Research Article

Assessment of the Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among School-Going Adolescent Females: Detailed Article

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ABSTRACT
Background: Adolescence is a critical developmental stage involving rapid biological, cognitive, and social transitions. These changes may predispose adolescents to emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Female adolescents are consistently reported to be at higher risk for such disorders compared to males. Early identification of psychological distress is essential for timely intervention.
Objectives: To assess the prevalence and severity of depression, anxiety, and stress among school-going adolescent females.
Methods: A cross-sectional observational study was conducted among 300 adolescent females aged 13-18 years enrolled in selected secondary and higher secondary schools. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) was used to assess psychological symptoms. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.
Results: Results showed high prevalence of psychological distress: anxiety (47.3%), stress (32.0%), and depression (26.0%). Most participants demonstrated moderate severity of anxiety and stress, while a large subset also presented with mild to moderate depressive symptoms.
Conclusion: The findings indicate a significant psychological burden among school-going adolescent females. Implementation of routine mental health screening, in-school counseling services, and psychosocial support programs is recommended.

Keywords. Adolescent Females; Depression; Anxiety; Stress; DASS-21; School Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical transitional period between childhood and adulthood characterized by rapid biological, psychological, and social changes. Mental health disorders frequently emerge during this phase, with depression, anxiety, and stress being among the most common conditions affecting adolescents worldwide. Adolescence, typically defined as the period between 10 and 19 years of age, is a unique phase marked by rapid physical growth, hormonal change, evolving cognitive abilities, and intricate social dynamics. This transitional phase often exposes adolescents to various psychological pressures, which may culminate in emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress.[1-3]

Globally, depression and anxiety disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability in adolescents. Adolescence is also a period where gender differences in emotional disorders become more prominent, with female adolescents exhibiting higher rates of internalizing problems compared to males. Contributory factors include biological changes (puberty), negative body image, academic pressure, peer relationship stress, and societal expectations.[4-5]

Psychological distress during adolescence can adversely affect academic performance, social functioning, physical health, and long-term mental well-being. Schools provide a strategic setting for early detection and intervention. Although many studies have examined adolescent mental health, few have specifically focused on the female population.[6-8]

This study aims to determine the prevalence and severity of depression, anxiety, and stress among school-going adolescent females.

Global Perspective

According to the World Health Organization, one in seven adolescents globally suffers from a mental health disorder, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent. These conditions develop early and are often persistent if unrecognized and untreated.

Regional and National Findings

Studies conducted across various regions of India have reported high prevalence rates of psychological distress among adolescents. For example:

- A study in Delhi reported prevalence rates of 47.9% for depression, 65.3% for anxiety, and 51.8% for stress among school students.
- In Chandigarh, nearly half of the adolescent female students showed significant levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms.

These findings reiterate the importance of focusing on adolescent mental health, particularly among females.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the prevalence of depression among school-going adolescent females.
2. To assess the prevalence of anxiety among school-going adolescent females.
3. To assess the prevalence of stress among school-going adolescent females.
4. To classify the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress among participants.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted.

Study Setting

The study was carried out in selected secondary and higher secondary schools.

Population and Sample

School-going adolescent females aged 13–18 years were included. A total of 300 students were selected using simple random sampling.

Instruments Used

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), a validated instrument with strong psychometric properties, was used to assess psychological symptoms. The questionnaire contains three subscales:

- Depression (7 items),
- Anxiety (7 items),
- Stress (7 items).

Each item is scored from 0 (did not apply) to 3 (applied most of the time), yielding cumulative scores for each subscale.

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining permission from school authorities and informed consent from participants, the DASS-21 was administered during school hours in a quiet classroom setting. Participants were assured confidentiality and were encouraged to respond honestly.

Data Analysis

Data were entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize the prevalence and severity of depression, anxiety, and stress.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	13–15 years	180	60
	16–18 years	120	40
Class	Secondary	150	50
	Senior Secondary	150	50
Family Type	Nuclear	210	70
	Joint	90	30

Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Psychological Condition	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Depression	78	26
Anxiety	142	47.3
Stress	96	32

Severity Distribution Depression

Severity Level	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Normal	114	38
Mild	66	22
Moderate	78	26
Severe & Extremely Severe	42	14

Anxiety

Severity Level	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Normal	87	29
Mild	57	19
Moderate	93	31
Severe & Extremely Severe	63	21

Stress

Severity Level	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Normal	123	41
Mild	60	20
Moderate	81	27
Severe & Extremely Severe	36	12

DISCUSSION

The present study revealed a high prevalence of psychological distress among school-going female adolescents. Anxiety was the most common disorder (47.3%), followed by stress (32.0%) and depression (26.0%).

The predominance of anxiety aligns with previous research indicating that adolescent females often experience high levels of worry related to academic performance, social relationships, and future uncertainty. The moderate severity in a large portion of participants suggests ongoing distress that may impact daily functioning.[9-10]

Depression, while less prevalent than anxiety, was still seen in more than a quarter of the participants. This is consistent with findings from other studies that identify adolescent girls as at heightened risk for depressive symptoms during mid to late adolescence, particularly when confronted with social pressures or internalized stress.[11-14]

Stress levels were also significant, indicating that external pressures such as school workload, parental expectations, and peer dynamics contribute to psychological strain in adolescent girls.[15-16]

Implications
The Findings Highlight the need for:
- Routine mental health screenings in schools
- Availability of school counselors and psychologists
- Implementation of stress management and life skills programs
- Training for teachers and parents to recognize early signs of emotional distress

Limitations
- Cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations.
- Use of self-reporting measures may introduce response bias.
- Study confined to selected schools limits generalizability.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated a significant burden of depression, anxiety, and stress among school-going adolescent females. Anxiety emerged as the most prevalent condition, followed by stress and depression. Considering the significant psychological impact, it is essential to implement school-based mental health programs, parent education, and supportive interventions to promote adolescent well-being.

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