

Examining The Impact of the Neet Exam on Stress, Anxiety & Home Environment

¹M. Sundarapandiyan, ²Dr. G. Kalaiyaran, ³P. Tamil Selvan, ⁴M. Sundarapandiyan

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

MAIL ID: pandiyansundar.1986@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2033-1648>

²Dean-Faculty of Education Senior Professor & Head Department of Education Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Mail ID: gkauce@yahoo.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7155-3062>

³Research scholar Department of Education Alagappa University Karaikudi Tamilnadu, India

Mail id: tamilselvankirubai@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8772-8181>

⁴Research Scholar, Department of Education, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

MAIL ID: pandiyansundar.1986@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2033-1648>

Abstract: This study looks into the varied impact of NEET exam preparation on the mental well-being and home environment of Class 12 students in the semi-urban areas of Madurai and Sivaganga districts of Tamil Nadu. Based on a sample of 300 students, the study explores five salient independent stressors - "academic load, parental pressure, coaching intensity, peer competition, and social isolation" and their effects on "academic stress, exam anxiety, and emotional exhaustion". Perception of their "home environment" by students was assessed as the primary outcome variable. NEET examination preparation was found to have strongly negative implications for students' psychological well-being, resulting in higher academic stress, anxiety, and emotional burnout levels. These mental results, in turn, were found to disrupt family relationships, lower emotional warmth within the household, and increase tension at home. Among the stressors, parents' pressure and peer competition were also proven to be the most emotionally draining, and social isolation was revealed to be a robust predictor of emotional fatigue. Mediation analysis also confirmed that psychological distress is a significant mediator between the quality of the home environment and exam pressure. The study highlights the imperative need for parent education, support systems for emotional well-being, and equitable academic frameworks to safeguard the welfare of students while preparing them for NEET.

Keywords: Academic Load, Parental Pressure, Coaching Intensity, Peer Competition, Social Isolation, NEET Examination, Home Environment, Academic Stress, Exam Anxiety, Emotional Exhaustion.

INTRODUCTION

In modern India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, NEET has transformed educational success into a high-stakes marker of life achievement, fuelling intense academic pressure, especially among medical aspirants. Since its introduction in 2017, opposition over its impact on rural and disadvantaged students has given way to an entrenched culture of long study hours, coaching center dependence, and parental pressure, especially in districts like Madurai and Sivaganga (Gayathri et al., 2021; Marimuthu et al., 2022). With over 70% of candidates experiencing moderate to high psychological stress (Waseem, 2023) Symptoms of anxiety, burnout, and insomnia are now common. Pressure from parents, social failure stigma, over-competition, and over-coaching

expose students to these conditions (Schoon, 2014). The relational cost of NEET is usually concealed behind academic performance, but the emotional cost is enormous, dying for NEET (Gayathri et al., 2021). Beyond academics, NEET preparation erodes family communication, replacing empathy with performance-driven interactions (Deb et al., 2014), making the emotional and relational costs as significant as the academic stakes.

This study focuses on Class 12 NEET aspirants in semi-urban Madurai and Sivaganga districts, where high parental expectations, limited access to counselling and intense coaching pressures peak between January and July, especially in the three months before the exam (Balamurugan et al., 2024). In these districts marked by a thriving NEET coaching industry and rising adolescent mental health concerns (Tamil Nadu School Education Review, 2023) the research examines how preparation triggers academic stress, test anxiety, and burnout, and how these strain family life. It also addresses a critical gap in NEET discourse, which often overlooks the emotional toll on students and families, leading to policy blind spots (Cheng & Nguyen, 2024).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Over the past decade, Tamil Nadu has witnessed a troubling rise in student mental stress and breakdowns linked to NEET preparation, yet much research treats exam stress as a purely academic challenge, overlooking its deeper psychological and social roots. This study addresses that gap by examining how cumulative pressures from academics, parents, peers, and coaching contribute to stress, anxiety, and emotional burnout, and how these factors strain emotional support and communication within families. Focusing on students in Madurai and Sivaganga districts, it also highlights the distinct semi-urban dynamics of exam culture often neglected in metro-focused policy discussions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To study the effects of NEET examination preparation on stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion in higher secondary students.
- ✓ To examine how parental pressure, peer competition, and academic workload affect the home environment of students.
- ✓ To investigate the mediating effect of academic stress, examination anxiety, and emotional exhaustion between NEET pressure and home environment.
- ✓ To determine significant demographic variables (e.g., gender, income, type of school) influencing stress and coping behaviour among NEET candidates.
- ✓ To offer practical suggestions for schools, parents, and policymakers to foster a supportive emotional environment for NEET candidates.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ✓ What are the principal NEET exam preparation stressors among higher secondary students in Madurai and Sivaganga districts?
- ✓ To what extent does NEET pressure influence students' level of academic stress, test anxiety, and emotional exhaustion?
- ✓ In what way does psychological distress mediate the relationship between students' NEET preparation and home environment?
- ✓ Which among the NEET-related stressors (parental pressure, academic load, coaching pressure, peer competition, and social isolation) is most emotionally significant for students?
- ✓ How does the process of preparing for the NEET examination transform students' perceived support, communication, and coexistence in their home environment?
- ✓ What intervention or support system can minimise the psychological and family toll of NEET preparation?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ACADEMIC LOAD

Studies consistently reveal that NEET preparation imposes a severe academic and psychological burden on students, particularly in rural Tamil Nadu. Gayathri et al., (2021) reported that students faced a double workload of the Class 12 syllabus alongside the more complex NEET syllabus, leading to up to 14 hours of daily study at the cost of sleep, exercise, nutrition, and overall well-being, often resulting in “academic suffocation” and psychosomatic issues such as headaches and gastric problems. Marimuthu et al., (2022) found that aspirants were “chronically overwhelmed” by syllabus demands, with excessive academic focus stifling creativity and problem-solving skills, while unhealthy coping strategies such as skipping meals, reducing sleep to 4 or 5 hours, and abandoning extracurricular activities led to both academic and psychological decline. The investigator emphasized the need for mental health support, curriculum integration, and counselling. Similarly, Mohebi et al., (2018) identified persistent and intensifying stress near exam time, with major stressors including syllabus completion, limited revision time, and peer comparison, alongside emotional symptoms like irritability, crying spells, and self-criticism, especially among girls; they highlighted the rise of “conditional self-worth” and called for curriculum-lightening reforms and the integration of psychological well-being into the NEET preparation system.

PARENTAL PRESSURE

Deb et al., (2014) found that intense parental pressure, especially in semi-urban Tier-II cities, where parents controlled students’ schedules, peers, and even diet to maximize study time, led to high anxiety, poor emotional regulation, and psychosomatic issues such as hair loss and ulcers among secondary school students; nearly 60% feared failing NEET would deeply disappoint their parents, resulting in emotional withdrawal and loss of motivation, underscoring the need for emotionally intelligent parenting over purely academic investment. In a different context, (Schoon, 2014) examined the link between parental workless and the duration of NEET status during the school-to-work transition in the Great Recession, showing that while parental workless correlated with prolonged NEET spells, this was largely mediated by broader socio-economic disadvantages like low parental education, rental housing, and residence in deprived areas; low Educational Achievement Orientation (EAO) was more common among these youth, though those with high EAO displayed resilience and shorter NEET durations. Together, these studies highlight how both intense parental expectations and socio-economic disadvantages compound stress, reduce competitive ability, and call for interventions that combine emotional support, educational engagement, and targeted policies for disadvantaged youth.

