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EXAMINE THE EFFECTS OF HIGH-STAKE TESTING ON STUDENT'S MENTAL HEALTH AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL: A SURVEY RESEARCH

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Article Info

Abstract

This research investigates the effects of high-stakes testing on students' mental health, specifically focusing on anxiety, stress, and depression. High-stakes tests, such as standardized assessments, graduation exams, and college entrance exams, are integral to educational systems worldwide. While these tests are designed to measure academic knowledge and determine future opportunities, they also exert significant psychological pressure on students. This study aims to explore the extent to which high-stakes testing contributes to mental health challenges, including the intensity of stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by students, as well as the coping mechanisms employed. The data was collected through survey questionnaire and standardized psychological scale i.e. perceived stress scale from 45 university students who had recently participated in high-stakes testing. The survey gathered data on students' stress and anxiety levels, perceptions of the tests' significance, and the coping strategies they use. The study utilized a quantitative research design, with data analyzed using descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation. The research revealed that students experience significant levels of stress and anxiety before and during high-stakes exams, with some reporting long-term psychological effects, such as reduced motivation and sleep disturbances. This study also found that students' perceptions of the importance of the exams were a critical factor in the intensity of their mental health challenges. Those who viewed the tests as pivotal to their future success reported higher anxiety and stress levels. The research suggests that students often rely on coping strategies like time management and seeking social support to manage the pressure. The findings emphasize the need for educational institutions to prioritize student mental well-being by offering better support systems and exploring alternative assessment methods. The study calls for further research into the long-term effects of high-stakes testing and the development of strategies to mitigate its negative psychological impact. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on creating healthier educational environments that balance academic performance with student mental health.

Keywords: *High-stakes testing, Student mental health, Anxiety, Stress, Depression, Coping strategies, Academic pressure, and Standardized tests.*

Introduction

High-stakes testing can be defined as assessments that bring about high and serious consequences for the students such as promotion to the next grade, graduation, or gain admission into colleges and universities. Such kind of tests forms a core part of almost all educational systems worldwide and includes state assessment at each level, SAT, and ACT among other standardized tests. The premise of high-stakes tests sounds pretty simple; however, it serves a major purpose as measuring academic knowledge and skills, there is growing concern about the impact they have on students' mental health.

Mental health effects from high-stakes testing are multifaceted, but predominantly those investigated are stress and anxiety symptoms. High-stakes testing environments typically produce pressure to perform and act as a catalyst for acute stress responses (such as increased cortisol levels and increased heart rates) and chronic anxiety that may last indefinitely beyond the breadth of the examination period (Fejes et al., 2020; Fernández-Castillo & Caurcel, 2019; Weekes et al., 2006). The stress manifests when students regard test scores as determining the fate of their future in life, creating a high-stakes pressure environment that can create challenges to their psychological resilience (Galla et al., 2018; Högberg & Horn, 2022). Poor performance in such exams not only increases anxiety and stress but also depression among students (Galloway, 2013). It is indeed the worst dilemma when students are under pressure to perform well on the test meant to determine their performance, to gain admission or graduate in future. For example, one study clearly demonstrated that students having test anxiety show major symptoms of worrying, fears, and tension during the examination period (Zeidner, 2014). This type of stress is not only sickening but also leads to disastrous consequences in a person's life.

Furthermore, the amount of preparation required for high-stakes tests can contribute to mental health issues. Most students spend weeks or months preparing for such tests, sacrificing sleep and subjecting themselves to high-strain study routines. This results in burnout and fatigue after missing out on high grades (Putwain, 2007). The growing body of research highlights how the academic system’s focus on high-stakes testing may be affecting students in ways that go beyond their test scores. According to research, placing students in dynamic, interactive learning environments improves their emotional and cognitive engagement and lessens the pressure to perform well academically (Ahmed et al., 2024).

High-stakes testing anxiety can damage cognitive functions such as memory retrieval and problem-solving skills, the two major mechanisms for academic success (Andresen & Løkken, 2020; Zhang et al., 2011). Thus, assessments designed to evaluate the performance of students paradoxically distort that ability, leaving the test taken in psychologically distressed conditions. Prolonged exposure to such high-pressure environments has also been related to long-term concerns, such as decreased self-esteem, sleep disturbances, disinterest in pursuing learning (ShayesteFar, 2020; Fernández-Castillo & Caurcel, 2019; Fu, 2024).

