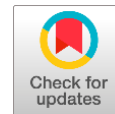


Burdened by Expectations: The Impact of Parental Pressure on College Students' Academic Stress



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Abstract This study explored the impact of parental pressure on academic stress among college students, aiming to understand how students' perceptions of their parents' expectations contribute to their overall academic experiences. Anchored on the need to examine psychosocial influences in higher education, the study seeks to clarify how external family expectations affect student well-being and academic performance. The research utilized a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design. A total of 225 college students were selected through simple random sampling to ensure fair representation and reduce selection bias. Data were collected using two standardized instruments: the Parental Pressure and Academic Stress as Perceived by Adolescents scale and the Questionnaire of Academic Stress in Secondary Education, both proven to be highly reliable. Descriptive statistics (mean and composite mean) were used to assess levels of the variables, and Spearman's rho correlation tested the relationship between them. Results revealed that students generally perceived a high level of parental pressure and experienced significant academic stress. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between perceived parental pressure and academic stress, suggesting that higher levels of perceived parental pressure are associated with increased levels of academic stress. These findings highlight the essential role of family-related factors in influencing students' academic and emotional well-being. The study concludes that while parental expectations can encourage achievement, excessive pressure may lead to psychological strain. Thus, educational institutions should consider psychosocial aspects when developing student support systems to foster a balanced and healthy learning environment.

Keywords: Academic motivation; College students; Mental health; Parental expectations; Student well-being

1. Introduction

Academic stress refers to the psychological distress or pressure experienced by students in response to academic demands and expectations. It arises from various sources such as heavy workload, tight deadlines, fear of failure, and the desire to meet high academic standards (Haspolat & Yalçın, 2023a). When unmanaged, academic stress can lead to negative outcomes including anxiety, sleep disturbances, poor concentration, and decreased academic performance (Rabbi & Islam, 2024a). It is widely acknowledged that persistent academic stress not only affects students' mental health but also undermines their motivation and overall well-being (Chemagosi, 2024a).

Parental pressure refers to the psychological influence exerted by parents on their children to meet certain expectations, particularly in academic achievement and career choices (Qadeer et al., 2025a). While parental involvement can have positive effects on student motivation and success, excessive pressure often leads to feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, and heightened stress (Wahyuni, 2025). Many students internalize their parents' high expectations, which may result in anxiety, perfectionism, and a diminished sense of autonomy. The impact of parental pressure is especially pronounced in



academic settings, where students feel compelled to perform not only for personal success but to fulfill family aspirations (Qadeer et al., 2025b).

In the Philippines, particularly in state universities across the southern part of the Philippines, these issues are highly relevant. Filipino families often place a strong emphasis on education as a means of upward social mobility, which can intensify parental expectations and academic stress among college students. The cultural importance of family reputation and collective achievement further shapes students' educational experiences, making the study of parental pressure in this context both timely and essential.

In today's academic landscape, students face growing mental health concerns due to the combined pressures of academic stress and parental expectations. Rising competition, rigid grading systems, and limited coping resources contribute to chronic stress, anxiety, and burnout among college students (Chemagosi, 2024b; Vetrivel et al., 2024). These issues are further intensified by parental pressure, which often manifests as unrealistic expectations, strict comparisons, or conditional approval based on performance (Curran & Hill, 2022; Iqbal et al., 2024). Students under such pressure frequently experience low self-esteem, fear of failure, and strained parent-child relationships, leading to emotional distress and withdrawal from academic and social activities (Qadeer et al., 2025c; Talley, 2024). As these problems continue to rise globally, they call for urgent attention from educational institutions, mental health professionals, and families alike.

Numerous studies have investigated the causes and consequences of academic stress among students, emphasizing its multidimensional nature. Research highlights that excessive academic demands, lack of time management skills, and high expectations from both self and others are key contributors to heightened stress levels (X. X. Luo, n.d.; Travis et al., 2020). These stressors have been found to negatively affect students' mental health, academic performance, and even physical well-being, leading to symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and sleep problems (Cheng et al., 2025). Moreover, students under chronic academic stress are more likely to experience burnout and disengagement from learning, signaling a need for institutional support systems and stress-reduction interventions (Walsham et al., 2023).

