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A Study on the Onset of Academic Stress During the Transition from Secondary Education to Undergraduate Studies

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Abstract: ***Academic stress is a challenge in every student's life. Its impact often results in reduced academic productivity and compromised semester results. Additionally, it can lead to health issues such as anxiety, depression, headaches, and fatigue. This study aims to identify the stress-related challenges students face and analyze the key factors contributing to academic stress. To understand its impact on academic performance, 100 students from the first-year of Bachelor's students were taken as the sample for the study. The findings indicate that stress factors are significantly due to the transitional change in teaching patterns and academic environment. The change in learning pattern, i.e., from teachers' focused learning of higher education schools to an independent framework of the University, underscores the importance of addressing stress to students' academic growth and life values, leading them to boost their confidence and adaptability.***
Keywords: Academic stress, transitional change, teaching patterns, adaptability, undergraduate students

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress can be described as the physical or mental stress to which the body reacts. Both the physical and physiological factors can lead to stress. Negative thoughts, social pressure, internal pressure, fear of failure, and relations, for education, one can take stress. In response to perceived stress, our body releases hormones such as Adrenaline and cortisol, which signal the body to prepare for an imminent threat. Stressors are defined as circumstances that disrupt or threaten to disrupt, an individual's daily functioning and causes people to make adjustments (Auerbach & gambling,1998) stress is viewed as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust or deal with stressors(Bernstein,et al 2008).

It is essential to understand that stress can also have positive as well as adverse effects on individuals. It means that stress might be an automatic, adaptive process responding to threat. Its role is to notify and prepare individuals to defend themselves. For instance, fear of things that truly harm individuals causes them to handle or evade them. Most psychologists think that light stress motivates individuals to succeed and encourages creativity. all those dresses may hinder individuals from performance on difficult tasks.(Auerbach & gambling,1998). Stress does not impact everyone, the same, but stress can result in illness and bad experiences. Coping with stress is therefore an important factor, it affects whether and how people search for medical care and social support and how they believe the advice of professional professionals (Passer & Smith,2007). Stress occurs when there is a burden on the person which exceeds his available assets (Mussarat & Seema,2013).If stress is harsh and extended, it can lessen academic performance, Hinder with a student's capability to involve in and add to campus life, and raise the probability of substance abuse, and other potentially destructive behaviours(richlin & hoe,2003).

Stress is a broad concept ,and when we dive into the description of stress we can discover that academic stress has also gained a notable value, because students face high pressure to be effective in their studies. The definition of academic stress is the anxiety and stress that comes from schooling and education. There is often a lot of pressure that comes along with with pursuing degree and one’s education (Suresh ,2015).Undergraduate student stated that stress was most common factor among all health factors which impact their academic performance,as stress harmful affect physical and physiological health(Dwyer & Cummings, 2001). Academic stress is a pervasive misfortune that surrounds students, emerging from the overwhelming demands that are inherent to their academic interests. The relentless pressure to excel in examinations, homework, and other academic obligations precipitates a profound sense of nervousness , which often manifests as overwhelming fear. Academic stress arises when academic related demands exceed those available resources to an individual which he/she adapts (Wilks, 2008).

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Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even an awareness of possibility of academic failure (Verna & Gupta,1990). Academic stress is physiological, agitated with regard to some expected frustration relating to academic failure, or even ignorance to the possibility of such failure.Students have to face many academic demands, for example, School examinations, answering questions in the class, showing progress in School subjects(Lal,2014). Academic stress is a significant factor explaining variation in academic accomplishment. It also presents the key mental health risks, issues, physical, and mental stress related ailments.Stress makes a significant contribution to the prediction of subsequent student performance and acts as a negative predictor of academic performance of student.(Snehlata,2017). Academic stress reflects perception of individuals, academic frustrations, academic conflict, academic pressure, and academic anxiety (Bisht,1989). Academic stress arises from the expectations placed on students by their teachers, their peers and themselves. Academic stress is considered as negative for many reasons like lower academic performances, mental health problems, physical health issues and negative coping techniques . Though stress is often considered bad,but there is always the other side of the coin(Geeta & Manisha, 2014).While academic stress is typically perceived as overwhelming, it can also have good consequences if managed properly: incentive to perform well, time management skills, a sense of accomplishment, preparation for future success. Academic stress may be both a motivator and a burden. The goal is to manage it effectively and find a balance that allows stress to stimulate production without overwhelming.It is critical to develop coping methods such as time management and seeking support when needed so that academic stress remains a positive influence rather than a negative one.