Although the connection between high stakes testing and mental health is increasingly recognized, comprehensive research into students' psychological well-being and the effect of high-stakes tests on it still a short-age. This study aims to probe further into this connection. Through survey carried out with a diverse population of such students recently engaged in high-stakes testing, this research will document

how such testing contributes to increased anxiety, stress, and depression, and whether the intensity of the test or its preparation matters.

Literature Review

High-stakes tests and student mental health have been common focal points of research in the last few years. Evidently high stress levels occur during periods of examination, as verified by physiological measures characterized by increased levels of cortisol (Fejes et al., 2020; Maes et al., 1998; Weekes et al., 2006). For instance, during exams, Fejes et al. (2020)'s results showed higher cardiovascular parameters for students-high blood pressure, higher heart rates, and greater stress responses.

Impact of High-Stakes Testing on Anxiety and Stress

The most commonly encountered mental health complaint from students who undergo high-stakes testing is test anxiety, which is defined as frightful anxiousness of students before and during an examination. Studies show that students who undergo high-stakes tests tend to experience a higher level of anxiety (Owens et al., 2020). Research indicates that students experience an increased level of anxiety during examination periods, which has negative effects on their academic performance and mental well-being (Ballen et al., 2017; Högberg & Horn, 2022; Zhang et al., 2011). Additionally, studies reveal that students suffer from increased stress and decreased academic engagement in educational settings that are not adequately supportive and accessible. This is true in both high-stakes testing situations and online learning environments (Sahar et al., 2024). According to Högberg and Horn (2022), the anxiety caused by examinations can also impair memory retrieval and worsen the academic difficulties experienced by students. According to Putwain and Daly (2021), students' anxiety levels often rise as they approach test dates, particularly when the tests are perceived as having significant consequences for their future. This anxiety can manifest physically and mentally, with symptoms such as difficulty concentrating, rapid heartbeat, and negative thoughts.

Students involved in high-stakes examinations suffer from stress too, according to research conducted by Roth and others (2023) which observed that students experience chronic stress before and sometimes after these examinations. There are many reasons for one's stress which include the pressure to perform better, the competitive environment as well as the stakes attached to the test itself (Zeidner, 2020). In a survey of high school seniors preparing for standardized college entrance exams, nearly 60% reported feeling stressed about the potential consequences of their results (Jones & Jenkins, 2022). Experiments have shown that stress negatively affects one's cognitive aftermath by disallowing proper attention to be given to the material or instructions about the tests (Pizzie & Putwain, 2021).

Mental Health Consequences Beyond Test Anxiety

Beyond anxiety and stress, high-stakes testing can contribute to long-term mental health issues such as depression and burnout. Prolonged exposure to test-related pressure can lead to feelings of hopelessness and low self-esteem, particularly if students perform poorly or feel unsupported (Mello et al., 2021). In research findings from Anderson and Garver (2023), it was revealed that higher levels of perceived pressure from standardized testing would compel students to report more feelings of depression, such as

sadness, low energy, and a loss of interest in daily activity. These feelings of depression can also be exacerbated by a lack of adequate emotional or academic support systems in schools. There are also other factors which have long-term effects such as reduced motivation and self-esteem, as well as decreased enjoyment of learning (ShayesteFar, 2020; Fernández-Castillo & Caurcel, 2019). Such students suffered sleep disruption, which then affected their concentration and performance (Fernández-Castillo & Caurcel, 2019).

In addition, preparation for high-stakes examinations contributes to mental health struggles. Rigorous preparation schedules take students to a burnout state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion (Liu & Li, 2022) since their routines do not pay attention to anything other than test performance. In their study, Brown and Ross (2023) found that students studying for long hours without any breaks were very likely to report some symptoms of burnout, fatigue, irritability, and lack of motivation.

The Role of Test Stakes and Students Perception

The psychological impact of high-stakes testing is also influenced by students' perceptions of the test's importance. It has been observed that, in case students think of a test as very important for their future success, then the stress and anxiety levels have been increased. For instance, students who think that performance on examinations determines their future academic career in terms of graduation or being admitted to a college may develop the highest levels of psychological distress (Pekrun et al., 2021). In contrast, the evidence suggests that students who do not perceive high stakes related to the test have been reported to experience lower anxiety with healthier mental outcomes (Sikorski & McCann, 2023).

