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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY ON ACADEMIC STRESS, BURNOUT AND COPING MECHANISMS AMONG MBA STUDENTS

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Abstract

Academic stress has become an important concern in management education because MBA students are required to manage academic workload, examinations, assignments, presentations, projects, internships, competition and career expectations within a limited period. This study examines academic stress, academic burnout and coping mechanisms among MBA students at Ashoka Business School (ABS), Nashik. A descriptive, quantitative and cross-sectional research design was adopted. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. A total of 110 questionnaires were distributed and 101 complete responses were retained for analysis. The study considers academic stressors such as workload, continuous assessments, tight deadlines, peer competition, internship and project pressure, faculty expectations, limited personal time, performance pressure, online or hybrid learning and fear of poor academic performance. It also examines burnout indicators including emotional exhaustion, daily fatigue, mental fatigue, concentration difficulty, frustration, reduced motivation and detachment from coursework. The findings show that fear of poor academic performance is a particularly prominent stressor, with 68.4% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Students also report substantial pressure from balancing academics with internships or projects and from lack of personal time. Burnout findings indicate considerable emotional and mental fatigue. At the same time, students use several coping mechanisms, including planning, peer and family support, relaxation, short breaks, positive reframing, hobbies and faculty guidance. The study concludes that academic stress should be addressed through a combined approach involving student-level coping skills and institutional support.

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Introduction:-**Background and Theoretical Framework:-**

Academic stress is increasingly recognized as a significant issue in higher education, particularly in professional programmes that combine intensive coursework with practical and career-oriented requirements. MBA students are expected to perform well in examinations, assignments, presentations and projects while also developing communication, analytical, leadership and professional skills. Internships, placement preparation and competition for employment can add another layer of pressure. When several demands occur simultaneously, students may experience worry, fatigue, reduced concentration and difficulty maintaining a healthy balance between academic and personal life. Academic stress can be understood as the psychological pressure experienced when students perceive that academic demands are difficult to manage with the time, energy, skills or support available to them.

The Transactional Model of Stress emphasizes the role of appraisal: the same assignment or examination may be perceived as manageable by one student and highly stressful by another depending on preparation, confidence and available resources. This perspective is useful for understanding why MBA students with similar academic schedules can report different stress experiences. The burnout perspective explains how prolonged pressure may contribute to emotional exhaustion, detachment from academic activities and a reduced sense of accomplishment. In student settings, burnout may appear through feeling drained, losing enthusiasm, experiencing concentration difficulties, becoming frustrated and feeling that academic effort is not producing desired results. Burnout should be distinguished from ordinary short-term tiredness because it is associated with persistent or repeated demands and inadequate recovery. The Demand-Control-Support perspective further suggests that high demands become more difficult when students have limited control over their schedules and insufficient social or academic support.

In an MBA programme, assessment clustering, strict deadlines and simultaneous projects may increase demands, while clear instructions, mentoring, peer support and flexible planning can provide resources. The Conservation of Resources perspective also helps explain why continuous academic pressure may consume time, energy, motivation and attention. Coping mechanisms are the strategies students use to manage academic demands and their emotional responses. Problem-focused coping includes planning, prioritizing tasks and managing time, whereas emotion-focused coping may include relaxation, positive reframing, hobbies and social support. A balanced coping approach can help students manage immediate pressure while protecting longer-term well-being.

Statement of the Problem: -

MBA students face academic pressure due to assignments, examinations, presentations, projects, internships, deadlines, peer competition and expectations about performance and future careers. When these demands accumulate, students may experience anxiety, fatigue, reduced motivation and difficulty concentrating. Prolonged academic pressure may also be associated with burnout-like experiences. Although students use different coping methods, the extent to which these methods are used and perceived as useful can differ across students. The problem is therefore not simply the presence of academic stress but the combination of multiple demands, limited recovery time and performance anxiety. The local context of MBA education in Nashik provides an opportunity to examine these issues using primary data from students. Understanding the specific stressors and coping mechanisms can help educational institutions design more relevant support rather than relying only on general advice.

Objectives of the Study: -

1. To study the level and major sources of academic stress among MBA students.
2. To identify the major indicators associated with academic burnout.
3. To examine the coping mechanisms used by MBA students to manage academic pressure.
4. To understand the practical implications of stress and burnout for students and educational institutions.
5. To suggest measures for reducing avoidable academic pressure and strengthening healthy coping.