Studies on parental pressure have similarly revealed its significant impact on students' emotional and academic outcomes. Findings indicate that high levels of parental control and unrealistic expectations can undermine students' autonomy and increase anxiety and academic-related distress (Yu et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2024). Students who perceive their parents as overly demanding often report lower self-esteem, fear of failure, and reduced intrinsic motivation to learn (Lavrijsen et al., 2023; Nakhla, 2019). These effects are particularly evident in cultures where family reputation and academic success are closely intertwined, making it harder for students to separate personal growth from parental approval.

Despite the growing number of studies on academic stress and parental pressure, there remains a lack of sufficient data exploring the direct relationship between these two variables, particularly among college students. While existing research has examined each concept independently, few studies have thoroughly investigated how perceived parental pressure contributes to or intensifies academic stress in the higher education context. This gap limits our understanding of how family-related expectations influence students' psychological well-being and academic experiences. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the general research question: How does parental pressure impact the academic stress experienced by college students? The general purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress, with the goal of providing insights that may inform student support programs, family education efforts, and institutional mental health strategies.

This research is important as it sheds light on the lived experiences of college students who navigate the challenges of meeting academic demands while managing parental expectations. For the respondents, the study offers a platform to voice their struggles and gain awareness of the factors affecting their well-being. It also contributes to the body of knowledge by deepening our understanding of how familial influences intersect with academic stress. For the wider academic community, the findings may inform the development of supportive interventions, promote mental health awareness, and guide policy decisions in educational institutions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

This research employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive correlational approach. Quantitative This research employed a quantitative research design, specifically the descriptive correlational method, to explore the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress among college students. Quantitative research is a systematic

investigation that focuses on quantifying data and applying statistical methods to analyze variables and identify patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; J. B. Esto, 2024). The descriptive correlational design, in particular, seeks to determine the degree and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them, allowing researchers to observe natural associations as they occur (Esponja et al., 2025). Through this design, the study aims to describe the current conditions of students' experiences and examine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between parental pressure and academic stress. The use of a quantitative descriptive correlational design is appropriate for this research because it enables the researcher to gather measurable data from a large number of participants, ensuring reliability and objectivity (Jovita et al., 2025). This design allows for the identification of patterns and relationships between the key variables without requiring experimental control or manipulation. Given that the study aims to determine whether parental pressure is linked to levels of academic stress, this method provides a practical and efficient approach for assessing correlations in a natural academic setting. Moreover, it aligns well with the goal of generating data that can inform student support strategies and policy recommendations.

2.2. Respondents and sampling

This study involved 225 college students from a State University in the southern Philippines, who were selected using simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is a probability sampling technique in which every individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing the risk of bias and ensuring that the sample accurately represents the larger group (Ahmed, 2024; Dollente & Esto, 2025). This method was considered the most appropriate for the study because it allows for fair representation of diverse student experiences across various academic programs. By giving each student an equal opportunity to participate, the sampling approach enhances the generalizability of the findings and strengthens the validity of conclusions drawn regarding the relationship between parental pressure and academic stress.

2.3. Research instrument

This study utilized standardized questionnaires to measure parental pressure and academic stress, both adopted from previously validated instruments. The Parental Pressure and Academic Stress as Perceived by Adolescents questionnaire developed by (Jindal et al., 2022) was used to assess students' perceived parental expectations and pressure, with a reported reliability index of 0.82. To measure academic stress, the study employed the Questionnaire of Academic Stress in Secondary Education developed by (García-Ros et al., 2018) which demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including a reliability index of 0.87. These instruments were selected for their validity and reliability in assessing the constructs central to this research. Minor modifications were made to adapt the items to the college setting while retaining the integrity of the original scales. The use of these validated tools ensured that the data collected was both accurate and suitable for quantitative analysis.

