

FROM BREAKS TO BURNOUT: A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS OF STUDY HABITS AND STUDENT STRESS IN USA AND INDIA

* *Pranitha Jeet*, ** *Kiaan Battine*, *** *Saisri Medicherla*, **** *Aditya Tripathi* & ***** *Dr. Sadhana Kapote*

* *S. Y. Bachelor of Arts, California State University, Sacramento State, USA.*

** *Senior High School, Davis, California State, USA*

*** & **** *S. Y. Bachelors of Management Studies, Kalyan, Maharashtra, India.*

***** *Assistant Professor, B. K. Birla College.*

Abstract:

Academic stress has become a concern among secondary students and higher education students in today's educational environment. Various study habits and patterns like study session length, break frequency, structured study techniques, multitasking behaviours and mainly social media usage during studying time affects the overall well-being as there is massive usage of social media among students. This study investigates the relationship between the study habits and student stress among secondary school and higher education students in India and USA.

Study is descriptive in nature, primary data is collected using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from respondents aged 14–25 years from India and USA. Findings reveal significant cross-country differences in study duration, structured scheduling, and stress levels. Multitasking and poor break management significantly increase stress and burnout risk. The moderating role of country highlights cultural variations in stress pathways.

Keywords: *Study Habits, Academic Stress, Burnout, Multitasking, Cross-Country Comparison, Student Well-being*

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Introduction:

Academic pressure among adolescents and young adults has intensified due to competitive educational systems and digital distractions. While long study hours are traditionally associated with academic success, unstructured study patterns, inadequate break cycles, and excessive multitasking may lead to stress and burnout.

India and the USA present contrasting educational environments. Indian students often face exam-centric pressure, whereas American students balance academics with extracurricular commitments. This study examines how study behaviors transition from productive engagement to burnout and whether these relationships vary across countries.

Problem Statmenet: Although academic stress among students has been widely acknowledged, there is lack of research about topics like study habits, patterns, study breaks, multitasking behaviour and effects of social media usage. Due to this research gap, there is insufficient evidence-based guidance to effectively address student

stress. It is very important to understand how students from different countries perceive and handle regarding academic pressure with multitasking behaviour and about the role of social media in a student's life. By understanding these perspectives, we can examine whether break patterns, study techniques, and social media use significantly affect student well-being in different countries.

Significance of the Study:

1. The study highlights the relationship between study habits and academic stress, helping to identify behaviors that contribute to student burnout.
2. It provides a cross-country comparison between India and the USA, offering insights into cultural and educational differences in study patterns.
3. The research contributes to student mental health and well-being literature by examining the role of multitasking and break management.
4. Findings can help educators design better academic support and stress management strategies for students.
5. The study offers practical guidance for students and parents to adopt healthier and more effective study routines.

Limitations of the Study:

The study uses a small sample size of 97 respondents, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

1. The research is limited to students from India and the USA, restricting broader global comparisons.
2. Data is collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may lead to response bias or inaccurate reporting.
3. The study focuses only on the age group of 14–25 years, excluding other student populations.
4. Being a cross-sectional study, it captures data at one point in time and does not examine long-term changes in stress and study habits.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse study habits among students in India and the USA.
2. To examine the relationship between break patterns and stress levels.
3. To assess the impact of multitasking and social media usage on academic stress.
4. To compare structured study techniques across both countries.
5. To identify factors leading from productive breaks to academic burnout.

Hypothesis of the Study:

- H1: There is a significant difference in study habits between students in India and the USA.
H2: Break patterns have a significant relationship with students' stress levels.
H3: Multitasking and social media usage significantly increase academic stress among students.
H4: Structured study techniques significantly differ between students in India and the USA.
H5: Poor break management significantly contributes to academic burnout among students.

Review of Literature :

A review of existing literature indicates that academic stress significantly influences students' motivation, study behavior, emotional adjustment, and overall academic performance. Research by Tabassum highlights that high academic stress negatively affects achievement motivation and leads to ineffective study habits among higher secondary students. Similarly, Khan Ayesha reported that excessive academic pressure reduces self-concept, emotional balance, and achievement motivation, thereby impairing students' ability to cope with academic demands. Studies on burnout and psychological well-being further reinforce this relationship. Anuradha G. found that inadequate emotional support and unfavorable classroom environments intensify stress and exhaustion, while Luo et al. (2023) observed high perceived stress and burnout among postgraduate medical trainees exposed to academic and clinical pressures. Rudakova's study on international students also emphasizes that transition-related stress and adjustment challenges significantly affect mental health and academic adaptation. Collectively, these studies establish that academic stress plays a critical role in shaping students' psychological well-being, emotional regulation, and academic engagement.