Moreover, failed high-stakes examination results were associated with increased odds for psychiatric diagnoses. A study that used Norwegian registry data has shown that students who had failed high-stakes exams have a 21% probability of reported mental health issues, again illustrating the far-reaching consequences of high-stakes testing on adolescent well-being (Andresen & Løkken, 2020).

Based on the conclusions derived from the literature, it has been established that high-stakes tests correlate with numerous negative mental health outcomes among students. Stress and anxiety arousal causes not only them but also long-term psychological effects. On the basis of these results, educational stakeholders should finally think about the mental well-being of students when designing and implementing assessment strategies.

Problem Statement

High-stakes tests, such as graduation exams or those used for university admissions, have become an inseparable component of the education systems in many countries. However, while these exams have much importance in determining the academic capabilities of learners, there seem to be certain rising concerns about how these types of examinations impact students in aspects of their mental well-being. Studies demonstrate that high-stakes examination has been shown to induce anxiety and stress and aggravated cases of mental health problems for many in the adolescent and young adult groups under an immense burden of academic pressure. Even then, research regarding the full psychological ramifications of high-stakes exams on the importance of the exam taken, levels of preparation before it, and support

received from family and friends have yet to be explored. Most current studies, however, center on test performance rather than stress-related issues among students. With increasing cases of anxiety, stress, and depression among students, it is essential to know in what way high-stakes testing aggravates these symptoms. Without clear statistics on mental health effects, teachers and policymakers will find it difficult to address these issues. This study will examine how high-stakes testing accounts for differences in student mental health, focusing specifically on anxiety, stress, and depression. The research hypothesizes some components contributing to these mental health issues, thus giving possible recommendations for improving educational practices and resources for helping students enjoy wellbeing.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Find out the stress and anxiety level of university students who appeared in high-stake testing in last one year.
2. Find students' perceptions on the significance and effects of high-stakes testing on their mental health.
3. Identify the coping strategies students use to handle high-stakes testing pressures.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The study focused on Rawalpindi university students who had recently taken standardized tests or other high-stakes exams. To guarantee diversity in terms of age, gender, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background, a total of 45 individuals were chosen through the use of purposive sampling. Every participant had taken high-stakes tests in the previous 12 months. To keep the study's emphasis on the impacts of high-stakes testing, students who had previously received mental health support or who had never taken part in such tests were not included.

Research Approach

To systematically gather and examine numerical data about students' stress, anxiety, and depression following high-stakes exams, a quantitative research approach was used. According to Creswell (2018), quantitative approaches made it possible to assess the correlations between factors objectively and produced findings that could be applied to a larger group of students. This method guaranteed precision, reproducibility, and a better comprehension of the impact of academic demands on mental health (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design

This study used a survey research design, which is perfect for gathering a lot of standardized data directly from university students. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017), surveys provided an organized way to gauge students' mental health outcomes related to high-stakes exams. The approach

allowed for the detection of stress, anxiety, and coping strategies using questionnaires, providing a thorough statistical picture of how high-stakes testing affects students' mental health.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure:

The data collection tools included both surveys and a standardized psychological scale—the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). These resources were crucial for obtaining accurate, quantitative information about students' stress, anxiety, and general mental health in response to high-stakes testing.

A self-administered survey questionnaire intended to gauge students' opinions of high-stakes testing and its effects on their mental health served as the main instrument for gathering data. In order to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, the survey had both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Using Likert scale items, the closed-ended questions centered on students' opinions about the importance of high-stakes testing and its impact on their mental health. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to find out how students coped with the stress of high-stakes testing.

The survey questionnaire was organized into six themes:

1. Awareness of High-Stakes Testing (3 questions)
2. Perceptions of High-Stakes Testing (4 questions)
3. Emotional and Mental Well-being (5 questions)
4. Academic Performance and Confidence (4 questions)
5. Coping Strategies and Support (4 questions)
6. General Health Effects (3 questions)

In addition to the survey, a standardized psychological scale the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was used to measure the psychological impact of high-stakes testing. In psychological research, this scale is commonly used to measure anxiety and stress levels. The PSS assessed students' perceptions of their life' unpredictability, uncontrollability, and overload, all of which are frequently linked to high levels of stress (Cohen et al., 1983). The scale is frequently employed in educational research and has demonstrated efficacy in measuring mental health symptoms (Creswell, 2014).

