

Research Article

Self Esteem and Percieved Stress Amongst School going Adolescents in Delhi - NCR: A Correlational and Cross-sectional Analysis

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Abstract: Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes that influence psychological well-being. Perceived stress and self-esteem are two important psychological constructs that affect adolescents' adjustment and mental health. The present study aimed to assess the levels of perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents aged 13-19 years, compare these variables across educational institutions and age groups, and examine the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem. A quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative research design was employed. The sample comprised 116 adolescents studying at Gurukul-The School and other private schools in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. Data were collected using an online Google Form comprising the Perceived Stress Scale-10 (PSS-10), 1983 and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), 1965.

The findings indicated a moderate level of perceived stress ($M = 20.84$, $SD = 5.41$) and moderately high self-esteem ($M = 30.47$, $SD = 4.82$) among participants. No significant difference in perceived stress was observed between students from Gurukul-The School and other private schools, $t(114) = -1.34$, $p = .183$. However, students studying at Gurukul-The School reported significantly higher self-esteem than those from other private schools, $t(114) = 3.79$, $p < .001$. Overall, adolescents (16–19 years) experienced significantly greater perceived stress than younger adolescents (13–15 years), $t(114) = -3.47$, $p = .001$, while age-related differences in self-esteem were not statistically significant, $t(114) = 1.00$, $p = .319$. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant moderate negative relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem ($r = -.51$, $p < .001$). The findings underscore the importance of fostering positive self-esteem and implementing school-based interventions to enhance adolescents' resilience and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Adolescence, perceived stress, self-esteem, Gurukul education, educational institution, psychological well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, school-going adolescents today face a steady mix of academic, social, and family pressures that shape how they see themselves and how they cope day to day. Adolescence brings rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional change, and researchers have long treated it as a period when young people are especially vulnerable to stress (Erikson, 1968). In Delhi-NCR, where academic competition, parental expectations, and the pace of urban life all press on students at once, adolescents frequently report high levels of perceived stress. Left unaddressed, this stress can wear down self-esteem, which in turn affects academic performance, friendships, and mental health. Looking at how stress and self-esteem interact among adolescents matters for building better school-based support and psychological interventions.

Stress has been studied from psychological, physiological, and educational angles for decades. Selye (1956) was among the first to describe stress as the body's non-specific response to any demand placed on it, laying out the General Adaptation Syndrome as

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three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. That early work treated stress as both a physical and psychological event, one that applies just as much to a classroom as to a laboratory. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) built on this with their transactional model of stress and coping, arguing that stress does not come from external demands alone but from how a person judges whether they have enough resources to handle those demands. This model still shapes much of the thinking on stress in adolescents today, since it puts the emphasis on how a person interprets a situation rather than the situation itself.

Stress is usually split into acute and chronic forms, and further into eustress (stress that motivates) and distress (stress that wears a person down) (Selye, 1956). Among adolescents, the most common categories are academic stress, peer-related stress, and family-related stress. Academic stress tends to come from exams, performance pressure, and competition; peer-related stress from social comparison, bullying, or the need to fit in; and family-related stress from parental expectations, discipline, or money worries at home. Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) found that Indian high school students carry a heavy load of academic stress driven by parental pressure and high-stakes exams, which feeds into anxiety and poorer mental health. That finding maps closely onto Delhi-NCR, where academic competition runs particularly high.

The link between stress and performance is often explained through the Yerkes-Dodson Law (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), which describes an inverted U-shaped curve connecting arousal, or stress, to performance. Under this model, a moderate amount of stress can sharpen focus and motivation, while too little or too much tends to hurt performance instead. This curve is useful for thinking about school-age adolescents specifically: some stress can push a student toward achievement, but too much of it, sustained too long, leads to burnout, anxiety, and a student pulling away from schoolwork. Knowing roughly where a student sits on this curve gives teachers and parents a way to judge how much pressure is actually helpful.

There is a fair amount of research on stress among school-going adolescents, both globally and in India. Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) developed the Perceived Stress Scale, which gave researchers a practical tool for measuring how stressful people judge their own lives to be, and it set the stage for a lot of the work on perceived stress that followed, including studies on adolescents. Studies using this and similar tools have repeatedly linked high perceived stress to weaker academic outcomes, disrupted sleep, and strained relationships among students (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015).

