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ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The current study has made an attempt to review the existing literature on academic stress experienced by the higher secondary school students and tried to find the causes and stressors of academic stress as well as the coping strategies for academic stress. The Literature reviews showcased that the causes for academic stress during schooling are lack of competence, inability to cope with studies, disturbed family dynamics, peer pressure. A lack of support from parents or teachers, even if it is only perceived, can add a lot of stress to students. They may feel that a lot is expected of them, but that they do not have a strong enough support system (whether emotional or practical) to achieve their goals. This is another cause of stress can affect high-achieving students. It is true that high aspirations and negative attitudes lead to mental disorder, depression, stress and even suicide among students. Therefore, parents and schools should let the children go ahead as per their interests and abilities without imposing their interests on their minds. Students should manage stress by creating a positive meaning for it in terms of their personal growth and feeling. Students must understand that positive stress and coping with negative stress can change them in a good way. It is therefore recommended that the counselling centre of the academic centres should put in place improved services such as social support groups made up of lecturers, administrators and students. With this, supportive skills like talking and sharing could be developed. This will enable students to feel comfortable and free enough to express their feelings. In order to reduce the adverse behaviours, the parents play a very crucial role in channelizing the forces of the adolescents. Appropriate guidance and directions should be given by the parents in helping to take right decisions which may affect their future. Building resilience, setting realistic goals and staying away from drugs, alcohol I relation with the recreational activities may be effective in reducing academic stress among the adolescents. The parents should take into consideration the interests and intelligent quotient of the children and not compel them to opt for the courses. The family atmosphere should be cordial, and the process of learning should be made enjoyable for the children only then the stress level among adolescents could be reduced. The author concludes that the support system and conducive environment is much required for the students to advance in their academic life and for reaching greater heights and goals.

Key words – Academic Stress, Students, Adolescents

I. Introduction

Earlier, the school was not considered as much stressful environment creator for students. The student population was less affected by this stress related problems. The students were expected only to study, and studying was never perceived as stressful. But nowadays, academic have become one among the stressors for students. Brand and Schoonheim-Klein (2009) explained that stress among students is multifactorial, arising from both academic and non-academic factors, including socio-cultural, environmental, and psychological attributes. At this stage, the academic performance of the youth/adolescents plays a crucial role in deciding about next higher stage of education, and probably career too (Rosa and Preethi, 2012). Therefore, excessive stress during this stage could result in increased prevalence of psychological problems like depression and nervousness, which could ultimately have negative impact on the outcome of the achievements (Waghacharve, etal, 2013). Academic stress is mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even unawareness to the possibility of such failure. Students have to face many

academic burden/load, for example, school examination, answering questions in the class, showing progress in school subjects. According to the statistics published by National Crime Records Bureau, there is one student every hour that commits suicide (Saha, 2017). The bureau registered 1.8% students who committed suicide due to failing in examinations and an 80% rise in suicide rates during a one-year time frame. A 2012 Lancet report also quoted that the 15-29 age group bracket in India has the highest rate of suicide in the world (as cited in "India has the Highest Suicide Rate", n.d.) and these numbers show no sign of dropping. Academic stress has been identified as the primary cause of these alarming figures. Lee & Larson (2000) explain this stress as an interaction between environmental stressors, student's appraisal and reactions for the same. It has now become a grave reality that is termed as a "career stopper" (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012). It therefore, becomes a significant cause of concern as it is symptomatic of rising mental health concerns in India (Nadamuri & Ch, 2011). Bisht (1989) stated that academic stress reflects perception of students' academic frustration, academic conflict, academic pressure, and academic anxiety. Academic stress is an important factor accounting for variation in academic achievement. Academic stress is conceptualized as interaction between students' environment, stressors, cognitive appraisal and coping with physiological and psychological response to stress and stressors related to academics.

II. Concepts

1. Stress

Stress means pressure or strain. Life constantly subjects us to pressures. In people, stress can be physical (e.g., disease), emotional (e.g., grief), or psychological (e.g., fear). Individuals vary in their ability to cope with stress. How you see a situation and your general physical health are the two major factors that determine how you will respond to a stressful event or to repeated stress.

Selye (1956) defines stress as "any external event or any internal drive which threaten to upset the organism equilibrium is stress". Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.

