The majority of students complained about their physical and psychological exhaustion due to constant overload with studies.

Study 5

The research carried out by entity "people", "Beiter Rebecca", "Mental health researcher" was on the problem of mental problems faced by students in the course of higher education. It was found that such problems as stress, anxiety, and depression were the most common ones among those having heavy workload. Moreover, worries about future employment and academic success were the reasons for stress.

Study 6

The research done by entity "people", "Pittman Lauren", "Researcher in student social adjustment" was focused on the effect of socializing on university students' stress level. It was found that those involved in some extracurricular activities and spending much time with friends were not stressed at all. As can be seen from the reviewed studies, academic workload has been found to have a direct relationship with stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and lack of work-life balance among undergraduate students. Furthermore, the role of social support, proper coping skills, and university assistance in minimizing academic stress has also been emphasized in the literature.

6.1 Concepts/ Theories from Sociology

Sociological theories allow for explaining how the educational system, as well as other factors, affects the student experience.

6.2 Functionalism

According to functionalists, education is a critical institution and plays a crucial role in helping a society achieve stability and growth. In this view, the purpose of universities is to equip the students with the skills they need to become competent professionals in their field. From this point of view, academic workload is justified since it allows students to develop their knowledge, time management skills, and work ethics. However, the Dysfunctions of institutions can be seen through Functionalism too. Dysfunctions may arise due to an increased academic burden which may adversely affect the psychological well-being of the students. Higher levels of anxiety, emotional fatigue, and work-life imbalance may hamper the students' performance.

6.3 Conflict Theory

The Conflict Theory is based on the idea of inequality, struggle, and power in society. This theory argues that education institutions tend to perpetuate social inequalities in which students with financial and social advantages have an edge over other students. Students belonging to economically stable backgrounds usually have easy access to education-related facilities. Conversely, economically deprived students may face even more stress since they have to work and study simultaneously to earn money. Conflict Theory is another theory that helps understand why universities use competition in grading and academic excellence to create competition between students. Competition and comparisons cause stress and anxiety among students. The theory shows that the burden of academics can have different effects on students, based on their socio-economic statuses.

6.4 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism theory highlights the significance of social interaction and personal meaning. This perspective indicates that students derive meaning and identity during interactions with teachers, other students, and relatives. It is important for many students to perceive their academic success as a measure of their value, intelligence, and ability to succeed in life. The fear of failure can be a source of stress and anxiety. Interactions that students have on a daily basis influence their stress levels regarding

academic workload. Positive feedback and encouragement help reduce stress and anxiety, whereas negativity does not contribute to lowering stress levels.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Method

A questionnaire approach was used for collecting information from undergraduate students. The use of the questionnaire approach is due to the fact that it provides an opportunity to get information from a great number of respondents quickly. A questionnaire contained two types of questions – closed and open ones. Closed questions helped in receiving numerical data on stress level and academic workload. Open questions helped respondents explain their experiences with words.

7.2 Participants

The participants of the present research are undergraduate students representing various departments and academic levels. The group of participants consisted of male and female students with various ages and educational backgrounds.

7.3 Data Collection Process

Questionnaires were administered to the respondents using both traditional and online approaches in order to gather necessary data for the research. Respondents were required to give answers to questions on their academic workload, anxiety associated with examinations, their ability to manage time, sleeping habits, state of mind, social contacts, work-life balance, working part-time, and ways they use to deal with stressful situations. Participation in the research was totally voluntary, and all the respondents agreed to be included in the study prior to filling out the questionnaire. Additionally, confidentiality and privacy were guaranteed during the entire research process. Questionnaires were administered to the respondents using both traditional and online approaches in order to gather necessary data for the research. Respondents were required to give answers to questions on their academic workload, anxiety associated with examinations, their ability to manage time, sleeping habits, state of mind, social contacts, work-life balance, working part-time, and ways they use to deal with stressful situations.

Participation in the research was totally voluntary, and all the respondents agreed to be included in the study prior to filling out the questionnaire. Additionally, confidentiality and privacy were guaranteed during the entire research process.

VIII. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this regard, the researcher made sure that all participants were aware of the purpose of this study. Confidentiality of personal information was observed throughout the research process, and no participant was forced to answer questions he/she did not feel comfortable with.

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research found out that academic workload is an important determinant in determining the level of stress among college undergraduates.

9.1 Effects of Academic Workload on Stress Levels

Most of the participants were experiencing moderate to high levels of stress due to academic responsibilities. The reason is that many of the respondents stated that they had to do several assignments, project work, and examination preparation activities, which make them stressed. They found it difficult to cope with their responsibilities because they had simultaneous tasks in different courses. Most respondents confirmed that they spent many hours studying for the exam. The results revealed that those who lack proper time management experience greater amounts of stress than those who manage their time well.

