

Academic stress and coping mechanism among students: An Indian perspective

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to provide insight into the role of academic stress among young adults, their emotional adjustment and coping mechanism. Over a period of time, academic stress among students has increased drastically due to parental expectation and competitive environment among students. This has resulted in having harmful effect to the individual, parents, society and nation at large. Numerous studies have stated that alarming number of students are not able to cope due to heavy syllabus, parents' expectation and

cut throat competition among students leading them to mental health issues like depression, anxiety and suicide. These facts require immediate attention; hence, awareness among students, parents and teachers should be created so that preventive measures can be taken to create a friendly and, healthy environment. In order to overcome such issues the counselors and health professionals must take initiative to create awareness among the parents and teachers about their role in fostering a healthy environment. Thus, to save youth from such vulnerable behaviors they should be directed towards creative and constructive activities to enhance their capabilities, interests, aptitudes and encourage them to achieve their goals.

Key Words: Academic Stress; Coping; Parental Pressure; Depression; Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

In Indian society education is known for its value system. The system is complimented for its integrity and is strongly associated with sanctified duty. The education structure of India is workbook oriented that majorly focuses on cramming of lessons which requires studying for long hours and regular study every day. This intricate schedule of studying from morning till evening leaves less or no scope for socialization and recreation (1).

Many psychiatrists have articulated their apprehension at the emergence of educational strain faced by students leading to high occurrence of deaths by committing suicide (1-3). The research have postulated that number of youth in India are asked to visit psychiatrist for school related distress, exhibiting higher levels of anxiety, refusal from going to school, phobia, physical complaints, prone to depression, weeping spells, irritability and decreased interest in performing school tasks (4). In Indian society the confident students are determined by showing brilliance in academics and not by individual or vocational quality (5,6). The reason behind this could be the fear of parents that their ward will fail, and this fear of failure which is reinforced by parents and teachers lessens the child's interest in studies. The above mentioned reason leads to adolescents having constant strain and failure in academics. Also, it has been found that 6.23% of Indian students are committing suicide every day (7), raising questions concerning to the education system and well-being of young people. In the national daily Times of India it was reported that remarkable spike in the incidence of suicide among teenagers across the country have given a reason to worry. It was stated by a Psychiatrist that "Even youngsters are ending their life which states the verity that they are dealing with mental health issues". Thus, this is going to be the foremost predicament in the years to come (8,9). Further it was reported that the psychiatrist reported that the reason behind the suicide could be the unnecessary academic pressure which children face from school, peers, parents and themselves (4). The other reason could be immeasurable pursuit to get the child admitted in renowned educational institute and getting the best score is the criterion that is pertaining up over the years (6).

According to psychologist Hans Selye the situations can be both positive and negative; it requires adjustment and this could also be stressful. The concept

of stress can be divided into 'Eustress (Positive stress) and Distress (Negative Stress) (7). Both stress types can be taxing to a person's resources and coping skills though distress will probably do more harm to an individual. Similarly, children and adolescents can experience variety of stressors ranging from appalling or shocking life events, unfortunate hassles and tension. These are the vital factors affecting young people's well-being and mental health (8,9).

In India, the precedent years have reported about 600% increment in the figure of suicides among teenagers. Adolescents in India attempts to commit suicide in every 90 minutes (10). This is only the tip of iceberg; there are many cases which remain under the cover. However, it must be noted that teenagers who suffering from depression are not even mentioned in the statistics (10).

REPORTS ON SUICIDE AND PARENTAL PRESSURE AMONG CHILDREN ACROSS INDIA

Report #1: The tragic death of 12th class students from Bangalore, India came into spotlight. The reason behind the tragedy was pressure by parents to excel in the field of education. In a nation where education system has been always been academic driven due to which parents and teenagers find no ease because entering into the finest institutions requires almost astounding levels of knowledge and competitive spirit (8).

Report #2: Rajani Dileep stated in a newspaper daily that she has faith in that children feel pressurized with or without parental pressure. She stated that educational system frights us to an extent that we consider if our ward doesn't perform well in academics they will fail in life. The parents burden their ward or overwhelm them with unconditional love and understanding by becoming new age parents. Either way, it doesn't help the teens as they compare themselves with their peers and feel disappointed or embarrassed despite having warm parents (8).

Report #3: Medical student Naveen killed himself in Chennai. It was reported that boy was depressed as he could not cope with the tough curriculum. Also, it was found that he was on medication, not out of choice, but due to pressure built up by his parents. (11-13).

Report #4: A report from Bangalore found that nearly 5% of 14,989 girls

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were found missing from 2009-2011. The girls eloped from home as they were not able to fulfill their parents wish to perform well in academics (12,13).

Report #5: In a daily newspaper, Times of India, it was reported that suicide rate in India specifically among teenagers up to 14 years of age is a grim which needs to be reflected. The strain to surpass the academic challenges coming through parents was the key factor forcing the adolescents towards suicide, depression and other mental health related problems (13,14).

Report #6: Sibal (Former Union Human Resource Minister, Government of India) observed that, “the sudden spike in suicides among students is a result of growing parental pressure on the child to beat his peers” (13-15).

The above reports reveal the scenario that parents try to fulfill their ambitions through their children thus, turning a blind eye towards the effect their actions have on the mental health of their wards (13-16). The reasons attributed behind this problem are Parental pressure on performance, Academic stress, Anxiety, Depression and Inability to Cope with Disappointments.