In academic stress, contributing factors:

- Academics: alphabetically first among the causes of stress on students is academic pressure.(Lal,2014). There are students who work hard with the intention of outshining their fellow colleagues, and securing their place as the “best” in the class.
- Heavy workload: Too much homework and backdated deadlines which exams proves that students are accompanied by a stressing phase where they constantly feel they have no time to play or participate in extracurricular activities. Heavy academic workload, and the feeling that you are constantly racing to meet another deadline can be daunting (Geeta & Manisha,2017).
- Expectations: In some cultures a lot of pressure is put on students from teachers. Parental pressure on children to shine in their study and perform well in extra curricular activities is at remarkably high(Geeta & Manisha,2017).
- Fear of failure: students might experience stress because of worrying about not accomplishing what is expected from them academically. Stress arises, for example, when meeting one’s personal goals becomes a challenge.
- Social pressure: students can also get stressed through social means such as fitting in with their colleagues, balancing relationships, maintaining social media accounts, and accomplishing their academic work.
- Personal issues: students live with family problems, health issues, or other personal obstacles which can contribute tremendously to academic stress. Young individuals put in the situation often find it tough to focus.
- Unclear goals or lack of purpose: students who do not see reasons behind their subject or have no clear basis to why they seek. Higher education might feel an enormous burden of stress from lacking in many factors such as aim, motivation, and even self discipline.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Narasappa (2012) in his article, he wrote about mental health problems in college going students from India. He studied the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression in this population. He further discussed on coping mechanisms, students can use to deal with above stated issues such as counselling and stress management techniques. Similarly Mussarat and other authors in their paper, discussed the negative correlation between academic stress and students' performance that as academic stress increases student performance tends to decrease. They also observed that younger students tend to experience more academic stress than older students. Based on their study, they defined academic stress as “the perspective of an imbalance between academic demand and an individual's resources to cope with those demands”. Struthers and his fellow authors provided a highlighting insight on stress management and the importance of teaching students effective coping strategies, to enhance both motivation and performance. They used an academic-specific coping scale (SCOPE) to help them understand their findings. Followed by Subramani and others, added a scholarly study on academic stress on the Indian Educational system. They confirmed the negative impact on students' mental well-being due to excessive academic expectations and pressure. Acknowledging the stress management courses and parent education programs, they mentioned future exploration of this study. Examining cultural factors affecting multicultural universities by comparing American and international students, Ranjita and Linda used Gadzella's Life Stress Inventory to evaluate their results. They highlighted the need for gender-sensitive mental health treatment. For future studies, they suggested separating international students based on their culture and educational backgrounds.

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As per Akgün and Ciarrochi, on examination of impact of Academic Stress on the students performance, they found that resourceful students maintain good grades, and emotions despite high stress, whereas the unresourceful students say the opposite. The whole study relies on self-reported stress levels. They recommend conducting training on how resourcefulness can help students in managing stress effectively.Dr. P. Suresh Prabu's study was conducted on 250 students from an analyzing stress variability based on gender, location, school type, subject stream and parental education. The result shows that male, urban, private school and science stream students face higher stress. He relied on self-reported data and was limited to one location only. He encouraged on studying student's attitude and academic stress management strategies and techniques.

