



# **FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE**

**(A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)**

**Exam Stress and its Impact on Academic Performance**

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## **Abstract**

Exam stress can lead to both academic failure and mental health problems for students. This paper attempted to find the relation between exam stress and its impact on academic performance. The sample for this research was 150 male and female students, conveniently approached through an online Google survey through class WhatsApp groups and emails of students. Nist and Diehl's test anxiety questionnaire was used to measure exam anxiety, and a set of questions were added to measure academic performance, after collecting the data it was run through SPSS for further procedures. The Pearson correlation and ANOVA prove the hypothesis of a significant correlation between test anxiety and academic performance. Findings also show a significant relationship between gender and academic performance. Females had more test anxiety which affected their academic performance. It can be concluded that the academic performance of university students will improve if students are supported with relevant coping mechanisms to deal with test anxiety. Furthermore, educational institutions also need to alter their system of testing to control students' anxiety.

*Keywords: Exam Stress, Academic Performance*

## **Introduction**

Exam stress is a sense of anxiety and tension associated with taking an exam. It's natural to be anxious about future tests, exams, papers, or presentations. A modest amount of stress can, in fact, push you and motivate you to work harder. Exam anxiety becomes a problem when it impairs your capacity to perform and meet your academic and learning objectives (Joseph, 2019). Exam periods and exam scenarios are stressful for students, according to several studies of exam stress, which is especially true for oral exams. This makes you worry more, makes you anxious and depressed, causes you to lose sleep, makes you forgetful, irritated, overwhelmed, weary, and makes you feel out of control (Šimic & Manenica, 2012). In contrast to the concept of exam stress I have laid the relation with academic performance. Academic performance refers to how well students succeed in various academic subjects. Classroom performance, graduation rates, and standardized test results are commonly used by teachers and education administrators to assess achievement. Academic attainment is critical for young people's effective social development. Students who do well in school have a better chance of adjusting to adulthood and achieving professional and financial success (Ongayo, 1998).

In the body, stress causes specific mental and physiological reactions. Mild stress can help with cognitive tasks and performance, but chronic high stress can lead to neuropsychiatric disorders including anxiety and depression. Stressed students should be provided with an effective relaxation program as well as counseling services so that they may cope better with examination stress (Singh, et al., 2012). Similarly in terms of education, academic performance is an important aspect of schooling. It is regarded as the hub around which the entire educational system revolves. Any academic institution's success or failure is determined by the academic performance of its students. Academic achievement serves as a foundation for knowledge acquisition and skill

development. Academic performance refers to the knowledge obtained as measured by a teacher's marks and/or educational goals set by students and teachers to be met over a specified period (Abaidoo, 2018).

### **Significance of study**

This study will help in understanding the relationship that exists between exam stress and the academic performance of students. This study will contribute to fill the gap in terms of Pakistan and look for the challenges that are in this domain. This study will make its way in terms of giving evidence that less exam stress would contribute to a boost in the academic performance of students.

### **Study Aims**

The aim of this study was to identify whether a link exists between exam stress and academic performance in FCCU students. In addition, this study attempted to examine if exam stress leads to bad academic performance and to find the difference in exam stress in both men and women.

The two research questions of this study include:

1. Does exam stress lead to poor performance of students in exams?

Which gender is impacted by exam stress, males, or females

## **Literature Review**

Exam stress is the feeling of tension and worry that comes from test-taking situations. It is normal to feel some stress about upcoming tests, exams, papers, or presentations (Joseph, 2019). Academic performance is the measurement of student achievement across various academic subjects (Courn, 2017). Examination stress is a state of psychological condition in which people experience extreme distress and anxiety in testing situations (Sasikumar & Bapitha, 2019). Many people experience some degree of stress and anxiety before and during exams and examination stress can impair learning and hurt test performance. It is measured from a scale that explains the statuses of students. This is the same context that I will be using for my study. The dimension of academic performance that this study will be interested to look deeply into will be the CGPA of students in FCCU. The attainment of knowledge of students in a given period is defined as the academic performance of the student.

A study was conducted to identify the link between test anxiety and the academic accomplishment of nursing students at the undergraduate level (Dawood et al., 2016). The current study was conducted on a convenience sample of 277 undergraduate nursing students from all academic levels at King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences - Riyadh (KSAU) who gave their voluntary consent to participate in the study using a descriptive correlation, cross-sectional research design. According to the findings of this study, many of the students who took part in it had moderate to severe test anxiety. In another study (Sasikumar & Bapitha, 2019) on the same hand, the relationship between exam stress and academic achievement of high school is discussed. An individual's response to pressure is defined as stress.