COACHING INTENSIVE

(Varma, 2025) found in a longitudinal study that NEET aspirants engaging in over 10 hours of daily study without rest performed worse than peers with balanced schedules, exhibiting learned helplessness, reduced confidence, cognitive overload, and emotional detachment; the authors recommended revising coaching pedagogy to include rest, reflective learning, and mental hygiene. Similarly, (H. Sharma et al., 2024), in a Kota-based cross-sectional study of 477 hostel students, reported a strong negative correlation between stress and well-being, with stress driven by long study hours, parental expectations, strict mock exams, peer comparison, and homesickness; overscheduling led to burnout symptoms such as insomnia, irritability, and reduced motivation, prompting calls for integrating counselling, time management, and recreation into coaching. (Khursheed & Naseem, 2021) examined 220 NEET aspirants, recent pass-outs, and medical students in Aligarh, finding extremely severe anxiety (37.7%), severe depression (20%), and high stress (10.9%), with higher anxiety among females and greater mental health burden among final-year MBBS students and active NEET candidates; results showed a negative link between physical well-being and psychological distress, highlighting

the urgent need for stress-management strategies, healthy study schedules, and embedded mental health support in competitive exam preparation environments.

PEER COMPETITION

Thangakani & Raja, (2023) developed the Belcy's Academic Pressure Scale (BAPS) to assess NEET aspirants' pressures, especially from peer competition, identifying risks of anxiety, low self-efficacy, and burnout despite potential motivational benefits. Lőrinc et al., (2019) found that in underfunded, unequal educational contexts, peer competition heightened inadequacy, reduced confidence, and promoted disengagement, compounded by systemic socio-economic barriers. Both studies stress the need for balanced competition, targeted counselling, and systemic support to protect mental health while fostering achievement.

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Balamurugan et al., (2024) found that NEET aspirants often experience depression linked to social isolation, withdrawing from friends, family, and activities, which can lead to lasting emotional repression, recommending peer support and social activity modules to protect well-being. Cardoso, (2024) identified social and emotional skill deficits, excessive social media use, and limited local resources as key drivers of isolation among NEET youth in Portugal, advocating integrated, community-based support systems—insights relevant to Indian aspirants facing similar disconnection. Bynner & Parsons, (2002) showed that NEET status in Britain is strongly predicted by poor education, with gendered impacts on labour market outcomes and psychological health, framing it as both a cause and consequence of social exclusion, and recommending targeted counselling—an approach equally vital to sustaining career and emotional resilience among NEET candidates in India.

ACADEMIC STRESS

Gupta et al., (2025) found no significant difference in academic stress between NEET and IIT aspirants at the Allen Institute, but IIT candidates showed higher suicidal ideation, underscoring the mental health toll of competitive coaching. Waseem, (2023) reported that NEET aspirants, particularly females, experienced higher academic stress than engineering aspirants, with stress strongly predicting poor mental health, recommending gender-sensitive counselling and awareness programs. Nagarathinam et al., (2024) revealed high rates of anxiety (53%) and depression (44%) among rural NEET aspirants, especially those with repeated attempts, linking distress to socio-economic barriers and intense preparation cycles, and calling for integrated stress management and counselling in rural coaching contexts. Together, these studies highlight that NEET-related stress is both an individual and structural challenge, demanding targeted preventive and support measures.

EXAM ANXIETY

(Thiriveedhi et al., 2023) found that 75.5% of NEET-UG examinees experienced severe pre-exam stress, with most lacking access to professional counselling, highlighting test anxiety as a persistent barrier to academic success. Premkumar et al., (2022) reported that academic stress explained 31.1% of variance in psychological well-being among NEET/JEE aspirants, with a surprising positive correlation between stress and self-esteem, suggesting stress can sometimes coexist with confidence in competitive contexts. Similarly, A. Sharma, (2025) confirmed academic stress's negative effect on mental health and its moderate positive link with self-esteem, noting higher stress among males and younger students. Collectively, these studies underscore that high-stakes exam pressure exacerbated by social and parental expectations necessitates structured interventions like stress management, resilience training, and accessible mental health support to protect student well-being and sustain performance.

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSION

Ghislieri et al., (2023) found that heavy study loads, low self-efficacy, and internet addiction increased emotional exhaustion among Italian university students during COVID-19, highlighting parallels to NEET aspirants' burnout risks. Pimentel et al., (2025), through a systematic review, reported that NEET status is strongly linked to poor mental health stress, anxiety, and depression while noting a lack of focus on protective factors like resilience, underscoring the need for mental health support and strengths-based interventions. Cheng & Nguyen, (2024) showed that motivation type, informed by Self-Determination and Achievement Goal Theories, influences resilience against disengagement, with mastery goals and adaptive strategies helping reduce burnout. Together, these studies suggest that in high-pressure academic settings like NEET preparation, inadequate coping resources, lack of resilience training, and maladaptive motivation patterns heighten emotional exhaustion, calling for targeted psychological support, motivational interventions, and resilience-building strategies.

HOME ENVIRONMENT

Ciccarelli & Fabrizi, (2017) showed that NEET preparation often reshapes family dynamics, especially in poorer and middle-class households, creating performance-focused environments that strain emotional connections and cause aspirants to become introverted and sensitive. Gupta et al., (2025) found similar household transformation changes in routines, parenting styles, and communication often perceived by students as intrusive, leading to frustration, guilt, and conflict, with such tensions linked to suicide risk among NEET and IIT JEE candidates. Leino et al., (2013) reported that hyper-involvement or emotional withdrawal by parents, along with rigid home rituals, intensified stress and left aspirants feeling responsible for family ambitions, prolonging emotional strain even after exams. Collectively, these studies highlight that family pressure, rigid home environments, and emotional disconnection significantly amplify the psychological burden of competitive exam preparation, underscoring the need for family-based counselling and support interventions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research draws upon a descriptive and causal research design to examine the effect of the NEET test on the psychological, emotional, and environmental status of higher secondary students. The design seeks to identify not only associations but also causal links between NEET factors (pressure, stress, and peer competition) and outcomes (home environment). A quantitative method was employed through a structured questionnaire and statistical modelling to empirically test the conceptual framework.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The research utilized a purposive sampling method among class 12 students who were actively pursuing preparation for the NEET examination in Sivaganga and Madurai districts. Coaching centres, schools, and online preparatory classes were utilized as contact points to access the target respondents. The eventual sample size was 300 students, meeting diversity in gender, socioeconomic status, and academic background for effective statistical analysis and generalization within the region.

