



**Academic Stress and its Impact: A case study of the Resident Female Research Scholars at
Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the impact of academic stress among the research scholars of Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra during their Ph.D. research work. A structured questionnaire was prepared to collect the data and distributed among the 120 female research scholars residing in female hostel complex. The study finds that most of the research scholars faced stress during different stages of their Ph.D. research work. Study identified various factors responsible for academic stress like study workload, difficulty to get information related to their topic, research publication, language barrier, technological changes, and relation with the supervisor. The findings of the study indicate that to reduce stress levels, 83.67% of respondents adapted to listening music and watch movies while few respondents take medicine and consult with psychiatrists to handle stress.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Female Research Scholars, Academic Load, Mental Health, Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra



Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines stress as “a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Stress affects both the mind and body”. In day to day life, to some extent almost everyone experiences stress. Learning the way how to respond or cope with stress, can help us to our overall well being. Nowadays stress is a common problem seen everywhere in academics, job professions, and in every person's daily life in the world. According to Robson et al. (2020) stress experienced by the students at the level of undergraduation and post graduation may be influenced by numerous factors, whether academic or non-academic feature, such as environmental, socio-cultural and psychological aspects. Some students experience significant levels of stress, especially during tests and examinations, which can lead them to anxiety symptoms. In recent years, the increasing demands of assignments, tests, and other activities have led to increase the academic stress. The journey to doctoral degree is known to be challenging. In academic environments, stress has become a major issue. Therefore, this study investigates the impact and related determinants of academic stress among Ph.D research scholars.

Literature Review

Kumar et al. (2025) studied the stress among research scholars and addresses the various issues of stress, study also suggested some remedies to cope-up with this issue. Academic pressure, financial issues, lack of resources, uncertainty of career, imbalance between work and life are the main issues of the stress among scholars identified in the study. It suggests coping methods such as counseling, extracurricular activities, management of time, family members and friends to counter the issue. Along with this, Authors also proposed an AAA (Approach- Assessment- Administration) strategy to improve funding, supervision, and overall well-being. Valentine et al. (2025) conducted a study among a total 260 Scholarship funded Ph.D. Scholars at Liceo de Cagayan University. Results showed how the behavior and well-being effect the academic performance. It was also found that time management and social ties were also important factors of behavior, in continuation to this, stress management and sound mental health showed better outcomes. The findings of the research also suggested that institution must provide such programs which support and promote both academic skill and student well-being. Jabeen



etal.(2024) studied impact of academic stress on motivation and achievement among 565 UG students University of Sargoda. The paper indicated that motivation consistently found positivity related to academic performance, findings direct relationship between academic stress and academic achievement had remained mixed and often insignificantly. Zhao (2024) focused on the academic stress on college students which leads to higher level of anxiety. The study showed that female and senior students experienced high level of academic stress and influenced by external factors such as high expectation, competition, work overload and insufficient resources as well as personal factor lack of motivation and poor performance are also major contributor to academic stress. Devi and Shokeen (2021) in their study “Academic stress among the library and information science students of Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, India”. The study revealed that the major stress-causing factors were tests, evaluation and grades, family stress, high expectations regarding carrier issues, fear of lagging behind others and poor time management in LIS students. The study showed that 22(44.44%) of respondents felt tiredness whereas only 11 (20.37%) respondents felt depression when they were in stress. Asif et al. (2020) identified the frequency of depression, anxiety and stress among the 500 students of three different universities of Sialkot, Pakistan. The study used a demographic sheet and DASS 21 to determine the level of depression, anxiety and stress. The data showed that the level of depression, anxiety and stress were found among 75%, 88.4% and 84.8% respondents respectively. The study also revealed that more than half of respondents of the Sialkot university faced the problem of mental health. The study also suggested that universities should create better learning and a friendly environment to overcome the burden of academic stress. Reddy et al.(2018) investigated academic stress and its sources among University Students. The data was collected from four disciplines commerce, management, basic science and humanities streams. The study revealed that commerce stream respondents felt more stressed to the comparison of management and science streams whereas females showed more fear of failure. There are different remedies like meditation, psychotherapy, biofeedback, life-skills training, and yoga which were found to be helpful and effective for reducing stress among the respondents. Prasad and Vaidya (2017) analyzed the causes of stress among Ph.D. research scholars with reference to Rashtasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University. The study identified six independent stress-causing factors i.e. role ambiguity, role overload, work overload, psychological factor, behavioral approach and avoidance strategies, and their effect on a dependent factor performance. The study showed that medium-level stress

in research scholars affects their research work. Work overload was the most stress-causing factor and behavioral approach strategies would reduce the stress and upgrade the research performance.