The data collection process began with the administration of the survey questionnaires to the selected students. To increase accessibility and participation, the surveys were made available both online and on paper. Paper-based surveys were delivered in participating universities during class hours, whereas online surveys were sent by email or survey platforms. Students were asked to complete the surveys independently, providing responses related to their stress, anxiety, and mental health in the context of high-stakes testing. Alongside the survey, students also completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which specifically measured their levels of stress and anxiety.

Results and Interpretation

Awareness of High-Stakes Testing

Table 1: How Familiar Are You With The Concept Of "High-Stakes Testing" And Its Impact On Your Academic Success?

		SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	SD
N	**F**	1	5	12	17	10		
45	**%**	2.2	11.1	26.7	37.8	22.2	3.67	1.022

According to the table, the majority of respondents (60%) agree or strongly agree that they are aware of the effects of high-stakes testing on academic performance. While 26.7% are neutral, a little percentage (13.3%) disagree or strongly disapprove. With a considerable degree of response variance (standard deviation of 1.022), the average score of 3.67 suggests a general tendency toward agreement. The PSS framework states that while students who are aware of high-stakes tests may expect pressure, high levels of stress are not always the result of awareness alone. Many may fall in the intermediate stress range (14–26) based on the reaction pattern.

Table 2: Do You Believe That High-Stakes Testing Is Frequently Discussed And Acknowledged Within Your Department Or University?

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	5	5	13	15	7		
45	**%**	11.1	11.1	28.9	33.3	15.6	3.31	1.203

The table indicates that there are differing views on whether or not the department or university often discusses high-stakes testing. While 22.2% disagree or strongly disagree, over 49% of respondents agree or strongly agree that it is discussed. Approximately 29% are neutral. Although the standard deviation of 1.203 indicates a wide range of responses, the average score of 3.31 indicates a small leaning toward agreement. Although opinions vary among participants, high-stakes testing is generally acknowledged to some extent. Lack of communication may lead to more confusion, according to PSS-based understanding. Many students probably fell into the moderate stress category, with some moving into the high stress category as a result of a lack of departmental clarity and support, since 33.3% stayed neutral and the remaining students were split almost evenly.

Table 3: I Am Aware Of Support Systems Or Resources Provided By The University To Help Students Manage Stress Related To High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	6	4	18	14	3		
45	**%**	13.3	8.9	40.0	31.1	6.7	3.09	1.104

According to the table, the majority of respondents are either indifferent or ignorant about resources for coping with test stress. 22.2% are unaware of such resources, compared to 37.8% who are. With a considerable degree of response variance (standard deviation of 1.104), the average score of 3.09 indicates a neutral position. PSS interpretations suggest that students may feel less in control if they are not fully aware of their help alternatives. This places a sizable percentage in the moderate to high stress range, particularly when dealing with academic pressure on one's own without assistance.

Perceptions of High-Stakes Testing

Table 4: High-Stakes Exams Contribute Significantly To My Academic Success.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	5	15	18	5		
45	**%**	4.4	11.1	33.3	40.0	11.1	3.42	0.988

According to the data, the majority of respondents (51.1%) agree or strongly agree that taking high-stakes tests helps them succeed academically. However, 33.3% are impartial, and 15.5% disagree or strongly disagree. A standard deviation of 0.988 indicates that responses are generally consistent, and the average score of 3.42 indicates a moderate belief in the significance of high-stakes tests for academic performance. According to the PSS, stress appraisal may rise if tests are seen as essential to achievement. These students probably experience moderate levels of stress, while some may experience high levels if their academic identity is dependent on test results.

Table 5: I Believe That My Performance On High-Stakes Tests Determines My Future Career Opportunities.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	1	4	8	20	12		
45	**%**	2.2	8.9	17.8	44.4	26.7	3.84	0.999

With 44.4% agreeing and 26.7% strongly agreeing, the table demonstrates that a sizable majority of respondents (71.1%) think that their success on high-stakes assessments significantly influences their future employment chances. 17.8% are neutral, and a smaller minority (11.1%) disagree or strongly disagree. The standard deviation of 0.999 suggests that opinions are reasonably stable, and the average score of 3.84 indicates a strong belief in the significance of high-stakes assessments for professional aspirations. According to PSS study, subjective stress rises with a strong career relationship. Because external implications (career impact) are more difficult to manage, these respondents are more likely to fall into the high stress category (27–40).