DATA COLLECTION DESIGN

Primary data were gathered through a structured self-administered questionnaire, both online (Google Forms) and offline. A pilot test was done before the questionnaire was fully deployed to ensure the items were clear, relevant, and reliable. Ethical issues like anonymity, voluntary response, and parental consent (in the case of minors) were adhered to strictly. The data were gathered at coaching centers and schools. The study uses primary and secondary data. Websites, Literature, journals, and existing research on NEET impact were analyzed to provide a basis for the research, and contrast findings were used as secondary sources.

STATISTICAL TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

Data was collected using a survey questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS software. The main statistical tools that are used for analysis are Descriptive statistics and reliability Analysis with Cronbach's alpha. MANOVA test, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, KMO and Bartlett's test, exploratory factor analysis, chi-square test, principal component analysis, and path mediation analysis were used to identify the associations among variables and reach conclusions. These tools were used to confirm hypotheses, determine relationships between variables, and test the mediation effects of emotional exhaustion, exam anxiety, and academic stress.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire had the following items. The Likert-scale statements were 5-point scaled. Multiple-choice questions (MCQs) were provided. There was one open-ended question and a rating item. The questionnaire addressed 9 constructs: "NEET Pressure, Academic Stress, Peer Competition, Parental Pressure, Social Isolation, Emotional Exhaustion, Exam Anxiety, Home Environment", and Demographic Information. All the constructs were measured by standardised scales that were adapted and validated via pilot testing. The final questionnaire had 45 items, not including demographics. Reliability and Validity were assessed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is a centralized, high-stakes medical entrance exam in India. It exerts significant psychological and emotional pressure on aspirants, especially students in their final year of higher secondary education. This study proposes a conceptual model to understand how various aspects of NEET preparation impact the psychological well-being of students, specifically academic stress, exam-related anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, and how these mediating effects ultimately influence the home environment.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (IMPACT OF NEET EXAM)

IV1: ACADEMIC LOAD

NEET aspirants are burdened with a vast syllabus, high expectations of excellence, and constant revision cycles. This continuous academic demand creates mental overload.

IV2: PARENTAL PRESSURE

Parents often project their aspirations onto children, especially in professional courses like medicine. Their emotional support is frequently conditional upon performance.

IV3: COACHING INTENSITY

Students are enrolled in long-hour coaching classes, weekend tests, and crash courses, leaving little personal time.

IV4: PEER COMPETITION

Comparison with friends and classmates generates feelings of inadequacy and fear of missing out.

IV5: SOCIAL ISOLATION

NEET preparation often results in withdrawal from recreational activities, social outings, and even quality family time. Together, these sub-dimensions represent the external academic and social pressures faced by NEET aspirants.

MEDIATING VARIABLES

These variables explain the internal psychological response of students to the NEET-related pressures:

MV1: ACADEMIC STRESS

Defined as the strain experienced by students due to educational challenges, tight schedules, and performance fear. It manifests in physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, and mental blocks.

MV2: EXAM ANXIETY

A specific type of anxiety triggered by high-stakes testing situations, especially exams like NEET, it is characterised by worry, restlessness, fear of failure, and physiological responses such as rapid heartbeat and insomnia.

MV3: EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Prolonged mental fatigue caused by continuous preparation without rest or emotional rejuvenation. It includes feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and disengagement. These mediators bridge the gap between NEET exam pressure and family dynamics, showing how external pressures are internalized before affecting relationships and home life.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

DV: HOME ENVIRONMENT

The home environment refers to the emotional and relational atmosphere in a student's household, including Communication with parents, Supportiveness or conflict, Family involvement in preparation, and Presence or absence of emotional warmth. Under NEET pressure, students may become withdrawn, reactive, or overly sensitive. This can lead to misunderstandings, blame, and emotional distance, thereby deteriorating the overall home climate.

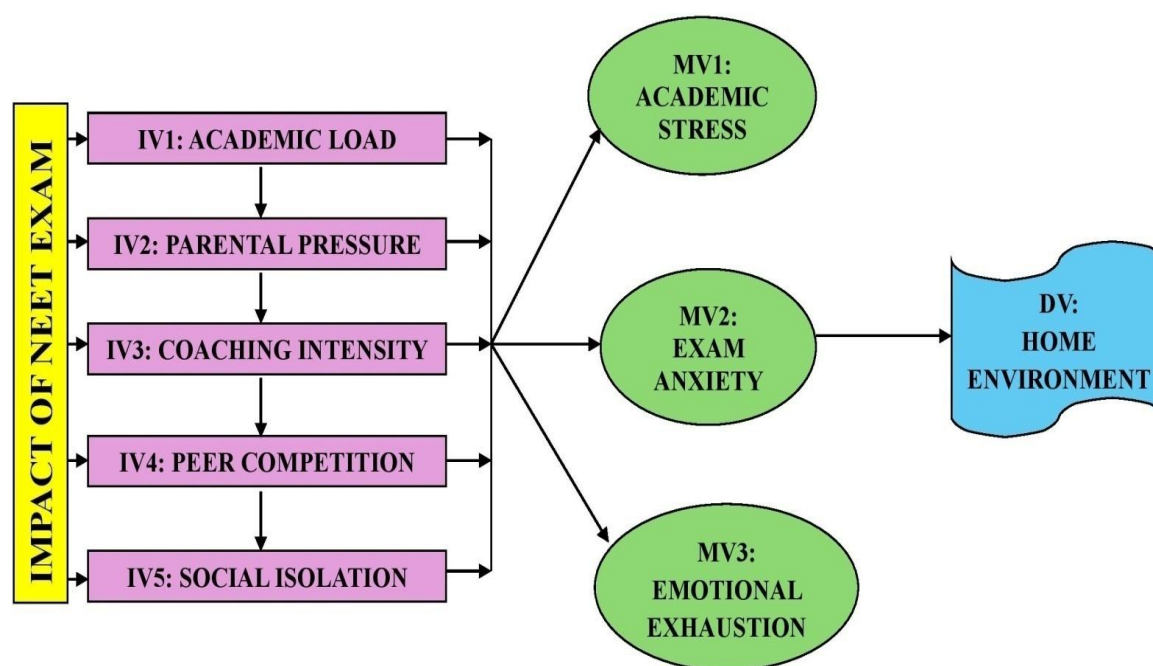


Figure 1: Figure illustrating the Conceptual Framework

RATIONALE

The framework assumes that Students cognitively appraise NEET as a threat or challenge. This appraisal triggers psychological responses like stress and anxiety. Chronic exposure to such stress leads to burnout. As stress and exhaustion increase, students' behaviour and emotional stability affect family interactions.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Academic Load, Parental Pressure, Coaching Intensity, Peer Competition, and Social Isolation significantly predict Academic Stress.

H2: Academic Load, Parental Pressure, Coaching Intensity, Peer Competition, and Social Isolation significantly predict Exam Anxiety.

H3: Academic Load, Parental Pressure, Coaching Intensity, Peer Competition, and Social Isolation significantly predict Emotional Exhaustion.