Juvilyn and others categorised student stress into interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic and environmental. Using 150 Student Life Stress Inventory responses, dotted the point as interpersonal involve factors who were working with new people, parental issues and dating; intrapersonal involve financial pressure and stage fear; academic involve the workload and academic grades and lastly environmental involve surrounding factors. They suggested investigating how these stressors can be correlated and methods on coping up with them for better strategies. Aihie and Ohanaka investigated perceived stress on 427 undergraduates, understanding with help of the PASS test. Male students reported to have stress due to procrastination and social pressure, final-year students due to workload and fear of graduation, physical science students due to course-wise difficulties. As the study calls for stress management programmes and counseling intervention especially for final-year students. The research would've been more accurate with longitudinal study and qualitative analysis. Wilson and Gillies (2005) examined the influence of self efficiency and social support on stress in young adults going to university from high school. The transition period of these students highlighted the significance of self efficiency in academic adaptation. Weidner and his fellow authors studied on very accurate conditions i.e. under low stress and high stress (right before final exam). On 133 undergraduates, they examined the impact of academic pressure on health behaviours. Two specific notes to be taken were the negative impact and therefore the mood change in student behaviour. The gender differences observed were females focused on routine based behaviours and these effort based behaviours were more affected due to stress.Since, it gives broad spotlight on gender differences and their behaviour expectations, the sample bias is seen. However, the study emphasizes on stress management techniques and institutional policies to support students' mental health and advocates on how academic stress should be considered as a serious health issue. Petrit learnt that 75.8% students experience moderate to high stress while self-management being the most significant stress factor. It was analysed based on 9 factors including self-management and teaching performance. It provides a strong foundation for understanding academic stress and guiding institutional policies, despite its limitations. Marwan discussed academic stress at King Saud University. Fear of failure, academic overload, exams and overprotective family expectations being the major factors. Religious practices were suggested as a coping mechanism as it positively correlates with stress. Time management techniques and counselling were suggested at the University level. Waqas and his fellow authors provided a study on academic stress and sleep disorders at Lahore Medical College. The study found that 59.7% students suffer from CVS stress and 77% with poor sleep quality. The study also mentioned frequent examinations and course fulfilment were one of the other stress factors. They suggested educational reforms and mental health support for better well-being of students.

III. RESULT

Stress Level Statistics (Reordered)

Stress Level	No. of Responses	Mean	Median (%)
Low Stress	27	6.75	27%
Moderate	21	5.75	21%
High Stress	20	4.75	20%
Severe Stress	32	7.75	32%

Fig. 1 Recorded table presenting stress levels, response count, Mean scores and Median percentages