When stress is seen negatively or becomes overwhelming, it causes anxiety before and during exams, affecting students' academic performance. The purpose of this study was to learn

about the examination stress experienced by Tamil Nadu high school students. In this study, 300 high school students were randomly picked from nine schools in the Pudukkottai educational area in Tamil Nadu, India. High school students are stressed out for a variety of reasons, including a lack of preparation, the nature of their studies, and a lack of necessary information. The association between examination stress and academic achievement in higher secondary school students was explored in this study (Bisht & Sudha, 2017). A total of 314 higher secondary school pupils from Kancheepuram district's five higher secondary schools were chosen at random. Academic Achievement was calculated using students' half-yearly assessment total results. Examination Stress and Academic Achievement were found to be moderate and low, respectively, according to the study's findings. Exam Stress and Academic Achievement were found to have a moderate negative relationship. In terms of Examination Stress, there was a substantial difference in Academic Achievement among higher secondary school pupils. Students with low levels of examination stress had superior academic achievement than students with moderate and high levels of examination stress.

The major goals of this study (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2016) were to put a conceptual model linking motivational processes involved in coping with the stress of university evaluation to the test, as well as to look at gender disparities in these processes. They used Mplus to investigate this model using multiple group path analysis. Men were more negatively affected by disengagement-oriented coping than women, despite having higher stress levels. There were also gender disparities in the relationships between engagement-oriented coping and results. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the processes linking motivation, coping, and academic success by filling a significant vacuum in the literature regarding gender variations in educational outcomes coping (Rezazadeh & Tavakoli, 2009). This research is a descriptive analytic

study that involved 110 University of Isfahan undergraduate students. In comparison to male students, female students exhibit a higher level of test anxiety, according to the research. Female students had a higher average test anxiety score than male pupils. Test anxiety was also found to have a statistically significant negative connection with academic achievement. There was no link between exam anxiety and the number of years spent studying.

A cross-sectional survey research methodology was used to investigate academic stress, study habits, and academic performance of 196 (113 males and 83 females) undergraduates at Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda. Our findings show the necessity for deliberate interventions aimed at lowering academic pressures and enhancing undergraduate study habits while considering the differences between faculties and years of study in order to improve academic performance (Nakalema & Ssenyonga, 2013). A research study (Khan, 2013) served as a pilot for future studies with the same characteristics. The study included 66 undergraduate students from a university in the northwest United States, 17 males and 49 females. There was no clear link between stress-coping skills and GPA. The only subscale that was substantially connected with GPA was planning, demonstrating that task planning to cope may have favorable results.

A local study from Pakistan confirms that female students experience a significantly higher level of test anxiety, as compared to male students (Eman et al., 2012). In addition, female students reported a significantly higher level of need for family support as compared to male students, and thus the study concludes that female students needed to pay more attention to controlling their level of test anxiety, worry, emotionality, and examination stress than male students, which could be done through training them. Bearing in mind the gender differences in test anxiety and examination stress different kinds of counseling strategies must be used for males and females



These studies are closely linked with my study as it allows to establish a link between the two variables i.e., exam stress and academic performance however it also allows me to address the gap of the modes of academic performance consistently rather than just the academic achievements. Apart from this the gap in gender stress prevalence allows us to work over a new domain of finding the causal links and addressing them in the context of Pakistan. By testing the levels of exam stress, we can find out the stress mediators and how much academic performance is affected having an either positive or negative impact.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The most relative theory to my research would be the spillover theory (Gill, 2003). Spillover theory describes the conditions under which positive or negative spillover occurs between the work microsystem and the family microsystem. According to research, when work-family connections are rigorously controlled in time and space, there is a negative spillover in terms of time, energy, and behavior. In terms of its relationship with my study the educational framework and system were analyzed to see the change in behavior and attitude change in students due to the pressure and its impact on their academic performance.