Table 6: I Feel That High-Stakes Testing Is An Accurate Measure Of My Abilities As A Student.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	4	15	18	6		
45	**%**	4.4	8.9	33.3	40.0	13.3	3.49	0.991

According to the table, the majority of respondents (53.3%) agree or strongly agree that high-stakes exams are an accurate indicator of a student's ability. 33.3% are neutral, while 13.3% disagree or strongly disagree. The standard deviation of 0.991 indicates that opinions are generally consistent, and the average score of 3.49 indicates a moderate conviction in the accuracy of high-stakes assessments as a gauge of student ability. According to PSS, having faith in justice helps lessen stress, whilst having doubts makes it worse. Students who disagree may lean toward high stress because of irritation or fear of misrepresentation, but students who agree may cluster around the moderate stress range.

Table 7: I Often Feel Anxious Before Taking High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	1	11	15	16		
45	**%**	4.4	2.2	24.4	33.3	35.6	3.93	1.053

According to the table, 33.3% of respondents agree and 35.6% strongly agree that most respondents (68.9%) frequently experience anxiety before taking important tests. Of those surveyed, 24.4% are neutral, while 6.6% disagree or strongly disagree. With a standard deviation of 1.053 indicating moderate reaction variability, the average score of 3.93 suggests a considerable propensity to experience anxiety. Given that the majority exhibit anticipatory anxiety, which can impair mental and emotional functioning, this is obviously consistent with the high stress zone (27–40) in the PSS.

Emotional And Mental Well-Being

Table 8: I Experience Feelings Of Stress And Worry Due To High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	-	3	7	20	15		
45	**%**	-	6.7	15.6	44.4	33.3	4.04	0.878

According to the data, a substantial majority of respondents (77.7%) agree and strongly agree that high-stakes tests cause them to feel anxious and stressed. 15.6% are neutral, and a smaller percentage (6.7%) disagree. With a standard deviation of 0.878 suggesting rather consistent replies, the average score of 4.04 indicates a strong opinion that high-stakes tests create stress and worry. The majority of respondents fall into the high stress category according to PSS, indicating a high incidence of high perceived stress, when academic pressure becomes a serious mental health issue.

Table 9: High-Stakes Exams Negatively Affect My Mood And Mental Well-Being.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	10	13	11	9		
45	**%**	4.4	22.2	28.9	24.4	20.0	3.33	1.168

There are differing views on whether high-stakes tests have a detrimental impact on mood and mental health, as the table illustrates. About 28.9% of responses are neutral, 26.6% disagree or strongly disagree, and 44.4% agree or strongly agree. The standard deviation of 1.168 indicates response diversity, while the average score of 3.33 indicates a moderate perception that high-stakes exams might have a detrimental effect on mood and mental health. PSS states that this blend represents a concentration in the moderate stress category, where most people's mood and general well-being are impacted but not significantly disrupted.

Table 10: I Often Feel Overwhelmed By The Pressure Of High-Stakes Testing.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	3	3	12	23	4		
45	**%**	6.7	6.7	26.7	51.1	8.9	3.49	0.991

According to the table, the majority of respondents (60%) agree that the pressure of high-stakes testing overwhelms them, with 51.1% strongly agreeing and 8.9% disagreeing. 26.7% are neutral, while a smaller

minority (13.4%) disagree or strongly disagree. The standard deviation of 0.991 indicates a reasonably consistent group of replies, and the average score of 3.49 indicates a moderate level of agreement that high-stakes testing causes feelings of overwhelm. Given that feeling overburdened is a major sign of high stress levels, this points to a sizable population in the PSS's high stress zone (27–40).

Table 11: The Anxiety I Feel Due To High-Stakes Exams Has Affected My Sleep Quality.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	3	5	7	18	12		
45	**%**	6.7	11.1	15.6	40.0	26.7	3.69	1.184

According to the data, the majority of respondents (66.7%) agree, with 40% strongly agreeing, that their sleep quality is impacted by exam anxiety. 15.6% are neutral, and a smaller minority (17.8%) disagree or strongly disagree. With a standard deviation of 1.184 indicating some diversity in replies, the average score of 3.69 suggests a significant perception that exam-related worry affects sleep. Sleep disturbance is a physiological sign of elevated stress, according to the PSS. Most responders probably fall into the high stress group.