Perceived stress, defined as how far a person sees situations in their life as unpredictable, uncontrollable, or overwhelming (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), is tied to a range of mental health outcomes: anxiety, depression, lower well-being, and reduced self-confidence. Adolescents who see their surroundings as consistently stressful tend to cope less well emotionally and often pull back from academic and social life. One concept that helps explain how people handle stress differently is self-esteem, which can either cushion or worsen the effects of perceived stress on well-being.

Self-esteem is, at its core, how a person judges their own worth. Rosenberg (1965), whose work still anchors most self-esteem research, defined it as a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self, made up of both self-respect and self-acceptance. Coopersmith (1967) took this further, describing self-esteem as the evaluation a person makes and keeps making about themselves — an attitude of approval or disapproval that reflects how capable, significant, and worthy they believe themselves to be. Maslow (1943) placed esteem within his hierarchy of needs, sitting between belonging and self-actualization, treating it as basic to healthy development rather than optional. Branden (1969) later

broke self-esteem into two parts: self-efficacy, meaning confidence in one's ability to think and cope with life, and self-respect, meaning a belief that one deserves happiness and success. Among adolescents, self-esteem develops largely through interactions with parents, peers, and teachers, and it responds strongly to academic and social feedback during the school years (Harter, 1999).

Self-esteem is often split into global self-esteem, an overall sense of self-worth, and domain-specific self-esteem, which covers particular areas like academic ability, appearance, or social skill (Harter, 1999). Researchers also distinguish between stable and unstable self-esteem — the latter shifting more with daily events and feedback — and between contingent and non-contingent self-esteem, where contingent self-esteem depends on meeting certain standards or achieving specific outcomes (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). For adolescents dealing with academic and social pressure, the domain-specific and contingent forms of self-esteem are the ones most likely to swing with the stress they face at school.

Taken together, stress and self-esteem appear closely linked during adolescence, a stage defined by identity formation and a heightened sensitivity to how others evaluate you. Stress and self-esteem have each been studied on their own quite extensively, but far fewer studies look at how they relate to each other among school-going adolescents in India, and almost none focus on the fast-growing, academically competitive Delhi-NCR region specifically. The World Health Organization (2021) has flagged rising mental health concerns among adolescents worldwide, with school-related stress named as a significant factor, which points to a real need for research grounded in this particular region. This study, then, sets out to examine the relationship between self-esteem and stress among adolescents in Delhi-NCR schools, with the goal of offering findings that can shape school-based mental health support, counseling practice, and policy for building psychological resilience in young students.

Aim of the study

This study aims to examine the relationship between self-esteem and stress among adolescents in schools across Delhi-NCR

Objectives

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To assess the levels of perceived stress among adolescents aged 13–19 years.
2. To assess the levels of self-esteem among adolescents aged 13–19 years.
3. To compare perceived stress between students studying at Gurukul-The School and students studying in other private schools.
4. To compare self-esteem between students studying at Gurukul-The School and students studying in other private schools.
5. To compare perceived stress between younger adolescents (13–15 years) and older adolescents (16–19 years).
6. To compare self-esteem between younger adolescents (13–15 years) and older adolescents (16–19 years).
7. To examine the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents.

Hypothesis

H₁ : There is a significant difference in perceived stress between students studying at Gurukul-The School and students studying in other private schools.

H₂ : There is a significant difference in self-esteem between students studying at Gurukul-The School and students studying in other private schools.

H₃ : There is a significant difference in perceived stress between adolescents aged 13–15 years and adolescents aged 16–19 years.

H₄ : There is a significant difference in self-esteem between adolescents aged 13–15 years and adolescents aged 16–19 years.

H₅ : There is a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative research design to examine perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents studying in different educational settings. A descriptive survey approach was adopted to assess the levels of perceived stress and self-esteem and to investigate whether these psychological constructs differed based on the type of educational institution and age group. The study further explored the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents.

A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate as it enabled the collection of data from participants at a single point in time and facilitated comparisons between naturally occurring groups without manipulating any study variables.

Participants

The study comprised adolescent students between the ages of 13 and 19 years who were enrolled in secondary and senior secondary educational institutions in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India. Participants were drawn from two educational settings: Gurukul-The School, representing the Gurukul educational system, and several conventional private schools located within Ghaziabad.

Students were categorized into two age groups for comparative analysis: younger adolescents (13–15 years) and older adolescents (16–19 years). The age classification was based on developmental stages commonly adopted in adolescent psychological research and facilitated the examination of developmental differences in perceived stress and self-esteem.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and only students who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and provided informed assent, along with parental consent where applicable, were included in the study.