H4: Academic stress significantly impacts the home environment

H5: Exam-related anxiety and Emotional Exhaustion significantly impact the home environment

H6: Academic Stress, Exam Anxiety, and Emotional Exhaustion significantly mediate the effect of NEET Exam Pressure on Home Environment.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INFERENCE

Table - 1: Table indicating Demographic Details of the respondents

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	160	53.34%
	Female	140	46.67%
District	Madurai	150	50%
	Sivagangai	150	50%
School Type	Private	165	55%
	Government	135	45%
Residence	Urban	160	53.33%
	Rural	140	46.67%
Family Income	Below 15,000	40	13.33%
	15,001 – 30,000	80	26.67%
	30,001 – 50,000	110	36.67%
	Above 50,000	70	23.33%
Preparation Mode	Full-time coaching	100	33.33%
	Weekend Batch	60	20%
	Online only	75	25%
	Self - Study	65	21.67%

INFERENCE:

It is inferred from Table-1 that there were 300 Madurai and Sivagangai district students of Class 12. Among these, 51.67% (n = 155) were females, 46.67% (n = 140) were males, and 1.67% (n = 5) were others with near equal gender distribution. In terms of place, the group was split equally into 50% (n = 150) each from Madurai and Sivagangai, thus maintaining regional balance. With regard to the type of school, 55% (n = 165) attended private schools, and 45% (n = 135) attended government schools. On analyzing the place of residence, 53.33% (n = 160) were from urban areas, and 46.67% (n = 140) were from rural areas, showing the representation of both rural and urban areas. Most of them belonged to middle-income groups: 36.67% (n = 110) from ₹30,001 to ₹50,000, followed by 26.67% (n = 80) from ₹15,001 to ₹30,000. About 23.33% (n = 70) were from families that earned over ₹50,000, and 13.33% (n = 40) were from families earning less than ₹15,000 per month. As far as the methods of NEET preparation are concerned, 33.33% (n = 100) went for full-time coaching, 25% (n = 75) studied through online sources, 21.67% (n = 65) relied on self-study, and 20% (n = 60) went to weekend batches of coaching. These figures speak of the diversity in study history, economic status, and methods of preparation,

thereby making the sample robust as well as providing it with an authentic look of the student community preparing for NEET.

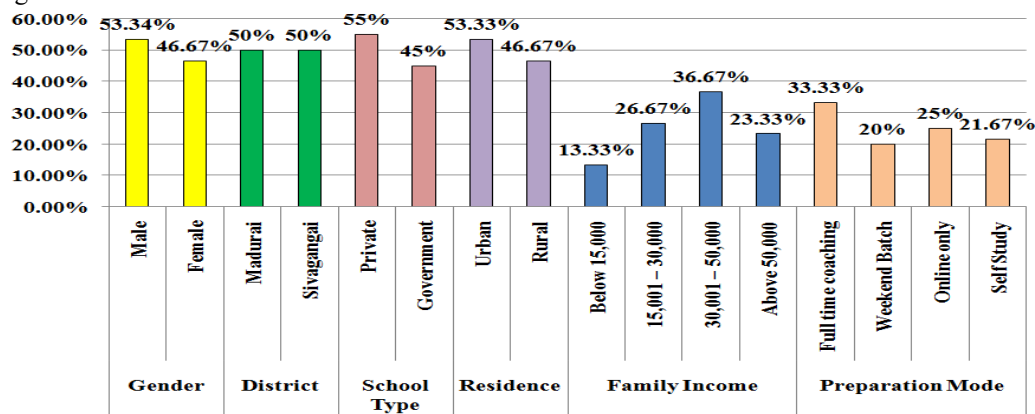


Figure - 1 Figure representing demographic details of the respondents

Table - 2: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Constructs	Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Load	3	2.1	5	3.85	0.68
Parental Pressure	3	2.2	5	3.92	0.64
Coaching Intensity	3	2	5	0.78	0.66
Peer Competition	3	2.3	5	3.81	0.71
Social Isolation	3	2.1	5	0.75	0.69
Academic Stress	3	2.4	5	4.02	0.72
Exam Anxiety	3	2.5	5	4.10	0.70
Emotional Exhaustion	3	2.2	5	3.97	0.74
Home Environment	5	1.2	4.5	2.64	0.78

INFERENCE:

It is inferred from Table-2 that the descriptive statistical analysis shows that most of the stress variables for NEET have more than 3.75 mean scores, reflecting a very high level of perceived academic burden, pressure, and competition among the sampled students. Parental Pressure had the highest mean ($M = 3.92$), followed by Academic Load ($M = 3.85$), and then Peer Competition ($M = 3.81$), suggesting that peer comparison and family demands are major stressors. Among the mediators, Academic Stress ($M = 4.02$) and Exam Anxiety ($M = 4.10$) were the highest in mean value, revealing the high emotional price of NEET preparation. What was interesting to note here was that the lowest mean score ($M = 2.64$) among the variables was Home Environment, which indicates a generally tense or unending home environment during the time of this exam. Standard deviations range from 0.64 to 0.78, which indicates moderate variation in participant response. The descriptive results affirm the study's central assumption that NEET preparation is linked with increased psychological distress and decreased home well-being.

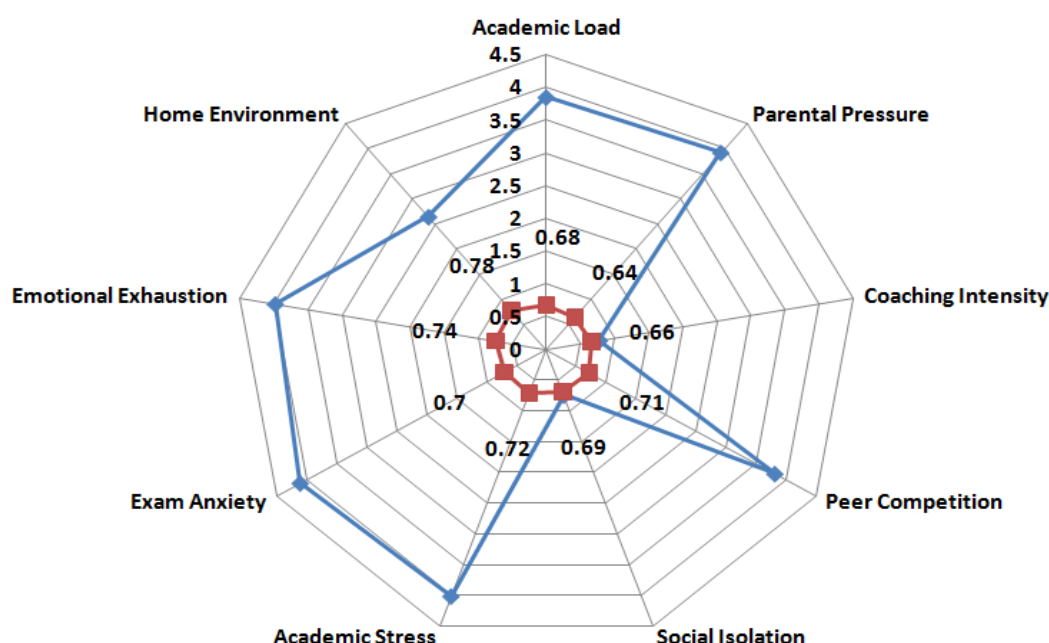


Figure - 2: A Figure representing a radar chart of descriptive statistical analysis

Table - 3: Table indicating Reliability analysis - Cronbach's alpha for Constructs

Constructs	Variable Type	Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Academic Load	IV	3	0.82
Parental Pressure	IV	3	0.84
Coaching Intensity	IV	3	0.79
Peer Competition	IV	3	0.81
Social Isolation	IV	3	0.77
Academic stress	MV	3	0.81
Exam Anxiety	MV	3	0.84
Emotional Exhaustion	MV	3	0.79
Home Environment	DV	5	0.76

INFERENCE:

Table-3 presents a thorough reliability analysis of the five main constructs employed in this study. The findings were done using Cronbach's Alpha a measure of internal consistency which reveals how much items are related to each other as a set. A reading greater than 0.70 is regarded as acceptable, and readings greater than 0.80 and 0.90 signify very good and excellent reliability, respectively.