A valuable theoretical paradigm for explaining health disparities is social stress theory. In the relationship between social structure and sickness, social stress theory describes a mediator. Noting the distinction between viewing stressful occurrences as random events and viewing them as socially patterned events. The stress model, in other words, tries to demonstrate that "high levels of disorder among specific groups can be linked to their severe exposure to social stressors or restricted availability to ameliorative psychosocial resources." Stress theory is a helpful and widely applied sociological concept for explaining the link between socioeconomic disadvantage and health. Experiential stress and structural stress are two types of stress caused by social disadvantage. Stress theory is a useful tool for understanding the link between widespread prejudice and discrimination and health consequences, but predictions based on it must be thoroughly investigated. The first step is to show that stress distribution is socially patterned, but researchers have generally ignored this subject (Meyer et al., 2008).

Elger developed the theory of academic performance (ToP) (2007). Six core concepts are emphasized in the theory to establish a framework that may be utilized to explain performance as well as performance improvements. To perform is to deliver valuable outcomes. According to the social behavior theory, social behavior is influenced by the environment, and institutions transform their knowledge through text, teacher-student learning, which is reflected in the student's academic performance (output), and academic achievement is a mirror or reflection of teaching methodology and students' learning outcomes. We conclude that social behaviors have a stronger association with grades than competencies, that peer difficulties have a stronger relationship with achievement than pro-social behavior, and that the relationship weakens as students' progress through the grades (Said et al., 2018). These are the two theories that were linked with my variables and further helped in terms of operationalizing them as well.

## **Methodology**

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study has received ethical clearance from the Department of Sociology Ethics Review Committee and the Forman Christian College Institutional Review Board (**Appendix A**). In this research study, it has been ensured that the necessary precautions have been taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. No names or identifiable information have been asked while collecting the data. There has been no deception, with the objectives of the research clearly shared with participants and informed consent taken before the start of data collection (**Appendix B**). No student has been forced to fill out the questionnaire, and they were informed that they could leave the study whenever they wanted to. The final data has been stored safely with the researcher and will not be shared with anyone. There is no foreseeable harm to the researcher, and there are no conflicts of interest.

### **Sample Design**

For this study the use of design was in the form of relational research. This will further be laid down in terms of the approach of survey-based and cross-sectional method in which the time dimension does not change but the spatial units are in variation that is change.

### **Sample Avenue**

To further continue with research conventional sampling method was used. The major tool for it was the questionnaire formed on the google forms that comprised of the consent of the participants including some of their demographic details in the demographic form. The distribution of the Google forms was also done from the digital platform that is very common to use within the

population, those were distributed among the university students (FCCU) through WhatsApp and Gmail highlighting that it's an academic form only.

As the identity of the participants who recorded their responses was kept anonymous as a core responsibility of mine, for this purpose none of the participants was asked for their roll numbers as that would have given a more specific idea of who the students were. Neither were they asked for their name or email address. A consent form was also provided to all the participants in which they could have a clear idea about what the study was about and then if they wished they could record their responses. However, on the researcher's end the email address was provided in case if anything was not clear or if there was some query of the respondent, they had direct access to get in contact with the researcher. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and no data was shared with anyone else.

### **Selection Criterion**

Out of the entire population of students the sample was based on 150 undergraduate students. The sample for this study was selected from undergraduate students of FCCU by using the convenience sampling technique/ technology. Convenience sampling was done to avoid bias and as it is known to be fast and convenient, and the participants were easily available. As the questionnaires were made and distributed online in this study setting up for the methodology conventional sampling allowed to conveniently select the participants.

### **Hypothesis**

H1. There is an inverse relationship between exam stress and academic performance in students, such that when exam stress is high, academic performance is low (Joseph, 2019).

H2. Female university students face higher exam stress than male students (Eman et al., 2012).

## Research Instrument

In this study the independent variable is exam stress, and the dependent variable is academic performance. The questionnaire included three sections, with a total of 15 questions (**Appendix C**). The first section consisted of socio-demographic variables, and the second section included academic questions. These questions were prepared by myself and my supervisor. The questions pertaining to academic performance included GPA and CGPA. The GPA of a student is the grade point average on a 4.0 scale. The GPA is calculated by averaging the scores of all your classes. CGPA is the Cumulative Grade point average.

The third section of the questionnaire included questions from the Nist and Diehl's Test Anxiety Scale, which measures test anxiety (Nist & Diehl, 1990). The questions included items such as 'I have visible signs of nervousness such as sweaty palms, shaky hands and so on, right before a test' and 'I remember the information that I blanked on once I get out of the testing situation'. The answers were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 'never' to 'always'. Never has been coded as '1' and always as '5'. The higher score, the more the student faces anxiety.

