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Impact of Parental Pressure on Students Academic Performance and Psychological Well-Being: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT :

This review integrates and analyses the available body of evidence regarding the effects of parental academic pressure on student academic performance and mental health. In this study emphasis is placed on peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025, and foundational studies. While the clear consensus is that the integrating role of realistic parental expectations and proper involvement in child school activities leads to higher levels of academic performance, self-actualization and mental health, the uniform negative effect of intrusive and controlling parenting styles in school activities is also evidenced. In such cases, parental pressure and academic expectations create a hostile school environment that psychologically drain children and increase their risk of developing psychosomatic disorders, depressive symptoms, anxiety, self-handicapping and burnout. There is evidence that an effect of parental expectations on a child's achievement and well-being is mainly based on how such expectations are framed, a child's psychosocial and motivational development, the family's psychosocial capital and the school's and cultural environment. The evidence from India and other similar contexts highlight the importance of decoupling academic aspiration and coercion.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Self Efficacy, Academic Stress, Parental Expectations

Introduction

The need to compete educationally has heightened the significance of grades, tests, admission, and job outcomes in family life. Parents can contribute positively by helping their children understand the value of education, making resources available to them, and tracking their progress. Parents build and sustain the expectations they have of their children. More numbers of children in the family leads to increases in expectations, the need to compete, and the concern for children's educational outcomes. Research shows that parental expectations can be found as part of parental involvement, and the two of them together can explain the variation in children's academic performance (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Castro et al., 2015; Wilder, 2014; Kim, 2022; Jeynes, 2024; Erdem & Kaya, 2020). Evidence also shows that engagement and educational performance can be strengthened by family support, a constructive learning environment at home, and alignment between parents and children with regards to their education (Koepp et al., 2022; Wang & Wei, 2024; Xu et al., 2024a; Li et al., 2024; Wang, 2024).

The problem here is that the concepts of high expectations, involvement and pressure are not the same. Parents can apply pressure on their children in different ways, e.g., by comparing them to their siblings or peers, controlling and regulating their children's leisure time, schooling, or family activities, by depriving them of love, or using threat or unrealistically high standards. All the aforementioned processes can elevate performance pressure, and at the same time undermine children's emotional and psychological security. Therefore, the focus of this review is to what extent, if any, parental expectations promote children's performance in education and what are the consequences of such expectations to children's motivation and mental health. I critically synthesize the evidence from India and neighboring countries, Europe, and East Asia.

Conceptualizing Parental Academic Pressure and Related Theories

Parental academic pressure refers to the perceived requirement by students to fulfill educationally valued standards outside the family, particularly when failure to do so has emotional or relational consequences. This overlaps with expectation and/or monitoring, but is different in the sense that it involves coercion, and does so in an intense and restrictive manner (Kaynak et al., 2021). Measurement research shows that perceived parental academic pressure is a distinguishable construct, while broader parenting meta-analysis shows that warmth, behavioral guidance and autonomy granting, are different from psychological control or harsh parenting styles (Kaynak et al., 2021; Pinquart, 2016). The distinction is also evident in research that "more" involvement is not necessarily better. Intrusive support with homework can be dys-functional, while desirable and well-structured home-based learning can be beneficial (Patall et al., 2008; Otani, 2020; Lerner et al., 2022; Cui et al., 2024).

In the context of the theory of self-determination, if parents empower child autonomy, competence and relatedness, children internalize educational aspirations; otherwise, parental involvement switches children's motivation toward compliance, and if things are really bad, motivation (Joussemet et

al., 2008; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Guo et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In line with expectancy-value perspectives, parental pressure switches children's beliefs about their capacity to achieve as well as their beliefs regarding the worthwhile of educational endeavors; achievement-goal perspectives predict that parental pressure focusing on social comparison, e.g. outperforming peers, can promote performance-avoidance behaviors rather than mastery (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Dotterer, 2022; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010; Yamamoto et al., 2022).

Impact of Parental Academic Pressure and Academic Outcomes

Parental expectations are considered one of the strongest components of involvement related to academic achievement of their child. Positive parental expectations and academic support are related to improvement in child's academic achievement, when parents also provide adequate resources and school communication. Several studies conducted on longitudinal and large-sample studies show that positive parental involvement and family educational processes are related to the achievement in mathematics and other areas (Wang & Wei, 2024). Other areas of learning (i.e., online learning, reading and digital learning, etc.) also show the positive effects of parental engagement. Positive expectations and support are related to parental engagement, and their absence may pose a threat to self-learning, creating self-doubt and anxiety, and can contribute to behavioral issues, disengagement, and burnout. Other research shows that family context, especially parental involvement and engagement in learning, along with the family's educational and economic resources, can positively impact self-learning and academic outcomes.