Everyone is exposed to stress at some time in their lives, that uncomfortable situation that affects the sense of well-being and quality of life. According to the cognitive-transactional model of stress, stress is the dynamic relationship between an individual and the environment in which a stimulus (whatever it is) disturbs an individual's homeostasis, causing him/her to respond to the situation with all available resources. When this occurs, we evaluate the demand relative to the available resources. Stress is a widespread phenomenon all around during all human lifespan. All people have experienced it throughout their history and throughout human history. The reason of the wide presence and inclusiveness of stress in human communities is the complexity of human social, personal, and ecological environment, multiple and simultaneously interactions of human with surrounding issues, and diversity in stress expression. In psychological sciences, stress is a feeling of mental press and tension. Low levels of stress might be desired, useful, and even healthy. Stress, in its positive form, can improve bio psychosocial health and facilitate performance.

2. Academic Stress

In today's highly competitive world, students face various academic problems including exam stress, disinterest in attending classes and the inability to understand a subject. Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even the fear of the possibility of academic failure. Academic stressors show themselves in many aspects in the students' environment: at school, home, in their peer relations and even in their neighbourhood. Academic stress is defined as the body's response to academic-related demands that exceed adaptive capabilities of students.

3. Higher Secondary School Student

In India, the combination of classes for Higher Secondary School varies from State to State. The consolidation of classes of the various school systems together forms the Higher Secondary stages consisting Classes XI-XII (<http://www.ncert.nic.in/>).

III. Review of Literature

A) Reviews of Studies conducted at National level

The Study results of Jayashankara Reddy, K., Karishmarajanmenon, M.S., and Anjanathattil (2018) stated that the dimensions of academic stress differed significantly among males and females and fear of failure was the only significant dimension that varied with respect to gender. Yashwant Kumar Nagle and Usha Sharma (2019) observed that 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. In order to overcome such issues, the counsellors and health professionals must take initiative to create awareness among the parents and teachers about their role in fostering a healthy environment. Dr. Prabhu, M. and Dr. Madan Mohan, G. (2014) noted that that anxiety largely contributes to the stress of students, hence teaching faculty must concentrate on addressing anxiety of students, which will automatically reduce stress among the students. Sibnath Deb (2015) found that the students reported feeling pressure from their parents for better academic performance. The degree of parental pressure experience differed significantly across the educational levels of the parents, mother's occupation, number of

private tutors, and academic performance. Abha Subba Rao (2008) observed that Schools and teachers can play a significant role in reducing academic stress. In some schools, administrators did not uniformly expect their students to earn high marks in the exams; instead, students were told that they were expected to 'meet their potential,' or perform to the best of their ability, this expectation was associated with a certain degree of stress. Debyani Roy Bhowmick (2017) revealed that high expectations of Teachers/Parents in terms of marks/grades, scolding from Parents/Teachers followed by poor performance, excessive competition, financial problem etc. are the factors causing stress among students. Rachana Parikh and Madhuri Krishna (2019) noted that proximal social environments (home, school, peers and neighbourhood) played a major role in causing stress in adolescents' daily lives. Salient social stressors included academic pressure, difficulties in romantic relationships, negotiating parental and peer influences, and exposure to violence and other threats to personal safety. Nitin Joseph and Aneesha Nallapati (2020) indicated that worrying about future and poor self-esteem was independently associated with academic stress among students. Male students adopted more of unhealthy means of coping with academic stress. Therefore, they need to be educated regarding the healthy coping methods.

Kadapatti and Vijayalakshmi (2012) concluded that as the number of siblings increased the academic stress of the students also increased. Family size was negatively and significantly related indicating that as the family size increased the academic stress decreased. Type of family was significantly related to academic stress indicating that students from the joint family had more academic stress than nuclear families. Sibnath Deb (2016) opined that as academic stress increased, male with high parental support were less likely to be depressed than female. In conclusion, high parental support was related to a reduced risk of depression in female; in male, parental support had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between academic stress and depression. Vishnu Vardhana Rao and Laxmanaiah (2011) stated that Students of both Government and Private Schools were found to have a similar stress perception. The students of Government-run schools exhibited more of avoidance coping strategies and therefore suitable for a systematic study on chronic stress for early intervention.