## Reliability Results

Table 1 presents the reliability results for this study. The Test Anxiety Scale has a high Cronbach's Alpha of 0.901, showing high reliability.

**Table 1**

*Reliability Results for this Study*

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Test Anxiety Scale	0.901

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire was distributed among the participants to record their responses. Convenience sampling was used, as during the summer holidays there was still a coronavirus scare and I was unable to get a complete list of university students from FCCU. The participants were sent an email of the survey in accordance with the instructors who were offering courses in the summers, as they had the list of the student's emails. The instructors were also visible on empower and were later approached through emails.

As we live in digital era and impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak it was more feasible and user-friendly to make the questionnaire online through google forms and was then distributed among the participants that were students. The form was demographic in nature for the purpose to have some prior knowledge about gender and some other personal characteristics that might have certain impact over their responses to differ from one another due to the variation in their thought process.

### **Data Analysis**

All statistical procedures were run with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, v.25). To explore the relationship between exam stress (independent variable) and academic performance (dependent variable) socio-demographic characteristics of participants, validity and reliability, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, and ANOVA was used.

## Results

### Sociodemographic results

Table 2 presents data for the sociodemographic and academic variables of the study respondents. The sample is almost equally split between males (50.7%) and females (49.3%). Most of the respondents are between the ages of 21 to 25 years (68.7%). The majority of the respondents for this study are Juniors or Seniors (57.4%). The majority of the students have a previous semester GPA between 2.6-3.5 (54.7%). Similarly, the majority of the students have an overall CGPA between 2.6-3.5 (58.6%).

**Table 2**

*Descriptive data of sociodemographic and academic variables of respondents*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	76 (50.7)
Female	74 (49.3)
<b>Age</b>	
18-20	45 (30.0)
21-25	103 (68.7)
26-30	02 (1.3)
<b>Academic year</b>	
Freshman	25 (16.6)
Sophomore	39 (26.0)
Junior	34 (22.7)



Senior	52 (34.7)
<b>Previous Semester GPA</b>	
1.5-2.5 GPA	24 (16.0)
2.6-3.5 GPA	82 (54.7)
3.5 and above GPA	44 (29.3)
<b>Overall CGPA</b>	
1.5-2.5 CGPA	22 (14.7)
2.6-3.5 CGPA	88 (58.6)
3.5 and above CGPA	40 (26.7)

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### Correlations results

**Table 3** presents the Pearson correlation results of the study variables. The results show a negative and significant relationship between test anxiety and CGPA (-.287\*\*). The results also show a positive and significant relationship between (i) gender and test anxiety (.230\*\*) and (ii) age and semester of study (.584\*\*).

**Table 3**

*Pearson correlation results*

	1	2	3	4
1. CGPA	1			
2. Gender	0.235**			
3. Age	.069	-.160*		

4. Semester of study	.043	-.021	.584**	
5. Test Anxiety	-.287**	.230**	-.070	.759

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Notes

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

### Linear Regression results

**Table 4** presents the simple linear regression results for the study. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(4,145)=8.376, p \leq .000$ ), with  $R^2$  of .433, confirming the variables of gender, age, semester of study, and test anxiety have an influence on the dependent variable academic performance. The model shows that the two variables of gender and test anxiety have a significant relationship with academic performance. When test anxiety is high, academic performance is low, proving hypothesis 1 correct. To show which gender experiences more test anxiety, we move top ANOVA.

#### Table 4

##### *Regression results for academic performance*

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Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE-b</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>
Constant	2.964	.273		
Gender	.422	.099	.334	4.282
Age	.148	.123	.113	1.200
Semester	-.014	.053	-.025	-.272
Test Anxiety	-.025	.005	-.357	-4.636

---

The dependent variable is academic performance.

The prediction model was statistically significant,  $F(4, 145) = 8.376, p \leq .000$

$R^2 = .433$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .188$

### **ANOVA Results**

For ANOVA results test anxiety was dummy coded into low, medium, and high-stressed students.

Table 5 presents the ANOVA results for the study variables of gender and test anxiety. It was found that the mean difference between gender and test anxiety was statistically significant,  $F(1,148) = 8.633, p=0.004$ . Female university students experience more test anxiety ( $3.27 \pm .668$ ), compared to males ( $2.97 \pm .565, p=.000$ ). It is thus that the second hypothesis of the study is also proven correct.

