



EFFECT OF COUNSELLING INTERVENTION ON ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

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Paper Received On: 25 APR 2022

Peer Reviewed On: 30 APR 2022

Published On: 1 MAY 2022

Abstract

Academic stress is a growing concern among intermediate students due to increasing academic demands, examination pressure, and performance expectations. Persistent academic stress can adversely affect students' emotional well-being, coping abilities, and academic adjustment. The present study examined the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students. A pre-test–post-test experimental design was employed involving 40 intermediate students from Guntur City, Andhra Pradesh. Academic stress was assessed using the **Academic Stress Scale** developed by Akram, Khan, and Baby (2013). The intervention comprised eight structured group counselling sessions focusing on academic stress awareness, emotional regulation, examination anxiety management, time management, study skills, relaxation techniques, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies. The collected data were analysed using the paired-sample t-test. The findings revealed a statistically significant reduction in academic stress following the intervention, demonstrating the effectiveness of structured counselling in improving students' ability to manage academic challenges. The study emphasizes the need to strengthen counselling services in educational institutions to promote students' psychological well-being, healthy coping, and academic adjustment.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Counselling Intervention, Intermediate Students, Psychological Well-being, Coping Strategies.

Introduction

Academic stress has emerged as a critical psychological challenge among intermediate students in the present competitive educational environment. During this stage, students experience increased academic responsibilities, examination pressure, performance expectations, parental aspirations, and concerns related to higher education and career

planning. The continuous struggle to meet these demands may create emotional strain and affect students' concentration, motivation, self-confidence, and overall academic adjustment. Therefore, providing appropriate psychological support to help students manage academic pressures has become an important need in educational institutions. Intermediate students often encounter stress due to multiple academic and personal factors, including extensive syllabus demands, fear of examinations, time constraints, competition with peers, and the desire to achieve academic success. While a moderate level of academic pressure may encourage students to perform better, excessive and unmanaged stress can negatively influence their emotional stability, learning effectiveness, and psychological well-being. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping highlights that stress is influenced by the way individuals perceive academic demands and their ability to cope with challenging situations. Hence, developing effective coping skills is essential for enabling students to deal with academic challenges positively.

Counselling intervention serves as an effective psychological support system that assists students in recognizing stress-related difficulties and developing constructive ways of managing them. A well-planned counselling programme can help students improve emotional regulation, strengthen problem-solving abilities, develop effective study habits, manage time efficiently, and adopt adaptive coping strategies. Cognitive behavioural approaches further support students in identifying unhelpful thoughts and replacing them with positive and realistic patterns of thinking, thereby promoting healthier responses to academic stress (Beck, 2011). In this context, the present study entitled **“Effect of Counselling Intervention on Academic Stress among Intermediate Students”** was undertaken to examine the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students. The intervention was designed to address important areas such as awareness of academic stress, examination anxiety management, relaxation techniques, time management, study skills improvement, emotional control, resilience building, and coping strategies. The findings of the study are expected to provide meaningful insights for teachers, counsellors, and educational institutions in developing supportive practices that enhance students' psychological well-being, academic adjustment, and successful management of academic challenges.

Need of the Present Study

Intermediate education is a crucial stage in students' academic and personal development, often accompanied by increased examination pressure, academic competition, and expectations regarding future educational and career opportunities. These demands can contribute to elevated levels of academic stress, which may adversely affect students' emotional well-being, learning, and academic performance if left unaddressed. Although academic stress has been widely recognized as an important educational and psychological concern, relatively few intervention-based studies have examined the effectiveness of structured counselling programmes among intermediate students. Most existing research has focused on identifying stress levels and associated factors rather than evaluating practical

strategies to reduce academic stress. The present study was therefore undertaken to assess the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence on the value of counselling in educational settings and assist teachers, counsellors, parents, and educational institutions in developing appropriate support programmes that promote healthy coping, psychological well-being, and positive academic adjustment.

Statement of the Problem

Academic stress has become a major challenge among intermediate students due to increasing academic demands, examination pressure, and high-performance expectations. Excessive stress can adversely affect students' emotional well-being, coping abilities, and academic adjustment. Although counselling is recognized as an effective strategy for promoting psychological well-being and healthy coping, limited evidence is available regarding its effectiveness in reducing academic stress among intermediate students. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to examine the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students.