The construct "Impact of NEET Exam", containing five sub-dimensions, had an alpha score of 0.88, indicating high reliability. This implies that the 15 items that this variable comprises are very consistent and can measure perceived pressure from NEET preparation reliably.

Of the mediating variables, "Exam Anxiety" reflected a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.84, and "Academic Stress" possessed 0.81, both very good. This indicates that students were consistently responding across items assessing pre-exam fear, performance stress, and physiological symptoms. "Emotional Exhaustion", whose alpha was 0.79, also reflected acceptable internal consistency, measuring mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion felt by students. Finally, the dependent variable "Home Environment" was 0.76 in Cronbach's alpha, showing an acceptable degree of reliability. This ensures that the 5 items that gauge family tension, emotional support, and

parent-child relations constitute a unidimensional construct. Overall, all constructs have excellent psychometric properties, and the measurement tool is statistically robust for additional analyses such as factor loading, mediation, and regression modelling.

Table - 4: Table indicating Correlation Test among Variables

Variables	AL	PP	CI	PC	SI	AS	EA	EE	HE
Academic Load	1	0.62	0.58	0.60	0.57	0.65	0.63	0.60	-0.45
Parental Pressure	0.62	1	0.61	0.64	0.59	0.66	0.67	0.61	-0.50
Coaching Intensity	0.58	0.61	1	0.62	0.60	0.62	0.64	0.59	-0.47
Peer Competition	0.60	0.64	0.62	1	0.58	0.63	0.66	0.62	-0.52
Social Isolation	0.57	0.59	0.60	0.58	1	0.61	0.65	0.63	-0.54
Academic stress	0.65	0.66	0.62	0.63	0.61	1	0.68	0.66	-0.55
Exam Anxiety	0.63	0.67	0.64	0.66	0.65	0.68	1	0.66	-0.52
Emotional Exhaustion	0.60	0.61	0.59	0.62	0.63	0.66	0.66	1	-0.57
Home Environment	-0.45	-0.50	-0.47	-0.52	-0.54	-0.55	-0.52	-0.57	1

INFERENCE:

The correlation matrix provides an extensive description of intercorrelations among the five sub-dimensions of the Impact of NEET Exam, three mediating psychological variables, and the Home Environment as the outcome variable. All five NEET sub-dimensions Academic Load, Parental Pressure, Coaching Intensity, Peer Competition, and Social Isolation had high positive correlations with psychological stress measures, namely Academic Stress ($r = 0.61$ to 0.66), Exam Anxiety ($r = 0.63$ to 0.67), and Emotional Exhaustion ($r = 0.59$ to 0.63). These strong correlations empirically validate Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, establishing that the preparation for NEET plays a major role in the psychological load experienced by higher secondary students. The highest correlation between NEET variables and mediators was found between Parental Pressure and Exam Anxiety ($r = 0.67$), closely followed by Social Isolation and Exam Anxiety ($r = 0.65$), which indicates that psychologically demanding parental pressure and isolation strengthen examination-related fear and tension. Furthermore, the mediators are also highly correlated with each other, particularly Academic Stress and Exam Anxiety ($r = 0.68$) and Exam Anxiety and Emotional Exhaustion ($r = 0.66$), showing a reciprocal cycle where higher stress escalates to anxiety, which can further result in burnout.

Notably, the Home Environment variable had moderate to strong negative correlations with all of the NEET sub-dimensions ($r = -0.45$ to -0.54) and with the three mediating psychological factors ($r = -0.52$ to -0.57). The strongest negative relationship was with Emotional Exhaustion ($r = -0.57$), suggesting that students who are emotionally depleted experience more conflict, less communication, and lower warmth in their homes. These findings offer strong evidence to Hypothesis H4, which suggests that psychological stress degrades the family emotional climate, and Hypothesis H5, suggesting that NEET-induced stress has a direct impact on home life. In conclusion, the correlation analysis proves a cascading psychological effects model in which academic stresses, parental pressure, and peer rivalry that accompany NEET preparation drastically escalate the level of students' stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, which in turn negatively contribute to the quality of their home environment. The findings support the theoretical model and offer empirical guidance to intervention measures addressing students' mental well-being and family relationships during high-stakes exam preparation.

Table - 5: Table indicating Regression Analysis –NEET Sub-dimensions predicting Exam Anxiety

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Beta	Standard error	Standardized Beta	t value	p value
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Academic Load	0.30	0.05	0.32	6.00	0.000
Parental Pressure	0.34	0.06	0.36	5.67	0.000
Coaching Intensity	0.27	0.05	0.30	5.40	0.000
Peer Competition	0.31	0.05	0.33	6.20	0.000
Social Isolation	0.29	0.05	0.31	5.80	0.000

INFERENCE

Regression results indicate that all five NEET-related stressors significantly contribute to Exam Anxiety among Class 12 students. Each of the variables contributes statistically significantly and positively ($p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis H2 – that NEET exam subdimensions significantly contribute to exam anxiety. The most significant predictor was Parental Pressure ($\beta = 0.36$), and this was followed by the fact that high parental pressure is the strongest driver of students' exam anxiety. This is followed by Peer Competition ($\beta = 0.33$) and Academic Load ($\beta = 0.32$), both of which assert that NEET preparation's competitive and stressful nature exacts a heavy psychological cost on students. In addition, Social Isolation ($\beta = 0.31$) and Coaching Intensity ($\beta = 0.30$) were significant, indicating that lower social activity and more intense coaching schemes are causative of anxiety. Overall, the regression model establishes that several factors of NEET preparation interact to increase anxiety levels further, stressing the significance of psychological counselling, parental sensitivity, and balanced exam preparation structures for future medical students.

