

**A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF DEPRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN
RELATION TO ACADEMIC STRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND NEUROTICISM****Dr. Mohan Galgotra¹, Dr. Yad Ram², Dr. Anuradha Rani³, Dr. Ana Bali⁴**¹Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, India²Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, India³Assistant Professor, Centre for Distance & Online Education, University of Jammu, India⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Jammu, India**ABSTRACT**

Adolescence is a formative and turbulent phase where physiological, psychosocial, and cognitive changes leave adolescents vulnerable to psychological disorders (Shorey, 2022). Depression is one of the most common mental health issues, with an estimated prevalence of 5% among adults (W.H.O.D, 2021). Depression is one of the global issues in the contemporary era and is a significantly contributed to various psychological problems and in the stage of adolescents this problem goes into a graver to due to various sociological demands of the society. About 8% of children and adolescents suffer from depression and 11% of adolescents have a depressive disorder by the age of 18 years according to the National Co morbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement (2017). This study has been conducted to estimate the prevalence of depression among adolescents studying in higher secondary schools in order to find out a relationship between certain psychological correlates. Descriptive research design was employed to find the prevalence of depression in relation to certain psychological correlates. The findings of the study revealed that depression among adolescents' correlates across certain psychological correlates like neuroticism, academic stress and self efficacy. As depression tends to be higher among adolescents experiencing high academic stress compared to moderate and low stress levels. Similarly adolescents with low self efficacy showed higher depression than those with high self efficacy and adolescents with high neuroticism showed higher level of depression.

KEY WORDS: Correlational, Depression, Academic Stress, Self Efficacy, Neuroticism**1. Introduction**

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physiological, psychological, and social changes that make adolescents vulnerable to various mental health problems (Shorey, 2022). Among these problems, depression has emerged as one of the most common psychological disorders affecting adolescents and young adults worldwide. Depression significantly influences an individual's emotional well-being, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life (Cuijpers et al., 2018). It is characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating, often accompanied by disturbances in sleep and appetite (Sinyor et al., 2016). If untreated, severe depressive conditions may lead to suicidal behaviour and increased risk of mortality (Trivedi, 2010).

Researchers have attempted to conceptualize depression in adolescents in different ways. Petersen (1993) described adolescent depression at three levels: depressed mood, depressive syndrome, and clinical depression. Depressed mood refers to temporary sadness due to negative experiences,

whereas depressive syndrome involves emotional symptoms such as loneliness, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness. Clinical depression represents a more severe condition where multiple symptoms persist for at least two weeks and significantly impair daily functioning.

Several psychological studies highlight the prevalence of depression among adolescents. Kovacs et al., (1984) reported that depression affects approximately 1.9–3.4% of primary school children and 3.2–8.9% of adolescents, with a high recurrence rate within five years. Later studies found increasing rates of depression among adolescents ranging between 8% and 20% (Steinhausen & Metzke, 2000; Bahls, 2000; Gorenstein et al., 2005). In India, studies have also shown the presence of significant psychological distress among adolescents. Sidana and Nijhawan (1999) reported psychiatric morbidity among school adolescents, with depression being the most common disorder. Similarly, Nair et al. (2004) found that about 3% of school-going adolescents aged 13–19 years suffer from depression. Other studies have also reported that approximately 8% of children and adolescents experience depression and about 11% develop depressive disorders by the age of 18 years (Valsamma & Rudi, 2012). Moreover, depression during adolescence is often associated with severe consequences such as suicide, substance abuse, poor academic performance, and long-term psychological problems (Lewinsohn et al., 1993; Weissman et al., 1999).

In the academic context, academic stress has been identified as a major contributor to depression among adolescents. Students frequently face pressure related to examinations, competition, parental expectations, and academic achievement. Excessive academic stress can lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, particularly when students lack effective coping mechanisms.

Another important psychological factor influencing depression is neuroticism, a personality trait characterized by emotional instability, negative thinking, and increased sensitivity to stress. Individuals high in neuroticism tend to experience anxiety, worry, self-doubt, and emotional distress more frequently than others. Research has consistently identified neuroticism as a strong predictor of depression. Smith (2018) found that students with higher neuroticism scores reported significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to those with lower neuroticism. Similarly, Johnson and Lee (2019) observed that students with high neuroticism were more susceptible to academic stress and often perceived academic challenges as overwhelming, increasing their vulnerability to depression.

