

# Indian Students On Their Way To PhD Journey - An Integration Of Hurdles And Opportunities

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## ABSTRACT

Frequent assessment, finance duress, cut-throat competitive atmosphere, negligible condition, the connection among colleagues as well as excessive workload may result in elevated levels of stress. Additionally, almost all researchers making an effort to forge an official persona that is definitely a new corner to these people. A descriptive research design is used in this study. A survey is performed to collect data from PhD students in Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). Data was collected using a convenience sampling method. The goal for this research was to find aspects that obstruct and hinder the progress of PhD students, with a focus on stress from the Supervisor's Role, Peer Relations, and Personal Aspects to check their overall performance. It was observed that Supervisor's roles, individual aspects, and peer factors have a significant impact on the overall performance of PhD Students.

**Keywords:** Stress, PhD Students, Supervisory Roles, Peer Relations, Personal Aspects, Overall Performance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ashford and LeCroy (2009) pointed out that "*stress is a state where external as well as individual demands or both surpass the individual's adaptive capacity or do not fit into the criteria of social and tissue system*". One can receive stress from anywhere, from any situation, the atmosphere of own thoughts (Keller *et al.*, 2011). People's reaction to stress varies from individual to individual. Sometimes a little amount of stress can bring huge damage to someone's health. An Individual's attitude and his strength to deal with stress are proportional to the effects of stress (Kirsten, 2012).

People face various problems including home-sickness, disinterestedness in doing work and the inability to understand the work, personal issues, financial factors, job insecurity, and many more things that are the reason for the stress (The Hans India, 2018). Growing consequences of negative experiences create a sensitive and vulnerable time frame for all students. In spite of this, students may well deal with increased hurdles as well as could tactic the difficulties of doctoral studies in one way or the other in comparison to another program/courses. These types of aspects can help to increase the barriers together with complications already present for many PhD students (Akerlind, 2008; Horstmannshof and Zimitat, 2007).

In a PhD program, a student is not expected to just fulfill his academic formalities and acquire a doctorate but is expected that he will play an active role in knowledge production specifically in his area by writing original and critical papers and books. As his career and university's reputation is somehow is dependent on the academic contribution of students. In the recent job market, scholars' achievements with good scholarly publication and presentation along with teaching ability are highly valued (Blaxter *et al.*, 1998).

Doctoral courses differ broadly in numerous forms together with subject areas. In doctoral research, the PhD students' teacher/mentor has the main part in both mentoring the PhD student for the thesis-writing technique and making them better in skilled development (Foster, 2003; Larsson and Frischer, 2003; Kurtz-Costes *et al.*, 2006).

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gardner (2008), in his research paper, defined the notion of independence in the context of research as well as in other aspects. The author interviewed 40 PhD students and registered the transition process found among them during the research process. The author reported that the students identified the factors like freedom, more healthy relationships among teachers and students, less hierarchy is much needed in that transition period to gain independence.

Ghaderi *et al.* (2009) proposed a comparative study of strain, worry and anxiety found among Indian and Iranian students. The study is based on the sample constituted of 80 Indian and Iranian students, both male and female, enrolled,

in postgraduate, PhD degree programs, in various faculties in the University of Mysore, Mysore. The survey revealed that in that particular case gender difference was not that significant. The final statement of the study was that Indian students remain under a higher level of stress, anxiety, and depression compared with Iranian students.

Stubb *et al.* (2011) handled research on the social and psychological aspects of the research aspects of PhD students. The study also revealed the association of research engagement with stress, depression, and anxiety. The majority of the participant PhD students reported that their stress is primarily due to their research engagement at the same time they positively reported that they got significant encouragement which helped them in advancing research work. The study further reported that inspiration and job prospects reduce the study pressure and increase self-confidence while depression, stress, and frustration badly affect academic activities.

Pyhältö *et al.* (2012) examined the problems the PhD students go through during their research period. At the same time, it explored the researcher's relationship to his or her research involvement. The study found that the source of the problems the PhD students faced during their work varied according to the individual circumstances. The origin of the problems is mainly the working load, lack of experts in specific fields, good supervising, the relationship among other students, and the scarcity of resources in the research area.

