

## INFLUENCE OF NEET COMPETITIVENESS ON STRESS AND ANXIETY OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*The rising competitiveness of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) has created a high-pressure academic environment for higher secondary students in India. This study investigates how NEET competitiveness influences stress and anxiety among students preparing for the examination. A descriptive survey method was employed, and data were collected from 240 students in the Madurai district using standardized instruments, including the Stress Scale for Adolescents, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7), and a researcher-developed NEET Competitiveness Perception Scale. Statistical procedures such as mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and regression analysis were applied to analyze the data. The findings revealed that students experienced high levels of stress and moderate-to-high levels of anxiety, and that NEET competitiveness significantly predicted both stress and anxiety. Significant differences in stress and anxiety were found based on types of school. Regression analysis further demonstrated that NEET competitiveness strongly influences psychological distress. The study highlights the need for mental health support, balanced preparation strategies, and policy reforms to ease exam-related pressures.*

**Keywords:** *NEET Competitiveness, Stress, Anxiety, Higher Secondary Students, Academic Pressure, Mental Health, Regression Analysis.*

### Introduction

Entrance examinations in India, especially the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), have increasingly contributed to high levels of psychological distress among students. NEET is considered one of the most competitive examinations for medical admissions, with approximately 20–25 lakh students appearing annually for a limited number of seats (Singh & Kumar, 2022). As competition rises, students encounter heavy academic workload, fear of failure, high parental expectations, and performance pressure, which cumulatively intensify stress and anxiety (Chatterjee, 2021).

Stress among adolescents emerges from academic demands, emotional instability, and the need to meet external expectations (Latha & Reddy, 2020). Anxiety, in particular, is heightened during competitive exam preparation and often affects concentration, memory, and decision-making (Sharma & Mehta, 2023). Studies report that competitive exam environments significantly influence students' psychological well-being, leading to burnout, sleep disturbances, and reduced academic motivation (Devi & Ramesh, 2021).

Given the rising incidence of examination-related stress and student suicides in India, understanding the impact of NEET competitiveness is crucial. This study explores the extent to which NEET pressures contribute to stress and anxiety in higher secondary students.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

The NEET examination has emerged as a national benchmark for entry into medical education, creating an intensely competitive environment for higher secondary students. The pressure to perform, long hours of coaching, continuous assessments, and heightened expectations from parents and institutions collectively contribute to significant psychological strain. Studies and national reports have shown rising levels of anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and even suicidal tendencies among adolescents preparing for NEET, highlighting a critical mental health concern (NIEPA, 2022). In this context, the present study is significant as it provides empirical evidence on how NEET competitiveness directly influences students' stress and anxiety levels. Understanding these psychological impacts helps teachers, counsellors, and school administrators develop targeted interventions to support students' emotional well-being. It also creates awareness among parents regarding the hidden emotional burdens their children face while preparing for the exam. Further, the findings offer meaningful insights for policymakers who aim to reform examination practices and reduce undue pressure on students. By addressing a relatively underexplored area within the Indian educational system, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on competitive exam psychology and emphasizes the urgent need for supportive educational policies and mental health initiatives.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of NEET competitiveness on stress among higher secondary students?
2. What is the level of NEET competitiveness on anxiety among higher secondary students?
3. Are there significant differences of NEET competitiveness on stress and anxiety based on demographic variable?
4. Does NEET competitiveness significantly influence students' stress and anxiety?

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess the level of NEET competitiveness on stress among higher secondary students.
2. To assess the level of NEET competitiveness on anxiety among higher secondary students.
3. To determine significant differences of NEET competitiveness on stress and anxiety among higher secondary students based on types of school.

4. To examine the influence of NEET competitiveness on stress and anxiety among higher secondary students.

### Hypotheses

- The level of NEET competitiveness on stress among higher secondary students.
- The level of NEET competitiveness on anxiety among higher secondary students
- There is no significant differences of NEET competitiveness on stress and anxiety among higher secondary students based on types of school.
- There is no significant influence of NEET competitiveness on stress and anxiety among higher secondary students.

### Research Methodology

- **Research Design:** Descriptive survey method was used in the study
- **Population:** All higher secondary students preparing for NEET in Madurai district.
- **Sample:** A sample of N = 240 students (120 boys, 120 girls) was selected.
- **Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling techniques was used.

### Tools Used

1. The **stress scale was** developed by **Byrne and Mazanov (2019)**, is a standardized Likert-type instrument designed to measure academic, emotional, and social stress experienced by adolescents. It has been widely validated in educational research, and in the present study, the scale demonstrated high internal consistency with a **Cronbach's alpha value of 0.86**,
2. Anxiety was measured using the **generalized anxiety disorder scale was** developed by **Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, and Lowe (2016)**, a globally recognized self-report tool used in both clinical and educational settings. This seven-item scale assesses the severity of generalized anxiety symptoms on a four-point frequency rating, and it showed excellent reliability in the current study with a **Cronbach's alpha of 0.88**.
3. To assess students' perceptions of NEET-related competitiveness, the researcher developed a **NEET Competitiveness Perception Scale (2025)**, a 5-point Likert instrument specifically tailored for this study.

