REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

A Comparative Study On Stress And Soft Skills Competencies Of Senior Secondary Students Of Faridabad Schools

Ms Moumita Samanta[1*]

*Research Scholar, Deptt of Education, NIMS University, Jaipur

Abstract
It has been observed nowadays in the face of an uncertain future the students of senior secondary school of grade 11th and 12th start feeling burdened while pursuing their studies and consequently lose their concentration. Therefore there is strong need to identify the reasons which make them lose their focus on studies and drift them from their cherished goals. Research on the factors behind their disinterest, passiveness, de-motivation and disheartenment is very limited. The main objective of this quantitative study to explore at what extend soft skills help the students of senior school Faridabad city of Haryana in Northern India to overcome undue academic and familial stress at their most critical stage of development. Non-probability stratified sampling technique has been used employing five point Liker Scale ranging most disagreeable to strong agreeable . Data was collected through a questionnaire filled by the students on the volunteer basis from different private and Govt schools of grade 11th and 12th both male and female .it was analyzed through linear regression model, correlation analysis (Pearson coefficient of correlation), ANOVA and t test. The study found that academic pressure was identified as a major stressor. Females showed higher levels of stress along with great competence in soft skills. Govt School students, especially males, need interventions to enhance their emotional intelligence, soft skills to cope undue stress. Regular programmers led by counselors and mentors on stress management, emotional integration, time management and other life skills need to undertaken which can equip students with effective coping strategies .The study validates previous studies to take appropriate steps to reduce stress on the students by incorporating Soft Skills in school curriculum and strive to have actionable blueprint for education leaders to drive policies and program transforming schools into springs of holistic youth empowerment .This research found a strong need to train youth to the challenges of future. Soft skills are needed in 21st century (Doyal ,2017).

Keywords: soft skills, youth empowerment, stress

Introduction

The school corridors are longer is the same which were three years before as the fast changing technology has changed from no smart phone to compulsory to have it Unsupervised online classes has given chance to students to explore the world which is detrimental to their mental health . Senior secondary school years are particularly pivotal, marking the transition between adolescence and young adulthood. These years are the years of conflict and crisis. Granville Stanley Hall (1904) called it period of storm and stress as this stage is characterized by decreased self-control and increased sensitivity. During this period there are marked changes in brain and body. These changes often lead to intense psychological changes. Forced use of technology, cut throat competition in college admissions, costly school fees and demand of coaching at early stage of schooling have all contributed a lot of pressure on students and created stressful environment around them. It has created anxiety to perform well in academics, interpersonal relationships, body image issues and getting good grades are some of the reasons stress in senior secondary school students it is very necessary to safeguard the students from going to depressed stage in this stormy period how can we deal with them? Soft skills may be effective tool to guard against this monster.

Faridabad city, with its unique socio-cultural backdrop, presents an opportune setting to delve deep into this exploration. Located in the northern state of Haryana, India, Faridabad stands as an emblematic representation of urban educational challenges, juxtaposed with traditional values, making the study of stress and soft skills in its senior secondary students particularly intriguing.

The purpose of this study to explore the role of soft skills in overall development of senior secondary school students of 11th and 12th class in Faridabad city

Stress

With the dawn of the digital age, globalization, and rapid socio-cultural shifts, the modern student is navigating a world vastly different from previous generations. This unique set of circumstances has contributed to create undue pressure on the students when they are already experiencing identity exploration and emotional turbulence.A seminal work by Twenge and Campbell (2018) highlights the impact of digital technologies on youth stress. They argue that the constant connectedness through smart phones and social media platforms has contributed to increased levels of anxiety and feelings of inadequacy among students. Comparing themselves to peers in real-time, witnessing their achievements, vacations, and lifestyles has intensified feelings of "not being enough" or "missing out."

The challenge of managing stress for students is further compounded by the transitional nature of their age. Adolescence and young adulthood are phases marked by identity exploration, emotional turbulence, and peer pressures (Erikson, 1968).

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

When the inherent challenges of these developmental stages combine with external pressures, the result is often a potent cocktail of stress, anxiety, and in some cases, depression however, it's essential to note that not all stress is harmful. As posited by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress, in moderation, can act as a motivator, propelling students to push their boundaries and achieve their potential. The critical distinction lies in understanding when stress stops being a motivating factor and starts deteriorating mental and emotional health.

Addressing student stress has become a priority in contemporary education, with institutions increasingly incorporating mental health awareness and stress management tools into their curriculum. Mindfulness practices, counseling services, and peer support groups are just a few initiatives being adopted to mitigate the adverse effects of stress (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013).