Singh *et al.* (2014) carried out research focusing on stress, its primary causes, and its diverse effects faced by female PhD students. The authors scrutinized how the factors like dispute, work pressure, the environment of the institutions, anxieties regarding the job, lack of enthusiasm, relationship with fellow researchers and supervisors, attendance issues affect the psychology of female students. Findings presented that huge work pressure, dispute, and lack of freedom badly affect the research work.

Prasad and Vaidya (2017) analyzed the causes of stress among PhD Students concerning Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University. Six independent stress-causing factors Work Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Overload, Physiological Factors, and Behavioural Approach And Avoidance Strategies and their effect on a dependent factor performance were assessed.

Marais *et al.* (2018) focused on French PhD students' well-being. The authors found a high level of mental distress among PhD students. Findings from the first study involved 136 participants and showed that a large fraction of the PhD students experiences abnormal levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. Authors also found that career training and prospects, research experience, and the impact of carrying out a thesis on health and private life have more impact on PhD students' mental health than the supervisors' behavior.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following objectives were developed for this research:

1. To evaluate the impact of stress factors on PhD students' Overall Performance.
2. To review the practices PhD students adopted to combat stress.

### 4. METHOD(S)

A descriptive research design is used in this study to describe the characteristics of PhD students. To achieve the objectives of the study, a survey was conducted through a questionnaire among PhD students in Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Data was collected using a convenience sampling method. The survey device was split into 3 segments (demographic, stress factors, and practices to manage stress). The instrument requested the PhD students to rate their overall stress on a Likert's Scale of 1 to 5 with 1 "No Stress" and 5 being "Highly Stressful". Finally, 468 responses were finalized. Some students denied information, and some tools were not completed too.

### 5. RESULTS

#### 5.1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Characteristics of the PhD students include gender, ethnicity, age, having children, marital status, academic achievement, and expectations about the PhD project (Table 1).

#### 5.2. HYPOTHESES

Ho1: There will be no significant prediction of the Overall Academic Performance of PhD Students by "Supervisor's Role" in AMU, India.

Ho2: There will be no significant prediction of the Overall Academic Performance of PhD Students by "Peer Relations" in AMU, India.

Ho3: There will be no significant prediction of the Overall Academic Performance of PhD Students by "Personal Aspects" in AMU, India.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile.**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age of PhD Students</b>		
Under 25 Years	45	9.61
26-30 Years	335	71.58
30 Years +	88	18.80
<b>Department</b>		
Commerce	116	24.78
Business Administration	50	10.68
Economics	40	8.54
Psychology	50	10.68
History	70	14.95
Political Science	94	20.08
Sociology	40	8.54
Social Work	08	1.70
<b>Year</b>		
I	108	23.07
II	123	26.28
III	94	20.08
IV	86	18.37
V	43	9.18
Extension	114	2.99
<b>Relationship Status</b>		
Single	345	73.7
Married	35	7.46
Engaged	32	6.83
Not Mentioned	56	11.9
<b>Nationality</b>		
Indian	440	94
Foreigner	28	6
<b>Scholarship Received</b>		
Non-Net- 8000/-p.m.	220	47
UGC- NET/JRF	142	30.34
CSIR- UGC (NET)-JRF	27	5.76
UGC- MANF for Minority Students	48	10.25
UGC- RGNF for SC Candidates	3	0.65
None	28	6

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

**Table 2: Model Summary.**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F
1	.617 <sup>a</sup>	.381	.379	.950	286.314
a. Dependent Variable: Overall Academic Performance					
b. Predictor: Supervisor's Role					

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

In this model (Table 2), the predictive variable, 'Overall Academic Performance' with R Square (.381) significantly predicted Supervisor's Role ( $F(1, 466) = 286.314, p < .001$ ), accounting for 38 percent of the variance. Supervisor's Role makes a significant contribution towards Overall Academic Performance of PhD Students.

**Table 3: Coefficients.**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Err.			Beta
1	(Constant)	.874	.147		5.963	.000
	Overall Academic Performance	.684	.040	.617	16.921	.000

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

The simultaneous multiple regression analysis is also statistically significant (Table 3). Therefore, Ho1: There will be no significant prediction of Overall Academic Performance by "Supervisor's Role" in AMU, India is rejected. 'Supervisor's Role' on students' Academic Performance showing 38 percent of the variance.