**Table 5**

*ANOVA results for test anxiety and gender*

Predictor Variable	N	M $\pm$ SD	P value
Male	76	2.97 $\pm$ .565	.000
Female	74	3.27 $\pm$ .668	

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to find out whether there is linkage between test anxiety and academic performance, does one gender gets more affected by it than others and to provide effective recommendations for structural changes and better policymaking by finding out the existing problems with the current exam system locally and nationally through available research and data about this problem. The results and corroboration of our study corresponded to results of other existing literature. The result of this study is like the results of cited literature.

### **Limitations**

However, the fact that is quantitative research, the element of being able to understand human behavior cannot be done through numbers as it requires more subjectivity to fully understand it. As the research is restricted to FCCU students only, it may be difficult to generalize this study to other students in Pakistan. It can also be time-consuming to collect the data and can be misinterpreted.

## **Concluding Recommendations**

This research is an attempt to provide an analysis on whether test anxiety exists in the students and if there is a link between test anxiety and academic performance. The questionnaire will provide me with responses that will help conclude the intensity of the existence of test anxiety and the level of impact it may have on CGPA of students. Test anxiety can be controlled to a certain extent if students are taught the coping mechanism for dealing with anxiety. Furthermore, altering the test system can be helpful for it as well. If these two methods are applied to prevent test anxiety not only a academic performance but mental health can improve as well.

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## Appendix A: IRB Certificate Approval



**FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE**  
(A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)

### **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD** **APPROVAL CERTIFICATE**

**IRB Approval Certificate**

**IRB Ref:** IRB-395/05-2022

**Date:** 18-05-2022

**Project Title:** Exam Stress and its effect on Academic Performance.

**Principal Investigator:** Syed Basit Ali

**Supervisor:** Dr. Jawad Tariq.

Institutional review board has examined your project in IRB meeting held on 18-05-2022 and has approved the proposed study. If during the conduct of your research any changes occur related to participant risk, study design, confidentiality or consent or any other change then IRB must be notified immediately.

Please be sure to include IRB reference number in all correspondence.

Dr. Kauser Abdulla Malik HI, SI, TI  
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## Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter

Date:

Dear respondents,

You have been asked to participate in a survey I am conducting, the title of my survey is “test anxiety and its impacts on academic performances”. This study is an attempt to find out whether there exists a co-relation between test anxiety and academic performance. I believe this research will open ways for more academic research and considerations and would help people diagnose this problem and understand to what extent they require to cope up mentally with issues like anxiety and worrying. The questionnaire attached to this form will require only 10-15 minutes of your time to answer all the questions, there is no return compensation for answering the questionnaire. There is no health risk nor mental nor physical, the information that you provide would only be used for research purposes and would not be shared with any 3<sup>rd</sup> party, your identity would be kept confidential, your participation in this research is only voluntarily, you have every right to withdraw from the survey at any point you wish to and that is your legal legitimate right. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you have read the above-mentioned form and you agree to provide answers to questions that would be asked during the survey.

Name of the participant:

Signature:

Researcher: Syed Basit Ali

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Date:

Signature:

## Appendix C: Questionnaire

The Nist and Diehl's Test Anxiety Scale for the measurement of test anxiety has been used for this study (Nist & Diehl, 1990). The questions pertaining to demographics of the respondents and their academic scores. The questionnaire is below mentioned.

### Section A: Socio-Demographic Questions

Q1. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other

Q2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

### Section B: Questions related to academics

Q3. What year are you currently studying in?

- Freshmen
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Q4. What was your previous semester's GPA? \_\_\_\_\_

Q5. What is your CGPA? \_\_\_\_\_



### Section C: Nist and Diehl's Test Anxiety Questionnaire

Please check <b>one</b> response for each item that best indicates how often you've experienced test anxiety.	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
Q6. I have visible signs of nervousness such as sweaty palms, shaky hands and so on, right before a test.					5
Q7. I have "butterflies" in my stomach before a test					5
Q8. I feel nauseated before a test.					5
Q9. I read through the test and feel that I do not know any of the answers.					5
Q10. I panic before and during a test.					5
Q11. My mind goes blank during a test.					5
Q12. I remember the information that I blanked on once I get out of the testing situation.					5
Q13. I have trouble sleeping the night before a test.					5
Q14. I make mistakes on easy questions or put answers in the wrong places.					5
Q15. I have difficulty choosing answers.					5

