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**"Residential and Gender-Based Disparities in Academic Stress and Performance: A Study of Secondary Students in Fazilka District"**

**Samriti Kataria<sup>1</sup> Dr. Shraddha Kapoor<sup>2</sup>**

1. Research Scholar Shri Khushal Das University
2. Research Supervisor Shri Khushal Das University

**ABSTRACT**

Gender and residential setting are two important sociodemographic characteristics that have a substantial impact on students' academic journeys. In the Fazilka area of Punjab, this study investigates the effects of two factors on the academic stress levels, study habits, and academic performance of students in the Xth and XIIth grades: gender (male vs. female) and residential origin (rural vs. urban). A stratified random selection technique was used to choose a sample of 400 students, 200 of whom were from urban areas and 200 of whom were from rural areas. The students were evenly divided by gender.

Standardised instruments such as the Academic Stress Scale, Study Habits Inventory, and academic success records were used to gather data. The study found that there were notable differences in study habits and academic stress depending on gender and residential location. Compared to their rural counterparts, urban students showed higher levels of academic stress, which may have been brought on by heightened parental expectations and rivalry. However, despite performing worse academically on standardised tests, rural children showed more consistent study habits.

Differences in gender were also noticeable. Male students displayed comparatively lower levels of stress but irregular study habits, while female students reported higher levels of academic stress but more disciplined study habits. Interestingly, there was not always a direct correlation between stress levels and academic accomplishment, suggesting that while extreme stress may impair performance, moderate stress may serve as a motivator.

This study highlights how crucial it is to take demographic and contextual factors into account when designing educational programs and mental health treatments. To support children from diverse backgrounds, educators and policymakers must use diversified techniques, particularly in under-resourced places like Fazilka. The results can guide the creation of focused academic support networks and school-based stress management initiatives.

**Keywords: Secondary Education, Fazilka District, Adolescents, Educational Psychology, Gender Differences, Residential Background, Urban-Rural Divide, Academic Stress, Study Habits, Academic Achievement**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Education is essential in determining how people and civilisations will develop in the future. However, psychosocial and demographic characteristics like gender and residential environment have a significant impact on academic success, which is not only decided by curriculum or IQ. Academic stress has become a significant issue in today's educational settings, impacting students' performance and mental health, particularly during secondary school, a critical changeover period. Situated in Punjab's southwest, the district of Fazilka has a distinctive fusion of rural and urban areas. Notwithstanding socioeconomic advancements, the area continues to exhibit differences between rural and urban learning environments in terms of infrastructure, parental participation, educational access, and general learning surroundings. These variations can have a big impact on students' study habits, academic stress levels, and, eventually, academic success. Additionally, how students view school and manage academic stress is influenced by gender roles and expectations that are common in both rural and urban regions. Boys may experience pressure to achieve and adhere to competitive norms, whereas girls may experience stress as a result of cultural constraints and traditional expectations. Students' academic experiences and results are shaped by the complex matrix created by the combination of gender and residential origin

Designing fair educational policies and interventions requires an understanding of these factors. This study examines the differences in academic stress, study habits, and performance between Grade X and XII students in the Fazilka area according to their gender (male/female) and residence location (rural/urban). Through suitable academic and psychological frameworks, it aims to produce data that may guide teachers, inform policy, and assist students.

### **1.1 Scope of the Study**

- focusses on pupils in Punjab's Fazilka district who are enrolled in Grades X and XII.
- includes both public and private schools in urban and rural areas.
- takes into account both male and female pupils when conducting a gender-based study.
- investigates three important factors: academic accomplishment, study habits, and academic stress.
- evaluates results using academic records and standardised instruments.
- The results are meant to assist with school mental health initiatives and local educational planning.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To investigate how secondary students in urban and rural areas differ in their levels of academic stress.
- To examine differences in academic stress levels by gender.
- To investigate the connection between students' study habits and their home environment.
- To evaluate kids' academic performance according to their residence and gender.
- To investigate how gender and residential background combine to affect academic achievement and stress.
- To offer suggestions for lowering secondary pupils' academic stress and enhancing their study techniques.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1 Gender Disparities in Academic Stress

Numerous studies have underscored considerable gender-based inequalities in academic stress levels among Indian students:

- Mathew et al. (2015) conducted a study in Delhi, indicating that female teenagers had greater academic stress than their male counterparts, frequently attributed to societal expectations and multitasking obligations.
- Bindu and Happy (2024) discovered that female students in Kerala encountered heightened academic stress, especially those from nuclear homes and as only children, indicating that family structure influences stress levels.
- Deb et al. (2015) noted that female students frequently experience elevated stress levels stemming from parental expectations and societal pressures, resulting in heightened anxiety and mental health challenges.