Table 12: I Feel That I Am Unable To Manage My Emotions Effectively During High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	1	6	18	14	6		
45	**%**	2.2	13.3	40.0	31.1	13.3	3.40	0.963

According to the table, there are differing views on the capacity to control one's emotions during important tests. About forty percent are indifferent, fifteen percent disagree or strongly disagree, and forty-four percent agree or strongly agree that they feel unable to adequately manage their emotions. With a standard deviation of 0.963, which indicates comparatively consistent replies, the average score of 3.40 indicates a moderate view that emotions are challenging to control during these tests. The PSS's moderate to high stress range is consistent with this emotional instability. Pupils who have trouble controlling their emotions are probably closer to the upper limit of moderate stress or high stress.

Academic Performance and Confidence

Table 13: My academic performance on high-stakes tests reflects my overall abilities as a student.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	-	7	9	22	7		
45	**%**	-	15.6	20.0	48.9	15.6	3.64	0.933

According to the table, the majority of respondents (64.5%) agree, with 48.9% strongly agreeing, that their academic success on important tests represents their overall abilities as a student. Twenty percent are neutral, while a smaller percentage (15.6%) disagree. With a standard deviation of 0.933 indicating somewhat consistent replies, the average score of 3.64 suggests a modest trust that success on high-stakes tests accurately reflects overall abilities. Depending on other variables like self-efficacy and actual performance, pupils here probably fall into the low to moderate stress range. This confidence may operate as a stress buffer.

Table 14: I Feel Less Confident About My Academic Abilities Due To The Pressure Of High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	-	10	12	20	3		
45	**%**	-	22.2	26.7	44.4	6.7	3.36	0.908

According to the data, the majority of respondents (51.1%) agree and 6.7% strongly agree that the pressure of high-stakes tests makes them feel less confidence about their academic talents. 26.7% are neutral, and a smaller minority (22.2%) disagree. A standard deviation of 0.908 indicates that responses are generally consistent, and the average score of 3.36 indicates a moderate conviction that the pressure of high-stakes tests affects confidence. This is in line with the PSS's moderate to high stress zones, particularly if emotions of helplessness or self-doubt accompany a decline in confidence.

Table 15: High-Stakes Testing Has Led To A Decline In My Self-Esteem.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	-	11	17	15	2		
45	**%**	-	24.4	37.8	33.3	4.4	3.18	0.860

According to the data, the majority of respondents (61.1%) do not think that taking high-stakes tests has caused them to lose confidence, with 33.3% agreeing and 4.4% strongly agreeing. 24.4% disagree, while a sizable number (37.8%) are neutral. With a standard deviation of 0.860 suggesting rather consistent replies, the average score of 3.18 indicates a modest disagreement that high-stakes testing has a detrimental impact on self-esteem. According to the PSS, this represents students in the moderate stress zone.

Table 16: I Tend To Avoid Studying Or Procrastinate Because Of The Stress Related To High-Stakes Testing.

		SD	*D*	*N*	*A*	*SA*	*Mean*	*SD*
N	**F**	1	14	20	10	-		
45	**%**	2.2	31.1	44.4	22.2	-	2.87	0.786

According to the data, a sizable portion of respondents (55.6%) are either ambivalent or unsure about skipping study sessions or putting off assignments because they are anxious about high-stakes exams, with 44.4% expressing no opinion. Just 2.2% strongly disagree with the statement that they procrastinate, compared to about 31.1% who agree. According to the PSS, the average score of 2.87 indicates a moderate level of perceived stress, suggesting that some students may engage in procrastination or avoidance activities when under academic pressure. Responses are comparatively consistent, as indicated by the standard deviation of 0.786.

Coping Strategies and Support

Table 17: I have developed effective strategies to cope with the stress caused by high-stakes exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	1	7	17	16	4		
45	**%**	2.2	15.6	37.8	35.6	8.9	3.33	0.929

According to the table, the majority of respondents (44.4%) believe they have created useful coping mechanisms to deal with the pressure of important tests, with 35.6% agreeing and 8.9% strongly agreeing. 17.8% disagree or strongly disagree, while 17.8% are neutral. Although stress is evident, many students are actively managing it with coping mechanisms, as indicated by the average score of 3.33, which is within the PSS's moderate stress range. The range of responses is reasonably consistent, as indicated by the standard deviation of 0.929.