**Table 4: Model Summary.**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F
1	.517 <sup>a</sup>	.267	.266	1.033	170.175
a. Dependent Variable: Overall Academic Performance					
b. Predictor: Peer Relations					

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

In this model (Table 4), the predictive variable, 'Overall Academic Performance' with R Square (.267) significantly predicted Peer Relations (F (1, 466) = 170.175,  $p < .001$ ), accounting for 27 percent of the variance. Peer Relations make a significant contribution to the Overall Academic Performance of PhD Students.

**Table 5: Coefficients.**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Err.			Beta
1	(Constant)	1.173	.165		7.088	.000
	Overall Academic Performance	.557	.043	.517	13.045	.000

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

The simultaneous multiple regression analysis is also statistically significant ( $p = .002$ ), Table 5. Therefore, Ho2: There will be no significant prediction of "Overall Academic Performance" by Peer Relations in AMU, India is rejected. 'Peer Relations' on students' Academic Performance showing 27 percent of the variance.

**Table 6: Model Summary.**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F
1	.778 <sup>a</sup>	.605	.604	.759	713.083
a. Dependent Variable: Overall Academic Performance					
b. Predictor: Personal Aspects					

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

In this model (Table 6), the predictive variable, 'Overall Academic Performance' with R Square (.605) significantly predicted Personal Aspects (F (1, 466) = 286.314,  $p < .001$ ), accounting for 60 percent of the variance. Personal Aspects make a significant contribution towards the Overall Academic Performance of PhD Students.

**Table 7: Coefficients.**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Err.			Beta
1	(Constant)	.408	.112		3.654	.000
	Overall Academic Performance	.854	.032	.778	26.704	.000

Source: Compiled and computed by a researcher.

The simultaneous multiple regression analysis is also statistically significant ( $p = .002$ ), Table 7. Therefore, Ho6: There will be no significant prediction of "Overall Academic Performance" by Personal Aspects in AMU, India. 'Personal Aspects' on students' Academic Performance showing 60 percent of the variance.

### 5.3. STRESS COPING SKILLS

What stress coping skills are most frequently used by PhD students. Responses to this survey question were answered by marking more than one option at a time. The graph below provides PhD students' responses to items in a question.



## 6. DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of supervisors in PhD students' experiences, their aspects, peer factors, and coping strategies. Moreover, other experiences they wanted to share and explain how this particular thing added stress to their work.

It was observed that doctoral students engage daily in multiple activities which may cause stress and can lead to change in their degree of importance for a particular task from one day to the next. Students live within these inherently structural tensions, whether they are aware of them or not. Possibly one of the vital aspects of PhD education and learning in Indian educational institutions is the connection between PhD. Students and their supervisors have been the attention of several research studies before. The problems within this theme 'supervision' are often related to a lack of supervision/guidance, lack of proper facilities in the institution, the unprofessional attitude of the supervisor, and free labor. It was found stressful that supervisors take much time for evaluation/checking the work of students. Students also found the environment and social backing problematic as there was no support among their colleagues/peers.

One way of being connected is getting in the department, giving time, talking to colleagues but not only academic things but also trying to discuss other things, this is done to create healthy academic relations and keep on asking frequent questions. Find a way to be connected to all out there. It is important to meet and greet every day and discuss thesis issues. The individualized nature and a kind of isolation about doctoral degree and the demand for continuous responsibility and creativity create the environment of stress. These factors may lead to anger, irritation, depression during this process. This frustration may sometimes lead to students' attrition from work itself, and sometimes they leave their program on account of time to involve and insecurity for the job. For many students, the changeover of pattern they had in earlier studies to independence is difficult and a different experience from their prior degrees. Various students learned a lot together with tough characteristics of the PhD which makes this program stressful. Few students experienced some situations wherein they became like they were not able to perform. As an honest matter for individual's health and well-being, is the vital answer why policymakers must focus on physical, mental, and emotional health issues, also it is claimed that the mental fitness of PhD students needs to be of main concern for a few further significant reasons. Number one, the efforts of PhD students on their own constitutes an important way to obtain systematic innovation, as a doctoral thesis needs an extraordinary submission to the existing knowledge base which further is a base for country development. In addition, the publication of thesis outcomes is a requirement for an educational job, causing this work a leading factor to occupational progress.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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