Significance of the Study:-

The study has academic significance because it brings academic stress, burnout and coping mechanisms into one research framework. It provides field-based evidence that can be used by students and future researchers as a reference for understanding the academic experiences of MBA students. It also connects theoretical concepts of stress and coping with actual responses collected from students. The institutional significance of the study lies in its practical implications. Colleges can use such findings to review the scheduling of assessments, provide mentoring and counselling, strengthen peer-support systems and improve communication about academic expectations. A supportive academic environment can help students maintain performance without creating unnecessary

pressure. The study is also relevant to student welfare. Stress can influence concentration, motivation, emotional energy and the ability to maintain personal routines. By identifying common stressors and coping methods, students can become more aware of their own patterns and seek appropriate support when pressure becomes difficult to manage.

Scope and Limitations:-

The study is confined to MBA students at ABS, Nashik, and focuses on academic stress, burnout indicators and coping mechanisms. It does not attempt to diagnose clinical mental-health conditions. The findings are based on self-reported responses and are descriptive in nature. The sample is a convenience sample, and the study is cross-sectional; therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all MBA students without further research.

Review of Literature: -

Bakhsh and Sayed (2015) examined sources of academic stress among regular and executive MBA students. Their work highlighted heavy coursework, numerous assignments, competition, syllabus demands and dissatisfaction with teaching methods as important stress sources. The study also emphasized practical strategies such as time management, task organization and adequate sleep. The relevance of this work to the present study is strong because both studies focus on the MBA learning environment and recognize that academic demands can influence students' psychological and physical well-being. Kushendar and Maba (2023) studied peer counselling as a coping strategy for academic stress and burnout among final-year students. Their discussion identifies workload, examinations, expectations, competition, limited time and fear of failure as important sources of pressure. Peer counselling was presented as a useful support mechanism because students may find it easier to discuss academic difficulties with classmates or friends. This perspective supports the present study's attention to peer and social support.

Shrivastav's (2025) work on psychological capital and burnout emphasizes resources such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. Although the context is employee well-being, the underlying idea is relevant to students because confidence and resilience may influence how individuals respond to pressure. Students who believe they can handle challenges may be more likely to plan, seek support and continue working through difficulties. Kalbande (2025) examined stress and burnout among social workers and emphasized workload, emotional pressure and organizational support. The study discussed self-care, colleague support and mindfulness as coping approaches. Although social work is different from management education, the findings reinforce the idea that both personal coping and organizational support are necessary when demands remain high. Wilczek-Rużyczka and Jabłeka (2013) discussed burnout and stress-coping strategies among academic students. Examinations, heavy study work, limited free time and unclear expectations were identified as important stressors. The study distinguishes problem-focused coping from emotional or avoidant coping and suggests that task-focused strategies can provide students with greater control over academic pressure.

Research Gap:-

The literature indicates that academic stress and burnout have been widely studied among students and employees, but comparatively less attention has been given to MBA students in a local Indian institutional context. MBA students face a combination of academic workload, practical projects, internships, presentations, placement preparation and competition. These demands may produce stress patterns that differ from those of other student groups. A second gap is that many studies examine stress or burnout separately. Fewer studies bring stressors, burnout indicators and coping mechanisms together within one field-based framework. The present study addresses this gap by examining the three areas in a single questionnaire among MBA students at ABS, Nashik. A third gap concerns practical coping. Identifying stressors alone does not tell institutions which support resources students actually use. The present research therefore considers planning, peer support, family support, relaxation, breaks, positive reframing, faculty guidance, hobbies and confidence in handling challenges. This provides a more complete picture of the student experience.

Research Methodology: -**Research Design:-**

The study adopts a descriptive, quantitative, and cross-sectional research design. The descriptive approach is appropriate because the main purpose is to identify and explain patterns of academic stress, burnout and coping among MBA students. The study does not manipulate variables and does not attempt to establish experimental cause-and-effect relationships. Primary data were collected directly from MBA students through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in simple English and included demographic questions followed by

statements relating to academic stress, burnout and coping mechanisms. The cross-sectional design means that responses were collected during a defined field-project period and represent students' reported experiences at that time.