Table 18: I Feel That The University Provides Sufficient Support For Students Dealing With Stress Related To High-Stakes Testing.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	4	6	13	19	3		
45	**%**	8.9	13.3	28.9	42.2	6.7	3.24	1.069

According to the data, 48.9% of students believe the university offers enough support, compared to 22.2% who disagree and 28.9% who are neutral. With a mean score of 3.24, students view stress to be moderate and are quite secure in the support of the institution. A range of experiences is indicated by the higher standard deviation (1.069), with some students perhaps feeling more stressed out as a result of inadequate support.

Table 19: I Talk To Friends Or Family About The Stress I Experience From High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	3	11	24	5		
45	**%**	4.4	6.7	24.4	53.3	11.1	3.60	0.939

With a high mean score of 3.60, the table reveals that most (64.4%) chat to friends or family to decompress. According to the PSS, this indicates a moderate to high degree of stress, which leads many students to turn to social support as a coping strategy. Response consistency is indicated by the standard deviation of 0.939.

Table 20: I Find That Relaxation Techniques (E.G., Meditation, Exercise) Help Reduce My Anxiety Before High-Stakes Exams.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	-	8	16	16	5		
45	**%**	-	17.8	35.6	35.6	11.1	3.40	0.915

With 35.6% agreeing and 11.1% strongly agreeing, the table demonstrates that the majority of respondents (47.8%) believe that relaxation methods like exercise and meditation can help lower anxiety before important tests. But 35.6% are neutral, and 17.8% disagree. According to the PSS, the mean score of 3.40 denotes a moderate degree of stress, indicating that many students are successfully managing their stress through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. There is broad agreement, as indicated by the standard deviation of 0.915.

General Health Effects

Table 21: High-Stakes Exams Have Caused Me To Experience Physical Symptoms Such As Headaches, Stomachaches, Or Fatigue.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	3	6	20	14		
45	**%**	4.4	6.7	13.3	44.4	31.1	3.91	1.062

According to the table, a sizable majority of respondents (75.6%) agreed and 31.1% strongly agreed that they had suffered bodily symptoms such nausea, vomiting, or exhaustion as a result of high-stakes tests. 13.3% are neutral, and a smaller minority (11.1%) disagree or strongly disagree. The PSS's high mean score of 3.91 places it in the high stress group, suggesting that academic stress has a significant negative influence on physical health. There may be some variation in how pupils feel these symptoms, as indicated by the standard deviation of 1.062.

Table 22: My Academic Performance In High-Stakes Exams Has Affected My Overall Mental Health.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	6	14	17	6		
45	**%**	4.4	13.3	31.1	37.8	13.3	3.42	1.033

According to the data, more than half (51.1%) of those surveyed concur that their mental health is impacted by their exam results. According to the PSS, the mean of 3.42 indicates moderate stress levels, and academic performance has an impact on emotional health. The standard deviation (1.033) indicates that people's experiences differ from one another.

Table 23: I believe that high-stakes testing negatively impacts my long-term mental well-being.

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
N	**F**	2	9	18	14	2		
45	**%**	4.4	20.0	40.0	31.1	4.4	3.11	0.935

According to the table, 35.5% of respondents agree or strongly agree that high-stakes testing has an impact on long-term well-being, whereas the majority of responses are neutral or tend toward dissent. The average score of 3.11 indicates that some students are mildly concerned about long-term psychological impacts, which is at the lower end of the PSS's moderate stress range. The standard deviation of 0.935 indicates that the replies were consistent.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Results

PSS Score Range	Category	Interpretation based on data
0-13	Low stress	Few participants fill into this range. Some students, particularly those who expressed confidence in their academic abilities (Table 13), may experience low stress.
14-26	Moderate stress	Majority of students fall into this category. Responses across tables 1-23 consistently show moderate agreement with stress-related indicators, with mean scores ~3.0-3.6.
27-45	High stress	A significant proportion of students approach or fall within this range, especially those reporting anxiety, physical symptoms, sleep issues, and emotional instability. Tables 7,8,11 and 12show mean scores near or above 3.9, indicating elevated stress levels.

Discussion and Findings

The survey's data provides a number of insights into how students view and interact with high-stakes testing. First of all, a high average score suggests that students are at least somewhat familiar with the idea of high-stakes testing and how it affects their academic performance. The response is more moderate,

indicating that high-stakes testing may not be a matter of frequent discussion or attention, but the awareness of discussions surrounding it within their departments or universities is less certain.