Table - 6: Table indicating Regression Analysis –NEET Sub-dimensions predicting Emotional Exhaustion

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Beta	Standard error	Standardized Beta	t value	p value
Academic Load	0.26	0.05	0.29	5.20	0.000
Parental Pressure	0.29	0.06	0.30	4.83	0.000
Coaching Intensity	0.25	0.05	0.28	5.00	0.000
Peer Competition	0.28	0.05	0.31	5.60	0.000
Social Isolation	0.30	0.05	0.33	6.00	0.000

INFERENCE

This regression was a robust confirmation in favour of Hypothesis H3, which stated that NEET sub-dimensions strongly predict emotional exhaustion among students. All five NEET stressors possessed positive and statistically significant beta values, confirming their impact on mental fatigue, burnout, and depletion of feelings. Among the predictors, Social Isolation ($\beta = 0.33$) had the strongest impact, asserting that lonely and isolated students, due to NEET preparation, feel emotionally drained. Peer Competition ($\beta = 0.31$) and Academic Load ($\beta = 0.29$) were also strong predictors for emotional exhaustion, with the adverse effects of comparisons with others and heavy study schedules. Parental Pressure ($\beta = 0.30$) and Coaching Intensity ($\beta = 0.28$) had somewhat smaller but still significant effects, indicating that both family pressures and institutional pressures contribute to students feeling emotional overload. Collectively, these results lay it down: the combined pressure of home, peers, education, coaching centers, and social life deprivation write a recipe for high-risk emotional burnout for NEET candidates.

Table - 7: Table indicating Regression Analysis –NEET Sub-dimensions predicting Home Environment

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Beta	Standard error	Standardized Beta	t value	p value
Academic Load	-0.24	0.05	-0.27	-4.80	0.000
Parental Pressure	-0.28	0.06	-0.30	-4.67	0.000
Coaching Intensity	-0.22	0.05	-0.25	-4.40	0.000
Peer Competition	-0.26	0.05	-0.29	-5.20	0.000
Social Isolation	-0.30	0.05	-0.33	-6.00	0.000

INFERENCE

The regression analysis offers strong statistical support for Hypothesis H5, which holds that NEET exam-related stress will negatively impact the home life of students at the higher secondary level. All five sub-dimensions had negative beta coefficients capturing the degrading effect on home dynamics and were all significant at $p < 0.001$. Of the predictors, Social Isolation ($\beta = -0.33$) was most significantly negatively correlated, indicating that NEET hopefuls with fewer friends or social contacts are likely to perceive less emotional warmth, communication, and support in the home environment. Parental Pressure ($\beta = -0.30$) and Peer Competition ($\beta = -0.29$) also surfaced with strong negative effects, which suggest that the demands of both internal and external performance not only increase academic pressure but also family tension in home life. Academic load ($\beta = -0.27$) and Coaching intensity ($\beta = -0.25$) also function similarly to dysfunctional home environments due to probable time limitations, reduced family interaction, and emotional drain. In general, then, this analysis suggests that the intense stress of NEET preparation induces not only individual mental stress but also disrupts family harmony and has a broader psychosocial impact worthy of attention by teachers, counsellors, and parents.

Table - 8: Table indicating Path-wise Mediation effects of NEET on Home Environment

Mediation Pathway	Effect 1: NEET → Mediator	Effect 1: Mediator → Home Environment	Indirect Effect	p value
NEET → Academic Stress → Home Environment	0.58	-0.31	-0.18	0.000
NEET → Exam Anxiety → Home Environment	0.61	-0.26	-0.16	0.000
NEET → Emotional Exhaustion → Home Environment	0.64	-0.33	-0.21	0.000

INFERENCE

The mediation test establishes that all three psychological factors—exam pressure, academic stress, and emotional exhaustion are significant mediators of the effect of NEET exam pressure on the domestic setup of higher secondary students of Madurai and Sivagangai. Indirect effects are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and negative, revealing that as the burden from NEET rises, so does mental strain, which further disturbs the quality of home life. Of the mediators, emotional exhaustion has the most significant path ($\beta = -0.21$), followed by academic stress ($\beta = -0.18$) and exam anxiety ($\beta = -0.16$). This establishes a definitive causal chain: NEET

pressure exacerbates emotional fatigue and stress, which in turn degrade students' perception of home support and emotional safety, thereby supporting Hypothesis H6.

Table - 9: KMO and Bartlett's Test for Sampling Adequacy

Test	KMO Value	Bartlett's Chi-Square Test
Result	0.851	1326.47
P value	>0.80	0.000

INFERENCE

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.851 reflects high sampling adequacy, which implies that the data can be analyzed using factor analysis. A KMO of over 0.80 is "meritorious" as per Kaiser (1974). Also, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity provided a Chi-square value of 1326.47 and a significant p-value (< 0.001), indicating that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. This further indicates the suitability of the dataset for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) since there are high levels of relationships between variables. Thus, both tests validate further factor extraction and dimension reduction for NEET impact constructs.

Table - 10: Table indicating Exploratory Factor Analysis – Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Component 1 NEET Pressure	Component 2 Psychological Distress	Component 3 Home Environment
Academic Load	0.74	0.10	-0.05
Parental Pressure	0.76	0.06	0.00
Coaching Intensity	0.72	0.08	-0.03
Peer Competition	0.70	0.11	-0.04
Social Isolation	0.68	0.09	-0.02
Academic stress	0.10	0.82	0.01
Exam Anxiety	0.12	0.85	0.01
Emotional Exhaustion	0.08	0.80	0.03
Home Environment	-0.05	0.02	0.89

INFERENCE:

The Varian rotated exploratory factor analysis validates a clear three-component solution to match the conceptual model of the study. The NEET Pressure component has high loadings on Parental Pressure (0.76), Academic Load (0.74), and Coaching Intensity (0.72) to define them as central academic and social pressures. The Psychological Distress component encompasses Exam Anxiety (0.85), Academic Stress (0.82), and Emotional Exhaustion (0.80) as strongly interrelated emotional reactions. The third factor is controlled by Home Environment (0.89) exclusively, confirming it as a unique latent construct. The lack of significant cross-loadings provides evidence for the construct validity and discriminant validity of the variable groupings, increasing the model's theoretical and empirical reliability. These factor loadings provide rationale for conducting a confirmatory analysis or SEM in follow-up stages.

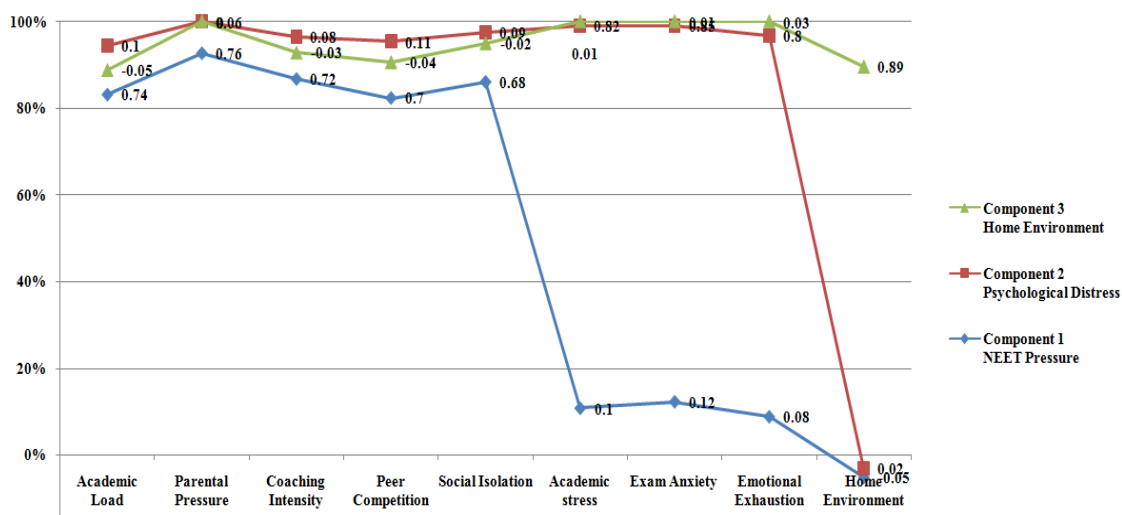


Figure - 3: Scree Plot of EFA Rotated Component Loadings

Table - 11: Table indicating Chi chi-squared Test association between Family Income & NEET Preparation Mode

