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A STUDY ON MARK BASED EXAMINATION ATTITUDE AND MENTAL STRESS IN THE LEVEL OF HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHENGALPATTU DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary educational framework, particularly within India's higher secondary tier, the systemic obsession with high evaluation scores has increasingly shifted student focus from deep conceptual learning to a superficial, "mark-based" attitude, causing severe psychological distress. This study investigates the relationship between mark-based examination attitudes and mental stress among higher secondary school students (Grades 11 and 12) within the localized socio-educational landscape of the Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu. Employing a descriptive survey research design, a representative sample of 500 students was selected via a random sampling technique from various government, aided, and private higher secondary schools across the district. Data collection was executed using a self-constructed "Mark-Based Examination Attitude and Mental Stress Questionnaire" consisting of two 40-item scales alongside a demographic profile sheet. Quantitative analysis (t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation) was conducted to test the differential variations and relationships across key demographic classifications. The statistical analysis revealed significant differential variations in mark-based exam attitudes and mental stress based on gender, school type, study methods, and daily study hours. Notably, government school students differed significantly from aided and private school students in exam attitudes, while private school students exhibited a distinctly unique stress profile. Furthermore, study duration heavily impacted student psychology, with 3-hour study blocks skewing exam attitudes and 1-hour study blocks showing distinct stress levels. Conversely, the stream of study (Arts vs. Science) yielded no significant differences. Crucially, a high negative correlation was established between a mark-based examination attitude and mental stress. The study concludes that exam pressure is a universal student issue unmitigated by the stream of study, where examination attitudes and mental stress remain deeply intertwined. The findings underscore an urgent need for local policymakers, educators, and counselors to introduce mental health interventions, guide optimal study habits, and transition toward balanced, progressive assessment reforms to mitigate this adolescent stress epidemic.

KEYWORDS: *Mark-Based Exam Attitude, Mental Stress, Higher Secondary Students, Chengalpattu District, Educational Assessment. SDG4 Quality Education, SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being*

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamentally a lifelong process designed to cultivate an individual's inherent potential, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to become productive members of society. In pedagogical theory, a crucial distinction exists between *education*—the external, transitive process occurring between teacher and learner—and *learning*, which is the internal transformation and comprehension experienced by the student. In the contemporary educational framework, particularly within India's higher secondary tier (Grades 11 and 12), this delicate balance between holistic learning and formal evaluation is increasingly strained. Higher secondary education serves as the critical gateway determining terminal university placements and future professional trajectories. Consequently, the assessment methodologies employed during this phase carry immense, high-stakes consequences for students, educators, and families alike.

While examinations are institutionally intended to objectively evaluate merit and academic readiness, the modern execution of these assessments has shifted student focus from deep conceptual understanding to a superficial, "mark-based" attitude. When academic success is quantified exclusively through terminal examination percentages, the intrinsic value of learning is superseded by rote memorization and performance pressure.

This systemic obsession with high scores alters how students perceive their own intelligence and academic worth, transforming a collaborative learning journey into a high-friction competitive environment.

The impact of this examination-centric paradigm is vividly observable within the rapidly evolving educational landscape of Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu. As a region characterized by a dense mix of semi-urban, rural, and burgeoning industrial zones, schools in Chengalpattu experience heightened institutional and societal pressures to deliver exceptional higher secondary board results.

Parents and local schools, keenly aware of the fierce competition for engineering, medical, and arts stream allocations in the state, often inadvertently amplify the pressure placed upon adolescents. This localized environment creates a critical intersection where intense parental expectations, institutional demands, and a mark-driven curriculum converge onto 11th and 12th-grade students.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE STUDY

The compounding pressure to secure elite marks manifests heavily as psychological distress, manifesting in persistent anxiety, sleep deprivation, and a profound fear of academic failure. Understanding the precise correlation between a mark-based examination attitude and the resulting mental health toll is paramount.