Research Methodology

For this study, a survey was conducted among the research scholars (female residents) of Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra (KUK). For the purpose of data collection, a structured questionnaire was prepared. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed among the Ph.D. research scholars and 106 of them were received back with 88.33% response rate. In the questionnaire, the questions were designed on a five-point Likert scale with SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree). Further, data analysis was done using simple statistical techniques like frequency and percentage tables.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify various kinds of academic stress being felt by the research scholars of Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra during their Ph.D. research work.
2. To find out the time stage when the Ph.D. research scholars feel more academic stress.
3. To identify the factors responsible for causing academic stress among Ph.D. research scholars.
4. To identify the common symptoms causing academic stress among Ph.D. research scholars.
5. To identify the techniques or remedial actions being adopted by the Ph.D. research scholars to reduce stress.

Data Analysis

Table 1
Research Scholars having feel of academic stress

| Academic Stress | Total Number | Percentage |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Yes | 98 | 92.45 |
| No | 08 | 7.54 |
| Total | 106 | 100 |

Table1 shows the quantative data of the research scholars who feels any kind of academic stress or not, during their Ph.D. research work. The findings suggests that most of the research scholars i.e. 98(92.45%) out of 106 feels academic stress during their Ph.D. research work.

Table 2
Stream-wise distribution of research scholars

| Stream | Number of Respondents (%) | Stress | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--------|-------------|
| | | Yes | No (%) |
| Arts and Humanities | 19 (17.92%) | Yes | 18 (94.74%) |
| | | No | 01 (5.26%) |
| Social Sciences | 40 (37.74%) | Yes | 39 (97.50%) |
| | | No | 01 (2.50%) |
| Science | 47 (44.34%) | Yes | 41 (87.23%) |
| | | No | 06 (12.77%) |
| Total | | 106 | |

Table 2 shows that 19 (17.92%) respondents are from Arts and Humanities, 40 (37.74%) and 47 (44.34%) respondents are from the Social Sciences and Science stream respectively. Maximum no. of Social Sciences research scholars i.e. 39 (97.50%) out of 40 (37.74%) feel stress and only 01 (2.50%) don't feel stress which is followed closely with 18 (94.74%) out of 19 (17.92%) research scholars from Arts and Humanities while 41 (87.23%) of Science stream research scholars feel stress during their Ph.D. research work. The result reveals that Social Sciences research scholars feel comparatively more academic stress than science research scholars.

Table3
Financial assistance during Ph.D. research work

| Financial Assistance | Yes | No | Funding Schemes | Total Number (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | No. (%) | No. (%) | | |
| | 80 (81.63%) | 18 (18.36%) | JRF/SRF | 61(76.25%) |
| | | | Any Others | 19 (23.75%) |

Table 3 shows that the maximum no. of research scholars i.e. 80(81.63%) avail the financial assistance as JRF/SRF (Junior Research Scholar Fellow/ Senior Research Fellow) from various funding academic findings such as UGC, ICCSR, CSIR, RUSA and University Research



Scholarship (URS) etc. during their Ph.D research work. Notably, around one-fifth of the research scholars are on their own for the financial assistance.

Table 4
Kind of academic stress felt by the research scholars

| Stress | Total Number |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Mental Stress | 75 |
| Physical Stress | 6 |
| Both | 17 |
| Total | 98 |

Table 4 shows the data about kind of stress being felt by research scholars during their Ph.D. work. Here, Data reveals that out of 98 research scholars, 75(76.53%) research scholars are feeling mental stress, 6(6.12%) physical stress, and 17(17.34%) of them feel both kind of stress.

Table 5
Stress affects Ph.D. research work

| Work Affected | Total Number |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Yes | 86 |
| No | 12 |
| Total | 98 |

Table 5 shows the data regarding the number of scholars feels their Ph.D. work is affected due to stress. Here, data shows that most of the of research scholars, 86(87.75%) mentioned that their Ph.D. research work is affected due to stress.