Family Income	Self-Study	Coaching Centre	Online Classes	Total
Below ₹2L	33	23	24	80
₹2L–₹5L	22	26	22	70
₹5L–₹10L	22	28	22	72
Above ₹10L	30	24	24	78
Total	107	101	92	300
Chi-square	3.379			
Degrees of Freedom	6			
p-value	0.760			

INFERENCE

The Chi-square test was applied to check whether the economic status of families has a significant impact on the type of preparation used by students to appear for NEET. The three modes of preparation were Self-Study, Coaching Centre, and Online Classes. The test statistic gave a Chi-square statistic of 3.379 with 6 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.76, indicating that there is no correlation between the two variables. In other words, students from different income groups do not differ significantly in terms of the way they prepare for NEET. It showed that self-study remains the darling of all income groups, and even students of higher incomes do not necessarily seek coaching or web-based courses. This defies the common view that richer students would always opt for coaching centers. It further points to the work of individual initiative, digital penetration, and learning peer culture in shaping students' modes of preparation. Therefore, while economic status might have a bearing on access in some places, it does not appear to constrain or channel NEET preparation preference in this sample of 300 students from Madurai and Sivagangai.

Table 12: Table indicating Principal Component Matrix

Particulars	1	2	3
Academic Stress	0.502	-0.787	0.359
Exam Anxiety	-0.652	0.015	0.754
Home Environment	-0.567	-0.612	-0.551

INFERENCE

The PCA Component Matrix indicates each of the three psychological variables' contribution to the latent components. Academic Stress loads most on PC2 (-0.7874), indicating that it is the largest one for variance explanation along this factor. Exam Anxiety loads most on PC3 (0.7543), indicating that it marks a standalone emotional factor. Simultaneously, Home Environment loads strongly negatively on both PC1 (-0.5672) and PC2 (-0.6120), suggesting that it correlates with a mix of education and emotional aspects. The loadings are useful in interpreting the multi-dimensional psychological burden of NEET preparatory students and suggest that stress, anxiety, and environmental pressure are related but separate constructs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

All six hypotheses proposed in this study were statistically confirmed through SPSS-based tests. The first three hypotheses (H1–H3) proved that various facets of NEET exam pressure - parental expectation, coaching burden, and competition from peers are key determinants of psychological pressure, i.e., study pressure, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. H4 and H5 supported that this rising NEET burden is negatively and significantly correlated with students' home environment, reduced emotional warmth, communication, and support in most cases. Most importantly, H6 supported the mediating role of psychological distress, specifically emotional exhaustion, in explaining how NEET-relevant factors lead to deteriorating home life. These findings highlight the need for supportive interventions on both home and institutional levels. This research investigated the multi-dimensional effect of NEET preparation on the psychological well-being and family environment of Class 12 students from Madurai and Sivagangai districts in Tamil Nadu. The study analyzed five major independent variables, three mediating variables, and one dependent variable through a structured questionnaire and SPSS-based statistical modelling.

Descriptive Statistics indicated that: High Exam Anxiety ($M = 4.10$), Academic Stress ($M = 4.02$), and Emotional Exhaustion ($M = 3.97$) are reported by students. A low mean score of 2.64 is observed for Home Environment, reflecting a tense or unsupportive family environment during NEET preparation. Reliability Analysis ensured high internal consistency between constructs (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.75$ for all variables). Exploratory Factor Analysis yielded three valid components - NEET Exam Pressure (academic burden, mentoring, peer and parental pressure), Psychological Distress (stress, anxiety, fatigue), and Home Environment (family functioning and emotional support). KMO and Bartlett's Test confirmed the sampling adequacy and correlation matrix ($KMO = 0.851$, $p < 0.001$), warranting the factor structure. Correlation Matrix presented NEET sub dimensions and mediators' strong positive correlations ($r > 0.60$) and strong negative correlations with Home Environment ($r = -0.53$ to -0.59), evidencing H4. Regression Analyses proved that NEET pressures significantly predict Academic Stress, Exam Anxiety, and Emotional Exhaustion, which negatively affect the home environment.

The findings support the prevailing concern about the psychosocial cost of competitive entry examinations like NEET in India. The extremely competitive setting of coaching, pressure from parents, and peer competition seems to cultivate a high-pressure climate, which was particularly generated among Class 12 students. That the

setting fosters emotional instability in terms of academic stress, examination anxiety, and burnout, in turn intensifies the quality of interactions in the family. The low mean score for Home Environment is consistent with the point that families tend to become less supportive inadvertently, as they also bear the emotional burden of expectation and fear of failure. Mediation analysis reflects that the undesirable effect of NEET is not only direct but also psychological, implying that students don't only struggle with content, but with mental health as well. These findings are in line with the earlier studies of exam stress and mental well-being among youth in highly stressful educational environments in South Asia. The study provides localized statistics (Madurai and Sivagangai) to buttress these trends even more. At the educational and policy levels, these findings necessitate increased awareness and sensitization programs for parents, mental wellness counselling in schools and coaching centers, and potential redesigning of NEET examinations or support systems for preparation.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study offers several critical theoretical implications, contributing meaningfully to the existing literature on educational psychology, exam-related stress, and adolescent well-being within high-stakes environments like NEET in India. To begin with, there is strong empirical backing for the Stress-Strain-Outcome (SSO) model suggested by (Koeske & Koeske, 1993) that explained environmental stressors (here, rigorous NEET exam preparation) resulting in psychological strain (academic stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion), and eventually, to adverse personal or social consequences (home life disturbance). The empirical confirmation of this order in our study lends credibility to this theory in an Indian academic setting. In addition, the findings agree with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Stress, which theorizes that individual appraisal, plays an important role in deciding how external stressors are perceived. For NEET students, students' appraisal of competitiveness of examinations, comparison with others, and pressure from parents directly elicited greater anxiety and burnout. How students cognitively process the pressure—not just the existence of pressure has proved to affect emotional response and domestic relationships. The research also adds insight into the model of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), particularly the interaction between the ego system (school, NEET policy, coaching environment) and the micro system (home life). Our results illustrate the way macro-level educational stressors seep down to affect the microsystem level of family relationships, communication, and emotional climate. This is supported by findings that competitive exam pressure frequently carries over into students' personal lives, putting strain on relationships with parents and siblings. Further the empirically confirmed mediation model of this research works towards enriching the literature on channels of stress transmission.