Further studies have also demonstrated that neuroticism negatively affects social and emotional functioning. Brown et al., (2020) reported that students with high neuroticism often experience social anxiety and avoidance behaviour, which may lead to loneliness and intensify depressive symptoms. Additionally, Garcia and Patel (2021) found that individuals high in neuroticism struggle with emotional regulation and frequently rely on maladaptive coping strategies such as rumination and avoidance, thereby increasing the likelihood of depression. A longitudinal study by Williams (2022) further revealed that students with high neuroticism experienced persistent depressive symptoms and lower academic performance over time. Similarly, studies by Yang and Koo (2022) and Yang et. al., (2023) confirmed that neuroticism is a major personality risk factor associated with depression among college students. More recent research by Vaishnav (2024) suggested that perceived stress mediates the relationship between neuroticism and depression, indicating that individuals with high neuroticism tend to experience greater levels of perceived stress, which subsequently increases

depressive symptoms.

In contrast to these risk factors, self-efficacy has been identified as an important protective factor against depression. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully manage challenges and achieve desired outcomes. Students with high self-efficacy are more confident in handling academic demands and stressful situations, which helps reduce the likelihood of emotional distress and depressive symptoms. On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy often experience feelings of helplessness, reduced motivation, and greater vulnerability to depression.

Thus, depression among adolescents is influenced by a complex interaction of psychological factors including academic stress, neuroticism, and self-efficacy. While academic stress and neuroticism may increase vulnerability to depression, strong self-efficacy can act as a protective factor by enhancing coping abilities and emotional resilience. Understanding the relationship among these variables is therefore essential for developing effective psychological interventions and support systems within educational institutions.

In view of the increasing prevalence of depression among adolescents and the significant role of psychological correlates, the present study attempts to examine depression among adolescents in relation to academic stress, self-efficacy, and neuroticism.

Depression is one of the most common psychological disorders among adolescents and young adults, significantly affecting their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being (Cuijpers et al., 2018). Adolescence represents a critical developmental period marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. During this stage, students often encounter various challenges such as academic pressure, social adjustments, increased responsibilities, and expectations for future success. These challenges can increase vulnerability to depressive symptoms including sadness, irritability, loss of interest, fatigue, low self-worth, and difficulty concentrating (Sinyor et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2018).

Depression during adolescence can manifest at different levels. Petersen (1993) conceptualized adolescent depression in three forms: depressed mood, depressive syndrome, and clinical depression. Depressed mood refers to temporary feelings of sadness in response to adverse situations, whereas depressive syndrome involves a cluster of emotional symptoms such as loneliness, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness. Clinical depression represents a more severe condition characterized by persistent symptoms lasting for at least two weeks and significantly impairing daily functioning. If left untreated, depression may lead to serious outcomes such as academic failure, social withdrawal, substance abuse, and suicidal behavior (Lewinsohn et al., 1993).

Among the various psychological and environmental factors associated with depression, academic stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy play a crucial role in the lives of students. Academic stress arises from the pressure to perform well in examinations, meet parental and societal expectations, compete with peers, and manage multiple academic responsibilities. High levels of academic stress often contribute to emotional distress and increase the risk of depressive symptoms among students. Similarly, anxiety, characterized by excessive worry, tension, and fear of failure, can intensify feelings of helplessness and negatively affect students' psychological well-being.

In contrast, self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and overcome challenges, serves as a protective psychological factor. Students with high self-

efficacy tend to cope more effectively with academic demands, regulate their emotions better, and demonstrate resilience in stressful situations. On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy often experience feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and reduced motivation, which may increase their susceptibility to depression.

Several studies have highlighted the interrelationship between these variables. Research indicates that high academic stress and anxiety are positively associated with depression, whereas self-efficacy shows a negative relationship with depressive symptoms. Students who experience excessive academic pressure and anxiety are more likely to develop depressive tendencies, particularly when they lack confidence in their ability to cope with academic challenges. Conversely, strong self-efficacy can buffer the negative effects of stress and anxiety by promoting adaptive coping strategies and psychological resilience.

Therefore, understanding the relationship between depression, academic stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy is essential for identifying risk factors and developing effective psychological interventions in educational settings. Such knowledge can help educators, counselors, and policymakers design support systems and mental health programs that reduce stress, enhance self-efficacy, and promote emotional well-being among students.