2.4. Statistical analysis

This study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to analyze the data collected (J. Esto et al., 2025; J. B. Esto et al., 2025). Descriptive statistics, including the mean and composite mean, were used to summarize and describe the levels of parental pressure and academic stress experienced by the respondents. To determine the relationship between the two variables, Spearman's rho correlation was used as the inferential statistical tool. This non-parametric test is most appropriate for this study because it measures the strength and direction of association between two ordinal or non-normally distributed variables (Ali Abd Al-Hameed, 2022). Given the nature of the data collected through Likert-scale questionnaires, Spearman's rho provided a suitable method for identifying significant correlations without assuming linearity or normality. This approach ensured that the analysis remained robust and statistically sound.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the levels of parental pressure as perceived by the respondents based on their responses to the standardized questionnaire. The results reflect the overall degree to which students feel influenced or pressured by their parents in relation to their academic performance.

Table 1. Parental Pressure as Perceived by the Respondents		
Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
2. My parents believe that I should be working harder in school.	3.25	Agree
1. My parents believe that I must support them when they become old.	3.13	Agree
9. My parents want me to be more responsible in life and take care of my family after graduation.	2.97	Agree

5. My parents believe that I should be better than they are.	2.86	Agree
8. My parents believe that I should tell them before doing anything.	2.79	Agree
4. My parents believe that I should excel in everything and achieve good grades.	2.77	Agree
6. My parents want me to excel in studies as well as in co-curricular activities.	2.72	Agree
11. I have to keep living up to their expectations so that they won't be disappointed.	2.69	Agree
10. My parents keep nagging me about little things.	2.30	Agree
7. My parents want me to get better grades than my cousins and friends.	2.16	Disagree
3. My parents always compare me with other children.	2.10	Disagree
Grand Mean	2.71	High Parental Pressure

Legend:

Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Very High Parental Pressure
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Parental Pressure
2.49-1.50	Disagree	Moderate Parental Pressure
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Low Parental Pressure

Table 2 displays the levels of academic stress experienced by the respondents as measured by the academic stress questionnaire. The data illustrates how frequently students encounter stress-related symptoms and challenges in relation to their academic responsibilities.

Table 2. Academic Stress among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
6. I believe academic results are crucial for my future.	3.09	Agree
9. I feel stressed when I fail to live up to my expectations.	3.08	Agree
16. I fear that I will forget the content during the exams.	3.02	Agree
14. I feel nervous before any exam.	2.97	Agree
2. There is too much homework.	2.91	Agree
11. I feel stressed when my assignments are not completed on time.	2.90	Agree
10. I cannot sleep because of the worry that I will not be able to meet the goals I have set for myself.	2.84	Agree
12. I feel I lack the time to complete all the activities I am required to do.	2.84	Agree
5. I feel stressed due to work-related issues and daily study.	2.81	Agree
3. I feel there are too many tests and exams.	2.77	Agree
1. I find it challenging to concentrate during classes.	2.75	Agree
13. Discussions and conflicts in the family related to my study give me stress.	2.64	Agree
4. Competition among classmates brings a lot of academic pressure on me.	2.60	Agree
7. I am dissatisfied with my current grades.	2.58	Agree
15. My classmates getting more marks than I gives me stress.	2.36	Agree
8. My parents care too much about my academic results, which gives me stress.	2.31	Agree
Grand Mean	2.78	High Academic Stress

Legend:

Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Very High Academic Stress
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Academic Stress

2.49-1.50	Disagree	Low Academic Stress
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Academic Stress

Table 3 presents the results of the test of relationship between the respondents’ perceived parental pressure and their level of academic stress using Spearman’s rho correlation. The findings indicate whether a significant association exists between the two variables, showing the strength and direction of their relationship.

Table 3. Test of the Relationship between the Respondents' Perceived Parental Pressure and Academic Stress

Paired Variables	Pearson	Correlation	p-value	Interpretation
	Coefficient			$\alpha=0.05$
Parental Pressure and Academic Stress	.553**		.001	Significant

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

4. Discussion

4.1 Parental Pressure as Perceived by the Respondents

The statement “My parents believe that I should be working harder in school” obtained the highest mean score of 3.25, which corresponds to a verbal description of “agree.” This means that a considerable number of students perceive that their parents expect them to exert more effort in their academic tasks. This implies that students are highly aware of their parents' academic expectations, which may create a sense of obligation to meet those expectations. The perceived need to satisfy parental standards may influence students’ study habits, time management, and academic choices. It also suggests that parental beliefs continue to play a central role in shaping students' academic behavior and motivation.