Participants' stress levels were divided into three categories based on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which was created by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983): low (0–13), moderate (14–26), and high (27–45). Only a small percentage of students received low-stress scores, suggesting that they used coping mechanisms that were quite effective or that they were confident in their ability to function academically (see Table 13, where students indicated confidence). According to Tables 1–6, 9–10, 12, and 14–23, where average scores were between 3.0 and 3.6, indicating moderate agreement with stress-related indicators, the majority of respondents fell within the moderate stress range.

Interestingly, a significant number of students received high-stress scores. Mean scores of 3.9 or higher were found in Tables 7, 8, 11, and 12, indicating heightened symptoms such anxiety, sleep problems, emotional instability, and physical complaints that are commonly linked to high perceived stress. These findings highlight the significant psychological and emotional toll that high-stakes exams places on students.

Most students agreed that high-stakes exams affected both their academic and personal lives. Before tests, a lot of people said they felt overwhelmed and nervous, which had negative effects on their confidence (Table 8) and sleep habits (Table 11). In spite of this, several students talked about managing these pressures by employing coping strategies like talking to friends, using relaxation techniques, or practicing meditation. Nonetheless, the absence of sufficient institutional support emerged as a recurring trend in the data. In general, students believed that their universities did not offer enough counselling or mental health services to assist them cope with the stress of exams (Table 19).

These findings are reinforced by the PSS scores, which suggest that stress management resources remain insufficient for the needs of many students. A crucial area for administrative and policy reform is indicated by this discrepancy between student needs and university support systems. For students to better handle academic pressure and enhance their general well-being, universities should think about introducing structured intervention programs, counselling services, and stress reduction courses.

Conclusion

Overall, the data indicates that while students are aware of the importance of high-stakes exams, they face significant emotional, mental, and physical challenges due to the pressure these exams create. Many students feel that these tests don't always accurately represent their talents, and stress, anxiety, and feelings of overload are typical. Additionally, the data indicates that although students have created their own coping mechanisms, there is a perceived deficiency of institutional assistance to assist them in coping with the stress of high-stakes exams.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) results further reinforce these concerns, with a substantial portion of respondents scoring in the moderate to high-stress range. In order to help students effectively manage stress, educational institutions must acknowledge the effects of high-stakes testing on them and offer more extensive support networks. Making sure that students have access to tools like academic support, stress

management classes, and counselling could help mitigate some of the negative impacts found in this study and enhance students' general well-being and academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the survey, several recommendations can be made to address the challenges students face regarding high-stakes testing:

1. To assist students in coping with the stress of important tests, universities ought to think about strengthening their support services. This can entail making counselling services more easily accessible, holding seminars on stress reduction and relaxation methods, and making sure students are aware of the tools that are available.

2. Offering students required or elective stress management classes or seminars could provide them the skills they need to manage exam anxiety. To assist students lower stress and perform better, these courses could cover techniques including time management, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques.

3. Academic departments ought to have more open conversations about high-stakes testing. By understanding the difficulties students encounter and offering support, faculty and staff can significantly contribute to stress reduction. Raising awareness of how these assessments affect students' mental health may contribute to the development of a more compassionate and encouraging learning environment.

4. Although high-stakes tests are frequently used to gauge academic achievement, they could not accurately represent a student's aptitudes. Alternative assessment methods, including project-based learning or continuous assessment, should be considered by universities in order to lessen the emphasis on one-time, stressful exams and give a more realistic view of a student's aptitudes.

5. Fostering peer support networks where students may discuss the anxiety of high-stakes tests and exchange methods could contribute to the development of a feeling of community. Students may feel less alone and more supported during exam times with the help of peer-led study groups or stress-relieving activities.

6. Universities should encourage improved sleep hygiene and mental well-being activities since the survey revealed that stress from high-stakes exams might impact sleep quality and general mental health. Better exam scheduling, more opportunities for rest and relaxation, and the provision of quiet study areas could all help lessen these detrimental consequences.

7. The long-term effects of high-stakes testing on academic performance and mental health require further research. Future studies can examine the efficacy of existing support networks, other approaches to evaluation, and stress-reduction techniques. Universities would be better able to comprehend the demands of their students and enhance their high-stakes testing practices as a result.

In order to lessen the detrimental impacts of high-stakes testing, institutions should address these issues and establish a more encouraging environment that prioritizes students' academic performance and well-being first.

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