Sampling Technique

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed for participant selection. Students who were readily accessible and willing to participate were recruited from the selected educational institutions following permission from the respective school authorities.

Convenience sampling was considered suitable for the present investigation due to the accessibility of participants within school settings and the exploratory nature of the study. Although this sampling approach limits the generalizability of findings to the broader adolescent population, it allowed the researchers to obtain a diverse sample representing two distinct educational environments.

Inclusion Criteria:

The following criteria were used for participant selection:

- Students aged between 13 and 19 years.
- Students enrolled in Gurukul-The School or private schools located within Ghaziabad.
- Students capable of comprehending English sufficiently to respond to the questionnaires.
- Students who provided informed assent and whose parents or guardians provided consent where required.

Exclusion Criteria:

Participants were excluded from the study if they:

- Were younger than 13 years or older than 19 years.
- Submitted incomplete or substantially unanswered questionnaires.
- Declined participation or withdrew their consent during data collection.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire.

Data were collected anonymously through an online Google Form. No personally identifiable information, such as names, contact details, or school identification numbers, was collected. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for academic and research purposes. They were also informed that they could choose not to participate or discontinue the survey at any stage prior to submission without any negative consequences.

As the survey was completed independently outside school hours through an online platform, formal permission from participating schools was not required. Appropriate parental consent and participant assent were obtained for respondents below 18 years of age prior to participation.

Measures

1. Demographic Information Form

A brief demographic information form was developed by the researchers to collect relevant background information from participants. The form gathered information regarding participants' age and educational institution. Age was subsequently categorized into two developmental groups (13–15 years and 16–19 years) for statistical analysis, while educational institution was classified into two categories: Gurukul-The School and other private schools.

2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), 1965

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg (1965). The instrument is one of the most widely used measures of global self-esteem and assesses an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth and self-acceptance.

The scale consists of ten statements measuring positive and negative feelings about oneself. Participants responded using a four-point Likert response format ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Five positively worded items and five negatively worded items are included in the scale, with negatively worded items requiring reverse scoring before computation of the total score.

Higher total scores indicate higher levels of global self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties across adolescent and adult populations and has been extensively used in educational and psychological research.

3. Perceived Stress Scale-10 (PSS-10), 1983

Perceived stress was assessed using the 10-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). The scale measures the degree to which individuals appraise situations in their lives as stressful over the preceding month.

Participants responded to each statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Never (0) to Very Often (4). The instrument contains both negatively and positively worded items. The positively worded items (Items 4, 5, 7, and 8) were reverse scored prior to calculating the total perceived stress score.

Total scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting greater perceived stress. The PSS-10 is widely recognized for its applicability across different age groups and has demonstrated strong validity and reliability in studies involving adolescents and young adults.

Procedure

The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and comprised three sections: a demographic information sheet, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Perceived Stress Scale-10.

The survey link was shared electronically with eligible participants through appropriate communication channels. Participants completed the questionnaire independently at their convenience outside school hours after reading the participant information and consent statement. For participants below 18 years of age, parental consent was obtained before completion of the survey.

The online administration ensured anonymity, minimized interviewer bias, and allowed participants to respond honestly in a familiar environment. On average, respondents required approximately 10–15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Responses were automatically recorded in Google Forms and subsequently exported to Microsoft Excel.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in perceived stress and self-esteem based on educational institutions (Gurukul-The School and other private schools) and age group (13–15 years and 16–19 years).

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents. For all statistical analyses, the level of significance was set at $p < .05$.

3. RESULTS

A total of 116 adolescents participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 19 years and were recruited from Gurukul-The School and other private schools in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. The collected data were screened for completeness before statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables, followed by independent-samples t-tests to examine differences in perceived stress and self-esteem across educational institution and age groups. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 116)

Variable	Category	n	%
Institution	Gurukul-The School	54	46.6
	Other Private Schools	62	53.4
Age Group	13-15 years	58	50.0
	16-19 years	58	50.0

Note. N = 116.