2. Review of Literature

Early research on depression among adolescents highlighted its prevalence and long-term psychological consequences. Research by Kovacs et al., (1984) reported that the prevalence of depression among primary school children ranged between 1.9%–3.4%, while among adolescents it ranged between 3.2%–8.9%. The study also found that nearly 70% of children diagnosed with depression experienced recurrence within five years, indicating the chronic nature of the disorder. Later studies emphasized the serious consequences associated with adolescent depression. Lewinsohn et al. (1993) reported that depression in adolescents is strongly associated with academic failure, poor peer relationships, substance abuse, and severe depression in adulthood. The study suggested that early identification of depressive symptoms is essential to prevent long-term psychological difficulties. Petersen (1993) conceptualized adolescent depression into three levels: depressed mood, depressive syndrome, and clinical depression. According to the study, depressed mood refers to temporary sadness, whereas clinical depression involves persistent symptoms that significantly impair daily functioning. Research by Weissman et al., (1999) revealed that adolescents suffering from major depressive disorder are at a higher risk of suicide. The study reported that about 7% of adolescents with major depressive disorder may commit suicide as young adults, emphasizing the seriousness of untreated depression. Further studies explored the increasing prevalence of depression. Steinhausen and Metzke (2000) and Bahls (2000) found that the prevalence of depression among adolescents ranged from 8% to over 20%, highlighting the growing mental health concerns among young people.

In the Indian context, Sidana and Nijhawan (1999) reported that psychiatric morbidity among school adolescents was 29% among girls and 23% among boys, with depression being the most common disorder. Similarly, Nair et al., (2004) found that about 3% of school-going adolescents aged 13–19 years suffered from depression, indicating the presence of the problem among Indian adolescents. Cash (2004) examined gender differences in depression and reported that adolescent and adult

females were diagnosed with depressive disorders nearly twice as often as males, although boys and girls show similar rates before the age of 12. Gorenstein et al., (2005) further supported earlier findings by reporting increasing rates of depression among adolescents and linking it with emotional and behavioral problems. Research began to examine personality factors influencing depression. Trivedi (2010) noted that depression is often a chronic condition that significantly affects an individual's quality of life and career potential. Later studies focused on psychological correlates of depression among students. Smith (2018) investigated the relationship between neuroticism and depression and found that students with higher neuroticism scores exhibited significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to students with lower neuroticism. Similarly, Johnson and Lee (2019) examined the impact of academic stress and neuroticism on depression among college students. The study found that students with high neuroticism were more vulnerable to academic pressure and often perceived academic challenges as overwhelming, leading to increased depressive symptoms. The researchers suggested implementing stress management programs and coping strategies in educational institutions. Galgotra (2017) in his study revealed that a majority of adolescents experience severe levels of depression, and the family environment plays a significant role in influencing the level of depression among adolescents. Brown et al., (2020) studied the role of neuroticism in students' social interactions and found that individuals with high neuroticism showed higher levels of social anxiety and avoidance behaviors, which contributed to loneliness and increased depressive symptoms. Research by Garcia and Patel (2021) examined the relationship between neuroticism, emotional regulation, and depression among young adults. The findings revealed that individuals with high neuroticism often engage in maladaptive coping strategies such as rumination and avoidance, which significantly increase the risk of depression. The study recommended mindfulness-based and emotion-focused interventions to improve emotional regulation. More recent studies have further strengthened the relationship between neuroticism and depression. Yang and Koo (2022) identified neuroticism as a major personality risk factor for depression, emphasizing that individuals high in neuroticism are more prone to negative emotional experiences and psychological distress. A longitudinal study conducted by Williams (2022) found that students with higher neuroticism scores experienced persistent depressive symptoms and lower academic achievement over time, highlighting the importance of early psychological screening and intervention programs. Further evidence was provided by Yang et al. (2023), who studied Chinese college students and reported a significant positive correlation between neuroticism and depression. The study suggested that personality traits play a crucial role in students' emotional well-being. Recent research by Vaishnav (2024) demonstrated that perceived stress mediates the relationship between neuroticism and depression. Individuals with higher neuroticism tend to experience greater perceived stress, which subsequently increases depressive symptoms.