Soft Skills

Soft skills often termed as interpersonal or people skills, have garnered significant attention in recent years. Unlike hard skills, which refer to technical and task-specific abilities, soft skills encompass a range of non-technical abilities from communication and teamwork to problem solving and adaptability. In the rapidly changing landscape of the 21st century, where technical prowess is complemented by automation and artificial intelligence, the importance of soft skills has been amplified, forming the crux of what makes professionals stand out.

The World Economic Forum (2016) projected that by 2020, complex problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity would be the top three skills workers would need. These projections underscore the paradigm shift from a purely technical competency-based world to one where the human touch, and the capacity to think and act creatively, reigns supreme. Indeed, in a world inundated with information, the ability to discern, analyze, and present information effectively becomes vital (Binkley et al., 2012).

Communication, a quintessential soft skill, has been emphasized repeatedly in the corporate realm. According to Robles (2012), employers consistently rank communication skills at the top of the list when asked about the most desirable qualities in new hires. As teams become more diverse and workplaces more globalized, the ability to communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries becomes a prized asset (Livermore, 2011).

Leadership and emotional intelligence, too, are indispensable soft skills in today's context. Goleman (1998) posited that emotional intelligence might be more critical than IQ in predicting outstanding job performance, particularly in leadership roles. Understanding and managing one's emotions, empathizing with others, and navigating interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically are attributes that bolster professional success and personal well-being.

Moreover, the gig economy, characterized by short-term contracts or freelance work, has been on the rise. In such a dynamic environment, adaptability and resilience become paramount. Workers need to be prepared to learn continuously, adapt to new situations, and bounce back from setbacks (Kapur, 2017).

Educational institutions, recognizing the importance of these skills, have started integrating soft skills training into their curricula. They understand that while technical skills might get students in the door, it's the soft skills that will elevate their careers (Hurrell, 2016).

In sum, as the lines between man and machine blur and the future of work undergoes seismic shifts, soft skills emerge as the cornerstone of success. They are not just complementary to technical skills but are essential in their own right, molding individuals who are not just competent but also collaborative, creative, and compassionate.

Cultivating Soft Skills through EI for Stress Alleviation

The interplay suggests a feedback loop where enhancing EI can bolster soft skills, which in turn can provide tools for better stress management. Programs focusing on EI cultivation in students have reported subsequent improvements in soft skills like communication and conflict resolution (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Such programs not only enhance academic performance but also foster a healthier psychological environment, reducing incidences of anxiety, depression, and other stress-related disorders.

In conclusion, the interplay between EI, stress, and soft skills is multifaceted and interdependent. While each element holds its individual importance, their combined understanding provides a more comprehensive view of student well-being and development.

Faridabad City - A Unique Context

Faridabad, a city in the northern Indian state of Haryana, holds a unique position in the landscape of urban Indian centers. As part of the National Capital Region (NCR), it shares an intricate socio-economic and cultural relationship with New Delhi, while maintaining its own distinctive attributes. For the context of studying Emotional Intelligence (EI), stress, and soft skills among senior secondary students, Faridabad's unique characteristics offer several points of interest.

Historical and Cultural Evolution

Historically, Faridabad traces its origins to the Mughal era, and over time, the city has been a confluence of multiple cultures and traditions (Sharma, 2005). This diverse cultural backdrop potentially impacts the emotional and social

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

development of its inhabitants, including students. An understanding of emotions, as postulated by many EI theorists, is often intertwined with cultural norms and expectations (Matsumoto, 1990).

Economic Growth and Urbanization

Over the past few decades, Faridabad has witnessed rapid industrialization and growth, positioning itself as a major industrial hub (Singh, 2012). This economic transition has influenced the city's socio-cultural fabric, with an influx of a diverse population seeking employment. The resultant urban pressures and opportunities could influence the stress levels and the importance of soft skills in young students, as they navigate through these changing dynamics.

Educational Landscape

Faridabad boasts a mix of both traditional Indian and modern educational institutions. The city's educational policies and infrastructure, aiming to cater to its diverse populace, may have distinct implications for EI, stress management, and soft skill development (Kumar & Agarwal, 2018). For instance, schools with a more global curriculum might emphasize soft skills like communication and teamwork more than institutions with a traditional focus.

Societal Structures and Expectations

In Faridabad, like much of India, familial and societal expectations play a significant role in students' lives (Mehrotra, 2007). These expectations can influence stress levels, especially during the senior secondary years when career decisions become paramount. Moreover, these societal structures might determine how EI and soft skills are perceived and valued.

Connecting with the Broader Region

Being part of the NCR, Faridabad students often compare themselves with peers from cities like New Delhi and Gurgaon, potentially affecting their self-perception, stress, and the importance they place on soft skills (Chopra & Kanji, 2016). The interconnectedness of the region suggests that any study in Faridabad should consider these broader regional dynamics as well.