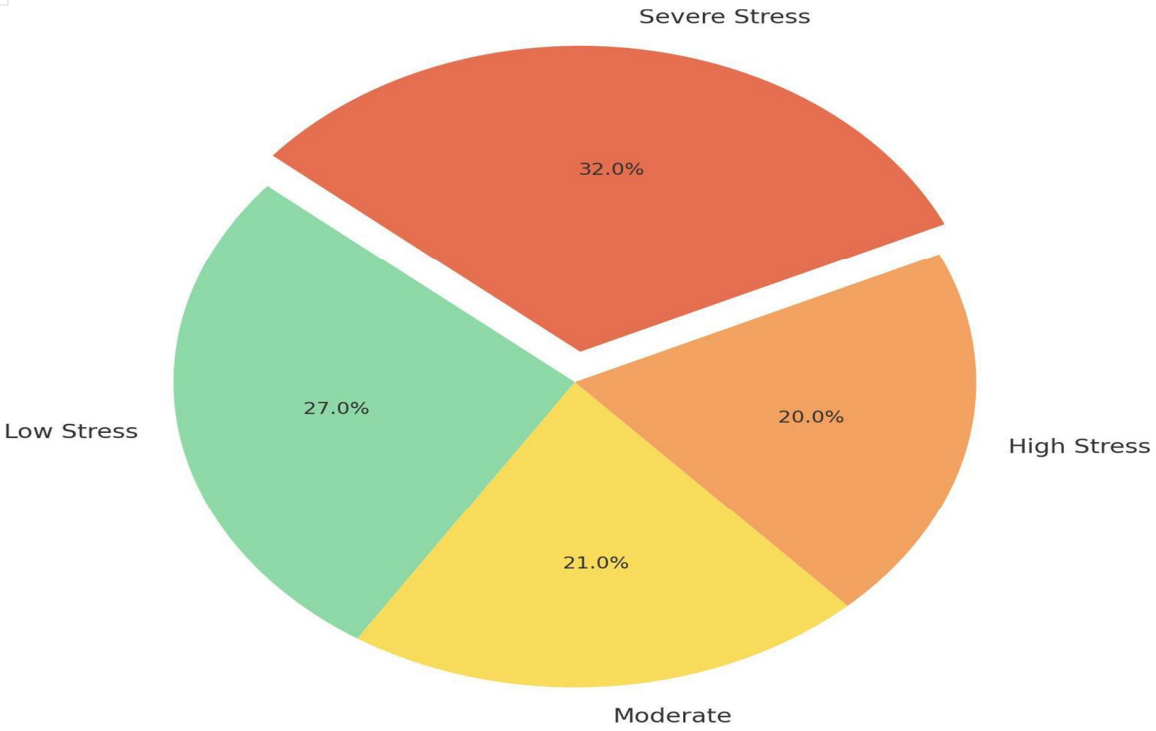

Fig. 2 Pie chart representing stress level categories among freshers based on reported percentage