The sample consisted of 116 adolescents. Of these, 54 (46.6%) were students of Gurukul-The School, while 62 (53.4%) attended other private schools. The age distribution was balanced, with equal representation from the younger (13-15 years) and older (16-19 years) adolescent groups.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Stress and Self-Esteem

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	M (SD)
Perceived Stress	8	34	20.84 (5.41)
Self-Esteem	18	39	30.47 (4.82)

Participants reported a moderate level of perceived stress ($M = 20.84$, $SD = 5.41$). Mean self-esteem scores indicated a moderately high level of global self-esteem ($M = 30.47$, $SD = 4.82$).

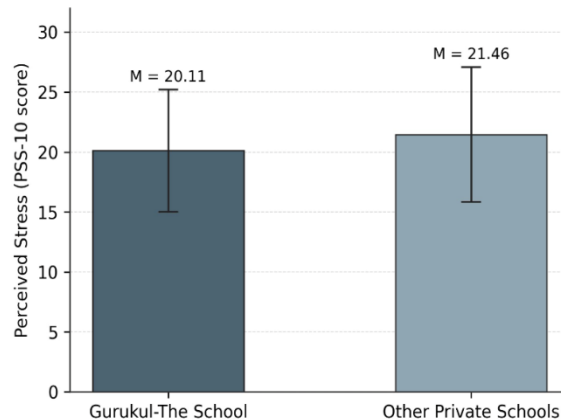
An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare perceived stress among students studying at Gurukul-The School and those studying in other private schools.

Table 3
Comparison of Perceived Stress by Educational Institution

Institution	n	M	SD	t	df	p
Gurukul-The School	54	20.11	5.09			
Other Private Schools	62	21.46	5.63	-1.34	114	.183

The findings revealed that students from Gurukul-The School reported slightly lower perceived stress than students from other private schools. However, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(114) = -1.34$, $p = .183$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Figure 1. Perceived Stress by Educational Institution



Note. Error bars represent one standard deviation. PSS-10 = Perceived Stress Scale-10.

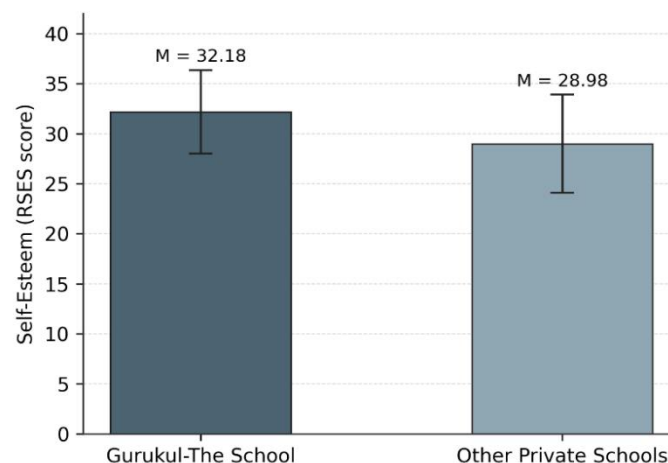
An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in self-esteem between students studying at Gurukul-The School and those studying in other private schools.

Table 4 Comparison of Self-Esteem by Educational Institution

Institution	n	M	SD	t	df	p
Gurukul-The School	54	32.18	4.16			
Other Private Schools	62	28.98	4.91	3.79	114	< .001

Students at Gurukul-The School demonstrated significantly higher self-esteem. ($M = 32.18$, $SD = 4.16$) than students at other private schools ($M = 28.98$, $SD = 4.91$). The difference was statistically significant, $t(114) = 3.79$, $p < .001$. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 was supported, indicating that the educational setting was associated with adolescents' self-esteem.

Figure 2. Self-Esteem by Educational Institution



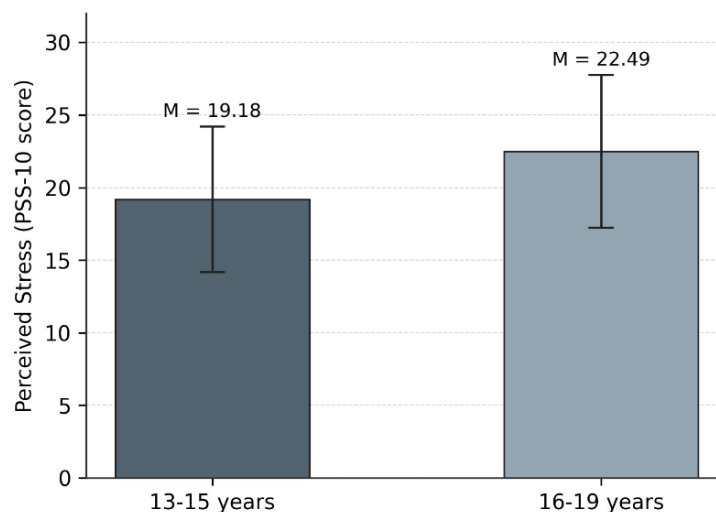
Note. Error bars represent one standard deviation. RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare perceived stress between younger adolescents (13-15 years) and older adolescents (16-19 years).