This finding aligns with previous studies which showed that students often internalize their parents' expectations, especially when those expectations emphasize academic diligence and achievement. According to research, such pressure is common in families that prioritize education as a primary means of success and stability. Moreover, students who perceive their parents as valuing academic effort may experience increased motivation, but also a higher risk of stress if expectations become too demanding (Garrote et al., 2021; Haspolat & Yalçın, 2023b).

On the contrary, the statement “My parents always compare me with other children” garnered the lowest mean score of 2.10, which is verbally described as “disagree.” This means that most students do not feel that they are frequently compared with others by their parents. This implies that direct comparison, as a form of parental pressure, is not commonly practiced or perceived by the respondents. It suggests that while parents may hold high expectations, they do not often express them through social comparison. This could be indicative of a more supportive or individual-focused parenting approach among many families.

This finding is supported by studies that suggest comparison with peers is less effective in promoting academic performance and may even lead to emotional distress when frequently practiced. Research indicates that students respond better to personal encouragement than to being measured against others (Barr, 2017). Additionally, recent studies have noted a shift in parenting styles, where parents are more cautious of the negative effects of constant comparisons on their children's self-esteem and academic confidence (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019).

The grand mean for the construct on parental pressure is 2.71, with a verbal interpretation of “High Parental Pressure.” This means that, in general, students perceive a relatively high level of academic pressure from their parents. This implies that while not all forms of pressure are present or intense, the overall atmosphere students experience at home leans toward high expectations regarding their academic performance. It also reflects a cultural or familial emphasis on educational success as a central value. This level of pressure can shape students’ motivation and stress levels depending on how they interpret and respond to their parents’ expectations.

These findings are consistent with previous research which indicates that high parental involvement, when perceived as pressure, can contribute to increased academic demands and emotional burden among students



(Strayhorn, 2018). Studies have shown that students often report feeling overwhelmed when they believe their worth is closely tied to their academic performance (Lu et al., 2021). Furthermore, high parental pressure has been linked to both improved academic effort and elevated stress, highlighting the complex influence of family expectations on student well-being (37).

4.2 Academic Stress among the Respondents

In terms of academic stress as perceived by the respondents, the statement "I believe academic results are crucial for my future" received the highest mean of 3.09, with a verbal description of "agree." This means that many students place significant importance on their academic performance as a key factor influencing their future success. This implies that academic outcomes are deeply linked to students' personal aspirations, career goals, and perceptions of self-worth. It also suggests that students internalize the belief that their academic achievements will determine future opportunities. As a result, the pressure to perform well academically may be self-imposed, driven by a desire to secure a stable and successful future. This finding is supported by several studies indicating that students often associate academic performance with long-term life outcomes such as employment and financial stability (Li et al., 2019). Research also shows that when students believe their future depends heavily on academic success, they tend to experience higher levels of academic stress and anxiety (Rabbi & Islam, 2024b). Additionally, the emphasis on academic achievement as a measure of personal value has been found to intensify stress among students navigating competitive academic environments (Chemagosi, 2024c).

On the contrary, the statement "My parents care too much about my academic results, which gives me stress" received the lowest mean of 2.31, with a verbal description of "agree." This means that, while some students do experience stress from their parents' concern over academic performance, it is not as strongly perceived across the group. This implies that parental concern, although present, may not always be interpreted as excessive or stress-inducing. It suggests that students may differentiate between parental support and pressure, with many recognizing their parents' involvement as concern rather than a source of stress. The result also reflects that students may be developing coping mechanisms or independence in how they handle academic responsibilities.

This observation aligns with recent studies indicating that not all parental involvement is perceived negatively; in fact, some students see it as a source of motivation and care rather than pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2016). Furthermore, findings suggest that students' interpretation of parental behavior varies depending on the quality of parent-child communication and mutual understanding (Moran et al., 2023). In some cases, moderate parental concern has even been associated with reduced stress and better emotional regulation among students (Moran et al., 2023).

The grand mean for academic stress is 2.78, which corresponds to a verbal interpretation of "High Academic Stress." This means that, on average, students experience a considerable level of stress related to their academic life. This implies that stress is a common and significant part of their college experience, influenced by personal expectations, academic demands, and possibly external factors like social or family influences. It also reflects the growing pressure students face in maintaining performance and balancing responsibilities. This level of stress, if persistent, could impact students' academic engagement and overall well-being.

