



## EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND ACADEMIC BURNOUT: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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### Abstract

**Aim of the study:** This study aims to explore the relationship between social relationships, and academic burnout among university students to assess if social relationships play a role in mitigating academic burnout among individuals. **Method:** For the study, a convenience sample of 119 university students was taken, 39 of whom were males and 80 were females. Social Relationship Scale measured the degree of social relationships, and Maslach Burnout Inventory was used to measure academic burnout among the students. These scores were then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (version 16). **Result:** The study found significant higher mean scores for males in social relationships ( $p = 0.004$ ). Also, we found significant negative correlation between social relationships and academic burnout tendencies. A significant positive correlation between social relationships and academic efficacy was also concluded.

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## Introduction

Academic burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress and frustration related to academic demands (Lin and Huang, 2013). Traditionally, burnout is defined as a three-dimensional syndrome that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Students' burnout is defined as "feeling exhausted because of study demands (exhaustion), having a cynical and detached attitude towards one's schoolwork (cynicism), and feeling incompetent as a student (reduced efficacy also known as reduced academic efficacy)" by Schaufeli et. al. (2022). While burnout is often attributed to academic workload, recent research suggests that social relationships play a significant role in determining the likelihood and severity of burnout among students in addition to academic workload (Lee et. Al., 2017; Khosravi, 2021; Zhang et. al., 2021; Ye et. al., 2021).

Social support refers to the resources provided by other people that help individuals cope with stress and adversity (Schaefer et. al., 1981). It can take many forms, including emotional support, tangible support, informational support, and social companionship (Schaefer et. al., 1981; Nick et. al., 2018). Research has shown that social support can play a protective role against academic burnout in students (Schaefer et. al., 1981; French et. al., 2018; Hupcey, 1998) For instance, a meta-analysis of 19 studies concluded that social support is negatively correlated with student burnout, with school or teacher support having the strongest negative relationship to student burnout (Kim et. al., 2018). Additionally, a moderated mediation model study found that social support had a direct negative impact on academic burnout (Ye et. al., 2021).

## Objectives

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the associative relationship between social relationships and academic burnout.

## Hypothesis:

Through this research, we aim to test the following hypothesis:

1. There will be a significant negative correlation between social relationships and burnout tendencies (cynicism and emotional exhaustion) among university students.
2. There will be a significant correlation between social relationships and academic efficacy.
3. Teachers will have the strongest negative correlation with emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

## Methodology

The study was concluded to obtain data for the following variables: social relationships and academic burnout. The sample consisted of 119 respondents out of which 39 were males and 80 were females. The method used to collect data was convenient sampling method. The original data sample set contained  $n = 143$  individuals. After screening the sample data set through the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and visual inspection (of the data set),  $n = 24$  respondents were excluded from the final data set.

Inclusion criteria:

Participants were selected who met the following criteria:

- Ages between 19 to 29
- Educational Background: Undergraduate and above

Exclusion Criteria:

- Ages beyond the abovementioned range.
- Participants who did not attempt all the items of all the scales were excluded.

## Tools Used:

The following tools were utilised to conduct the study:

1. To measure the burnout levels among students, Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey (MBI-SS) was used. According to Maslach and Leiter (2016), the MBI "has been considered the standard tool for research" in the burnout field (p. 104). Originally the scale was developed to assess burnout levels among individuals (General Survey) but, In the 4th edition of the manual, Maslach et al. (2017) proposed a version of the MBI-GS developed to measure burnout in college and university students.
2. To assess the degree of social relationships, Social Relationship Scale (Kumar et. al., 2017) was used. The scale is further divided into seven dimensions. These dimensions include the various relationships an individual experiences in his/her environment; parents, siblings/cousins, friends, relatives, peers/classmates, teachers, and strangers.
3. To analyse the data, the software program Statistical Package for Social Science Version 16 (SPSS 16) was utilized. The data set was collected, coded, and descriptive analysis was completed. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish the substantial association between various dimensions of social relationships and the different dimensions of academic burnout. Also, p values of mean

differences (of various dimensions and gender) were also compared.

### Procedure

After determining the target group and its inclusion and exclusion criteria, physical forms were given to the participants for their convenience. Prior to filling out the forms, the participants were informed of the guidelines they needed to follow, and their consent was obtained. The necessary data was then collected from them. The participants were assured that their information would remain confidential and only be used for research purposes by the researcher and supervisor. Participation in this study was completely voluntary.