Table 6
Time stage of Ph.D work and stress

| Time stage of Ph.D. | Total Number |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Course work time | 28 |
| Data collection time | 41 |
| Thesis writing time | 24 |
| For submission time and viva | 9 |

**While collecting the data, in this section of the questionnaire, research scholars had the choice to select more than one options.*

Table 6 shows the data regarding the time stage when Ph.D. research scholars felt the most stress. Here, the data shows that out of 98 respondents, at the time stage of data collection maximum no. of respondents (41.83%) feel stress, followed by 28(28.57%) experience stress at the stage of the research course work and the least no. of research scholars (9.18%) feels stress at the stage of their thesis submission and viva.

Table 7
Factors responsible for causing stress

| Factors | SA No.(%) | A No.(%) | N No. (%) | D No. (%) | SD No. (%) |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Study Workload (Exam, Paper writing, Thesis writing, etc) | 29(29.5) | 48(48.97) | 14(14.28) | 2(2.04) | 5(5.10) |
| Difficulty to get information related to your topic | 19(19.38) | 43(43.87) | 22(22.44) | 8(8.16) | 6(6.12) |
| Inadequate resources to do Ph.D work | 18(18.36) | 44(44.89) | 16(16.32) | 14(14.28) | 5(5.10) |
| Research Publications (Articles, Book Chapters, Conference Paper, etc | 25(25.50) | 42(42.85) | 20(20.40) | 7(7.14) | 4(4.08) |
| Online Information Search | 8(8.16) | 26(26.53) | 39(39.79) | 22(22.44) | 3(3.06) |
| Language Barrier | 5(5.10) | 21(21.42) | 28(28.57) | 33(33.67) | 11(11.22) |
| Technological Changes | 8(8.16) | 23(23.46) | 38(38.77) | 21(21.42) | 8(8.16) |
| Relation with Guide/Faculty members | 8(8.16) | 16(16.32) | 36(36.72) | 16(16.32) | 22(22.44) |
| Regarding submission of thesis | 13(13.26) | 38(38.77) | 33(33.67) | 8(8.16) | 6(6.12) |
| Health Related Issues | 18(18.36) | 31(31.63) | 21(21.42) | 18(18.36) | 10(10.20) |
| Financial Issues | 17(17.34) | 20(20.40) | 28(28.57) | 24(24.48) | 9(9.18) |

Table 7 reveals the factors which are responsible for causing stress during Ph.D. research work. Here, data shows that the majority of research scholars agree with study workload, inadequate resources, difficulty to get information related to their topic, and research publications like book chapters, conference papers and articles are major factors causing stress during Ph.D. research

work. Most of the respondents are neutral about the technological changes and relationship with guide/ faculty members whereas only 8.16% of research scholars strongly disagree with the stress due to technological changes and 22.44% of research scholars strongly disagree with the factor of stress due to relation with guide. 33.67% of research scholars disagree with the language barrier as a stress-causing factor. 39.79 % of research scholars are neutral about the stress factor while searching their online information. Similar kind of results are there for the stress factor regarding the submission of the thesis, health-related issues, and financial issues.

Table 8
Symptoms when feel stressed

| Symptoms | Yes No. (%) | No No. (%) |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| Over-react and get frustrated with your work | 67 (68.36%) | 31 (310.63%) |
| Argue | 35 (35.71%) | 63 (64.28%) |
| Feel miserable and dull | 65 (66.32%) | 33 (33.67%) |
| Lose your control | 73 (74.48%) | 25 (25.51%) |
| Irritability and impatience | 64 (65.30%) | 34 (34.69%) |
| Headache | 83 (84.69%) | 15 (15.30%) |
| Chest pain/Rapid Heart Beat | 23 (23.46%) | 75 (76.53%) |
| Restlessness | 78 (79.59%) | 20 (20.40%) |
| Change in appetite-either not eating or eating too much | 54 (55.10%) | 44 (44.89%) |

Table 8 shows the physical and psychological symptoms among research scholars when they feel stress during Ph.D. research work. The data indicates that 83(84.69%) of research scholars feel headache, 78(79.59 %) feel restlessness, 73(74.48%) of research scholars lose their control, 67(68.36%) over-react and get frustrated with their research work and 23(23.46%) of research scholars feel/suffered from chest pain/rapid heartbeat.