Data Sources and Instrument:-

Primary data are the core source of the present study. The field project records that 110 questionnaires were distributed and 101 complete responses were retained for analysis. Secondary sources, including books, research articles and previous studies, were used to develop the theoretical framework and literature review. The questionnaire contained 35 questions. Five questions covered demographic information. Ten statements measured academic stress, ten measured academic burnout, and ten examined coping mechanisms. Except for demographic questions, the study used a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The instrument was designed to capture practical student experiences such as workload, deadlines, performance pressure, fatigue, concentration, support and relaxation.

Sampling Method and Area: -

Convenience sampling was used because the respondents were accessible to the researcher within the field-project period. The sampling area was Ashoka Business School, Nashik, Maharashtra. The sampling unit was the individual MBA student. The study included MBA first-year and second-year students and respondents from different specializations. The use of convenience sampling is practical for institution-level academic field research, but it has a limitation: the sample may not perfectly represent the wider MBA population. Therefore, the findings are best understood as evidence from the selected ABS sample rather than as a universal estimate.

Data Collection Procedure:- The questionnaire was distributed through online and offline modes. Online distribution allowed students to respond through Google Forms, while printed forms could be used where required. Responses were checked and organized before analysis. The data were then coded for percentage and descriptive interpretation.

Tools Used for Analysis:- SPSS was identified as the primary statistical software in the field project. Percentage and frequency analysis were used to summarize demographic and Likert-scale responses. The project also describes the use of descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha for reliability, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, ANOVA, Chi-square, weighted mean and ranking analysis. In this research-paper version, emphasis is placed on the reported descriptive findings because the field project data presented to the researcher provide the clearest basis for interpretation.

Results: -

Sample Profile:- The respondent profile shows that 81.2% of the sample consists of MBA first-year students, while 18.8% are second-year students. The dominance of first-year respondents means that the overall findings are influenced strongly by the experiences of students who are still adapting to the MBA academic environment. First-year students may face adjustment to the course structure, new teaching methods, continuous assessment and competitive expectations. The age distribution is concentrated in the 21–23 years group, which accounts for 85.1% of respondents. This is a typical age range for MBA students and represents a stage in which students are actively preparing for professional careers. Career expectations and concern about future employment can therefore interact with academic pressure. Gender distribution is highly concentrated among female respondents, who represent 85.1% of the sample, while male respondents account for 14.9%. No respondent selected the other category. The findings therefore reflect the experiences of the sampled group and should not be treated as a gender-balanced estimate. Finance students represent the largest specialization group at 51.5%, followed by HR, Business Analytics and Marketing. Because Finance students form more than half of the sample, the overall stress pattern may reflect their experiences more strongly than those of other specializations.

Discussion: -

The central finding of this study is that academic stress among MBA students is multidimensional. Workload, continuous assessments, deadlines, competition, faculty expectations, limited personal time, performance pressure, online or hybrid learning, internships and projects all contribute to the academic pressure reported by respondents. The strongest individual indicator is fear of poor academic performance, suggesting that psychological concerns about outcomes may be as important as the academic task themselves. The finding of 68.4% agreement on fear of poor performance is particularly important because academic performance in an MBA programme is often connected

with students' expectations about placement and future career development. A student may therefore perceive a lower grade not only as an academic setback but as a possible threat to future opportunities. This can increase anxiety and encourage excessive comparison with peers. The study also identifies time-related pressure as a recurring theme. Continuous assessments, tight deadlines, internship or project responsibilities and lack of personal time all show substantial agreement. These factors are interconnected because students have a fixed amount of time. When academic requirements accumulate, personal time and recovery may be reduced, which can contribute to fatigue and emotional exhaustion. The burnout findings are consistent with this interpretation. Feeling drained at the end of the academic day, emotional exhaustion, mental fatigue, concentration difficulty and frustration are all reported by substantial proportions of respondents. These results do not prove that academic stress causes burnout, but they indicate that students experience a pattern of pressure and reduced energy that deserves institutional attention.