Table 5
Comparison of Perceived Stress by Age Group

Age Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p
13-15 years	58	19.18	5.02			
16-19 years	58	22.49	5.27	-3.47	114	.001

The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived stress between the two age groups, $t(114) = -3.47$, $p = .001$. Older adolescents (16-19 years) reported significantly greater perceived stress than younger adolescents (13-15 years). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Figure 3.
Perceived Stress by Age Group



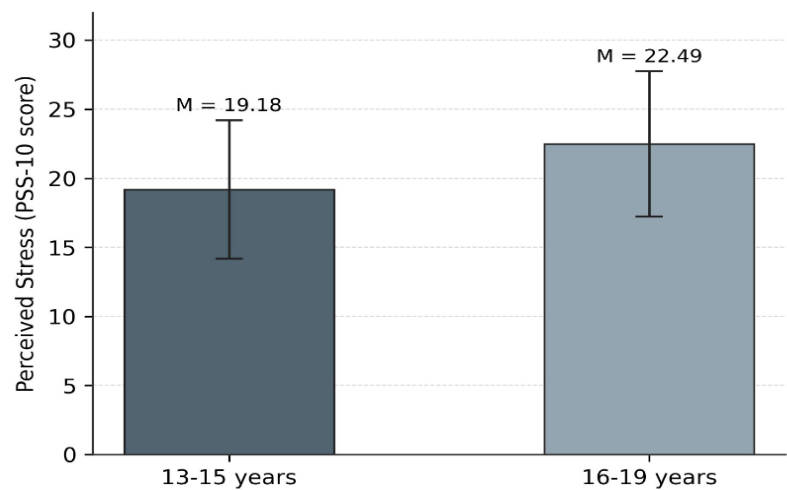
Note. Error bars represent one standard deviation. PSS-10 = Perceived Stress Scale-10. An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare self-esteem across age groups.

Table 6
Comparison of Self-Esteem by Age Group

Age Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p
13-15 years	58	30.92	4.64			
16-19 years	58	30.03	5.01	1.00	114	.319

Although younger adolescents reported marginally higher self-esteem than older adolescents, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(114) = 1.00$, $p = .319$. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Figure 4. Self-Esteem by Age Group



Note. Error bars represent one standard deviation. RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem.

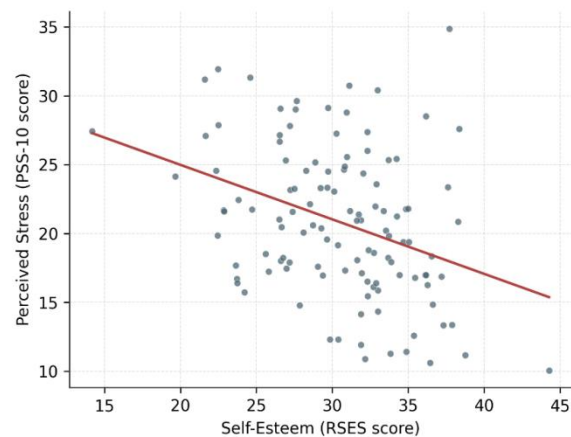
Table 7 Correlation Between Perceived Stress and Self-Esteem

Variable	1	2
1. Self-Esteem	—	
2. Perceived Stress	-.51*	—

Note. *p < .001.

The analysis revealed a moderate negative correlation between self-esteem and perceived stress, $r = -.51$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that adolescents with higher levels of self-esteem tended to experience lower levels of perceived stress, whereas those reporting lower self-esteem experienced comparatively higher levels of stress. The magnitude of the correlation suggests that self-esteem is an important psychological correlate of perceived stress among adolescents. Accordingly, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Figure 5. Scatterplot Illustrating the Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Perceived Stress



Note. Illustrative scatterplot generated to reflect the reported correlation coefficient ($r = -.51$, $N = 116$); the fitted line represents the direction and strength of the association.