Table 9
Frequency of meeting with supervisor

| Frequency | Total Number |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Daily | 47 |
| At least once a week | 39 |
| At least once a month | 10 |
| At least twice in a year | 2 |
| At least once a year | 0 |
| Total | 98 |

Table 9 deals with the frequency of meeting of research scholars with their supervisor. Here, data shows that 47(47.95%) respondents meet with the supervisor on daily basis whereas 39(39.79%) respondents meet weekly and 10(10.20%) respondents meet on monthly basis. Only 2(2.04%) respondents said that they meet with their supervisor at least twice in a year.

Table 10

Feel of stress during meetings/interacting with supervisor

| Stress Frequency | Total Number (%) |
|------------------|------------------|
| Always | 8 (8.16%) |
| Sometimes | 44 (44.89%) |
| Rarely | 11 (11.22%) |
| Never | 35 (35.71%) |
| Total | 98 |

Table 10 shows the frequency of stress feel by the research scholars during the meeting /interacting with their supervisor. The findings of the study show that meeting or talking to the supervisor is not a major factor for causing stress but sometimes research scholars feel stress while interacting their supervisor. Out of 98, only 8(8.16%) research scholars report that they always feel stress during the interaction with their supervisor and 35(35.71%) of research scholars never feel stress at the time of interaction with the supervisor.

Table 11
Seminar/conference attendance regarding academic stress

| Seminar/Conference | Total Number |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Yes | 28 |
| No | 70 |
| Total | 98 |

Table 11 shows the number of research scholars who attended any seminar/conference regarding academic stress. Here, data shows that 70 (71.42%) of research scholars did not attend any type of seminar/conference related to academic stress whereas only 28 (28.57%) of research scholars attended such seminar/conference.

Table 12
Methods adopted to reduce stress

| Techniques/Remedies | Total Number | In Percentage(%) |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Yoga/ Meditation | 42 | 42.85 |
| Listening Music/ Watching Movie | 82 | 83.67 |
| Read Novels/ Good Books | 35 | 35.71 |
| Writing Diary | 17 | 17.34 |
| Talking with Friends/ Family | 77 | 78.57 |
| Sleeping | 65 | 66.32 |
| Take Medicines/ Consult Psychiatrists | 7 | 7.14 |
| Talk a Walk | 26 | 26.53 |
| Using Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, Youtube, Snapchat, etc) | 67 | 68.36 |

Table 12 shows that research scholars adopted different types of techniques/remedies to overcome their stress during their Ph.D. research work. The findings show that most of the research scholars agree to listening music, watching movies and talking with friends as the best techniques they adopted to reduce academic stress. Social networking sites are also adopted by research scholars to reduce academic stress. Only 7(7.14%) of research scholars take medicine/consult with psychiatrist to reduce their stress.



Suggestions given by the respondents :

- In master's degree, Teachers should explain the importance of the Ph.D. and teach about research methodology and how to conduct research in a particular field.
- Universities should organize conferences and seminars related to academic stress.
- Their should be proper infra to teach scholars about how to publish research papers in a good journal.
- The relationship between scholars and their guides should be friendly, so that scholar can share their academic problems without hesitation.
- The university should organize a time to time yoga, meditation camps and provide academic counseling for students to reduce academic stress.
- Financial assistance is not available to all the research scholars, it should be provided to each scholar.
- University should provide adequate resources for research work like journal access, subject databases & reference management software, etc. If these resources are being provided by the university then it should conduct induction programs for awareness of research scholars.

Conclusion

The study indicates social sciences research scholars feel more academic stress than science research scholars. The results indicate that research scholars feel more mental stress during their Ph.D. research work. In the study, major factors causing academic stress among the research scholars are study workload, research publications, inadequate resources and technological changes and also some research scholars feel stress due to lack of financial support. The study further revealed that most of the research scholar felt headache, restless, loss of control, over-react and get frustrated with their work. It is suggested that universities should organise yoga camps, meditation, and health checkup camps from time to time on the university campus and it should also run awareness campaigns to spread the awareness of coping up with the stress, so that scholars can manage their stress, acquire emotional balancing skills, it would be very helpful for reducing the stress level.



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