The problem of the present study is stated as follows:

"Effect of Counselling Intervention on Academic Stress among Intermediate Students."

Review of literature

Manjula (2016) examined the effectiveness of a stress management intervention among pre-university students. The findings revealed significant improvement in coping skills and time management abilities, along with a reduction in academic stress, highlighting the value of structured interventions for stress management.

Park et al. (2017) investigated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural stress management and yoga interventions among first-year college students. The results showed significant improvements in psychosocial well-being, physical functioning, and stress management, suggesting that structured psychological interventions can effectively reduce student stress.

Jobby and Viswasom (2018) studied the impact of counselling services on stress among 98 first-year MBBS students using a pre-test and post-test design. The findings indicated a significant reduction in stress levels and improvement in students' coping abilities after the counselling intervention.

Chaudhary (2019) examined the effect of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) on students preparing for competitive examinations. The study reported that CBT significantly reduced stress and enhanced coping skills, demonstrating its effectiveness in managing examination-related stress.

Rentala et al. (2019) evaluated a holistic stress management programme among Indian adolescent girls through a randomized controlled trial. The intervention was found to reduce academic stress and improve psychological well-being, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive stress management approaches.

Rentala et al. (2019) assessed a group health promotion programme for reducing educational stress, anxiety, and depression among adolescent girls. The findings indicated positive effects of group-based interventions on students' mental health and coping abilities.

Ajith et al. (2020) studied a stress reduction programme among first-year medical students and found that the intervention reduced academic stress while strengthening coping skills.

Reddy et al. (2021) examined biofeedback therapy as an intervention for academic stress among graduate students. The findings indicated reduced stress levels and improved stress management abilities among participants.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students.

Hypothesis of the Study

There will be a significant difference in the academic stress scores of intermediate students before and after the counselling intervention.

Methodology of the Study

The present study employed a **one-group pre-test–post-test experimental design** to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students. Academic stress was measured before the implementation of the counselling programme (pre-test) and again after the completion of the intervention (post-test) using the same standardized instrument. The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was analysed to determine the effectiveness of the counselling intervention in reducing academic stress.

Sample of the Study

The sample for the present study consisted of **40 intermediate students** selected from colleges in **Guntur City, Andhra Pradesh**. The participants were selected using the **purposive sampling technique** based on predetermined inclusion criteria, including enrolment at the intermediate level, willingness to participate in the counselling programme, and availability throughout the intervention period. The selected sample was considered appropriate for evaluating the effectiveness of the structured counselling intervention in reducing academic stress among intermediate students.

Tool Used for Data Collection

Academic stress was measured using the **Academic Stress Scale** developed by **Akram, Khan, and Baby (2013)**. The scale consists of **36 items** rated on a **four-point Likert scale** ranging from **No Stress (1)** to **Extreme Stress (4)**. Higher scores indicate greater academic stress. The instrument has established **reliability (0.80)** and **validity (0.89)**. It was administered before and after the counselling intervention to assess its effectiveness in reducing academic stress.

Counselling Intervention Programme

A structured counselling intervention programme comprising **eight group counselling sessions** was conducted over **two weeks** among **40 intermediate students**. Each session

lasted approximately **45–60 minutes** and focused on addressing academic stress-related concerns. The Academic Stress Scale was administered before and after the intervention to assess changes in students' stress levels.

The intervention was developed based on **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)** and psychoeducational counselling principles, with emphasis on emotional regulation, positive thinking, effective study habits, stress management, and adaptive coping strategies (Beck, 2011). The sessions incorporated discussions, cognitive restructuring, relaxation techniques, self-reflection activities, and practical strategies for managing academic pressures.

The programme focused on academic stress awareness, examination anxiety management, time management, study skills, resilience building, and coping strategies. The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated by comparing pre-test and post-test scores using the **paired-samples *t*-test**.