By evaluating the psychological landscape of higher secondary students specifically within Chengalpattu District, this study aims to provide empirical data on how localized socio-educational factors influence student well-being. Ultimately, the findings seek to inform local educators, counselors, and policymakers on the urgent necessity of balancing academic rigor with mental health interventions and progressive assessment reforms.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The existing literature reveals that high-stakes examination systems induce severe psychological distress, establishing a significant positive correlation between academic stress, test anxiety, and rigid institutional ranking structures—particularly at critical higher secondary milestones where the pressure to secure elite marks for university admission is paramount (Nagaraju, 2009; Jaisa, 2015).). Empirical findings demonstrate that these traditional, terminal evaluations often fail to reflect true academic merit or protect student well-being (Rama & Vasudhakar, 2013), with errors and performance deficits frequently driven by test environment anxiety, rule overgeneralization, and situational carelessness rather than a lack of foundational knowledge (Ozelem, 2015; Reining et al., 2014). Furthermore, this academic stress is heavily compounded by socio-familial variables, where

intense parental involvement, high parental expectations, urban localities, and dense syllabi consistently escalate adolescent anxiety and give rise to severe psychosomatic symptoms (Sukla, 2013; Suri, 2016). Conversely, contemporary research indicates that these negative attitudes and mental strains can be systematically mitigated by transitioning toward continuous, low-stakes formative assessments, incorporating internal project-based grading, fostering autonomous school climates, and leveraging structured family support to build versatile emotional coping mechanisms (Hardy, 1993; Tork, 1978; Pinar, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study utilized a descriptive survey research design to investigate the relationship between mark-based examination attitudes and mental stress among higher secondary school students in the Chengalpattu district. Employing a random sampling technique, a representative sample of 500 students was selected from various higher secondary schools across the district. Data collection was executed using a self-constructed instrument titled the "Mark-Based Examination Attitude and Mental Stress Questionnaire," which comprised two primary scales containing 40 items each, alongside a personal data sheet to capture key demographic variables: gender, group of study (arts vs. science), type of school management (Govt, Aided, Private school), study method (memorizing vs. understanding), and daily study hours. The gathered data will be analyzed quantitatively to test five primary null hypotheses concerning significant differential variations in students' examination attitudes and mental stress levels across these demographic classifications.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation and t-value for the scores on Mark Based Exam Attitude & Mental Stress with respect to Gender.

Research Variable	Boys N = 208		Girls N = 292		t-value	Level of Significant
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Mark Based Exam Attitude	26.70	5.31	24.80	6.25	3.66	S
Mental Stress	18.68	6.70	16.36	7.22	3.70	S

The t – value calculated for Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress with respect to Gender reveals that the Boys and Girls differed significantly.

Table 2

Mean Standard Deviation and t - value for the scores on Mark Based Exam Attitude & Mental Stress with respect to Student's Group of Study.

Research Variable	Arts Group N = 220		Science Group N = 280		t-value	Level of Significant
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Mark Based Exam Attitude	25.96	5.93	25.30	5.95	1.23	N.S
Mental Stress	16.76	6.64	17.76	7.41	1.58	N.S

The t – value calculated for Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress with respect to Group of Study reveals that the Arts and Science Group Students did not differ significantly even at 0.05 level.

Table 3

Mean Standard Deviation and F – Ratio for the scores on Mark Based Exam Attitude & Mental Stress with respect to Type of School Management.

Research Variable	Govt School N = 194		Aided School N = 173		Private School N = 133		F-ratio	Level of Significance	Groups Differed Significantly
	(1)		(2)		(3)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Mark Based Exam Attitude	22.83	5.99	27.71	5.48	26.87	4.83	40.54	S	(1,2) (1,3)
Mental Stress	16.02	6.59	16.17	7.39	20.71	6.30	22.54	S	(1,3) (2,3)

The F-ratio calculated for the Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress with respect to Type of School reveals that the students differed significantly in Mark Based Exam Attitude and its entire dimensions.

Further analysis of difference between Types of Schools tested through Turkey-HSD reveals that the students who are studying in Govt. School differ significantly with Aided School and Private School in Mark Based Exam Attitude. Whereas in Mental Stress the students studying in Private school differed significantly with those who are studying in Govt. and Aided school.

Tale 4

Mean Standard Deviation and t - value for the scores on Mark Based Exam Attitude & Mental Stress with respect to Study Method.