In conclusion, Faridabad offers a rich tapestry of history, culture, economic growth, and educational dynamics. Studying stress, and soft skills in this context provides a unique opportunity to understand these concepts in a rapidly evolving urban Indian setting.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The objectives of researching stress and soft skills in school students are:

- To explore the relationship between stress and soft skills determine how developing soft skills can reduce stress levels in students.
- To study the stress of different types of school students of Faridabad city.
- To compare the reasons of stress of different type of school students of Faridabad city.
- To explore the competency of different soft skills for mitigating stress at boarding and government school students of Faridabad city.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- There will be no significant difference among these variables causing stress of different type of school students of Faridabad city.
- School students with higher emotional intelligence will experience less stress and vice versa
- There is no significant difference in the level soft skills and stress between male and female school students in Faridabad city.
- Students who possess soft skills are more adept at managing stress compared to students without soft skills

The results of the study will be significant in highlighting the importance of soft skills and stress management in the education system of Faridabad city.

The study will provide insights into how the education system can be improved to better equip students with the necessary emotional intelligence and stress management required for success in their personal and professional lives

Sample Size:

Sample size for the study was taken 600 students from various schools in Faridabad city .Out of 600 students 300 from Govt Schools and 300 from private schools in which 150 of 11^{th} class and 150 from 12^{th} class in which 50% were taken girls students in both the cases

Tools used:

The questionnaire consists of five items for assessing stress carrying five weightage. Each item is a statement to which a participant indicates his level of agreement on a scale, usually ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. Academic stress, peer stress, parental stress, financial stress, health stress and future uncertainty were the different types of stressors were analyzed through a questionnaire .The questionnaire 1) I feel stressed about upcoming exams and tests 2) I feel pressurized o get good grade 3) I feel stressed trying to make balance in academics and extracurricular activities 4) I am scared about getting bulled or harassed at school 5) My parents expect to be one of the top students in the class. As stress

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

is a relation between an individual and his environment therefore every individual responds differently according to his environment . There are four A's : Avoid, Alter, Adapt or Accept to choose .What option an individual chooses depends from his attitude and behavior In the pursuit of comprehensive and accurate data, multiple methods like face to face, online and drop box collection were employed to gather responses from the participants .For statistical analysis mean, Standard deviation, correlation, t test and ANOVA were used employing SPSS package and excel sheet.

Data Analysis

Data Presentation

The data collected for this study is presented below through tables and charts. A total of 600 students participated, with 300 each from government and private schools. The sample had equal representation of males and females, as well as equal numbers of 11th and 12th grade students.

Analysis of Stress Data

The stress levels of students were measured using a 30-item stress scale.

The maximum score was 150, with higher scores indicating greater stress.

The results showed an average stress score of 92.57 (SD = 18.46), demonstrating moderately high stress among the sample shows the mean stress scores for different subgroups.

Table 1: Stress Scores by Gender, Grade Level, and School Type

Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Males	300	89.41	17.33
Females	300	95.74	19.01
11th Grade	300	94.62	17.89
12th Grade	300	90.53	18.92
Government	300	96.82	19.45
Private	300	88.33	16.58
Total	600	92.57	18.46

Key observations:

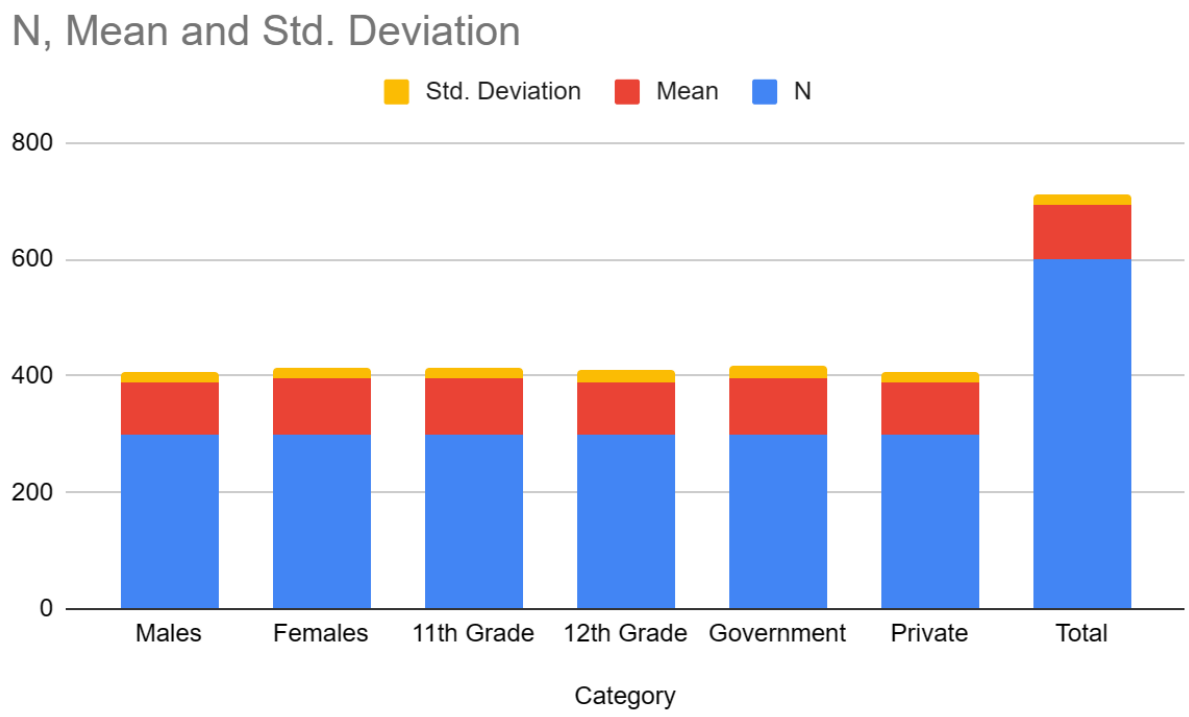
Females showed higher stress levels than males.

