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STRESS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF LOCALE AND STUDY HABITS

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined stress among secondary school students in relation to locale and study habits using a 2×3 factorial design. A descriptive survey method was employed. The sample comprised 1100 secondary school students selected from four districts of Himachal Pradesh through incidental sampling. Data were collected using the Students Stress Scale (Akhtar, 2011) and Study Habits Scale (Rani & Zaidka, 2015). Two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to examine main and interaction effects. The findings revealed no significant main effect of locale on stress, $F(1, 1094) = 0.00, p > .05$. Similarly, no significant main effect of study habits was found, $F(2, 1094) = 0.040, p > .05$. The interaction effect between locale and study habits was also not significant, $F(2, 1094) = 0.381, p > .05$. The results indicate that stress levels among secondary school students are not significantly influenced by geographical locale or variations in study habits. The findings suggest the need for broader psychosocial interventions beyond demographic and study-pattern variables to address student stress.

KEYWORDS: Stress, Locale, Study Habits, Secondary School Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress has become an important concern in contemporary school education due to increasing academic expectations and competitive learning environments. Secondary school students are required to meet performance standards, prepare for examinations, and make decisions related to future academic and career pathways. Alongside these academic responsibilities, they must also adjust to evolving social expectations and personal responsibilities. Although a moderate level of stress can enhance alertness and motivation, excessive or prolonged stress may negatively affect students' psychological well-being, academic engagement, and overall performance. The secondary school stage generally encompasses students between 13 and 16 years of age and represents a period marked by structured academic evaluation and increased accountability. Students

at this level are expected to demonstrate consistent academic achievement while balancing classroom learning, homework, co-curricular participation, and examination preparation. Pressures arising from high parental expectations, teacher evaluation, peer comparison, and concerns about future opportunities may contribute to elevated stress levels. If not effectively managed, stress can manifest in the form of anxiety, irritability, sleep disturbances, difficulty in concentration, and reduced academic efficiency. Therefore, examining factors associated with stress among secondary school students is essential for fostering supportive and productive educational environments. Among various academic factors, study habits play a significant role in shaping students' learning experiences and academic adjustment. Study habits refer to the systematic and organized practices adopted by students to facilitate

learning and retention of subject matter. These practices include effective time management, regular revision, attentive listening in class, systematic note-taking, organized study schedules, and strategic preparation for examinations. Well-developed study habits promote self-discipline, academic confidence, and clarity in learning objectives. Students who follow structured study routines are generally better prepared for assessments and may experience lower levels of academic uncertainty and stress. In contrast, ineffective study habits such as procrastination, irregular study schedules, lack of planning, poor organization of materials, and inadequate revision may increase academic pressure. Students who delay preparation until examinations approach often experience heightened anxiety and perceived overload. Poor study routines can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and lack of control, thereby intensifying stress responses. Consequently, study habits may serve either as a protective factor that reduces stress or as a contributing factor that amplifies it, depending on their quality and consistency. Empirical research supports the importance of study habits in academic and emotional outcomes. **Radha and Muthukumar (2015)** examined study habits of college students and reported no significant differences based on gender or type of institution; however, urban students demonstrated comparatively stronger study habits than rural students. **Ahsan and Kumar (2016)** found a significant negative relationship between test anxiety and effective study habits among physical education students, indicating that well-structured study routines were associated with lower examination-related stress. Similarly, **Dhanalakshmi and Murty (2018)** observed a significant relationship between study habits and academic stress among B.Ed. trainees, suggesting that academic preparation patterns influence stress experiences. **Fajardo et al. (2019)** investigated the effects of instructional strategies on achievement, study habits, and test anxiety, finding that pre-existing study habits significantly predicted academic performance. Although improvements in study habits were not always statistically significant, organized preparation was linked to better academic outcomes. **Majumdar and Saha (2021)** explored study habits of secondary school students in relation to gender and locality and reported no significant differences in several study habit domains across

