

Indian Journal of Commerce, Business & Management (IJCBM)



A Peer Reviewed Research journal of Commerce, Business & Management

ISSN : 3108-057X (Online)

3108-1282 (Print)

Vol.-1; Issue-2 (Oct.-Dec.) 2025

Page No.- 48-53

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<https://ijcbm.gyanvividha.com>

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A Study of Mental Health and Academic Stress of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers

Abstract: The present study investigates the mental health and academic stress of adolescents in relation to the employment status of their mothers. With increasing maternal participation in the workforce, concerns have emerged regarding the potential impact on adolescent well-being, emotional stability, and academic adjustment. This study aimed to compare the mean scores of mental health and academic stress among adolescents of working and non-working mothers and to determine whether maternal employment significantly influences these developmental outcomes. Using a descriptive survey design under the quantitative research framework, data were collected from a sample of 50 Class IX students studying in CBSE, ICSE, and UP Board schools in the urban region of Kanpur Nagar. Standardized tools were used, including a Mental Health Assessment Scale and the Student Academic Stress Scale (SAAS). The collected data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test to compare the two groups objectively. The findings revealed that the mental health of adolescents does not significantly differ based on their mothers' employment status. Adolescents of working mothers ($M = 57.92$, $SD = 5.33$) and those of non-working mothers ($M = 57.16$, $SD = 5.45$) showed nearly identical mental health scores, and the computed t-value (0.49) was far below the critical value at the 0.05 level. These results suggest that maternal employment does not exert any measurable effect on adolescents' psychological well-being. Similarly, no significant difference was found in academic stress between the two groups. Although adolescents of working mothers reported a slightly higher mean stress score ($M = 22.24$) compared to those of non-working mothers ($M =$

19.32), the obtained t-value (1.80) failed to reach statistical significance. The study concludes that maternal employment status—whether the mother is working or non-working—does not significantly impact adolescents' mental health or academic stress. These findings highlight that other factors, such as family environment, emotional support, effective communication, and peer or school influences, may play more decisive roles in shaping adolescent outcomes. The study recommends further research incorporating variables such as socio-economic background, parenting practices, and family dynamics to develop a more holistic understanding of adolescent development.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers, Mental Health

Introduction: Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by profound physical, emotional, cognitive, and social transitions. It is during this period that individuals begin shaping their personal identity, building academic competence, and developing emotional resilience. These changes are complex and often challenging, particularly when adolescents lack consistent emotional support or experience heightened pressures at home or school (Steinberg, 2017). In contemporary society, where maternal employment is steadily increasing, the dynamics of adolescents' developmental experiences have undergone significant transformation. Working mothers contribute substantially not only to the economic foundation of their families but also to societal progress, gender equality, and improved standards of living. However, their professional commitments can inadvertently influence the psychosocial and academic experiences of their adolescent children (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).

The life of a working mother is often characterized by continuous negotiation between professional responsibilities and domestic expectations. Scholars note that working mothers frequently encounter emotional strain, guilt, and role conflict as they attempt to balance childcare and workplace demands (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Their absence during crucial moments of adolescent development may sometimes result in feelings of neglect, loneliness, or emotional disconnection among their children. Adolescents, who are inherently vulnerable due to rapid developmental changes, may perceive reduced supervision or limited emotional availability as distressing (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). This emotional strain can manifest in various behavioral outcomes, including irritability, anxiety, or withdrawal. A large body of research suggests that adolescents with working mothers may experience increased academic stress owing to diminished parental guidance and irregular support for school-related activities. Academic pressure, already a pervasive concern among students in secondary schools, becomes more pronounced when adolescents must independently manage homework, examinations, and co-curricular engagement. Many adolescents attempt to compensate for the perceived gap in parental involvement by pushing themselves to perform exceptionally, often resulting in heightened stress and mental fatigue (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015). The pressure to excel academically is further amplified by societal expectations, competitive educational environments, and peer comparisons.