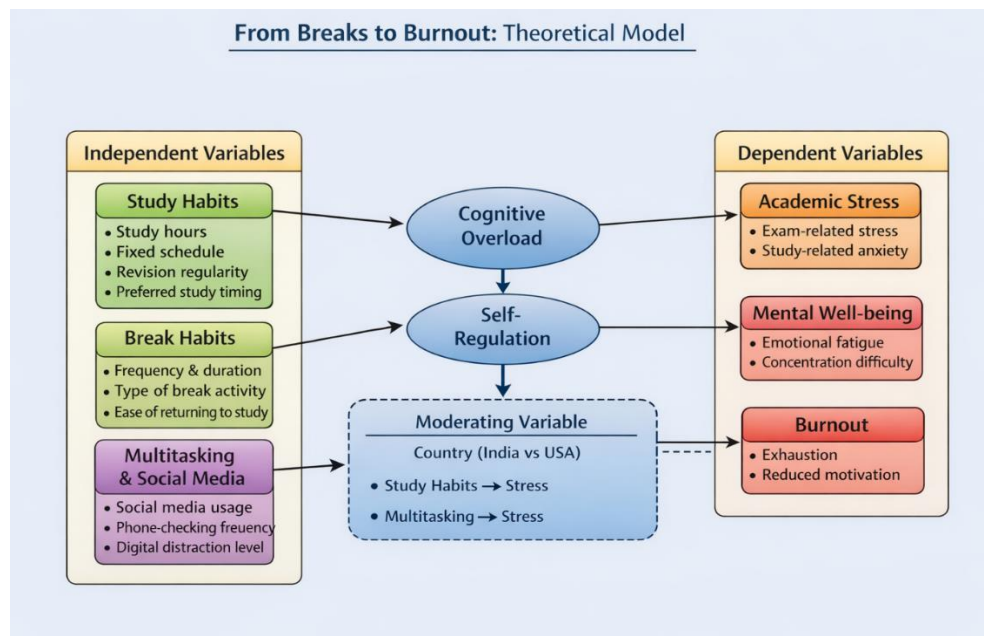
Student burnout research consistently shows that burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism, reduced sense of accomplishment) is strongly linked to both personal (self-control, self-efficacy, anxiety) and contextual factors (family functioning and classroom/school environment). Large empirical studies and mechanistic models indicate that academic stress and anxiety predict higher burnout, and that personal resources such as academic self-efficacy or self-control can moderate or buffer these effects (Satpathy, 2024). Family variables—conflict, cohesion, parental emotional warmth and adaptability—are repeatedly associated with student burnout, often indirectly through peer support, psychological capital or anxiety; classroom-level supports (teacher–student relationships, perceived teacher support) are also important protective or risk factors (Gao, 2023).

Following Variables are identified based on review of literature:

- **Study Hours and Stress:** Excessive study hours without structured breaks increase cortisol levels and academic fatigue.
- **Break Effectiveness:** The Pomodoro technique and distributed learning improve retention and reduce stress.
- **Multitasking Impact:** Research suggests multitasking with social media reduces cognitive efficiency and increases perceived stress.
- **Digital Distraction:** High phone usage during study correlates with lower academic satisfaction.
- **Cross-Cultural Differences:** Asian education systems show higher performance pressure, whereas Western systems show stress due to balancing multiple commitments.

However, limited cross-country comparative studies focus on break behavior and multitasking as mediators of burnout.

Based on variables identified , following model is proposed:



In this model, study habits, break habits, and multitasking/social media use act as independent variables. These factors influence students' cognitive overload and their ability to practice self-regulation while studying. Higher cognitive overload and poor self-regulation can lead to academic stress, reduced mental well-being, and eventually burnout (such as exhaustion and reduced motivation).

Additionally, country (India vs. USA) acts as a moderating variable, meaning that the relationship between study habits, multitasking, and stress may differ depending on the educational and cultural context.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and comparative research design using a structured survey method to critically examine the relationship between study habits and students' stress levels among secondary school and higher education students in India and the United States. The research is both descriptive and analytical in nature, as it seeks to identify patterns in study behavior—such as study techniques, multitasking tendencies, study session duration, break habits, and social media usage—and to analyze their impact on students' stress levels and mental well-being. The target population includes 10th grade students and students pursuing higher education from both countries. A total sample of 97 respondents was selected through convenience sampling, comprising 65 students from India and 32 students from the USA, within the age group of 14–25 years.

Primary data was collected through an online structured questionnaire divided into five sections: Study Habits, Break Habits, Multitasking and Social Media, Stress and Mental Well-being, and Study Techniques and Patterns. The questionnaire consisted mainly of multiple-choice questions designed to capture behavioral patterns and perceived stress levels. The collected data was analyzed using percentage analysis, mean score comparison, cross-tabulation, and comparative charts to examine differences between Indian and American students. Additionally, correlation analysis was applied to explore the relationship between study habits and stress levels. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses,

and exclusive use of data for academic research purposes. The scope of the study is limited to students from India and the United States, and other external factors influencing mental health are beyond the purview of this research.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Data Analysis 1: Study Habits Comparison

Objective 1: To analyse study habits among students in India and the USA.

Hypothesis 1: H1: There is a significant difference in study habits between students in India and the USA.