## 2. Disparities in Academic Stress Between Urban and Rural Areas

Residential environments considerably influence students' academic stress and performance.

- **Pinki et al. (2020)** examined adolescents in Haryana and discovered that urban pupils had greater academic stress than their rural peers, likely attributable to heightened rivalry and academic expectations in urban settings.
- **Sujithran and Bindhu (2024)** indicated that during the COVID-19 epidemic, urban students in Kerala encountered heightened academic stress resulting from the sudden transition to online learning and insufficient access to resources.
- **Iflah Sultan (2019)** emphasised that rural students have greater academic anxiety than their urban counterparts, due to the scarcity of educational resources and support networks in rural regions.

## 3 Synergistic Effects of Gender and Residential Environment

The convergence of gender and residential background significantly affects students' academic experiences.

- **Sushma Bala et al. (2025)** conducted a study in Jammu and Kashmir, revealing that both gender and locality greatly impacted students' mental health, with rural female students being especially susceptible to academic stress.
- **Nagabharana et al. (2022)** noted that in Karnataka, female students from rural regions experienced elevated academic stress levels, frequently attributed to restricted access to educational resources and societal pressures.
- **Correlation between Academic Stress and Performance**  
Academic stress is associated with students' performance and overall well-being.
- **Deb et al. (2015)** discovered that severe academic stress adversely affected students' performance, resulting in problems such as anxiety, depression, and diminished academic progress.
- **Sharma et al. (2021)** emphasised that students in scientific disciplines encountered elevated stress levels, which adversely impacted their academic performance and mental well-being.

## 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This research employs a descriptive survey approach to investigate the influence of gender and residential environment (urban versus rural) on academic stress, study habits, and academic achievement in secondary school students.

### 3.2 Population & Sample

The target population comprises students of class X and XII from both urban and rural schools of **Fazilka District**, Punjab.

### 3.3 Sample Size

A total of **400 students** were selected using **stratified random sampling**, ensuring equal representation:

- **200 Urban Students** (100 male, 100 female)
- **200 Rural Students** (100 male, 100 female)

### 3.4 Tools Used

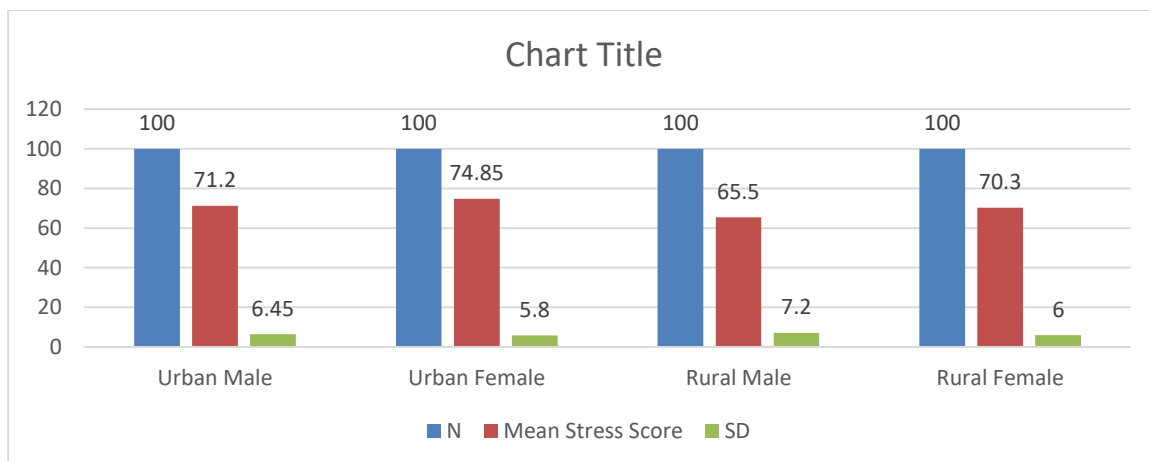
1. **Academic Stress Scale** – standardized scale by Dr. A.K. Singh and Dr. R. Dubey
2. **Study Habit Inventory** – by M.N. Palsane and Anuradha Sharma
3. **Academic Achievement** – based on previous final examination scores (converted to percentages)