METHOD

Articles were retrieved by performing a search of the bibliographic database by including the keywords like, stress, peer pressure, academic stress, parental pressure, suicide, depression, anxiety among children. The search result identified forty relevant literatures specific to Indian scenario. Searches were limited to the literature from 2006-2017 which are done within Indian context. The studies in English language only were included for the review. Technical reports, working papers, newspaper publications were also included in the search. The Exclusion criteria included articles focusing on spouse, animal studies, pathological studies, neurobiological and pharmacological studies, physiological studies. The numbers of potential articles identified and subsequently examined for relevance against each of the search terms are shown in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
Numbers of potential articles identified and subsequently examined for relevance against each of the search terms

Search Term	Articles Identified	Articles Retrieved
Academic stress and children	20	09
Parental pressure and children	14	06
Suicide and academic stress	15	15
Depression, anxiety and academic stress	25	10
Total	74	40

OBJECTIVES

- The major objective of the present study is to create awareness and minimize the vulnerable behavior of students.
- To prevent children and parents from psychological problems which they face due to heavy competition being posed at them by the society.
- To create awareness about early identification as a preventive measure.

PARENTAL PRESSURE

The parents’ mostly believe that excellence in learning is the only way to thrive in life. With proliferation in educational levels and middle class families the parents’ anticipations from their wards have seen escalation. Also, there comes an inclination of paternities to attain the objectives which they were not able to achieve during their childhood they try to attain it via their children (17). All these put children into strenuous environment and adolescents who are not able to handle the pressure face psychological problems like anxiety, depression and stress. In a web extract it was stated that suicide rates of youth is increasing day by day, the children as young as 9 years of age have initiated to contemplate suicide, believing that if they do not reach a standard set of brilliance their parents will not want them anymore (17). Thus, without being considerate towards their ward’s opinion and his/her capabilities, parents push children into fields according to their demands and this lowers the self-esteem of the child (18). Thus, it makes child suspicious, angry and withdrawn about his/her intelligence and capabilities which obstructs their learning and growth to become a healthy being (18).

ACADEMIC STRESS, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONG STUDENTS

The psychological distress anticipated towards academic challenges or failure or even a cognizance of the possibility of academic failure is referred as academic stress (19). Kouzma and Kennedy identified that school related situations such as assessments, rankings, studying, self-imposed need to prosper as well as that prompted by others are reported as central sources of stress for high school students (20). Further apprentices who had complex levels of academic stress were likely to experience feelings of depression. Thus, the academic stress is pain staking and counted as a major risk factor for psychopathology (21).

Anxiety disorder has been reported amongst children and adolescents across the world in major number (22-25). Anxiety has substantial negative effects on adolescent’s social, emotional and academic achievements (24-25). Also, the major disorder i.e. depression is prevalent among all the age groups and is becoming the most common mental health problem for students making them writhe. This is caused by “poor social problem-solving, cognitive distortions and family conflict (25-27) as well as alienation from parents and peers, helpless attribution style, gender, and perceived criticism from teachers” (25).

INABILITY TO COPE WITH DISAPPOINTMENTS

In India mental health problems among young people have been recurrently reported (28-29). Apart from failures and disappointments at individual level, the society also plays a major role in prompting adolescents with mental health issues. The catastrophe and dissatisfactions in Indian society are not considered as a learning process but as youngster’s incompetence which has managed to reflect an unreasonable credence that failure means being unproductive in life. The parents wish to see their ward outshine in every field be it school, sports, dance, music etc. in order to fulfill these interests, parents prepare a restricted schedule for the child. Other than this the teen is burdened with homework and arrange for learning for school tests if any. These results in a taxing situation and when they are not able to cope with these restrictions they try to escape. All these lower the growth of young people and will just let them face failures and disappointments in life (27).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE

Development of children in all phases of life has role models but the primaries are parents and most important part of growth happens at home. The social theories have explained that adolescents learn by perceiving and imitating. Thus, parents should put more of efforts and strength to be aware of their ward’s prospects and future aspirations. If parents from an early age facilitate their child freedom, give them space of their own, let them take decisions whether it is right or wrong, this would let the child to be more confident, capable of being independent and will be vital to make adolescents into a well nurtured and brilliant human being. Thus, the chapter focuses on the strenuous academic environment of children in Indian context, there are various measures which can be applied in future like adolescents’ in their growth years should be exposed to all sort of experiences i.e. sports, music, languages, places, spirituality, art, literature etc. It gives understanding to child to foster in their areas of interest. Also, it would inculcate the value of being open to varied ideas and experiences of accepted wisdom.

Playing independently without any teacher and parent instructions, the teen is able to progress, learn to develop problem solving skills and interests more efficiently. Furthermore, counselors in schools should be a mandate and the analysts should keep a regular check on parents and teens in order to sustain a balance in mental health of child. Awareness of academic stress and mental health should be encouraged among both parents and children. In every learning institute, adolescents and parents should be taught different strategies on how to cope up with stress and anxiety thus promoting well-being and resilience among adolescents’ (30).

CONCLUSION

Being superior in learning is not the only criteria to excel in life this should be learnt by parents who must expedite their ward’s capabilities in the thrust areas where they can compete and sparkle with their potency. There are many instances where it is shown that children from challenged environment like living in slums, poverty, learning in difficult conditions surpassing in pursuit of education, sports, art, literature, music etc. Thus, it should be understood by parents that professional success does not guarantee success in life. Hence, more of thoughtfulness should be dedicated on child rearing and socializing with appropriate nurturing.

"It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are"
-E. E Cummings

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