Student Motivation: From Internalization to Compliance

Student motivation is an essential element linking parenting with performance. There is consistent evidence that positive parental involvement is related to student motivation. However, the nature and rationale of parental involvement influence the outcome (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Özyıldırım, 2024; Boonk et al., 2022; Pinneo & Nolen, 2024). The involvement of parental control predicts a lack of student motivation and school worry, and is often associated with low grades. On the other hand, involvement with an emphasis on autonomy, combined with support, predicts student perceived competence and school worry, and is associated with higher grades.

There is ample research that supports involvement parenting and positive motivation in the development of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and adaptive behavior (Kovács et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023). There are contradictions, as research by Seo et al. (2025) shows that control over students' long-term life goals negatively influences students' academic motivation. What is key in all the above is internalization: students may, for example, comply with parents' requests to prepare for a school test and consequently obtain a good grade; but, in the process, become more dependent on external stimuli for school motivation, and become fearful of failure and uninterested in learning.

Mental-Health Impact of Academic Stress and Pressure

There is evidence to suggest that academic stress may adversely affect mental health. A review of 52 studies found an association between academic pressure and mental health issues of adolescents, although the review noted that heterogeneity and the majority of studies being observational limited the review's ability to come to conclusive causal evidence (Steare et al., 2023). Other cross-national studies have found schoolwork pressure to be detrimental to the mental well-being of children and adolescents, and evidence suggests that stress increases during adolescence due to an imbalance between the demands of school work and stress vs. social and emotional support (Cosma et al., 2020; Löfstedt et al., 2020; Kulakow et al., 2021; Birgersson et al., 2024; Ringdal et al., 2020). Academic stress has also been related to increased anxiety, depression, burnout, and lower life satisfaction in a multitude of settings (Fu et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2022; Högberg, 2021; Högberg et al., 2020; Moksnes et al., 2016; Yusoff et al., 2021).

Parental pressure can increase students' sense of achievement as a means of securing acceptance and self-worth. Chinese and Hong Kong research shows high parental pressure or expectations can cause anxiety and depression, but the effects can be moderated by the presence of parental warmth (Quach et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2024b). Pamuk and Circir (2025) connect perceived parental academic pressure to self-handicapping and subjective academic well-being. The stress process can also lead to burnout. Harsh family processes can also transmit burnout from parents to adolescents through the stress process of discipline and psychological distress (Zhang et al., 2023). Research studies on stress and multilevel models have shown that academic stress is context-dependent and can vary (Sun et al., 2011; Hosseinkhani et al., 2020a, b).

Thus, the pathway likely is perceived parental pressure -> threat appraisal/stress -> anxiety and burnout or depressive symptoms -> impaired engagement and well-being. Buffering effects of social relationships on well-being are supported by daily-diary and school-climate studies (Wang et al., 2021; Long et al., 2020; Lönnfjord & Hagquist, 2021; Redmond et al., 2022). Research on academic stress has shown a link between academic stress and suicidal ideation, and emphasizes the need for prevention and care (Ang & Huan, 2006a, b; Tang et al., 2020).

Cross-cultural Evidence and Indian Context

We see cross culturally how pressure impacts children differently based on gender, age, socioeconomic status, prior accomplishments, self-efficacy, resilience, peer and teacher support, as well as the match between the expectations of parents and students. (Koepp et al., 2022; Zhao & Bodovski, 2020; Tang & Tran, 2023; Tan et al., 2020). East Asian filial values may make high expectations culturally understandable, but may still create an overcontrolling, psychologically harmful culture (Guo et al., 2021; Yamamoto et al., 2022). Studies based on self-esteem, anxiety, and school climate indicate individual differences and variability in contexts (Krauss et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020; Haugan et al., 2021; Kaman et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022).

India is particularly pertinent because extreme competition in the educational system can concentrate family aspirations. There is a growing body of evidence for India in line with the broader international evidence. Available studies have linked academic pressure and stress with adolescent anxiety and mental health, and long-term studies have highlighted the role of hyperarousal and social acceptance in the relationship (Deb et al., 2015; Jayanthi et al., 2015; Trevethan et al., 2022). This line of evidence supports the need for interventions that focus on both the student and the family unit. Ultimately, the key elements that explain the theoretical gaps will remain until long-term studies are conducted. Similarly, in an Indonesian school context, higher academic stress has been linked to authoritarian parenting styles and democratic parenting, respectively, highlighting the role of relational styles (Utari & Hamid, 2021).