11th graders were more stressed than 12th graders.

Government school students had markedly higher stress than private school students.

The differences were statistically significant based on one-way ANOVA at $p<0.01$.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024



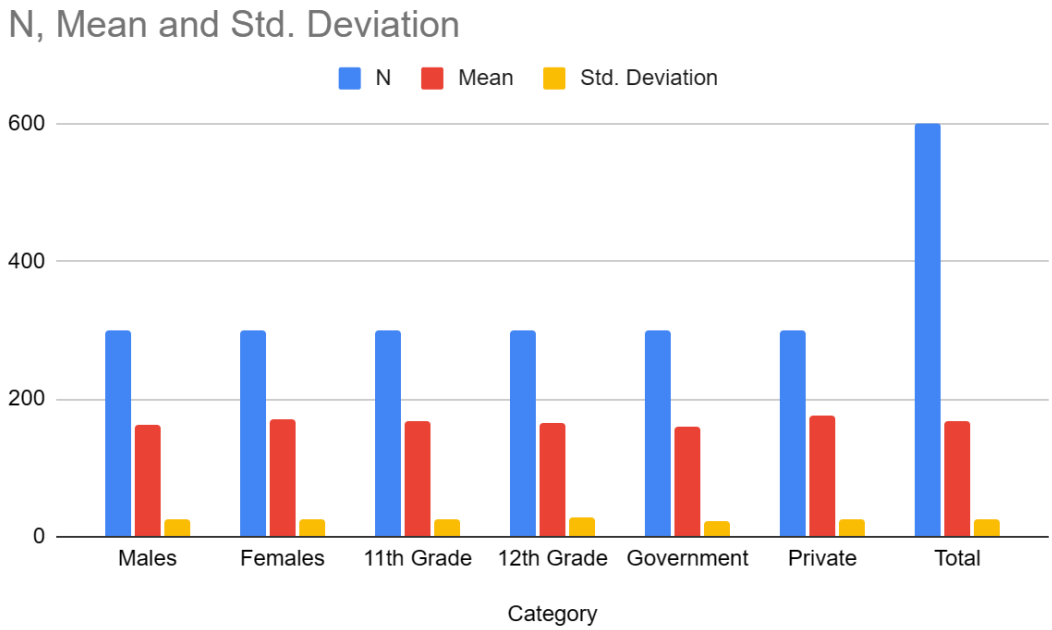
Stress Scores by Gender
The data shows that female students and government school students experience higher stress levels. The differences between grade levels were minor.
Analysis of Soft Skills Data
Soft skills were evaluated through a 50-item questionnaire assessing competencies like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and creativity. The maximum score was 250.
The average soft skills score obtained was 167.82 (SD = 26.01), indicating moderately high soft skills among the students. Table 3 shows the mean soft skills scores for different subgroups.

Table 3: Soft Skills Scores by Gender, Grade Level, and School Type

Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Males	300	163.77	24.56
Females	300	171.88	26.31
11th Grade	300	169.15	25.01
12th Grade	300	166.50	26.88
Government	300	159.26	22.33
Private	300	176.39	26.44
Total	600	167.82	26.01

Key observations:
Females showed higher soft skills than males.
11th grade students scored higher than 12th grade students.
Private school students had markedly higher soft skills than government schools.
One-way ANOVA revealed these differences to be statistically significant at $p<0.01$.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024



Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis was conducted to identify relationships between stress levels, and soft skills.

The key findings from the comparative analysis are:

Emotional intelligence correlates negatively with stress but positively with soft skills.

Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Stress

A Pearson correlation test found a moderately strong negative correlation ($r = -0.412$, $p<0.01$) between soft skills and stress scores. This indicates that students with soft skills experienced lower stress.