Mental health concerns among adolescents have been rising worldwide, with the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) reporting that nearly one in seven adolescents globally faces a diagnosable mental health condition, many of which remain untreated. Adolescents of working mothers may be particularly vulnerable due to inconsistent emotional support, limited family interaction, and increased household responsibilities. These adolescents often juggle schoolwork alongside domestic tasks or caregiving for younger siblings, placing additional strain

on their emotional and cognitive resources (Offer, 2014). The cumulative effect of these pressures can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance. However, the influence of maternal employment on adolescents is not uniformly negative. Some studies highlight the strengths of adolescents raised by working mothers, including improved independence, stronger problem-solving skills, and better gender-role attitudes (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Positive outcomes are especially evident when working mothers have flexible job schedules, supportive spouses, or effective coping strategies. When the mother's employment contributes to financial stability, adolescents may benefit from better educational opportunities, extracurricular exposure, and overall family wellbeing (Bianchi, 2011). Thus, the relationship between maternal employment and adolescent development is multifaceted and shaped by several contextual variables, such as socioeconomic status, family structure, nature of employment, and quality of parent-child relationships.

Despite these potential benefits, disruptions in emotional availability, supervision, and communication remain central concerns in households where mothers work long or inflexible hours. Many adolescents report feeling burdened by expectations to help with household chores or maintain personal discipline in the absence of their mothers. These responsibilities, though contributing to maturity, may also intensify feelings of overwhelm. The constant struggle of working mothers to balance professional commitment and household management may sometimes result in frustration or emotional exhaustion, which can spill over into family interactions. Adolescents are highly perceptive and may internalize this distress, leading to emotional insecurity or strained relationships. Family dynamics, societal perceptions, and cultural expectations also play critical roles in shaping the experiences of adolescents of working mothers, especially in countries like India, where traditional gender norms persist. Social attitudes often place disproportionate expectations on mothers to manage domestic responsibilities, even when they hold full-time employment. These societal pressures sometimes foster guilt among working mothers and create an environment where adolescents, too, sense the challenges faced by their mothers. Consequently, adolescents may struggle with conflicting emotions—admiration for their mother's professional success and disappointment over perceived emotional unavailability.

Furthermore, academic institutions often emphasize performance and competition, which compounds the stress experienced by adolescents. Continuous assessments, peer pressure, and extracurricular obligations place significant demands on students, making parental support essential in navigating academic challenges. For adolescents of working mothers, the absence of immediate guidance during critical academic tasks may contribute to feelings of frustration or inadequacy. Without proper emotional and academic support, these challenges can adversely affect mental health and motivation. Given the evolving nature of family structures and rising maternal employment, it is imperative to understand how these shifts affect adolescents' mental health and academic stress. Addressing these issues can guide parents, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals in creating supportive environments for adolescents. Schools can play a vital role by offering counseling services, mentorship programs, and academic support that compensate for reduced parental involvement. Likewise, families can benefit from improved work-life balance policies, flexible job structures, and shared household responsibilities.

In conclusion, while maternal employment is an essential component of modern society

and contributes significantly to household stability and women's empowerment, its impact on adolescents must be studied comprehensively. The mental health and academic stress experienced by adolescents of working mothers require specialized attention. A nuanced understanding of their experiences can help foster resilience, emotional wellbeing, and academic success. This study aims to explore these dynamics in depth, providing evidence-based insights into the challenges and strengths of adolescents raised in households where the mother is employed.

Research Objectives :

1. To compare the mean scores of Mental Health of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.
2. To compare the mean scores of Academic Stress of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

Research hypothesis :

H₀₁ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of Mental Health of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of Academic stress of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

Methodology : The present study adopted the **descriptive survey method** under the **quantitative research approach** to investigate the mental health and academic stress of adolescents. The population comprised Class IX students of working and non-working mothers studying in government and private schools affiliated with the CBSE, ICSE, and UP Boards located in the urban region of Kanpur Nagar. From this population, a **sample of 50 adolescents** was selected using the **simple random sampling technique**, ensuring each participant had an equal chance of being included in the study. For data collection, standardized tools were used, including a **Mental Health Assessment Tool** with dimension-wise items and specific scoring procedures for positive and negative statements, and the **SAAS (Student Academic Stress Scale)**, a 30-item Yes/No self-report measure designed to assess overall and dimension-wise academic stress levels. The collected data were systematically analyzed using appropriate **descriptive and inferential statistical techniques**, specifically **Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.), and t-test**, to compare and interpret the findings objectively.