Critical Synthesis and Representative Evidence

From the literature, three conclusions may be drawn. First, parental expectations, in and of themselves, are not detrimental: they reflect confidence and structure and have an authentic educational focus and value. Second, the same expectation may be delivered in qualitatively different ways. Autonomy support and process feedback may foster self-control and effectively adjust to the child's current level, in contrast to psychological control and intrusive help that may foster a learned-helplessness mindset and chronic stress. Realistic calibration and process feedback may support self-efficacy and under-control anxiety, in contrast to repeated approval and comparison that may lead to a self-esteem focus and social comparisons. Third, parental expectations may conflict and trade off with one another. The achievement focus and educational value need to be part of the assessment as well (Steare et al., 2023).

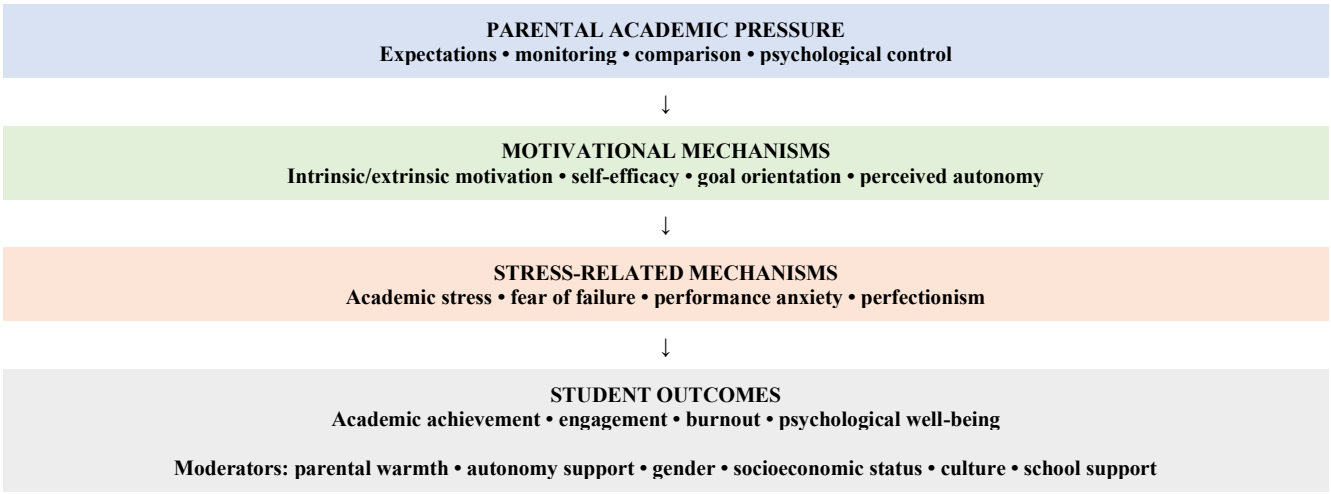
Because of several methodological limitations, stronger inference is not yet possible. For example, while many studies use a longitudinal design, they focus on smaller time spans and may be susceptible to the accumulation of ‘fixed effects’ and reinforcing feedback processes. Other studies use cross-sectional designs and may be susceptible to adolescent self-report biases that can distort objective demands of the situation into subjective levels of stress sensitivity. Finally, a lack of standardized measures and validated pressure scales make it difficult to assess family processes across cultures.

Table 1. Representative Studies on Parental Academic Pressure and Student Outcomes

Author(s) & Year	Country	Sample/Population	Study Design	Main Variable	Major Finding	Key Implication
Steare et al. (2023)	International	52 adolescent studies	Systematic review	Academic pressure	Pressure generally associated with mental-health problems	Assess pressure and well-being jointly
Xu et al. (2024b)	China	16,344 adolescents (CEPS)	Cross-sectional survey	Expectations and pressure	Higher parental expectations can operate through increased academic pressure	Separate aspiration from experienced pressure
Jeynes (2024)	Multiple settings	54 quantitative studies	Meta-analysis	Parental expectations	Expectations positively related to achievement	Expectations can be productive when not coercive
Kulakow et al. (2021)	Germany	Grade 8 adolescents	Two-wave longitudinal	School pressure/support	Support predicted more adaptive stress trajectories	Parental support can buffer school pressure
Lerner et al. (2022)	United States	School-age children and parents	Survey/mediation	Autonomy-supportive involvement	Autonomy support related to competence, motivation and grades	How parents help matters
Gao et al. (2020)	China	2,583 primary students	Cross-sectional family study	Psychological control	Control linked to poorer achievement under debilitating failure mindsets	Family and student beliefs interact
Trevethan et al. (2022)	India	282 adolescents	Longitudinal	Academic stress/anxiety	Stress predicted anxiety through physiological and social pathways	Mechanisms should be targeted
Kleinkorres et al. (2023)	Germany	Primary students	Cross-sectional	Parental vs school pressure	Both pressure sources related to lower well-being	Pressure is multi-contextual
Özyıldırım (2024)	Multiple settings	37 studies; 45,428 students	Meta-analysis	Parental involvement/motivation	Overall positive association with academic motivation	Quality and type of involvement remain important
Li et al. (2024)	China	Left-behind children	Survey/mediation	Expectations and involvement	Involvement mediated part of expectation-achievement association	Family processes explain expectation effects
Pamuk & Circir (2025)	Adolescents	Secondary-school students	Moderated mediation	Perceived parental pressure	Self-handicapping linked pressure to lower academic well-being	Avoid fear-based motivation