Note: Considering the research design and objective, burnout tendencies were analysed separately rather than academic burnout as a whole. Thus, Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism and Academic Efficacy were individually compared to personality traits and all the dimensions of the social relationship scale.

The analysis was interpreted, and the findings were compared to the set hypothesis. Finally, the conclusions were documented in a concise and accurate manner.

### Result

The study was carried out to understand how various dimensions of social relationships and academic burnout interact with each other. For this, Pearson Correlation coefficient analysis was observed to study how different variables

interacted with each other. The following tables conclude all the results of the analysis.

### Descriptive Analysis

The following tables show the descriptive analysis conducted on the sample data set.

**Table 1:** Shows the frequency distribution of the sample according to age range.

Age Groups	Frequency	Percent
19 - 21	63	52.9
22 - 24	52	43.7
25 - 27	4	3.4
Total	119	100.0

Table 1 represents the frequency distribution and the percentage of the respondents based on their Age. Out of the 119 respondents, 63 (52.9%) belonged to the Age Group 19 – 21, 52 (43.7%) belonged to the Age Group 22 – 24, and 4 (3.4%) belonged to the Age Group 25 – 27.

**Table 2:** Shows the frequency distribution of the sample according to gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	39	32.8
Female	80	67.2
Total	119	100.0

Table 2 represents the frequency distribution and the percentage of the respondents based on their Gender. The sample was divided into 39 Males (32.8%) and 80 Females (67.2%).

### Statistical Analysis

**Table 3:** Shows the correlation between the total score of SRS, and its dimensions with the dimensions of MBI Burnout Scale.

	SRS Total	Parents	Siblings	Friends	Relatives	Peers	Teachers	Strangers	EE	C	AE
<b>SRS Total</b>	1										
Pearson Corr.		.567**	.552**	.623**	.733**	.740**	.666**	.516**	-.347**	-.310**	.387**
Sig (p-value)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000
<b>Parents</b>		1									
Pearson Corr.	.567**		.209*	.125	.335**	.280**	.271**	.159	-.161	-.236**	.239**
Sig (p-value)	.000		.023	.175	.000	.002	.003	.085	.080	.010	.009
<b>Siblings</b>			1								
Pearson Corr.	.552**	.209*		.245**	.343**	.301**	.203*	.120	.020	-.040	.085
Sig (p-value)	.000	.023		.007	.000	.001	.027	.194	.830	.666	.359
<b>Friends</b>				1							
Pearson Corr.	.623**	.125	.245**		.324**	.439**	.393**	.222*	-.064	-.071	.107
Sig (p-value)	.000	.175	.007		.000	.000	.000	.015	.490	.444	.249
<b>Relatives</b>					1						
Pearson Corr.	.733**	.335**	.343**	.324**		.383**	.369**	.359**	-.364**	-.288**	.212*
Sig (p-value)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.020
<b>Peers</b>						1					
Pearson Corr.	.740**	.280**	.301**	.439**	.383**		.534**	.425**	-.284**	-.313**	.419**
Sig (p-value)	.000	.002	.001	.000	.000		.000	.000	.002	.001	.000
<b>Teachers</b>							1				
Pearson Corr.	.666**	.271**	.203*	.393**	.369**	.534**		.213*	-.450**	-.292**	.463**

<b>Teachers</b>	.000	.003	.027	.000	.000	.000		.020	.000	.001	.000
Sig (p-value)											
Pearson Corr.	.516**	.159	.120	.222*	.359**	.425**	.213*	1	-.220*	-.117	.253**
<b>Strangers</b>	.000	.085	.194	.015	.000	.000	.020		.016	.206	.005
Sig (p-value)											
Pearson Corr.	-.347**	-.161	.020	-.064	-.364**	-.284**	-.450**	-.220*	1	.525**	-.399**
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	.000	.080	.830	.490	.000	.002	.000	.016		.000	.000
Sig (p-value)											
Pearson Corr.	-.310**	-.236**	-.040	-.071	-.288**	-.313**	-.292**	-.117	.525**	1	-.513**
<b>Cynicism</b>	.001	.010	.666	.444	.001	.001	.001	.206	.000		.000
Sig (p-value)											
Pearson Corr.	.387**	.239**	.085	.107	.212*	.419**	.463**	.253**	-.399**	-.513**	1
<b>Academic Efficacy</b>	.000	.009	.359	.249	.020	.000	.000	.005	.000	.000	
Sig (p-value)											

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

“EE” stands for Emotional Exhaustion

“C” stands for Cynicism.