Overall, the review of literature indicates that depression among adolescents and college students is influenced by several psychological factors, particularly neuroticism, academic stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy. High neuroticism and academic stress are positively associated with depression, whereas strong self-efficacy can act as a protective factor in helping students to cope effectively with academic and emotional challenges.

3. Rational of the study

Keeping into consideration the existing literature indicates that depression among adolescents and college students has been widely studied across different psychological and social contexts. Several researchers have identified depression as a major mental health concern among young individuals and have examined its prevalence, causes, and consequences. Studies such as Kovacs et al. (1984), Lewinsohn et al. (1993), and Steinhausen and Metzke (2000) primarily focused on the prevalence and consequences of depression among children and adolescents, highlighting its association with academic difficulties, social problems, and long-term psychological disorders.

Later research shifted attention toward personality traits and psychological correlates of depression. Studies by Smith et al. (2018), Brown et al. (2020), and Yang et al. (2023) established a significant relationship between neuroticism and depression, suggesting that individuals with high neuroticism are more prone to emotional instability, anxiety, and negative thinking patterns. Similarly, Johnson and Lee (2019) emphasized the role of academic stress in intensifying depressive symptoms, particularly among students with high neurotic tendencies.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between neuroticism, academic stress, and depression, most of them have examined these variables separately or in limited combinations. Very few studies have attempted to explore the combined influence of multiple psychological factors such as neuroticism, academic stress, and self-efficacy on depression among adolescents or college students.

Furthermore, several studies have been conducted in Western countries and developed regions, while limited empirical research has been carried out in the Indian context, particularly among adolescents in specific regions. In India, only a few studies such as those by Nair et al. (2004) and Sidana and Nijhawan (1999) have examined depression among adolescents, mainly focusing on prevalence rather than its psychological correlates.

Another important gap is that self-efficacy has not been sufficiently explored as a protective psychological factor in relation to depression and academic stress among adolescents. While some studies acknowledge the importance of coping mechanisms and resilience, limited research has examined how self-efficacy may reduce the impact of neuroticism and academic stress on depression. Moreover, there is scarcity of region-specific research, particularly among adolescents studying in colleges in Jammu and Kashmir, where socio-cultural and academic pressures may influence students' psychological well-being.

Therefore, in view of the limited integrated research on these variables and the lack of regional studies, the present study attempts to examine depression among adolescents in relation to neuroticism, academic stress, and self-efficacy. The study aims to provide a better understanding of how these psychological correlates interact and influence depression among students, which may help in designing appropriate psychological interventions and support systems in educational institutions.

4. Objectives of the study

1. To assess the level of depression among students.
2. To examine the main effect of “academic stress” on the depression among adolescents.
3. To examine the main effect of “self efficacy” on the depression among adolescents.
4. To examine the main effect of “neuroticism” on the depression among adolescents.

5. To study the influence of “neuroticism”, “self efficacy” and “academic stress”, on depression among adolescents.
6. To suggest some educational implications based on the findings of the study.

5. Hypotheses of the Study

1. There will be no significant main effect of “academic stress” on depression among adolescents.
2. There will be no significant main effect of “self-efficacy” on depression among adolescents.
3. There will be no significant main effect of “neuroticism” on depression among adolescents.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive research design to examine the relationship between depression and its psychological correlates, namely academic stress, neuroticism, and self-efficacy among adolescents. The design was considered appropriate as it helps in identifying the nature and extent of relationships among variables without manipulating them.

6.2. Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of first year college students. These students represent a crucial developmental stage where psychological factors such as stress, personality traits, and self-beliefs significantly influence emotional well-being.

6.3. Sample of the Study

Sample for the present study comprised first-year college students. The participants were selected using a random sampling technique to ensure fair representation of the population. A total of 200 students studying in the first year of undergraduate classes were randomly selected as the sample for the study. From this sample, the data were further classified into different level i.e., high, moderate (average), and low of academic stress, neuroticism, and self-efficacy for further analysis. Out of the total sample of 200 students, the data were further stratified according to the levels of these psychological variables in line with the objectives of the study. For detailed analysis, the sample was restricted to 90 students who clearly represented different levels of the psychological correlates of depression.

6.4. Variables of the Study

Dependent Variable

- Depression

Independent Variables

- Academic Stress
- Self-Efficacy
- Neuroticism

6.5. Tools Used for Data Collection

The following standardized psychological tools were used for the study:

1. The **Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)** was administered to measure the level of depression among adolescents.
2. The **Academic Stress Scale** developed by Poorva Jain and Neelam Dixit was administered to measure the level of academic stress among adolescents.