The coping findings provide a positive dimension to the study. Students are not passive in the face of stress. They plan academic work, seek support from peers and family, take short breaks, use relaxation activities, reframe stressful situations, seek faculty guidance and maintain hobbies. Short breaks and confidence in handling challenges receive particularly high agreement. These findings suggest that students already have coping resources that can be strengthened through institutional support. The findings are broadly consistent with Bakhsh and Sayed, who emphasized workload, assignments, competition and time management among MBA students. They also support the importance of peer support discussed by Kushendar and Maba. The role of psychological resources discussed by Shrivastav is reflected in the present finding on confidence in handling academic challenges. The importance of organizational support in Kalbande's work also has a parallel in the present study's recommendation for institutional mentoring and counselling. Overall, the results suggest that stress management should not be treated as the student's responsibility alone. Students can improve planning and recovery habits, but academic systems also influence stress. Coordinated assessment schedules, clear expectations, supportive faculty communication and accessible mentoring can reduce avoidable pressure. The best approach is therefore a shared responsibility between students, faculty and institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations: -

Conclusion:-

This study concludes that academic stress and burnout-related experiences are important concerns among the selected MBA students at ABS, Nashik. Students face pressure from workload, continuous assessments, tight deadlines, peer competition, faculty expectations, limited personal time, performance pressure, online or hybrid learning and the challenge of balancing academics with internships and projects. Fear of poor academic performance is the most prominent reported stressor, with 68.4% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This result suggests that academic stress is not only about the amount of work students receive but also about how strongly they connect academic performance with their future. Career expectations and competition may therefore intensify the psychological impact of academic demands.

Burnout indicators show a related pattern. Many students report feeling drained, emotionally exhausted and mentally fatigued, while concentration difficulty, frustration, reduced motivation and detachment from coursework are also present. These findings indicate a need for early support and recovery rather than waiting until students become severely disengaged. At the same time, students use a wide range of coping mechanisms. Planning, peer support, family support, relaxation, short breaks, positive reframing, faculty guidance and hobbies are all used. The strong response to short breaks and confidence in handling challenges indicates that many students have practical resources that can be strengthened. The overall conclusion is that academic stress cannot be eliminated completely from management education because academic challenge is part of professional development. However, unnecessary and excessive pressure can be reduced. A combined approach involving student self-management, supportive faculty practices and institutional systems is most appropriate for creating a healthier and more productive MBA learning environment.

Recommendations:-

1. Conduct regular student stress-management and academic well-being awareness programmes.
2. Provide accessible counselling, mentoring and peer-support facilities.
3. Coordinate assignment, test and presentation schedules to reduce excessive clustering of deadlines.
4. Conduct workshops on time management, study planning, examination preparation and work-life balance.
5. Encourage students to use short breaks, exercise, hobbies and other healthy recovery activities.
6. Promote positive and collaborative classroom environments that reduce unnecessary peer comparison.

7. Provide clear assessment criteria and constructive feedback so students understand academic expectations.
8. Strengthen faculty-student communication and create safe channels for students to discuss academic difficulties.
9. Encourage students to seek support from family, friends, mentors or professional services when stress becomes difficult to manage.
10. Review online and hybrid learning support, including communication, technical assistance and student engagement.

Scope for Future Research: -

Future research can include students from multiple MBA colleges and cities to improve generalizability. Larger and more balanced samples can allow meaningful comparison by gender, year of study and specialization. Longitudinal studies can examine how stress changes during examinations, internships, project submissions and placement periods. Mixed-method research using interviews and focus groups can provide deeper understanding of students' personal experiences. Future researchers can also test specific interventions such as time-management workshops, peer counselling, mindfulness programmes or assessment-scheduling changes. Such studies would move beyond descriptive measurement and evaluate which interventions actually reduce stress or burnout indicators over time.

Appendix: Questionnaire Structure: -

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. Section A covered demographic information such as age, gender, year of study and specialization. Section B contained ten academic-stress statements concerning workload, continuous assessments, deadlines, peer competition, internship and project balance, faculty expectations, personal time, performance pressure, online or hybrid learning and fear of poor academic performance. Section C contained ten burnout statements covering emotional exhaustion, feeling drained, reduced enthusiasm, mental fatigue, detachment, effort and results, concentration, frustration, motivation and burnout. Section D contained ten coping statements covering planning, peer support, family support, relaxation, short breaks, positive reframing, faculty guidance, hobbies, confidence and perceived effectiveness of coping. The research paper has been structured in the same academic sequence as the supplied research-paper format: title and author information, abstract and keywords, introduction, literature review, research gap, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, recommendations, future scope and references. Tables have been kept to a minimum and the substantive findings are presented mainly through paragraphs and interpretation.

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