Results:

Objective 1: To compare the mean scores of Mental Health of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

H₀₁ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of Mental Health of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

Table 1 : Statistical Summary (Mean, SD, t-value) of Mental Health of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEm	t	df	Result
Working Mothers	25	57.92	5.33	1.56	0.49	48	t _{0.05} =2.01 Not Significant H ₀ =Accepted
Non-Working Mothers	25	57.16	5.45				

Table 1 presents the statistical comparison of mental health scores of adolescents of working and non-working mothers. The mean mental health score of adolescents with

working and Non-Working mothers is 57.92 (SD = 5.33), while for those with non-working mothers the mean is 57.16 (SD = 5.45). The computed t-value is 0.49 with 48 degrees of freedom, which is much lower than the critical value $t_{0.05} = 2.01$. Since the obtained t-value does not exceed the critical value, the difference between the two groups is statistically **not significant**. This indicates that the mental health of adolescents does not differ meaningfully on the basis of whether their mothers are working or non-working. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0)—that there is no significant difference in mental health between the two groups is **accepted**.

Objective 2: To compare the mean scores of Academic Stress of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference between the mean scores of Academic stress of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers.

Table 2

Statistical Summary (Mean, SD, t-value) of Academic Stress of Adolescents of Working and Non-Working Mothers

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEm	t	df	Result
Working Mothers	25	22.24	5.32	1.62	1.80	48	$t_{0.05}=2.01$ Not Significant H_0 =Accepted
Non-Working Mothers	25	19.32	5.86				

Table 2 presents the statistical comparison of academic stress among adolescents of working and non-working mothers. The mean academic stress score of adolescents with working mothers is **22.24** (SD = 5.32), while those with non-working mothers have a slightly lower mean score of **19.32** (SD = 5.86). The calculated standard error of mean (SEm) for the working and Non-Working mother group is **1.62**, and the obtained **t-value is 1.80** with **48 degrees of freedom**. When this t-value is compared with the critical value at the 0.05 level ($t_{0.05} = 2.01$), it is found to be lower than the required threshold. This indicates that the difference in academic stress between the two groups is **not statistically significant**. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant difference in academic stress among adolescents of working and non-working mothers, is **accepted**.

Discussion and Conclusion : The findings of the present study indicate that the mental health and academic stress of adolescents do not differ significantly on the basis of their mothers' employment status. The comparison of mean scores for mental health shows that adolescents of working mothers (M = 57.92) and those of non-working mothers (M = 57.16) have nearly identical levels of mental well-being. The low t-value (0.49), which is far below the critical threshold, confirms that maternal employment does not create any measurable impact on the mental health of adolescents. This suggests that factors other than maternal working status such as family environment, parenting style, peer support, and school climate may play a more influential role in shaping adolescents' mental health.

Similarly, the analysis of academic stress also reveals no significant difference between the two groups. Although adolescents with working mothers reported a slightly higher mean score (M = 22.24) compared to those with non-working mothers (M = 19.32), the obtained t-value (1.80) fails to reach the significance level. This indicates that the employment status of mothers does not impose additional academic pressure on adolescents. It is possible that

supportive family practices, effective time management, shared responsibilities, and strong communication within the household help maintain academic balance regardless of whether the mother is employed or not. These findings align with previous research suggesting that maternal employment does not inherently increase stress or negatively affect adolescent adjustment when the overall family environment remains positive and cohesive.

The study concludes that maternal employment status—whether working or non-working—does not significantly influence the mental health or academic stress of adolescents. Both groups of adolescents exhibit comparable levels of psychological well-being and academic pressure, as evidenced by the non-significant t-values in both analyses. These results support the null hypotheses, indicating that maternal working status is not a determining factor in adolescents' mental health or academic stress. The findings emphasize that the quality of family interactions, emotional support, and the home environment may be more crucial in shaping adolescent outcomes than whether the mother is employed. Future research may explore additional variables such as socio-economic status, parental involvement, family dynamics, and school-related factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent development.

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