B) Reviews of Studies conducted at International level

Michaela C. Pascoe, Sarah E. Hetrick & Alexandra G. Parker (2020) observed that students commonly report high levels of academic related stress, cross-culturally. The academic-related stress experienced by secondary and tertiary students' impacts their mental and physical health and leads to a range of academic problems. Karel Fromel and Michal Safar (2020) found that adolescents with academic stress are not more physically active after school than adolescents without academic stress represents a warning, they also added that there is a need to seek ways to promote physical activity among adolescents who are at mental health risk. Ranjita Misra and Linda G. Castillo (2014) examined that differences in stressors and reaction to stressors were found between men and women after controlling for age. Male participants reported more stress that was due to conflict. Women displayed greater behavioural and physiological reactions to academic stressors. Fatima Al Rasheed and Atta Abbas Naqvi (2017) in their study revealed that Students studying in health cluster colleges reported high academic stress and self-medication practice. The major stressors identified were examination and course load. Student counselling sessions and counselling by pharmacists regarding self-care may help in the reduction of such stressors and may promote responsible self-medication.

The Study results of Igor Portoghese and Maura Galletta (2019) disclosed that considering a high prevalence of academic distress among University students and the limited interventions aimed to reduce stress, universities should employ preventive interventions by measuring and controlling for potentially harmful psychosocial risk. Wenjun Chen (2018) noted that social support from family towards was found negatively associated with pressure, workload, and overall academic stress, support from significant other was negatively associated with pressure, despondency, and overall academic stress, while support from friends was negatively associated with pressure among students. Xi Lin, Shu Su and Alyssa McElwain (2019) indicated that students' academic self-confidence, confidence for success in their future career, and confidence in making the right academic decisions influence their intentions to actively master the knowledge. While exploring Stress profile and university performance of pharmacy students, Elham Alshammari (2019) found that no relationship was found between academic performance and academic stress, no correlation between age and academic stress; and a significant relationship was found between the year of study and academic stress. Siti Fatimah Abdullah1 and Norliana Ahmad Shah (2020) noted that students feel stress when they do not understand what the lecturer teaches because of a lack of attention in class, when students have a conflict with other students or with their lecturer, it may also cause them to experience stress during their study time, they also added that knowing how to better manage sources of stress helps students experience less stress, allowing them to perform to their fullest potential.

IV. Conclusion

The current study made an attempt to review the existing literature on academic stress experienced by the higher secondary school students and made an effort to find the causes and stressors of academic stress as well as coping strategies for academic stress. The Literature reviews showcased that the causes for academic stress during schooling are lack of competence, inability to cope with studies, disturbed family dynamics, peer pressure. A lack of support from parents or teachers, even if it is only perceived, can add a lot of stress to students. They may feel that a lot is expected of them, but that they do not have a strong enough support system (whether emotional or practical) to achieve their goals. This is another cause of stress can affect high-achieving students. It is true that high aspirations and negative attitudes lead to mental disorder, depression, stress and even suicide among students. Therefore, parents and schools should let the children go ahead as per their interests and abilities without imposing their interests on their minds. Female students tend to experience slightly high mean score of academic stress in comparison with the male students, however this difference is not significant statistically. Students should manage stress by creating a positive meaning for it in terms of their personal growth and feeling. Students must understand that positive stress and coping with negative stress can change them in a good way. It is therefore recommended that the counselling centre of the academic centres should put in place improved services such as social support groups made up of lecturers, administrators and students. With this, supportive skills like talking and sharing could be developed. This will enable students to feel comfortable and free enough to express their feelings. In order to reduce the adverse behaviours, the parents play a very crucial role in channelizing the forces of the adolescents. Appropriate guidance and directions should be given by the parents in helping to take right decisions which may affect their future. Building resilience, setting realistic goals and staying away from drugs, alcohol in relation with the recreational activities may be effective in reducing academic stress among the adolescents. The parents should take into consideration the interests and intelligent quotient of the children and not compel them to opt for the courses. The family atmosphere should be cordial, and the process of learning should be made enjoyable for the children only then the stress level among adolescents could be reduced. The author concludes that the support system and conducive environment is much required for the students to advance in their academic life and for reaching greater heights and goals.

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