3. The **Self-Efficacy Scale** developed by G. P. Mathur and R. P. Bhatnagar was administered to assess the level of self-efficacy among adolescents.
4. The **Neuroticism Scale** developed by I. S. Muhar, Prabha Bhatia, and Geeta Kapoor was administered to assess the level of neuroticism among adolescents.

6.6. Statistical Techniques Used

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques such as:

- Percentage
- Mean was used to describe the level of depression among adolescents.
- Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine differences among groups based on levels of neuroticism, academic stress, and self-efficacy

7. Results of the Study

Table 1. Showing the level of Depression among adolescents

Levels of Depression	Percentage	Depression Mean scores
Normal	14%	7.41
Mild	13%	13.23
Borderline	17%	18.17
Moderate	21%	25.29
Severe	27%	33.13
Extreme	8%	43.14

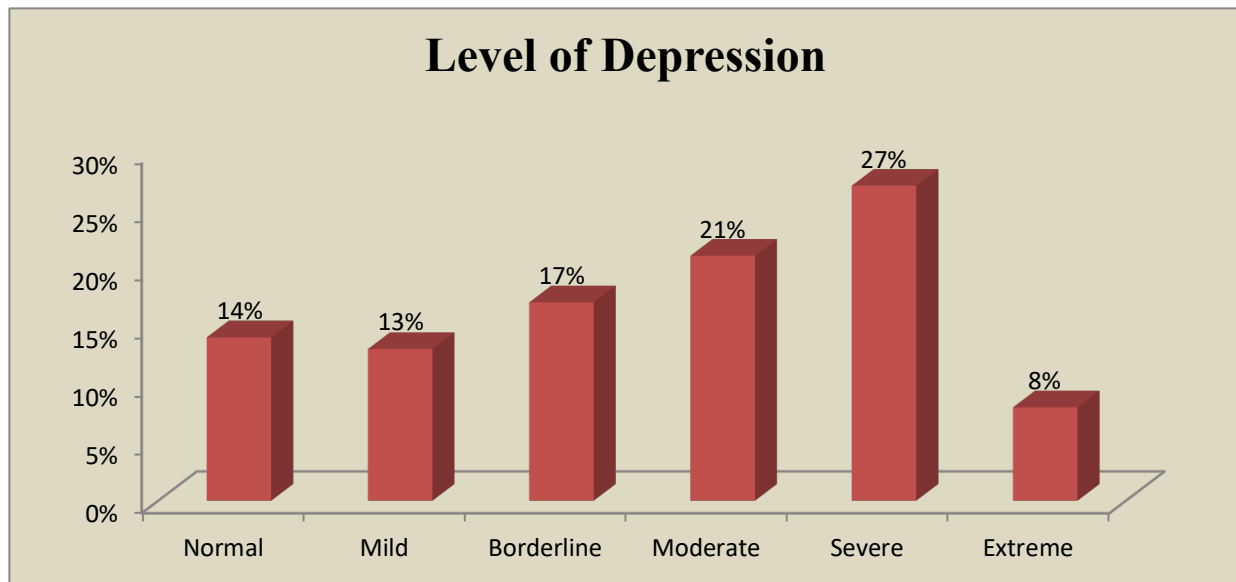


Figure 1: Showing the level of Depression among adolescents

The above table shows that 27% of the adolescents exhibit a severe level of depression, which constitutes the largest proportion of the sample. About 21% of the adolescents show a moderate level of depression, while 17% fall under the category of borderline depression. In addition, 14% and 13% of the adolescents fall in the normal and mild levels of depression, respectively.

Table 2. Showing the F-ratio indicating the significant effect of Academic Stress on Depression among adolescents.

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Significance
Academic stress (A)	711.60	2	355.80	7.22**	Significant
Error	1330.30	27	49.27		
Total	2041.90				

The obtained F-ratio for Academic Stress is 7.22, which is higher than the table value of F at the 0.01 level of significance (df = 2, 27). Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant effect of academic stress on depression among adolescents is rejected. This indicates that academic stress has a significant effect on depression among adolescents. Further examination of the mean scores reveals that adolescents experiencing higher levels of academic stress exhibit higher depression scores compared to those with lower levels of academic stress. Hence, it may be concluded that academic stress is significantly related to depression among adolescents.