The present study examined differences in perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents based on educational institution and age group, as well as the relationship between the two variables. The findings indicated that students studying at Gurukul-The School reported significantly higher self-esteem than students attending other private schools, while no significant difference was observed in perceived stress across educational institutions. Older adolescents (16-19 years) experienced significantly greater perceived stress than younger adolescents (13-15 years); however, age did not significantly influence self-esteem. Finally, a statistically significant moderate negative relationship was observed between perceived stress and self-esteem, suggesting that adolescents with higher self-esteem were less likely to perceive stressful situations as overwhelming.

Overall, two of the four group-comparison hypotheses were supported, and the hypothesized relationship between self-esteem and perceived stress was confirmed. These findings provide preliminary evidence that educational environment may contribute to adolescents' self-esteem, whereas developmental stage appears to be more closely associated with perceived stress. Furthermore, the inverse association between self-esteem and perceived stress underscores the importance of fostering positive self-evaluations as a potential protective factor for adolescent psychological well-being.

4. DISCUSSION

The present study examined perceived stress and self-esteem among adolescents aged 13-19 years and investigated whether these variables differed across educational settings and age groups. Additionally, the study explored the relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem. The findings provide valuable insights into adolescent psychological well-being and highlight the role of educational environment and developmental stage in shaping self-esteem and stress experiences.

One of the primary objectives of the study was to compare perceived stress among students studying at Gurukul-The School and those enrolled in other private schools. The results indicated that although students from Gurukul-The School reported marginally lower levels of perceived stress, the difference was not statistically significant. This finding suggests that adolescents experience comparable levels of perceived stress irrespective of the educational setting in which they study.

The absence of a significant institutional difference in perceived stress may be explained by the universal nature of stressors experienced during adolescence. Academic expectations, peer relationships, family responsibilities, social media exposure, career uncertainty, and developmental transitions are common sources of stress that affect adolescents across different educational systems. Although Gurukul education emphasizes holistic development, value-based learning, discipline, and close teacher-student relationships, students remain exposed to many of the same developmental and societal challenges as their peers in conventional schools. Consequently, the educational setting alone may not be sufficient to substantially reduce perceived stress among adolescents.

This finding is consistent with the transactional model of stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which emphasizes that stress is determined not merely by external circumstances but by an individual's appraisal of situations and perceived coping resources. Adolescents studying in different educational systems may therefore perceive

and respond to stressors in similar ways despite variations in school philosophy and learning environment.

In contrast, a significant difference emerged with respect to self-esteem. Students studying at Gurukul-The School demonstrated significantly higher levels of self-esteem than students enrolled in other private schools. This finding supports the second hypothesis and suggests that educational environment may contribute meaningfully to adolescents' perceptions of self-worth.

The higher self-esteem observed among Gurukul students may be attributed to several characteristics commonly associated with the Gurukul system of education. Gurukul education traditionally emphasizes character development, ethical values, discipline, mindfulness, community living, and holistic personality development alongside academic learning. Such an educational climate may foster greater self-acceptance, competence, and emotional security among students. The emphasis on interpersonal relationships, individualized attention, experiential learning, and value-based education may further contribute to a stronger sense of identity and self-confidence.

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that positive school climate, supportive teacher-student relationships, and opportunities for personal growth contribute significantly to adolescent self-esteem. Educational environments that promote belongingness, autonomy, and competence are known to strengthen positive self-evaluations. The present findings therefore align with broader educational and developmental literature suggesting that schools play an important role in shaping adolescents' psychological well-being beyond academic achievement.

Another important objective of the study was to examine age-related differences in perceived stress. The findings revealed that adolescents aged 16-19 years experienced significantly higher perceived stress than those aged 13-15 years. This finding supports the third hypothesis and is consistent with developmental theories of adolescence.

Late adolescence is characterized by increasing academic demands, greater responsibility, identity exploration, career planning, preparation for higher education, and heightened social expectations. Students in this age group often face competitive examinations, concerns regarding future educational and occupational opportunities, and greater pressure to achieve academically. Simultaneously, older adolescents experience increasing independence and complex interpersonal relationships, all of which may contribute to elevated stress levels.

From the perspective of Erikson's psychosocial theory, older adolescents are actively engaged in resolving issues related to identity formation and future role commitments. Uncertainty surrounding these developmental tasks may intensify psychological stress, particularly when accompanied by academic and familial expectations. Consequently, the higher perceived stress reported by older adolescents in the present study appears consistent with established developmental literature.