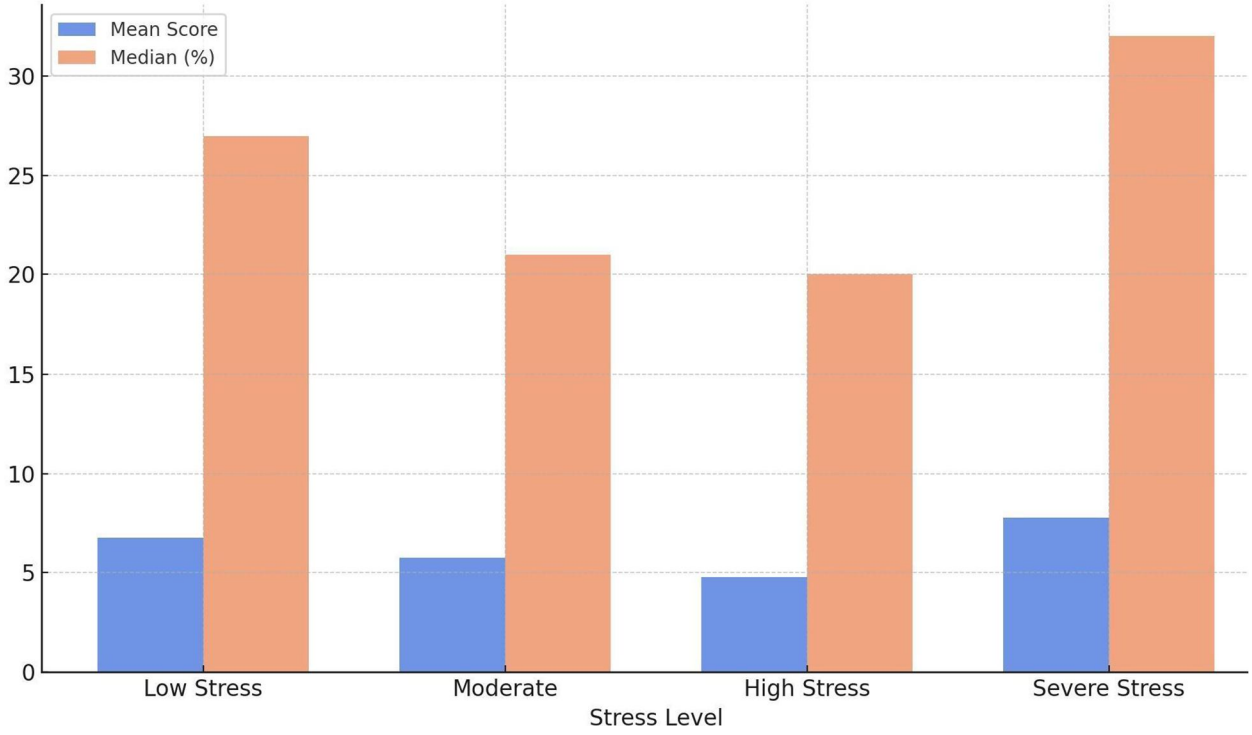

Fig. 3 Graphical representation of stress categories with corresponding mean and median distributions

The study shows an indicative approach towards the academic stress experienced by the students, transitioning from secondary education (12th grade) to university life. These students have encountered significant shifts as students are introduced to a new academic structure involving semester pattern exams , continuous assessment through assignments and high performance expectations. This sudden transition often introduces new academic and social pressure which contributes to high academic stress.
The data shows 32% of students have experienced severe stress highlighting transition into university which is often accompanied by intense academic pressure. This group had a high mean stress score of 7.75 which shows severity & intensity of their experiences. Meanwhile, on the other hand, only 27% of participating students reported experiencing low levels of stress.
These data show a significant number of students find it difficult and struggle to adjust with requirements of the university system. various factors such as handling assignments, dealing with semester examinations, fulfilling academic expectations, and adapting to a different learning approach contribute to these stress levels.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of present study shows the valuable insights into academic stress validating that students transitioning from higher secondary education i.e. 12th grade to University study i.e. first year of bachelor's. It portrays the period of transition that marks the significant factors of both academic and social stressors that contribute to increased stress levels among the students. As noted, 32.0% of students experience severe academic stress which focuses on the intensity and seriousness of their experience as they adapt to new education patterns and academic years. The shift of relatively structured pattern and teachers orientated guidance to increased independent university structure marked an intense factor resulting in a major source of academic stress. Adapting to such an unexpectedly intense framework and simultaneously adjusting to increased personal and social responsibilities indicates the level of increased stress. Whereas on the other hand, 27% of students reported to have low levels of academic stress indicating adaptation to new education patterns is easier for them. These differences between these two groups of students focus on their individual coping mechanisms, academic preparation, continuous internal assessments, assignment punctuality, support system and personal endurance. This transition phase acts as a significant phase in a student's academic journey. As adapting to a new academic framework with managing multiple assignments, preparing for their internal assessments and semester examinations, meeting elevated performance expectations from their educators. It becomes essential for educational organizations to understand these transition stressors and recognise the need for a transition support program, academic mentoring, stress management workshops and psychological counselling services based on the findings. These could be effective strategies to ease the levels of academic stress among the students. Also, developing a supportive and communicative academic environment can help reduce the psychological burden among the students during such a phase. The result highlights the need of a structured academic support system and provides healthier adjustment for the students entering university. The future work can continue with the aspects of psychological skill hand-in-hand with the socio-economical roles in academic stress. The factors will remain the same as the result may vary.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that academic stress is a prominent concern among students transitioning from 12th grade to university life, new semester exams, ongoing grading and much tougher expectations can pile up ,which collectively leads to increased stress levels. Statistics show that approximately 32% of students experienced intense academic stress indicating the intense pressure and difficulty in adapting to the new educational environment; in contrast , 27% of students manage to maintain low stress levels , suggesting that effective coping strategies ,prior presentation, and strong support networks really make a difference in how students manage academic demands. Collectively these figures highlight the necessity for educational institutions to recognize the challenges of this transition and implement supportive measures such as academic mentoring ,stress management workshops transition support programs, and psychological counseling services when university builds such caring environment ,they ease the mental load of course work and enable students to meet university demands with greater confidence and fall as strain.