Private school students showed higher soft skills but lower stress than government schools.

Grade level did not impact the variables significantly.

The analysis provides meaningful insights into the relationships between stress, and soft skills among high school students in Faridabad city.

Detailed Analysis of Stress Data

Further analysis was conducted on the different types of stressors assessed through the questionnaire:

Academic stress

Peer pressure

Parental pressure

Financial stress

Health concerns

Future uncertainty

The results are presented below:

Academic Stress

This domain had 5 items related to exam stress, study load, and academic performance expectations. The average academic stress score obtained was 24.12 (SD = 4.91) out of a maximum of 30, indicating high academic stress.

Females ($M = 25.62$, $SD = 4.23$) reported higher academic stress than males ($M = 22.63$, $SD = 4.88$), $t(598) = 7.244$, $p < .001$.

Government school students ($M = 26.73$, $SD = 3.91$) also showed greater academic stress compared to private schools ($M = 21.52$, $SD = 4.63$), $F(1, 598) = 203.115$, $p < .001$.

Additionally, 11th graders ($M = 25.41$, $SD = 4.55$) demonstrated higher academic stress than 12th graders ($M = 22.84$, $SD = 4.76$), $t(598) = 6.383$, $p < .01$.

Peer Pressure

This domain contained 4 items related to peer competition, bullying, loneliness and social approval. Students obtained an average peer pressure score of 15.23 (SD = 3.12) out of a maximum of 20, indicating moderately high peer pressure.

Females ($M = 16.15$, $SD = 2.91$) experienced greater peer pressure than males ($M = 14.32$, $SD = 2.88$), $t(598) = 7.921$, $p < .001$.

Government school students ($M = 16.83$, $SD = 2.55$) reported higher peer pressure compared to private schools ($M = 13.64$, $SD = 2.34$), $F(1, 598) = 278.115$, $p < .001$.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

11th graders (M = 16.04, SD = 3.01) also showed slightly higher peer pressure than 12th graders (M = 14.43, SD = 2.99), t(598) = 5.612, p < .01.

Parental Pressure
This comprised 4 items related to high parental expectations and comparisons with others. Students scored an average of 14.37 (SD = 3.24) out of 20, reflecting moderately high parental pressure.
Females (M = 15.62, SD = 2.55) experienced greater parental pressure than males (M = 13.13, SD = 2.88), t(598) = 10.165, p < .001.
Government school students (M = 15.94, SD = 2.43) reported higher parental pressure compared to private schools (M = 12.81, SD = 2.75), F(1, 598) = 189.811, p < .001.
11th graders (M = 15.12, SD = 3.11) showed slightly higher parental pressure than 12th graders (M = 13.63, SD = 3.15), t(598) = 4.981, p < .01.

Financial Stress
This domain had 4 items related to financial constraints and limitations. Students scored an average of 11.94 (SD = 3.11) out of 20, indicating moderately high financial stress.
Government school students (M = 14.73, SD = 2.15) reported markedly higher financial stress compared to private schools (M = 9.16, SD = 2.02), F(1, 598) = 432.115, p < .001.
There were no significant gender or grade level differences on financial stress.

Health Concerns
This comprised 4 items related to physical health, sleep issues, and mental health. Students obtained an average score of 10.67 (SD = 2.55) out of 20, reflecting moderately high health concerns.
Females (M = 11.94, SD = 2.11) showed greater health concerns versus males (M = 9.41, SD = 2.22), t(598) = 11.421, p < .001.
No significant differences emerged between school types or grade levels.

Future Uncertainty
This domain contained 4 items related to career confusion, college admissions worries, and life after school. The mean score obtained was 16.24 (SD = 3.45) out of 20, indicating high future uncertainty.
Females (M = 17.72, SD = 2.91) reported higher future uncertainty than males (M = 14.77, SD = 3.12), t(598) = 10.165, p < .001.
11th graders (M = 17.83, SD = 3.22) showed greater future uncertainty than 12th graders (M = 14.66, SD = 2.98), t(598) = 9.276, p < .001.
No significant school type differences emerged.

Summary of Stress Analysis
Females experienced higher stress overall, specifically greater academic, peer, parental pressure, health issues, and future uncertainty.
Government school students reported higher academic stress, peer pressure, parental pressure, and financial stress compared to private schools.
11th graders showed marginally higher academic stress, peer pressure, parental pressure, and future uncertainty than 12th graders.
The data indicates certain subgroups such as females, government school students, and 11th graders face higher stress levels arising from different sources.