Interestingly, no statistically significant age-related difference was observed in self-esteem. Although younger adolescents reported slightly higher self-esteem than older adolescents, the difference was not sufficient to reach statistical significance. This finding suggests that global self-esteem may remain relatively stable across adolescence despite increasing developmental demands.

Self-esteem develops gradually through continuous interactions with family, peers, teachers, and the broader social environment. While adolescence is often associated with fluctuations in self-perception, several longitudinal studies have suggested that overall self-esteem demonstrates relative stability during middle and late adolescence, particularly when supportive social environments are present. The present findings therefore indicate that although older adolescents experience greater stress, this increase does not necessarily correspond with a decline in overall self-esteem.

Perhaps the most important finding of the study was the significant moderate negative relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem. Adolescents with higher self-esteem reported lower perceived stress, whereas those with lower self-esteem experienced greater stress. This finding supports the fifth hypothesis and reinforces the well-established association between positive self-evaluation and psychological well-being.

Self-esteem has long been regarded as a protective psychological resource that enhances resilience, adaptive coping, and emotional regulation. Adolescents with positive self-esteem are generally more confident in their abilities, perceive challenges as manageable, and are more likely to employ constructive coping strategies when confronted with stressful situations. Conversely, adolescents with low self-esteem may interpret everyday challenges as overwhelming, experience greater self-doubt, and demonstrate increased emotional vulnerability, thereby reporting higher levels of perceived stress.

The observed relationship can also be understood through the lens of cognitive appraisal theory. Individuals with stronger self-beliefs often evaluate potentially stressful situations as challenges rather than threats, resulting in lower subjective stress. In contrast, adolescents with diminished self-worth may possess fewer perceived coping resources, leading to heightened stress appraisals.

The present findings are also consistent with previous empirical studies that have reported inverse associations between self-esteem and perceived stress among adolescents and young adults. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that self-esteem functions as a psychological buffer against stress by promoting adaptive coping, emotional resilience, and positive mental health outcomes. The current study therefore adds further support to this growing body of literature within the context of Indian adolescents studying in different educational settings.

Implications

The findings of the present study have several practical implications.

- First, educational institutions should recognize that psychological well-being extends beyond academic performance and should incorporate programs aimed at enhancing students' self-esteem and emotional resilience. School counsellors, psychologists, and educators can play an important role in developing interventions that strengthen self-confidence, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping skills.
- Second, the significantly higher stress experienced by older adolescents highlights the need for targeted mental health initiatives for students approaching higher secondary education. Stress management workshops, career guidance, mindfulness-based interventions, and counselling services may help adolescents navigate the academic and developmental challenges associated with this stage of life.
- Third, the significantly higher self-esteem observed among students studying in Gurukul-The School suggests that educational practices emphasizing holistic development, value-based learning, supportive interpersonal relationships, and socio-

emotional growth may contribute positively to adolescent psychological well-being. While these findings should be interpreted cautiously, they encourage educators to integrate similar principles within mainstream educational settings to promote healthier developmental outcomes.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the present study is subject to certain limitations. The use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader adolescent population. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and participants' subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, making it impossible to determine whether self-esteem influences perceived stress or vice versa. Additionally, participants were recruited from one Gurukul institution and private schools within a single geographical region, thereby limiting the representativeness of the sample.

Future research may overcome these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples drawn from multiple educational settings across different regions. Longitudinal studies could provide a better understanding of developmental changes in stress and self-esteem over time. Researchers may also examine additional variables such as resilience, emotional intelligence, social support, coping strategies, academic achievement, mindfulness, and family functioning to develop a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent psychological well-being.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the growing literature on adolescent mental health by demonstrating that educational environment and developmental stage influence different aspects of psychological functioning. While perceived stress did not differ significantly across educational settings, students studying at Gurukul-The School demonstrated significantly higher self-esteem than their peers studying in other private schools. Older adolescents reported greater perceived stress than younger adolescents, reflecting the increasing developmental and academic demands associated with late adolescence. Finally, the significant negative relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem highlights the protective role of positive self-evaluation in promoting adolescent psychological well-being. These findings underscore the importance of creating educational environments that foster both academic excellence and socio-emotional development, thereby equipping adolescents with the psychological resources necessary to navigate the challenges of contemporary life.

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