Eker & Yildizli (2025)	Türkiye	849 ninth-grade students	Structural equation modelling	Academic involvement/motivation	Support and monitoring predicted achievement; extrinsic motivation mediated	Achievement effects may coexist with externally regulated motivation

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Linking Parental Academic Pressure with Academic and Psychological Outcomes



Research Gaps, Practical Implications, and Future Directions

Further research should aim to include more longitudinal and multi-country studies, integrate dyadic parent-student data, include qualitative data and intervention studies, and test autonomy, self-efficacy, fear of failure, stress and burnout as mediators. It should examine whether digital monitoring and tutoring change the intensity and/or visibility of parental pressure. It should oversample low-income, rural and non-elite locations. In the context of home-based learning, engaging in research on parental support to build student resilience. Assuming parental support may no longer be warranted (Mamolo, 2022; Kanungo et al., 2024).

Research has shown that the use of explicit expectations is related to fewer negative parent-school interactions. Conversely, threats, comparisons and sexually suggestive comments were viewed to be the most damaging to the parent-school relationship. One important finding from the review was the consensus among stakeholders that parental involvement, while supportive and caring, should not be excessive and/or involve pressure and control. The involvement should facilitate, not overwhelm, students. Therefore, schools should ensure parental involvement is educational supportive and caring in nature (not pressure and control) and address parental concerns with school-related anxiety and/or emotional distress. Finally, in the area of parental involvement, the evidence reviewed indicates that facilitating/supporting (not overly participating) is the better of the two educational end-points.

The idea of distinguishing challenge from threat helps implement this principle. Challenging expectations involve setting goals within students' zone of attainment and providing timely feedback and scaffolding. Students retain some degree of voice in the process. Threatening expectations involve communicating to students and/or their families that the goal is beyond their zone of attainment and/or goal achievement depends on extraneous factors beyond their control, such as the student's relationship with the teacher. Setting challenging expectations requires interaction with families, a review of the workload, and student check-ins, in addition to policies and practices that address the well-being of students and the climate of the school.

We also took into account the broader body of evidence supporting these pathways with research that addresses the interaction of parents in the learning context, and the achievement-related home environment, and the relationship stress adjustment (Abu Bakar et al., 2021; Curtis et al., 2021; Fiskerstrand, 2022; Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2020; Tamayo Martinez et al., 2022). In addition, we relied on the original research addressing the relationships between parental involvement and student self-directed learning (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Joussemet et al., 2008) in order to emphasize the need for considering mechanisms and context rather than the absolute amount of parental involvement.

Conclusion

Parental academic expectations can be a developmental resource or a psychological burden. The focus should be on the motivation and the realism of the expectation. When expectations are realistic, students are less susceptible to burnout and more efficient at employing self-protective mechanisms. In the last decade of research, the most positive outcome on student achievement was the support of behavioral involvement of the parents. The Research associates negative parental involvement as coercive pressure, intrusive control, repeated social comparison, and conditional approval with psychological stress and a decline in students' psychological well-being. While the cultural values and competitive educational systems help modify the interpretation of pressure, the elimination of students' need for autonomy and secure relationships is not possible. In high-stakes environments, like that of India, finding the sweet spot between expectation and psychological safety is recommended. In order to achieve this, balancing behavioral expectations and the emotional needs of children is crucial. For practice, there is agreement among researchers that setting realistic and challenging

expectations is the goal for parents and teachers. Expectations should allow the child to develop intrinsic motivation and engage in self-regulated learning. This helps develop self-transcendence and self-actualization which leads to higher psychological well-being for the student.

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