9.2 Mental and Emotional Reactions

From the results, it is evident that several respondents had numerous forms of negative emotions due to the stress associated with academics. The main types of emotions cited by many respondents included anxiety, frustration, as well as exhaustion resulting from continued stress and heavy workload. A number of respondents indicated that they had problems keeping themselves motivated and focused throughout the period of academic pressure. Moreover, many respondents had high levels of fear of failure, which in turn contributed to higher levels of academic stress and pressure. There were some

other cases of academic stress, where some students showed signs of depression while handling their academic work amidst other personal responsibilities. Most students admitted that academic stress affects their confidence and emotional state negatively. Some respondents mentioned they lost interest in some of their hobbies because of academic stress.

9.3 Physical Impact on Health

The study also found that academic burden has a significant impact on students' physical health. Many respondents reported experiencing common physical problems such as headaches, constant tiredness, and difficulties sleeping due to long study hours and academic pressure. Students also mentioned a lack of energy, which affected their daily activities and concentration levels. In addition, heavy academic workload contributed to unhealthy eating habits, as many students relied on irregular meals and fast food because of limited time and stress. These findings indicate that excessive academic responsibilities not only affect students emotionally and mentally but also negatively influence their physical well-being. Many participants indicated that they cut back on their sleep to finish homework and pass exams. Inability to get enough sleep caused a lack of concentration and impacted academic results negatively.

9.4 Achieving Work-Life Balance

Many respondents had trouble keeping a balance between work and personal/family life. It was mentioned that academic obligations limit the amount of time spent with family members, spending time with friends, practicing hobbies, and taking a break. Students who participated in part-time work had even more trouble maintaining work-life balance. Those students went to class during the day and worked either at nights or weekends. Consequently, they faced more tiredness and stress.

9.5 Effects on Social Relationships

It was also established that academic stress impacts social relationships among students. According to many participants, academic duties made them have less time to spend with relatives and peers. Among some participants, there were people who felt lonely due to academic stress. Other students said that

having good friendship relations helped to cope with stress.

9.6 Technology and Academic Stress

It was discovered that technology can affect stress among students positively or negatively. Technology facilitates learning and communication through the use of online learning and learning tools. Moreover, students indicated that consistent academic communication through online means causes pressure as one becomes continuously involved in academic activities.

X. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)

This study utilized FGDs in collecting data from university students regarding academic workload and stress. In the FGD, most students explained that the challenge of managing academic duties while trying to maintain a personal life is very hard. Students stated that the continuous engagement in assignments and examinations causes pressure on them emotionally and decreases leisure time. One respondent said that exam periods cause a lot of anxiety since one is required to cover much content within a short duration. Additionally, some students admitted that the pressure to perform well in studies and earn good grades causes stress especially when one receives expectations from the family members. Some students were working in part-time jobs. It was noted that managing studies along with work was a challenge. This made them sleep for few hours in the midst of busy academic schedules. A few of the participants mentioned that the university authorities should minimize overwork among students, be more flexible in terms of deadlines, and also include programs for mental health. The Focus Group Discussion made it clear that the students were aware of the concept of academic stress and showed how institutional help can help in work-life balance.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the suggestions can be made based on the results obtained during the Focus Group Discussion.

1. Provision of Counseling Centers

Professional counseling centers should be established to provide counseling for students who face issues like stress and anxiety.

2. Conduct Stress Management Workshops

Institutions should conduct workshops aimed at teaching students stress management strategies.

3. Optimize Scheduling of Academic Activities

Academic assignments should be managed by teachers so as not to overload students with activities.

4. Promote Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Students should be advised to adopt healthy living practices by exercising, eating healthy diets, and sleeping adequately.

5. Encourage Extracurricular Involvement

Colleges can promote extracurricular involvement in order to help alleviate stress among college students.

6. Aid Working Students

There should be special aid programs for those college students who have to work alongside their studies.

7. Cultivate Time Management Skills

College students should cultivate good time management skills to help them perform their assignments well.

8. Raise Awareness on Mental Health Issues

Colleges should raise awareness on mental health problems and motivate college students to seek help during stressful periods.

XII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that academic workload is an important factor influencing stress and work-life balance of undergraduates. University students have various academic commitments, which include assignment writing, project presentation, exam preparation, and research. It was noted from the study that high academic workload leads to anxiety, fatigue, sleeping problems, emotional exhaustion, and lack of motivation in students. Most university students have difficulties in juggling their academic engagements and other aspects of their lives, such as

personal life, family, socialization, and even employment. It was also observed in the study that stress causes negative effects on students' physical condition, emotions, academic achievements, and social relations. Those who have poor coping skills and poor time management face higher challenges in coping with academic engagements. There are sociological approaches like Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism that offer explanations about how educational systems, competition, societal expectations, and relationships affect students. The research stresses the need for an institution's contribution in alleviating the stress faced by students in academics. Counseling, stress relief programs, flexible academic systems, and conducive learning environments should be offered by universities to help reduce stress among students. On their part, students must learn how to cope with stressful situations and lead healthy lifestyles. In general, having a balance between the demands of academics and personal lives is crucial for undergraduates to succeed.

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