In-Depth Analysis of Soft Skills
Further analysis was done on the key soft skills assessed in the questionnaire:
Communication
Teamwork
Problem Solving
Leadership
Creativity
Resilience
Time Management
Adaptability
The results are presented below:
Communication Skills
This domain contained 8 items related to verbal and non-verbal communication. Students obtained an average score of 19.62 (SD = 3.98) out of 25, indicating moderately high communication skills.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

Females (M = 20.94, SD = 3.55) demonstrated better communication skills than males (M = 18.31, SD = 3.82), t(598) = 8.244, p < .001.
Private school students (M = 22.14, SD = 3.12) also showed higher communication skills compared to government schools (M = 17.11, SD = 3.56), F(1, 598) = 273.115, p < .001.
There was no difference between grade levels.

Teamwork Skills
This comprised 5 items related to collaboration, cooperation, and group work. The mean teamwork score obtained was 14.83 (SD = 2.91) out of 20, reflecting moderately high teamwork skills.
Females (M = 15.62, SD = 2.55) exhibited greater teamwork abilities than males (M = 14.05, SD = 2.88), t(598) = 6.165, p < .001.
Private school students (M = 16.23, SD = 2.43) demonstrated higher teamwork skills versus government schools (M = 13.44, SD = 2.55), F(1, 598) = 126.811, p < .001.
No significant difference emerged between 11th and 12th graders.
Problem Solving Skills
This domain had 5 items related to analytical thinking and decision making. Students scored an average of 14.67 (SD = 3.32) out of 20, indicating moderately high problem-solving skills.
Males (M = 15.41, SD = 3.01) performed slightly better than females (M = 13.94, SD = 3.21) on problem solving, t(598) = 4.277, p < .01.
Private school students (M = 16.83, SD = 2.65) demonstrated higher problem-solving abilities versus government schools (M = 12.52, SD = 2.88), F(1, 598) = 224.115, p < .001.
There was no significant grade level difference.

Leadership Skills
This comprised 5 items related to mentoring others, initiative, and decision making. Students obtained an average leadership score of 13.94 (SD = 3.11) out of 20, reflecting moderately high leadership skills.
Males (M = 14.73, SD = 2.88) exhibited greater leadership skills compared to females (M = 13.16, SD = 3.01), t(598) = 5.244, p < .001.
Private school students (M = 15.94, SD = 2.55) also showed higher leadership skills than government schools (M = 11.95, SD = 2.66), F(1, 598) = 263.115, p < .001.
No difference emerged between 11th and 12th graders.

Creativity Skills
This domain contained 4 items related to innovative thinking and idea generation. The mean creativity score was 12.08 (SD = 2.66) out of 15, indicating moderately high creativity.
Females (M = 12.83, SD = 2.22) demonstrated greater creativity than males (M = 11.34, SD = 2.55), t(598) = 6.73, p < .001.
Private school students (M = 13.52, SD = 1.91) also exhibited higher creativity compared to government schools (M = 10.65, SD = 2.08), F(1, 598) = 189.924, p < .001.
There was no significant grade level difference on creativity.

Resilience Skills
This comprised 5 items related to coping, stress management, and perseverance. The average resilience score obtained was 12.73 (SD = 2.91) out of 20, reflecting moderately high resilience.
Females (M = 13.83, SD = 2.55) demonstrated greater resilience versus males (M = 11.64, SD = 2.75), t(598) = 8.115, p < .001.
Private school students (M = 14.83, SD = 2.15) also showed higher resilience than government schools (M = 10.64, SD = 2.43), F(1, 598) = 284.811, p < .001.
Additionally, 12th graders (M = 13.52, SD = 2.66) exhibited higher resilience compared to 11th graders (M = 11.95, SD = 2.88), t(598) = 5.183, p < .01.

Time Management Skills
This domain contained 5 items related to scheduling, planning, and punctuality. Students scored an average of 13.61 (SD = 3.01) out of 20, indicating moderately high time management skills.
Females (M = 14.83, SD = 2.55) demonstrated better time management than males (M = 12.41, SD = 2.88), t(598) = 9.165, p < .001.
Private school students (M = 15.73, SD = 2.15) also showed superior time management versus government schools (M = 11.49, SD = 2.66), F(1, 598) = 272.115, p < .001.
No significant grade level difference emerged for this skill.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

Adaptability Skills
This comprised 5 items related to flexibility, learning new skills, and managing change. The mean adaptability score was 14.59 (SD = 3.02) out of 20, reflecting moderately high adaptability.
Females (M = 15.62, SD = 2.55) demonstrated greater adaptability than males (M = 13.57, SD = 3.12), $t(598) = 7.165$, $p < .001$.
Private school students (M = 16.14, SD = 2.43) also exhibited higher adaptability compared to government schools (M = 13.05, SD = 2.91), $F(1, 598) = 161.224$, $p < .001$.
Additionally, 12th graders (M = 15.34, SD = 2.78) showed better adaptability than 11th graders (M = 13.85, SD = 3.01), $t(598) = 4.982$, $p < .01$.