## 4 DATA ANALYSIS

**Table 1: Mean Academic Stress Scores by Gender and Residence**

Group	N	Mean Stress Score	SD

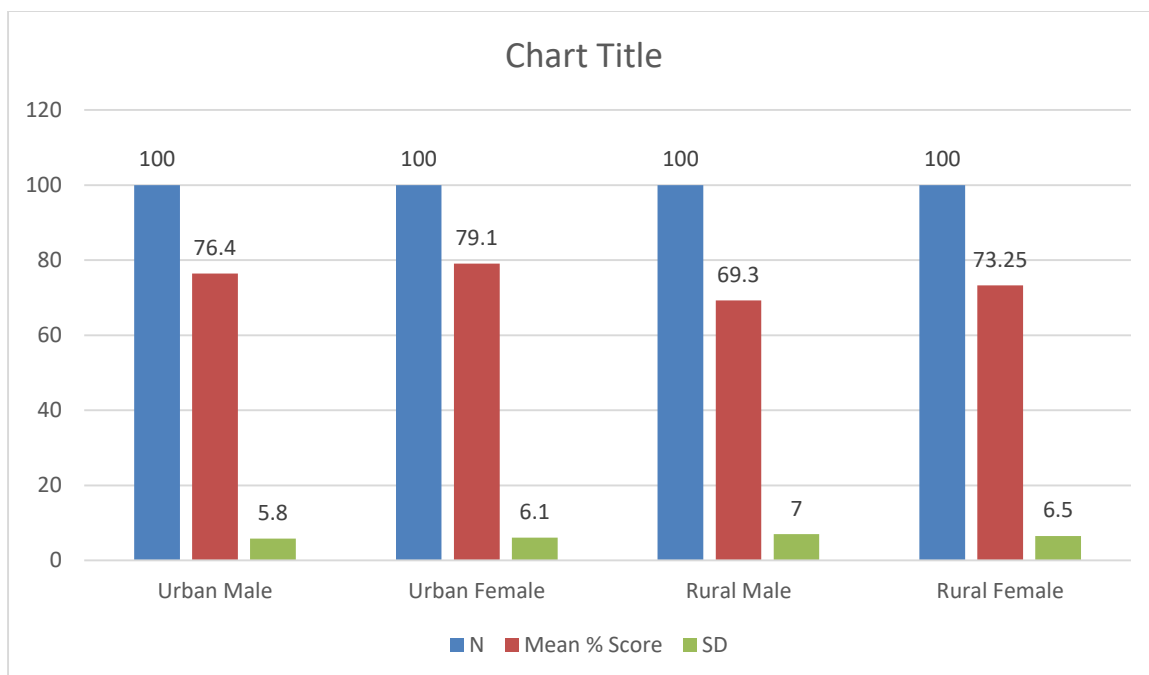
Urban Male	100	71.20	6.45
Urban Female	100	74.85	5.80
Rural Male	100	65.50	7.20
Rural Female	100	70.30	6.00



**Interpretation:** Urban students show higher academic stress than rural students. Female students experience more stress than males in both settings.

**Table 2: Mean Academic Achievement by Gender and Residence**

Group	N	Mean % Score	SD
Urban Male	100	76.40	5.80
Urban Female	100	79.10	6.10
Rural Male	100	69.30	7.00
Rural Female	100	73.25	6.50



**Interpretation:** Urban students perform better academically than rural ones; females outperform males in both urban and rural settings.

## Conclusion

This study examined the influence of home environment and gender on academic stress, study habits, and academic achievement among secondary students in Fazilka district, Punjab. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that both gender and residence substantially influence students' academic stress and performance. Urban kids exhibited elevated academic stress levels relative to their rural counterparts, possibly attributable to intensified competitiveness, excessive scheduling, and parental pressure in metropolitan settings. Female students, regardless of location, encountered heightened academic stress compared to male students, potentially due to cultural expectations, multitasking demands, and emotional sensitivity. Urban students outperformed rural students in academic performance. Moreover, female pupils surpassed their male counterparts in performance. This indicates that, despite elevated stress levels, girls generally cultivate superior study habits and sustain concentration. Conversely, rural pupils may be deficient in access to academic resources, internet connectivity, and individualised assistance. The research validates the need for location-specific and gender-sensitive academic and mental health assistance in secondary educational institutions. The stress-performance dynamics suggest the necessity of equilibrium—moderate stress can be motivating, but severe stress impedes results.

## Findings

- Female students indicated elevated academic stress levels compared to their male counterparts.
- Urban students exhibited greater academic stress than their rural counterparts.
- Urban kids, particularly girls, exhibited superior academic performance.
- Female students exhibited more regimented study habits.
- The residential environment and gender substantially affect academic achievement.

## Suggestions

- Conduct stress management workshops in urban and rural educational institutions.
- Implement gender-sensitive counselling to tackle distinct emotional and intellectual difficulties.
- Improve rural educational infrastructure, encompassing libraries and internet connectivity.
- Advocate for equitable academic timetables to mitigate stress levels.
- Programs aimed at enhancing parental awareness to alleviate strain and optimise home study conditions.
- Promote peer mentorship initiatives to assist academically disadvantaged children.
- Utilise digital educational resources to diminish the urban-rural disparity.

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