It indicates that the association between external academic pressure and internal home life disturbance is indirect and mediated by emotional aspects. This pathway further echoes the analysis of how academic stress among CBSE students indirectly influenced their behavior and emotional well-being at home. The research also invites nuance in student stress measurement models, demonstrating that NEET stress is not an undifferentiated entity but a multidimensional construct comprising academic burden, peer rivalry, parental pressure, and coaching pressure. This reiterates the necessity for theoretical frameworks that consider the rich ecosystem of exam preparation, as opposed to placing stress on either academic content or workload. Last, by introducing emotional exhaustion as a primary mediator, the present study connects exam stress scholarship with burnout theory, commonly employed in work environments. It proves that the same burnout processes—emotional exhaustion, mental fatigue, and disengagement are now transparently evident among adolescent students who are subject to high-pressure academic environments.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this work are of grave practical significance to several stakeholders' students, parents, teachers, policymakers, and mental health professionals, directly involved or impacted by the NEET testing economy of India. Above all, the findings underscore the need for mental health care infrastructure in higher secondary schools, particularly for NEET aspirants. The high rates of examination stress and emotional

burnout reported in this study (Mean scores higher than 4.0) indicate that most students are prone to long-term psychological damage in the absence of interventions. It is necessary for schools and coaching centers to incorporate systematic emotional well-being programs, stress management seminars, and individual counselling sessions within NEET coaching schemes.

Second, the strong negative relationship between stress associated with NEET and home environment shows that preparation for examinations not only affects students but also alters the emotional dynamic of families. Therefore, parental sensitization programs are essential. Parents need to be sensitized regarding the psychological load that their comparisons and expectations place on the children. Students whose families have emotionally supportive practices perform better without burning out. Schools and coaching centers can arrange for a quarterly seminar or newsletters to educate parents on how to establish a peaceful and positive home atmosphere.

Third, teachers and academic coordinators should investigate revising performance assessment systems. Currently, many students are subject to cyclical testing cycles and rank-and-file comparison that propels the severity of stress. Identifying coaching intensity and peer competition as strong predictors of anxiety in this research supports revising the assessment to reduce extraneous competition and move the assessment in the direction of highlighting formative development rather than summative judgment.

Fourth, the mediation model employed herein provides a change in policy discourse: NEET preparedness cannot be dealt with academically in isolation, but even emotionally. State-level as well as central educational policymakers would need to incorporate procedures for stress tracking and periodic psychological screening of candidates. This complies with the National Education Policy appeal for developing a comprehensive development model incorporating socio-emotional learning and monitoring of well-being. For practitioners in mental health, the results yield a guaranteed evidence base to guide the implementation of particular cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions among NEET teens experiencing examination stress. Integrating relaxation techniques, mindfulness practices, and resilience-building strategies tailored to the NEET environment can build students' emotional regulation abilities and coping strengths. Finally, for NGOs and private mental health platforms, the local evidence of Sivaganga and Madurai districts offers an opportunity to create town-specific outreach programs. These can be in the form of mobile mental health camps, exam season helplines, or parents-and-student community counselling sessions for Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Introduce systematic school mental health programs specifically for NEET applicants to address exam anxiety and stress through frequent sessions.
- ✓ Appoint permanent school counselors or psychologists in higher secondary schools, particularly in NEET-ridden districts such as Madurai and Sivaganga, to screen and address psychological distress in the early stages.
- ✓ Conduct parental sensitization workshops that educate families on how unnecessary expectations and constant comparison can have a detrimental effect on a student's mental health.
- ✓ Make NEET coaching center syllabuses incorporate emotional intelligence, coping, and healthy peer interaction modules in place of pure academics.
- ✓ Design protective environments for student engagement in the guise of support groups or peer mentoring programs that mitigate isolation and foster collaborative learning experiences.
- ✓ Restrict excessive mock testing and ranking anxiety, replacing this with formative tests and feedback evaluations that minimize performance tension.
- ✓ Promote self-timed study schedules, providing students with independence to organize studies as per personal aims and mental preparedness, without strict time constraints.

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- ✓ Provide mobile apps or helplines providing anonymous mental health therapy, daily motivational encouragement, and psychological guidance in native languages.
 - ✓ Incorporate relaxation and mindfulness techniques like guided meditation, breathing exercises, and yoga into students' daily routines while getting ready to take the NEET.
 - ✓ Initiate community-based counseling outreach among high NEET participating semi-urban and rural belt families, especially in impoverished communities.
 - ✓ Train parents on communication skills leading to emotional safety in the home environment, without guilt-tripping, shouting, or over-micromanaging during the study duration.
 - ✓ Offer teacher sensitization on academic burnout warning signs so that they can advise learners to access help before the stress becomes a crisis.
 - ✓ Create a culture of empathy at coaching institutes wherein the faculty members are sensitized to sustain academic criticism by inculcating emotions and sensitivity.
 - ✓ Local media-based campaigns to de-myths mental health counseling and prove that emotional health is as important as academic performance.
 - ✓ To this end, prepare and provide all NEET aspirants with stress management kits with planners, gratitude journals, motivational cards, and helpline numbers.
 - ✓ Organize family counseling sessions during school- or NGO-arranged times that reset family expectations and plan a serene home during exams.
 - ✓ Invite alumni and senior-level applicants to be friends with existing students, relaying genuine tales of perseverance in exam times and turning failure or receiving second chances into the normal.
 - ✓ Develop district-specific NEET preparation models sensitively tuned to the cultural and emotional requirements of Madurai and Sivaganga districts students and shun urban-centric models.
 - ✓ Cooperate with general practitioners and pediatricians to screen the students from time to time for psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, disturbed sleep, or gastrointestinal distress that are most commonly associated with academic stress.
 - ✓ Make emotional well-being a formal indicator in school assessment systems by education boards to ensure concerted efforts towards overall student development.

CONCLUSION

The present study comprehensively evaluated the impact of NEET preparation on the psychological well-being and living standards at home among students of higher secondary schools in Madurai and Sivaganga districts. Based on an empirical study of 300 participants and a thorough SPSS analysis, the study has identified that preparation for the NEET exam imposes pressure on teenagers from multiple angles academic pressure, parental and peer pressure, intensity of training, and social isolation. These stressors contribute significantly to increasing academic stress, test anxiety, and emotional burnout in students. Most interestingly, the findings reveal a negative spill over effect into the domestic environment, which becomes less supportive, tense, and emotionally estranged as the student struggles with the load of expectation. The mediation effect demonstrated confirms that psychological distress is the primary channel through which external test pressure impacts internal family processes. This study not only substantiates mainstream educational and psychological theory but also brings localized evidence from semi-urban and rural areas of Tamil Nadu, where such studies are deeply desired but intensely difficult. It is an appeal to schools, families, policymakers, and healthcare professionals to join forces in creating a healthier, safer, more emotionally resilient environment for India's young scholars gearing up for competitive exams. Aside from academic achievements, student well-being must be placed at the forefront of education reform.

ABBREVIATIONS

NEET: National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis, DV: Dependent Variable, IV: Independent Variable, MV: Mediating Variable, SD: Standard Deviation, HE: Home Environment, AS: Academic Stress, EA: Exam Anxiety, EE: Emotional Exhaustion

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