Table 3. Showing the F-ratio indicating the significant effect of Self-esteem on depression among adolescents.

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Significance
Self Esteem (A)	534.20	2	267.10	5.26*	Significant
Error	1371.80	27	50.81		
Total	1906.00				

The obtained F-ratio for Self esteem is 5.26, which is higher than the table value of F at the 0.05 level of significance (df = 2, 27). Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant effect of self esteem on depression among adolescents is rejected. This indicates that self esteem has a significant effect on depression among adolescents. Further examination of the mean scores reveals that adolescents experiencing higher levels of self esteem exhibit lower level of depression compared to those with lower levels of self esteem. Hence, it may be concluded that self-esteem is significantly related to depression among adolescents.

Table 4. Showing the F-ratio indicating the significant effect of neuroticism on depression among adolescents.

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Significance
Neuroticism (A)	468.80	2	234.40	5.63**	Significant
Error	1126.60	27	41.73		
Total	1595.40				

The obtained F-ratio for Self esteem is 5.63, which is higher than the table value of F at the 0.05 level of significance (df = 2, 27). Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant effect of neuroticism on depression among adolescents is rejected. This indicates that neuroticism has a significant effect on depression among adolescents. Further examination of the mean scores reveals that adolescents experiencing higher levels of neuroticism exhibit higher level of depression

compared to those with lower levels of neuroticism. Hence, it may be concluded that neuroticism is significantly related to depression among adolescents.

8. Conclusions of the Study

The analysis clearly demonstrates that depression among adolescents is significantly influenced by multiple psychological and academic factors. A substantial proportion of the sample exhibits severe levels of depression, underscoring the urgency of addressing this issue within college contexts. The statistical findings reveal that academic stress, self-esteem, and neuroticism each exert a significant effect on depression levels. Specifically:

- Higher academic stress is associated with increased depression, highlighting the pressure adolescents' face in performance-driven environments.
- Greater self-esteem serves as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of depression and reinforcing the importance of fostering positive self-concept in students.
- Elevated neuroticism correlates with higher depression scores, suggesting that personality traits play a critical role in vulnerability to mental health challenges.

Taken together, these results emphasize that adolescent depression is not a singular phenomenon but rather a multidimensional outcome shaped by academic, psychological, and personality-related factors. The findings call for holistic interventions in colleges that reduce academic stress, strengthen self-esteem, and provide support for students with high neurotic tendencies and depression. Such measures can contribute to healthier developmental trajectories and improved well-being among adolescents.

9. Implications of the Study

The findings of the study carry important implications for college education and adolescent well-being. Since a considerable proportion of adolescents experience moderate to severe levels of depression, and factors such as academic stress, self-esteem, and neuroticism significantly influence these outcomes, colleges must adopt a more holistic and supportive approach to student development.

a) Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Excessive academic stress contributes to higher depression levels, suggesting the need for balanced curricula that emphasize experiential and joyful learning rather than rote memorization and exam pressure.
- Incorporating stress-management strategies, project-based learning, and flexible assessment methods can reduce performance anxiety.

b) Counseling and Mental Health Support

- Colleges should establish counseling services and peer-support programs to identify and assist students at risk of depression.
- Regular screening and workshops on emotional regulation can help adolescents manage stress and neurotic tendencies.

c) Self-Esteem Building Initiatives

- Since higher self-esteem is linked to lower depression, educators must create environments that foster confidence, recognition, and positive reinforcement.
- Activities such as debates, arts, sports, and leadership opportunities can help students develop a stronger sense of self-worth.

d) **Teacher Training and Sensitization**

- Teachers should be trained to recognize early signs of depression and understand the psychological impact of academic stress.
- Professional development programs can equip teachers with strategies to support students emotionally while maintaining academic rigor.

e) **Policy and Institutional Support**

- Educational policies must integrate mental health as a core component of school education, ensuring resources and frameworks for implementation.
- Collaboration between educators, parents, and policymakers is essential to create a supportive ecosystem for adolescent well-being.

In essence, the study highlights that academic success cannot be pursued in isolation from emotional health. By reducing stress, fostering self-esteem, and addressing personality-related vulnerabilities, schools can create nurturing environments that promote both academic achievement and psychological resilience.

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