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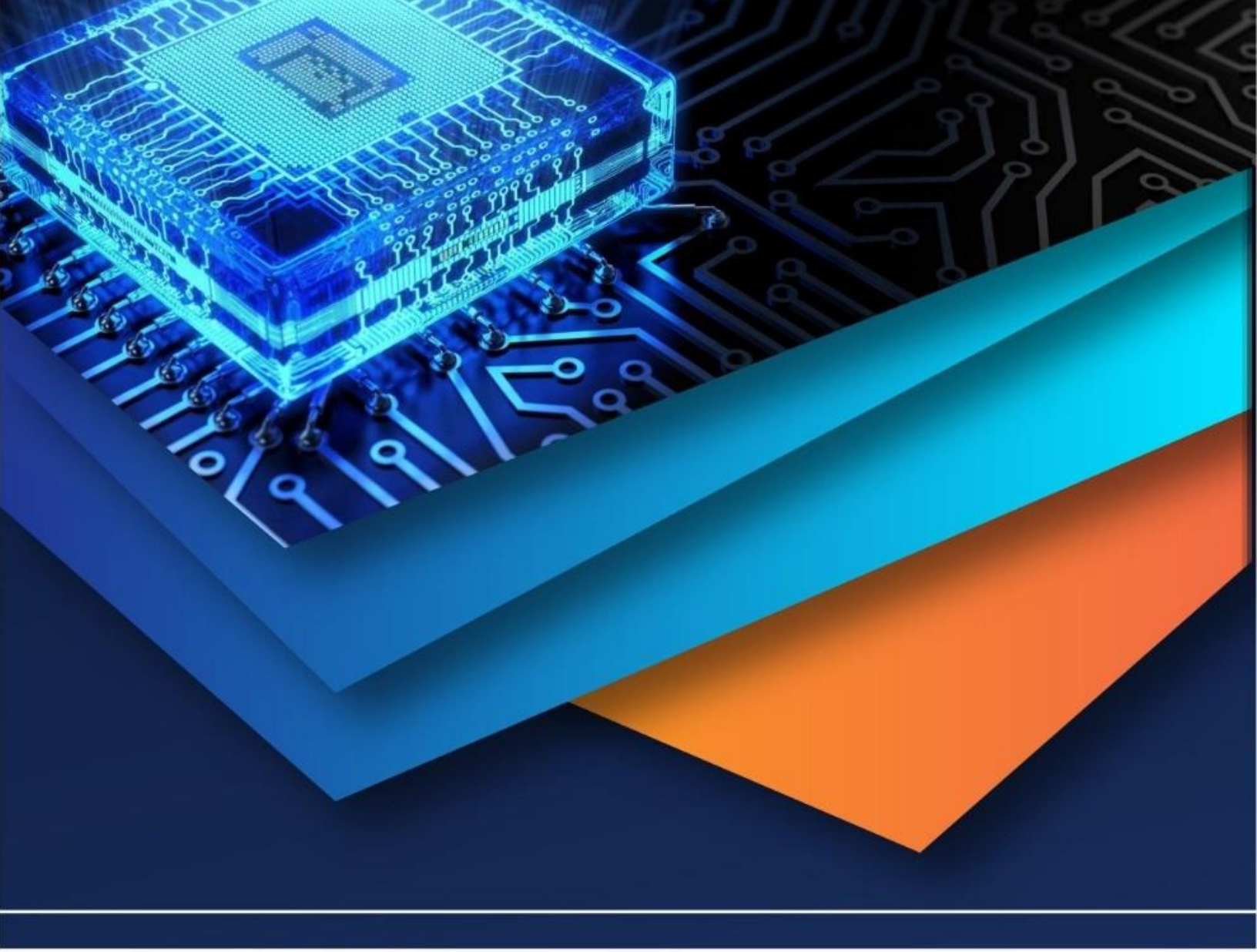

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