“AE” stands for Academic Efficacy.

Table 3 shows the correlation between the dimensions of the Social Relationship Scale (SRS) and the dimensions of Maslach's Burnout Inventory Scale. The dimensions of SRS include Total Score (SRS Total), Parents, Siblings, Friends, Relatives, Peers, Teachers, and Strangers. The dimensions of Maslach's Burnout Inventory Scale include Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Cynicism (C), and Academic Efficacy (AE). The correlation coefficient is measured using Pearson's correlation coefficient, which ranges from -1 to +1. A positive correlation coefficient indicates a positive relationship between the two variables, while a negative correlation coefficient indicates a negative relationship between the two variables. The closer the coefficient is to zero, the weaker the relationship between the two variables.

## Discussion

This study aims to explore the associative relationship between social relationships and academic burnout among university students. Table 3 shows the correlation between and within the dimensions of the Social Relationship Scale (SRS) and the dimensions of Maslach's Burnout Inventory Scale. The table suggests that the Total score of SRS is negatively correlated with both the emotional exhaustion and cynicism dimensions of Maslach's Burnout Inventory Scale with EE ( $r = -.347$ ), and C ( $r = -.310$ ). This correlation is also significant with p values for emotional exhaustion and cynicism being .000 and .001 respectively. This proves hypothesis 1 and affirms that social relationships do in fact mitigate academic burnout. Moreover, the Total score of SRS is positively correlated with academic efficacy ( $r = .387$ ) with the correlation being significant ( $p = .000$ ). This proves our hypothesis 2 that there will be a

significant positive correlation between social relationships and academic efficacy.

Furthermore, the strongest positive correlation of social relationships is with Relatives (0.733), Peers (0.740), and Teachers (0.666). The weakest positive correlation is with Strangers (0.516). All the correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Dimensionally speaking, Teachers have the highest positive correlation with academic efficacy with  $r = .463$  and this was also significant with  $p = .000$ . This proves our hypothesis 3. Interestingly the Teachers dimension also has the strongest significant negative correlation with emotional exhaustion ( $r = -.450$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and cynicism ( $r = -.292$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

## Conclusion

To conclude, the findings suggest that there is a significant negative correlation between social relationships and academic burnout tendencies of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Individuals who had a higher degree of social exchange experienced lower burnout in school. Moreover, social relationships is also significantly positive with academic efficacy. This reflects that people with a higher score of the social relationship scale performed better in school. Furthermore, the Teachers dimension among all the social relationships, had the strongest and most significant positive correlation with academic efficacy implying that richer social interactions with teachers can profoundly impact a student's performance in academics. These findings can directly help educators in formulating various interventions to tackle academic burnout in educational institutions.

## Limitations

In our study, we encountered several limitations that could have potentially influenced our results. Firstly, the sampling technique was convenient sampling. Although it was not purposive in nature, it would be interesting to see how the random sampling method can vary the results.

Moreover, some participants expressed difficulty in completing the questions in the scales in terms of ambiguity of the items and understanding of the respondent. This could have led to inaccurate data, thereby affecting the reliability and validity of the results.

Another limitation of our study was that it relied solely on self-reported measures. This approach might have resulted in response bias, where participants might have provided socially desirable responses, or attempted to portray themselves in a positive light. This could have resulted in an overestimation of positive and underpinning of negative traits. As the study was conducted within a specific timeframe, there was not enough time to collect more data or conduct a more in-depth analysis.

## Suggestions

Overall, the study shows promising associations between all the mentioned variables and it can help figure out various interventions in educational institutions to help students mitigate academic burnout. But there are some suggestions for future research. First, use random sampling. It may produce different results. Second, projective tests may be used to reduce biases on behalf of the respondents. Last, a longitudinal study would help us better understand the relationship among social relationships and academic burnout. Hence, it is important to expand further into this domain.

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