urban and rural settings, though certain dimensions such as motivation and health showed variation. **Bracken (2023)** identified a significant negative correlation between organized exam preparation and perceived examination anxiety among nursing students. More recently, **Sharma and Sharma (2025)** reported significant differences in study habits based on locale among higher secondary school students, with urban students demonstrating comparatively stronger study patterns. These findings indicate that while study habits are consistently associated with academic outcomes and stress-related variables, the role of contextual factors such as locale remains inconclusive. Differences in educational resources, institutional infrastructure, parental educational background, and socio-cultural environment across rural and urban settings may influence both study habits and stress levels. However, empirical evidence regarding the combined effect of study habits and locale on stress among secondary school students remains limited. In view of the above considerations, the present study seeks to examine stress among secondary school students in relation to their study habits and locale. By employing a factorial design, the study aims to determine whether stress levels differ across varying levels of study habits, whether locale significantly influences stress, and whether an interaction effect exists between these variables. Understanding these relationships will provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers in designing interventions that promote effective study practices and reduce academic stress among students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study area-wise differences in stress among secondary school students.
2. To study the difference in stress among secondary school students with regard to their study habits.
3. To study interaction between area and study habits with regard to stress among secondary school students.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:

1. There will be no significant area-wise differences in stress among secondary school students.
2. There will be no significant difference in stress among secondary school students with regard to their study habits.

3. There will be no significant interaction between area and study habits with regard to stress among secondary school students.

METHODOLOGY

In the present investigation, the survey technique within the framework of the descriptive research method was employed to accomplish the objectives of the study.

SAMPLING

The data were gathered from four districts of Himachal Pradesh namely Kullu, Mandi, Bilaspur, and Shimla. The investigation comprised a total sample of 1100 secondary school students.

RESEARCH TOOLS USED

In the present study, data were collected using the *Students Stress Scale* developed by Akhtar (2011) and the *Study Habits Scale* constructed by Rani and Zaidka (2015). The collected data were subsequently analyzed through the statistical technique of Two-way Analysis of Variance.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In order to know the main effects of area and level of study habits, as well as their interactional effect on the stress levels of secondary school students, a 2x3 factorial Analysis of Variance (Two Way ANOVA) was performed. The design incorporated two area categories (urban and rural) and three levels of study habits (good, average and poor), applied to the students' mean stress scores. The means and standard deviations of stress scores across area and study habits levels are presented in Table 1.

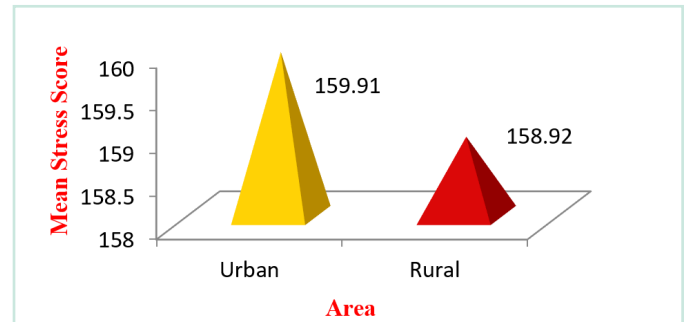
Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Stress Scores of Secondary School Students with regard to Area and Study Habits

Sr. No.	Area(A)	Level of Study Habits (B)	Mean Stress Scores			
			Good	Average	Poor	Total
I	Urban	Mean	158.94	160.21	159.47	159.91
		S.D.	26.230	23.064	19.573	23.116
		N	86	389	75	550
II	Rural	Mean	159.79	158.42	160.35	158.92
		S.D.	23.303	23.273	20.676	22.947
		N	102	380	68	550

III	Total	Mean	159.40	159.33	159.89	159.41
		S.D.	24.622	23.169	20.039	23.026
		N	188	769	143	1100

The pictorial representation of weighted mean stress scores of secondary school students with respect to their area is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Weighted Mean Stress Scores of Secondary School Students with regard to their Area



On the basis of the mean scores of stress of secondary school students with respect to area and study habits, F-Ratios were calculated. The results are given in the Table 2 as follows:

Table 2: Summary of the Results of Analysis of Variance for Stress of Secondary School Students with respect to Area and Study Habits

Sr. No.	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares (Variance)	F-Ratio
I	Area (A)	0.039	1	0.039	0.00 ^{NS}
II	Study Habits (B)	42.695	2	21.347	0.040 ^{NS}
III	Interaction (AXB)	405.262	2	202.631	0.381 ^{NS}
IV	Error Variance	581992.502	1094	531.986	
V	Total	28536364.00	1100		
VI	Corrected Total	582704.622	1099		

NS-Not Significant

MAIN EFFECTS

(a) Area (A)

Table 4.12, depicts that the calculated value of F-ratio for the main effects of area on the stress levels of secondary school students was found to be 0.00 which is less than the table value even at 0.05 level of significance, for d_f 1 and 1094. Therefore,

Hypothesis No. 1, “*There will be no significant area-wise difference in stress among secondary school students*” was retained. This indicated that students from different areas (urban and rural) did not differ significantly in their levels of stress. The mean stress score of secondary school students with belonging to urban areas was 159.91, while the secondary school students with belonging to rural areas were 158.92, respectively. On the basis of mean score, it may be concluded that the secondary school students with belonging to urban and rural areas showing almost negligible difference.

(b) Study Habits (B)

The calculated value of ‘F’ for the main effect of study habits on stress among secondary school students, irrespective of their areas, came out to be 0.040 which is less than the table value even at 0.05 level of significance, for d_f 2 and 1094. So, the Hypothesis No. 2, “*There will be no significant difference in stress among secondary school students with regard to their study habits.*” was retained. It may therefore be concluded that secondary school students possessing varying levels of study habits did not exhibit any significant difference in their levels of stress. The mean stress scores for students with good, average, and poor study habits were 159.40, 159.33, and 159.89 respectively. These closely comparable mean values indicated that students categorized under average study habits (Mean = 159.33), good study habits (Mean = 159.40), and poor study habits (Mean = 159.89) experienced nearly identical levels of stress.

INTERACTIONAL EFFECT (AXB)

The calculated value of *F*-ratio for the interactional effect of area and level of study habits on the stress of secondary school students was found to be 0.381 which is less than the table value even at 0.05 level of significance, for d_f 2/1094. Hence, the Hypothesis No. 3, “*There will be no significant interaction between area and study habits with regard to stress among secondary school students*” was retained. This indicates that there existed no significant interaction between area and study habits with regard to stress levels of secondary school students. In other words, the area and study habits did not have any statistically significant combined impact on the stress experienced by secondary school students.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study examined the level of stress among secondary school students in relation to area such as urban and rural settings, and study habits. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that there was no significant difference in stress levels with respect to area. This finding demonstrated that stress was a pervasive phenomenon affecting students irrespective of geographical location. The absence of area-based variation suggested that environmental setting alone did not substantially influence students’ stress experiences. Consequently, policies and institutional frameworks aimed at stress reduction should be designed in a comprehensive and equitable manner across both urban and rural schools. Educational institutions must prioritize students’ psychological wellbeing through the systematic integration of stress management programmes, structured guidance and counseling services, and life skills education within the curriculum. Sensitization of teachers and parents to early manifestations of stress is equally essential to ensure timely and supportive intervention. A whole-school approach to emotional and psychological wellbeing is therefore imperative for fostering balanced and resilient learners. The analysis further indicated that students with differing levels of study habits did not exhibit significant differences in stress. In addition, the interaction effect between area and study habits was found to be non-significant, signifying that the relationship between study habits and stress remained consistent across environmental contexts. This finding underscored that neither geographical location nor variations in study habits independently or interactively contributed to differential stress levels. The results highlighted the necessity of adopting multidimensional intervention strategies that extend beyond structural or behavioural factors alone. While strengthening effective study habits remains important, educational planning should also address broader psychosocial determinants of stress. Teacher training initiatives and school counseling frameworks should therefore adopt an integrated perspective that acknowledges the complex interplay of academic, emotional, and environmental influences on students’ holistic development.

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