Table -1 Eight-Session Counselling Intervention Programme for Reducing Academic Stress among Intermediate Students

Session	Focus Area	Core Counselling Activities
1	Orientation and Rapport Building	Introduced the programme, established rapport, discussed group norms, and encouraged active participation.
2	Understanding Academic Stress	Enhanced awareness of academic stress, identified personal stressors, and explored their impact on learning.
3	Emotional Awareness and Self-Management	Recognised emotions, identified stress triggers, and practised emotional regulation.
4	Time Management and Academic Planning	Setting academic goals, organised study schedules, prioritised tasks, and reduced procrastination habits .
5	Learning Strategies for Academic Success	Strengthened note-making, concentration, memory, active learning, and revision skills.
6	Positive Thinking and Cognitive Restructuring	Practised cognitive reframing, positive self-talk, and structured problem-solving.
7	Relaxation and Stress Reduction	Practised deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, and guided imagery.
8	Examination Readiness and Resilience Building	Strengthened examination confidence, prepared coping plans, reviewed learning, and reinforced adaptive coping.

Session-wise Counselling Intervention Programme

Session 1: Orientation and Rapport Building

The session focused on introducing the counselling programme, establishing rapport, creating a supportive environment, and encouraging students' active participation.

Session 2: Understanding Academic Stress

Students were provided awareness about academic stress, its causes, symptoms, and effects. Common stressors such as examination pressure, workload, competition, and expectations were discussed.

Session 3: Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation

Students identified personal stress triggers and learned techniques for understanding, expressing, and regulating emotions effectively.

Session 4: Time Management and Goal Setting

The session focused on developing academic goals, effective study schedules, task prioritisation, and strategies to overcome procrastination.

Session 5: Study Skills Enhancement

Students were trained in effective learning strategies, including concentration improvement, note-making, revision techniques, and examination preparation skills.

Session 6: Cognitive Restructuring and Positive Thinking

Students learned to identify negative academic thoughts, practise positive self-talk, develop realistic thinking patterns, and improve problem-solving abilities.

Session 7: Relaxation and Stress Management

The session introduced relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, and guided imagery to manage stress effectively.

Session 8: Examination Preparedness and Coping Skills

The final session focused on examination confidence, coping strategies, resilience building, and reinforcement of stress management skills.

Evaluation of the Intervention

The effectiveness of the counselling intervention was evaluated by comparing pre-test and post-test academic stress scores. The obtained scores were analysed using the **paired sample t-test** to determine the impact of the counselling programme on students' academic stress levels.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table: 2 Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of Academic Stress

Assessment	N	Mean	SD
Pre-test	40	110.58	12.63
Post Test	40	92.46	10.74

Interpretation

The results presented in **Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of Academic Stress** indicate a reduction in students' academic stress levels after the counselling intervention. The mean academic stress score decreased from **110.58 (SD = 12.63)** in the pre-test to **92.46 (SD = 10.74)** in the post-test, showing a positive change following the intervention.

The findings suggest that the structured counselling programme was effective in helping intermediate students manage academic stress. The intervention contributed to improved

stress awareness, emotional regulation, and the development of adaptive coping strategies. These results highlight the effectiveness of counselling interventions in promoting students' academic adjustment and psychological well-being.

Table: 3 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Academic Stress Scores

Assessment	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t-Value	p-value
Pre-Test	40	110.58	12.63	18.12	6.91	<0.01
Post Test	40	92.46	10.74			

Interpretation

The results presented in **Table 3** reveal a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test academic stress scores of intermediate students. The mean score decreased from **110.58 (SD = 12.63)** in the pre-test to **92.46 (SD = 10.74)** in the post-test, with a mean difference of **18.12**. The obtained *t*-value (**6.91**) was significant at the **0.01 level ($p < 0.01$)**, indicating that the counselling intervention was effective in reducing academic stress. The findings demonstrate that structured counselling sessions helped students develop effective stress management skills, including emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, and adaptive coping strategies. Thus, the hypothesis stating that counselling intervention would significantly reduce academic stress was accepted. The study highlights the importance of counselling programmes in educational settings for promoting students' psychological well-being and academic adjustment.

Educational Implications

The findings of the study highlight the significance of providing systematic counselling support within educational institutions to address academic stress among intermediate students. Counselling programmes can assist students in developing effective coping skills, emotional balance, and confidence in managing academic challenges. Teachers and counsellors should be sensitized and trained to recognize stress-related difficulties and provide timely guidance and support. Educational institutions should incorporate mental health initiatives, life skills education, and counselling services as important components of student development programmes. Such efforts can promote students' psychological well-being, academic adjustment, and holistic development.

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