These results are consistent with prior research showing that college students often experience high academic stress due to demanding coursework, time constraints, and fear of failure (Hjeltne et al., 2015). Studies also reveal that academic stress is not only widespread but can affect students' concentration, motivation, and mental health (Pascoe et al., 2020). Additionally, similar findings indicate that a sustained high level of stress may negatively impact students' long-term academic goals and personal development (Pascoe et al., 2020).

4.3 Relationship between the Respondents' Perceived Parental Pressure and Academic Stress

The results revealed a correlation coefficient of .553 with a p-value of .001, indicating a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between parental pressure and academic stress among the respondents. The significance level of .01 (2-tailed) confirms that the relationship is not due to chance, and the variables are meaningfully associated. This suggests that as perceived parental pressure increases, the level of academic stress among college students also tends to rise. The strength of the correlation shows that parental expectations have a considerable influence on how students experience stress in their academic life. These findings highlight the important role of familial influence in shaping students' academic emotional experiences.

This means that college students who feel greater pressure from their parents are more likely to experience higher levels of academic stress. This implies that the pressure to meet parental expectations may contribute significantly to the psychological strain students encounter in their studies. The relationship suggests that students may internalize their parents' expectations, leading to increased anxiety, fear of failure, and emotional burden. It also reflects the interconnectedness of

family dynamics and academic experiences, especially during the college years. The significant association underscores how parental influence can directly impact students' well-being and academic mindset.

These findings are supported by prior research indicating that perceived parental pressure is a strong predictor of academic stress and emotional exhaustion among students (Y. Luo et al., 2020). Other studies have shown that students who feel overwhelmed by their parents' expectations tend to report lower emotional resilience and higher academic anxiety (Ambe et al., 2024). Additionally, research has emphasized the role of family-related stressors in influencing academic performance and psychological health during the college transition period (Varzaneh et al., 2024).

The findings of this study have meaningful implications for educational policy and institutional practices, particularly in promoting student well-being in academic environments. The significant relationship between parental pressure and academic stress highlights the need for universities and colleges to recognize family-related stressors as part of students' overall academic experience. Policies that support regular mental health assessments, parent-student dialogue programs, and stress management workshops can help institutions address the broader emotional and psychological needs of learners (Ambe et al., 2024).

Moreover, the results suggest the importance of incorporating family engagement in student support frameworks, ensuring that parents are informed about the potential impacts of their expectations on students' mental health (Garbacz et al., 2017). Ultimately, integrating psychosocial awareness into academic policies can create a more responsive and student-centered learning environment that balances performance with well-being (Bhardwaj et al., 2025).

5. Conclusions

The results on parental pressure as perceived by the respondents reflect a reality in which many students still feel the weight of their parents' expectations in their academic journey. This perception suggests that family influence remains a central force in shaping students' academic attitudes and behavior. While some forms of pressure may be viewed as encouraging, others may be internalized in ways that affect a student's emotional and mental state. It becomes clear that how students interpret and respond to parental expectations is a key factor in their overall academic experience.

The findings on academic stress reveal that students view their academic performance as directly tied to their future, reinforcing the idea that school success carries both personal and societal weight. This perception can be both a motivating force and a source of pressure that students carry daily. The experiences of stress reflect the complex academic landscape students navigate, where achievement, identity, and future aspirations intersect. As students face mounting demands, their ability to cope is shaped not only by institutional support but also by their personal beliefs and emotional resilience.

The established relationship between parental pressure and academic stress confirms that these two experiences are meaningfully connected in the lives of students. It shows that emotional and psychological factors outside the classroom can significantly influence a student's academic well-being. Recognizing this connection encourages a more holistic understanding of student success, one that considers both academic and familial influences. This highlights the importance of viewing student well-being through both academic and interpersonal lenses, calling for balanced support from both educational institutions and families.

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Ethical considerations

This research was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards to protect the rights and well-being of all participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from each respondent, ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by securely storing data and presenting results in aggregate form, with no identifying information disclosed. Moreover, the study upheld the ethical principles of respect, integrity, and fairness, ensuring that no harm or distress was caused to any participant throughout the research process.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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