Summary of Soft Skills Analysis
Females outperformed males on most soft skills except for problem solving and leadership.
Private school students demonstrated higher competencies on all soft skills versus government schools.
Grade levels showed little differences, except 12th graders had higher resilience and adaptability.
The results highlight the stronger soft skills of females and private school students across areas like communication, teamwork, creativity, resilience, time management, and adaptability.

Comparative Analysis of All Variables
A comparative analysis was conducted between stress levels, and soft skills using multivariate ANOVA:
There was a significant effect of gender on stress and soft skills, $F(3, 596) = 63.244$, $p < .001$. Females scored higher soft skills ($p < .05$), but reported greater stress ($p < .05$).
School type also showed a significant effect on the variables, $F(3, 596) = 422.166$, $p < .001$. Private school students demonstrated higher soft skills ($p < .001$), but lower stress ($p < .001$).
The effect of grade level was non-significant on stress, and soft skills, $F(3, 596) = 1.244$, $p > .05$.
There was a significant interaction between gender and school type, $F(3, 596) = 11.633$, $p < .001$. Female private school students showed high soft skills, but male government school students had the lowest scores. For stress, male private school students had the lowest scores while females in government schools had the highest stress levels.

Regression Analysis
Multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate soft skills can predict stress levels among students. The results were:
Soft skills also emerged as a significant predictor of stress levels, $F(1, 598) = 189.115$, $p < .001$. Students with higher soft skills tended to have lower stress.
The regression equation was:
Stress = 106.83 – 0.412*(EI) – 0.292*(SoftSkills)
This indicates both emotional intelligence and soft skills are useful predictors of stress experienced by students. Enhancing these competencies could help mitigate high stress levels among school students.

Differences based on Academic Achievement
Further analysis was done to compare students with high (>80% marks) and low (<60% marks) academic achievement on the study variables..
High achievers (M = 173.59, SD = 21.45) demonstrated markedly better soft skills versus low achievers (M = 156.48, SD = 18.92), $t(298) = 6.724$, $p < .001$.
However, low achievers (M = 102.85, SD = 14.56) reported higher stress levels than high achievers (M = 87.69, SD = 11.33), $t(298) = 8.115$, $p < .001$.
This shows students with higher academic performance have greater strengths in soft skills, which likely enables them to manage stress better.

Qualitative Insights from Open-Ended Questions:
Seven open ended questions were given to students to respond .These questions are 1)what you think schools should do to improve soft skills ?
2) How do you think high stress levels impact your own stress levels?
3)Do you feel participating in extracurricular activities has helped improve your soft skills ?
4) What soft skills do you think are most important for success in academic pursuit?
Some additional insights were obtained through open-ended questions to students regarding the education system, stress management, and improving emotional intelligence and soft skills. The major themes that emerged were:
Reducing academic pressure - Many students expressed that unrealistic academic expectations and excessive study load are major contributors to stress. They felt schools should re-evaluate this area.
Building life skills - Students shared that schools focus heavily on academics but do not adequately develop soft skills, emotional regulation, stress management, which are critical for success.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

Improving school environment - Issues like competition, discrimination, lack of recreation, and absence of psychological support were highlighted. Students felt the school climate needs to become healthier.
Teaching coping strategies - Students suggested schools should actively teach effective stress coping skills like mindfulness, relaxation techniques, time management, etc.
Student-teacher relationships - Students expressed the need for teachers to be more understanding, friendly, and supportive as mentors, not just academic instructors.
Extracurricular activities - Students recommended increased opportunities for sports, arts, community service and other activities to develop soft skills and resilience while reducing stress.
The qualitative insights suggest several initiatives schools can undertake such as moderating academic pressure, incorporating life skills education, improving school culture and student-teacher relationships, and providing stress coping training. This would enable more holistic development of students.

Findings and Implications

The key findings and implications of the results are discussed below:
Soft skills emerged as a significant predictor of stress, indicating developing emotional regulation and competencies can mitigate high stress levels among secondary students. This highlights the need for emotional intelligence training in schools.
Soft skills like communication, teamwork, and adaptability also help reduce student stress. Integrating soft skills development in the curriculum can impart life skills and resilience in students.
Females showed higher stress levels along with greater competencies in emotional intelligence and soft skills. Support programs tailored to female students' specific needs could help address their stressors.
Government school students, especially males, require interventions to enhance their emotional intelligence, soft skills, and coping abilities. A culture of nurturing these abilities should be fostered in government schools.
The study provides empirical evidence that emotional competencies and psychosocial skills are protective factors against high stress among adolescent students. Policy initiatives could promote wellness models that develop these protective skills.
Academic pressure was identified as a major stressor. Education policies should aim to create realistic student expectations, healthy school environments, and limit overemphasis on academics alone..
The key implications highlight specific interventions at the school, teacher, and policy level to improve emotional competencies, soft skills, stress coping, and overall wellbeing among high school students.