Table: Study Hours by Country

Country	Less than 1 hr	1–2 hrs	2–4 hrs	More than 4 hrs	Total
India	4	28	18	15	65
USA	11	9	5	7	32

(Source : Primary Data)

Interpretation:

Indian students mainly study for longer duration as compared with USA. Chi-square value calculated is 4.2 with p value 0.0404. Thus, there is a clear variation in study duration patterns between India and USA students, indicating different study habits. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Data Analysis 2: Break Patterns vs Stress

Objective 2: To examine the relationship between break patterns and stress levels.

Hypothesis 2: H2: Break patterns have a significant relationship with students' stress levels.

Table: Break Frequency vs Mental Health Impact

Stress Level \ Break Frequency	No stress experienced	Moderate stress	High level of stress	Very high stress
Every 25–30 minutes	23	13	7	3
Every 45–60 minutes	13	4	3	5
Only when tired	0	4	1	12
No breaks	0	0	3	7

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation:

Students who take regular breaks (25–30 minutes) mostly reported low stress. Students who take breaks only when tired reported higher moderate and high stress levels. Students with no breaks show higher very-high stress responses. Chi-Square calculated is 45.79 , p= 0.0001, Thus we accept H2

Data Analysis 3: Multitasking and Stress

Objective 3: To assess the impact of multitasking and social media usage on academic stress.

Hypothesis 3: H3: Multitasking and social media usage significantly increase academic stress among students.

Table: Social Media Distraction vs Stress

	Stress	No Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress	Very High Stress
Multitasking					
Never	2	1	0	0	
Rarely	3	4	4	1	
Sometimes	4	19	13	6	
Very Often	6	14	8	15	

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: Among students who very often spend time on social media, 15 reported high stress. Students who sometimes get distracted mostly reported moderate stress. Chi-Square calculated is 9.87 with p value = 0.0017, it proves higher multitasking and social media distraction is associated with increased academic stress, supporting H3.

Data Analysis 4: Structured Study Techniques

Objective 4: To compare structured study techniques across both countries.

Hypothesis 4: H4: Structured study techniques significantly differ between students in India and the USA.

Table: Structured Study Techniques by Country

Technique Followed	India (65)	USA (32)
No structured technique	36	3
Pomodoro method	13	20
Time-blocking	10	6
Active recall / spaced repetition	6	3
Total	65	32

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: Indian students do not follow structured techniques much as compared to USA students. There are observable differences in the use of structured study techniques across countries, with Chi-Square 14.5 with p = 0.0001, thus confirming H4.

Data Analysis 5: Break Management and Burnout

Objective 5: To identify factors leading from productive breaks to academic burnout.

Hypothesis 5: H5: Poor break management significantly contributes to academic burnout among students.

Table: Break Frequency vs Study Fatigue

Break Frequency	Low Burnout	Moderate Burnout	High Burnout	Severe Burnout
Every 25–30 minutes	5	1	3	8
Every 45–60 minutes	6	1	7	15
Only when tired	5	3	9	29
No breaks	1	0	1	4

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation: Students taking breaks only when tired reported high fatigue levels (29 Severe Burnout). Regular breaks (25–30 minutes) show lower exhaustion levels. Chi-Square calculated is 4.56 at p value 0.0327, justifying poor break management is linked with greater fatigue and burnout symptoms, thus H5 is supported.

Challenges : During the execution, the study has faced several practical and methodological challenges. Major challenges were faced during collection of data from students, as the research is relied on self-reported survey responses, many factors such as personal bias, misunderstanding of questions, or socially desirable answers might have influenced the overall data. The limited sample size and sampling method restrict the generalizability of the findings. Differences in terms of cultural and educational of India and United States might also affect students interpretation of survey questions. Time and coordination constraints during cross-cultural data collection were additional challenges encountered during the study.

Remedies: Educational institutions can introduce effective structured study habits, techniques and study break frameworks for students based on the association between unstructured study patterns and higher stress levels. Since, social media plays a big role in academics and managing stress level hence, evidence-based interventions like notification control, scheduled digital detox periods & focused study environment should inculcated in students daily life. Longitudinal research can further assess whether programs like time management, cognitive coping strategies and academic planning produce sustained reductions in burnout among adolescents. By observing the cultural differences of India and United States with the help of data collected, policymakers and educators should consider contextual academic pressures when designing student well-being initiatives. Mixed method and longitudinal designs must be adopted for future research to explore casual relationship between study habit and stress. Larger representative samples and psychological assessment tools can help in strengthening reliability of findings.

Conclusion: The study examined the relationship between study habits and stress management among secondary and students pursuing higher studies in India and Unites States. After collecting information from both the countries, analysis of factors was done such as session length, break frequency, structured study techniques, multitasking behaviour and social media usage which helped in understanding the that how different study patterns influence student well-being in a cross-cultural context. The findings helped us in understanding different perspectives of students for topics like study routine, frequent multitasking, break habits, attitude towards social media and handling stress from both countries. With the data collected from both the countries, the similarities and differences in how students experience academic pressure are highlighted. This study throws spotlight on adopting structured study techniques and mindful digital engagement as it does show effect on

academics. Effective study habits and approach towards stress management help in reducing burnout and enhance overall well-being in the world of digitally driven educational environments.

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