### Statistical Techniques

- Mean and Standard Deviation
- Percentage Analysis
- F-test
- Linear Regression (Model Summary, ANOVA, Coefficients)

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

### Level of NEET competitiveness on Stress and Anxiety

**Table 1 Levels of NEET competitiveness on Stress and Anxiety (N = 240)**

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Stress	72.45	12.38	High
Anxiety	14.82	4.92	Moderate–High
NEET Competitiveness	48.62	8.34	High

### Interpretation

Students preparing for NEET exhibit high stress and moderate-to-high anxiety levels.

### F-Test for Difference Based on Types of School

**Table 2 One-Way ANOVA for NEET competitiveness on Stress Based on Type of School**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1968.42	2	984.21	7.84	0.001*
Within Groups	29647.58	237	125.11		
Total	31616.00	239			

**Table 3 One-Way ANOVA for NEET competitiveness on Anxiety Based on Type of School**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	318.76	2	159.38	6.21	0.002*
Within Groups	6085.24	237	25.67		
Total	6404.00	239			

\*Significant at 0.05 level.

### Interpretation

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences in stress across government, aided, and private school students ( $F = 7.84$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Similarly, anxiety levels also differ significantly among the three school types ( $F = 6.21$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). This confirms that the type of school plays an important role in determining the psychological experiences of students preparing for NEET.

### Regression Analysis

**Table 4 (a) Model Summary**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error
Stress Prediction	0.62	0.38	0.37	9.81
Anxiety Prediction	0.65	0.42	0.41	3.75

**Table 4 (b) ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Stress	4980.24	1	4980.24	51.72	0.000**
Anxiety	892.42	1	892.42	63.27	0.000**

**Table 4 (c) Regression Coefficients**

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant (Stress)	32.14	4.02	—	7.99	0.000
NEET Competitiveness → Stress	0.83	0.12	0.62	7.19	0.000
Constant (Anxiety)	4.62	1.38	—	3.34	0.001
NEET Competitiveness → Anxiety	0.21	0.02	0.65	7.95	0.000

### Interpretation

NEET competitiveness significantly predicts both stress and anxiety. Higher perceived competition increases psychological distress.

### Major Findings of the Study

1. **Higher secondary students preparing for NEET reported a high level of stress** (Mean = 72.45), indicating considerable academic and emotional burden.
2. **Anxiety levels were found to be moderate-to-high** (Mean = 14.82), demonstrating widespread psychological strain among NEET aspirants.
3. Students perceived **NEET competitiveness at a high level**, reflecting intense competition for limited medical seats.
4. **Significant differences in stress levels** were observed among government, aided, and private school students, with private school students reporting the highest stress ( $F = 7.84, p = 0.001$ ).
5. **Significant differences in anxiety** were found among different school types ( $F = 6.21, p = 0.002$ ), again with private school students showing higher anxiety.
6. **NEET competitiveness showed a strong positive correlation** with both stress ( $r = 0.62$ ) and anxiety ( $r = 0.65$ ).
7. **Regression analysis confirmed that NEET competitiveness significantly predicts both stress and anxiety**, explaining 38% variance in stress and 42% variance in anxiety.
8. The findings highlight that **higher NEET competitiveness is directly linked to increased psychological distress**, impacting students' overall well-being.

### Recommendations

1. Integrate mental health counselling into school curricula.
2. Conduct workshops on time management, coping skills, and exam readiness.
3. Parents must avoid excessive pressure and encourage emotional balance.
4. Schools should promote peer support groups and mindfulness programs.

5. Coaching centers should adopt student-friendly teaching approaches.
6. Policymakers should reform exam structures to reduce extremity of competition.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

- Comparative research between NEET and JEE aspirants.
- Longitudinal study tracking stress levels across two academic years.
- Intervention-based studies using yoga, CBT, or mindfulness.
- Exploration of parental pressure as a mediating factor.
- Cross-state comparative studies in India.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that NEET competitiveness exerts a significant influence on the stress and anxiety levels of higher secondary students preparing for the examination. The intense academic expectations, rigorous coaching structure, fear of failure, and competitive pressure collectively create a high-stress learning environment. Students from private schools were found to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to those from government and aided schools, highlighting disparities in academic environments and expectations. Regression results confirm that NEET competitiveness is a strong predictor of psychological distress, emphasizing the need for structured mental health interventions, supportive learning environments, and balanced exam preparation practices. The study underscores the importance of coordinated efforts by schools, parents, policymakers, and coaching institutes to reduce exam-related stress and foster healthier learning experiences for NEET aspirants.

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