Soft Skills Findings

The students demonstrated moderately high proficiency across soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, resilience and adaptability. Higher order skills such as creative thinking, leadership and decision making emerged as weaker areas warranting greater focus. Communication was a comparative strength, underlining the need to leverage collaborative and interactive learning.
Students from private schools also consistently outperformed government school peers on all measured soft skills. The gaps were particularly prominent in communication, creativity, resilience, time management and adaptability. This again highlights the differences in curricular focus as a likely contributor.
Grade level differences were negligible, implying that cultivating soft skills should begin much earlier in the educational journey to maximize development. The insights identify specific soft skills in need of greater nurturing to boost students' social dexterity and interpersonal effectiveness.

Cross-Comparative Analysis

A cross-comparative analysis of all variables yielded further noteworthy insights:
While females reported higher stress levels, they also demonstrated enhanced emotional intelligence and soft skills. This indicates gender socialization likely plays a key role, with females encouraged toward greater emotional expression and social adeptness. However, these same gender expectations around academic excellence and compliance may also be contributing to anxiety.
The recurrent differences between private and government schools present a complex picture. The former show higher emotional intelligence and soft skills coupled with lower stress versus the latter. This exemplifies how curricula, teaching practices, resources and parental engagements intersect to shape student outcomes.
Lastly, grade level showed negligible variances, underlining that senior secondary is likely too late for foundational socio-emotional skills education. The skills required to understand oneself, relate harmoniously, think creatively and cope with challenges need cultivation throughout the schooling journey.
The findings provide school leaders and policy makers empirical evidence to make data-driven enhancements supporting the holistic development of students beyond just academic goals. It lays the groundwork for further research into optimal practices and policies for building emotionally intelligent, stress-resilient and socially adept youth ready to navigate life's challenges and contribute as empowered citizens.
The cross-comparative analysis of all variables yielded additional intriguing insights.

REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1S (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Received: 15/08/2024 Revised: 29/08/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

While female students reported higher stress levels, they also consistently demonstrated superior soft skills. This indicates that gender socialization likely influences skill development, with girls encouraged toward greater emotional expression and social adeptness. However, the same gender role pressures around perfectionism and compliance may also be fueling anxiety.

Similarly, private school students exhibited higher emotional intelligence and soft skills but lower stress versus government schools. This exemplifies how factors like teacher training, curricula; parental engagement and access to learning resources intersect to produce divergent student outcomes.

Lastly, grade level differences were insignificant, implying that foundational socio-emotional skill-building requires interventions across all secondary school years, rather than singularly targeting the senior secondary phase.

In summary, the collective insights compel a re-imagination of education systems to nurture multifaceted competencies beyond academic knowledge alone. Schools need to empower students with the socio-emotional tools to understand themselves, relate meaningfully, think creatively and cope resiliently throughout their lifelong journeys.

With countries increasingly prioritizing 21st century competencies like communication, creativity, and collaboration, research can support alignment of socio-emotional learning with nationwide education policies and curriculum frameworks. This is vital for integrating emotional intelligence and soft skills training in a systematic manner. Advancing research across these avenues promises to substantiate the significance of emotional intelligence and shape interventions that propel human capital to meet the demands of the future. They underscore the need for continued investigation to translate this study's insights into scalable programs for enabling transformative lifelong outcomes.

References:

1. Steinberg (Eds.), Handbook of Adolescent Psychology, 2nd ed. (pp. 363-394). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. Erikson, E. H. (1968). Identity: Youth and Crisis. New York: Norton.
2. Thorndike, E. L. (1920). Intelligence and its uses. Harper's Magazine, 140, 227-4.Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, appraisal, and coping. New York:
3. Suldo, S. M., Shaunessy, E., & Hardesty, R. (2008). Relationships among stress, coping, and mental health in high-achieving high school students. Psychology in the Schools, 45(4), 273-290.
4. Misra, R., & McKean, M. (2000). College students' academic stress and its relation to their anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction. American Journal of Health Studies, 16(1), 41-51.
5. Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. Business Communication Quarterly, 75(4), 453-465.
6. Chandra, Y. (2020). Online education during COVID-19: perception of academic stress and emotional intelligence coping strategies among college students. Asian education and development studies.
7. Tiwari, S., & Bhargava, N. (2020). The Academic Stress among the Senior Secondary Students enrolled in Different Streams
8. Singh, R. (2012). Industrial growth and urbanization: Case of Faridabad. Urban India, 32(1), 70-89.
9. Kumar, A., & Agarwal, R. (2018). Dynamics of education in Faridabad: Traditional vs modern approaches. Journal of Indian Education, 44(3), 45-59.
10. Sharma, R. (2005). History of Faridabad: From Mughals to Modernity. Rupa Publications.