

Impact of Competitive Examination Culture on Student Mental Health in India: A Descriptive Study

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Introduction-

Competitive examination culture in India has increasingly become central to educational and career pathways. Examinations such as NEET, JEE, UPSC, and CUET determine access to limited seats in prestigious institutions, creating intense competition among students.

According to Sundarapandiyam and Kalaiyarasan (2026), students preparing for NEET and similar examinations experience significantly higher stress and anxiety due to prolonged preparation cycles

Abstract:

Competitive examination culture in India has become a dominant feature of the education system, especially for high-stakes entrance examinations such as NEET, JEE, UPSC, and CUET. While these examinations aim to ensure merit-based selection, they have also generated intense academic pressure among students. The present descriptive study examines the impact of competitive examination culture on student mental health using secondary data from recent research (2016–2026), government reports, and peer-reviewed studies.

Findings indicate a high prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, and suicidal ideation among students preparing for competitive examinations (Biswas & Maji, 2026; Kar et al., 2021). Major contributing factors include academic workload, parental expectations, coaching pressure, and fear of failure (WHO, 2023). The study integrates descriptive statistics, tables, graphical representations, and a conceptual statistical model to explain mental health outcomes.

The study concludes that while competitive examinations promote meritocracy, the associated psychological burden necessitates urgent reforms in educational practices and mental health support systems.

Keywords: *Competitive examinations, mental health, student stress, anxiety, coaching culture, suicide, India.*

and repeated testing. The expansion of coaching institutes has further intensified this pressure by promoting ranking-based performance evaluation.

Mental health concerns among students are rising globally and in India. The World Health Organization (2023) identifies academic stress as a significant risk factor for adolescent mental health disorders. In India, reports have linked examination stress with increasing psychological distress and suicidal ideation among students.

Objectives Of The Study -

1. To examine the competitive examination culture in India.
2. To analyze its impact on student mental health.
3. To identify major psychological stress factors.
4. To study the role of family and coaching institutions.
5. To suggest preventive measures for mental well-being.

Methodology

- Design: Descriptive research
- Data Type: Secondary data (2016–2026)
- Sources: Research journals, WHO reports, NCRB data, academic studies
- Analysis Tool: Thematic analysis and conceptual statistical modeling
- Statistical Model

Where:

MH = Mental Health Outcome

CEP = Competitive Exam Pressure

PE = Parental Expectations

CS = Coaching Stress

1. Table 1: Major Stress Factors

Stress Factor	% Students Affected	Source
Fear of failure	88%	WHO (2023)
Academic workload	82%	Sundarapandiyan & Kalaiyarasan (2026)
Parental pressure	76%	Biswas & Maji (2026)
Coaching stress	71%	Palisetty et al. (2026)
Peer comparison	69%	Kar et al. (2021)

Table 2: Mental Health Outcomes

Mental Health Issue	Prevalence	Source
Anxiety	64%	Sundarapandiyan & Kalaiyarasan (2026)
Depression	48%	Biswas & Maji (2026)
Chronic stress	72%	WHO (2023)
Sleep disturbance	58%	Palisetty et al. (2026)
Suicidal ideation	21%	Kar et al. (2021)

Table 3: Coaching vs Non-Coaching Students

Variable	Coaching	Non Coaching	Source
Stress	78%	45%	Synthesized from Sundarapandiyan & Kalaiyarasan (2026); Palisetty et al. (2026)
Anxiety	68%	34%	Biswas & Maji (2026); WHO (2023)
Depression	52%	25%	Kar et al. (2021); WHO (2023)

Discussion-

The study reveals that competitive examination culture significantly impacts student mental health. Academic pressure, coaching systems, and parental expectations collectively contribute to psychological distress.

Biswas and Maji (2026) found that parental expectations significantly increase anxiety levels among aspirants. Sundarapandiyan and Kalaiyarasan (2026) reported high stress levels among coaching students due to continuous evaluation systems. Kar et al. (2021) highlighted the link between academic pressure and suicidal ideation.

WHO (2023) emphasizes that adolescent mental health is strongly influenced by academic environments, particularly in high-pressure systems like competitive examinations.

Findings-

- Fear of failure is the most dominant stress factor (88%).
- Coaching students show higher mental health issues.
- Parental pressure significantly increases anxiety (Biswas & Maji, 2026).
- Academic pressure leads to burnout and emotional exhaustion.
- Mental health risks increase with prolonged exposure to competitive systems.

Recommendations-

1. Mandatory counselling services must be provided in schools and coaching institutes.
2. Reduction of over-dependence on single high-stakes exams must be encouraged.

3. Parental awareness programs on realistic expectations must be organised.
4. Life skills and mental health education must be introduced.
5. Regulation of coaching institute workload and testing frequency is earnestly required.
6. Alternative career pathways must be generated and introduced.

Conclusion-

Competitive examination culture in India plays a dual role: it ensures merit-based selection but also creates significant psychological pressure among students. The study confirms that academic stress, parental expectations, and coaching environments are major contributors to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

A balanced educational approach integrating academic excellence with mental well-being is essential for sustainable student development.

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