Research Variable	Memorizing N = 225		Understating N = 275		t-value	Level of Significant
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Mark Based Exam Attitude	25.00	6.49	26.08	5.43	1.99	S
Mental Stress	16.39	7.20	18.09	6.92	2.67	S

The t - value calculated for the Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress with respect to Student's Study Method reveals that the students differ significantly in Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress.

Table 5

Mean Standard Deviation and F – Ratio for the scores on Mark Based Exam Attitude & Mental Stress with respect to Study Hour.

Research Variable	1 Hours N = 151		2 Hours N = 211		3 Hours N = 138		F-ratio	Level of Significance	Groups Differed Significantly
	(1)		(2)		(3)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			

Mark Based Exam Attitude	**26.04**	**5.08**	**27.36**	**5.50**	**22.41**	**6.24**	**33.22**	**S**	**(1,3) (2,3)**
Mental Stress	**19.70**	**6.57**	**16.68**	**7.35**	**15.70**	**6.60**	**13.56**	**S**	**(1,2) (1,3)**

The F-ratio calculated for the Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress with respect to Study Hours reveals that the students differed significantly.

Further analysis of difference between Types of Schools tested through Turkey-HSD reveals that the students who are studying for 3 Hours differ significantly with those who are studying for 2 Hours and 1 Hours in Mark Based Exam Attitude. Whereas in Mental Stress the students studying in for 1 hours differed significantly with those who are studying for 2 Hours and 3 Hours.

Table 6
Relationship between Mark Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress

Research Variable	Correlation Value (r)	Remark
Mark Based Exam Attitude Vs Mental Stress	0.73	High Negative Correlation

It is found that Mark Based Exam Attitude **is** High negatively correlated with Mental Stress.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- There is a statistically significant difference between boys and girls regarding both their Mark-Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress (t-test results).
- Students from the Arts and Science streams do not differ significantly in their Mark-Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress, even at the 0.05 significance level.
- The type of school (Government, Aided, Private) significantly impacts students' Mark-Based Exam Attitude (including all its dimensions) and Mental Stress. Government school students differ significantly from both Aided and Private school students. Private school students experience significantly different levels of mental stress compared to their peers in Government and Aided schools.
- The chosen study method leads to a significant difference in both exam attitude and mental stress levels.
- The number of daily study hours significantly impacts both variables. Students studying for **3 hours** differ significantly from those studying for 1 or 2 hours. Students studying for **1 hour** differ significantly from those studying for 2 or 3 hours.
- There is a **high negative correlation** between Mark-Based Exam Attitude and Mental Stress.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that demographic and academic environment factors—such as gender, school type, study methods, and daily study hours—play a critical role in shaping how students perceive exams and experience academic stress. Strikingly, the stream of study (Arts vs. Science) does not influence these psychological outcomes, suggesting that exam pressure is a universal student issue rather than stream-specific. Crucially, the strong negative correlation highlights that Mental Stress and Exam Attitude are deeply intertwined. Private schools and lower study hours (1 hour) are notably linked to distinct stress profiles, while higher study hours (3 hours) heavily skew exam attitudes. Ultimately, fostering a healthier, more balanced attitude toward mark-based evaluations is a direct pathway to mitigating the mental stress epidemic among students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Tailored Counseling by School Type and Gender

- **For Private Schools:** Targeted stress-management workshops and mental health counseling must be prioritized in Private Schools, as their students exhibit distinct and concerning stress patterns.
- **For Government Schools:** Academic orientation programs should be introduced in Government schools to help students reshape and optimize their attitude toward competitive, mark-based testing.

2. Guidance on Optimal Study Habits

- **Promote Balanced Study Hours:** Students should be guided away from extreme study habits. Time-management workshops should help "1-hour students" scale up efficiently to reduce anxiety, while ensuring "3-hour students" incorporate healthy breaks to avoid burnout.
- **Refine Study Methods:** Schools should actively teach modern, low-stress study techniques (e.g., active recall, spaced repetition) rather than leaving students to unguided study methods that fuel anxiety.

3. De-emphasizing a "Marks-Only" Culture

- **Holistic Evaluation:** School administrations and parents need to collaborate to shift the focus from pure rote-learning and marks to holistic skill development. Improving a student's fundamental attitude toward testing will naturally alleviate severe mental stress.

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