

Academic Stress in Senior Secondary School Students in the Social and Gender Perspective

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Abstract—Academic stress among Senior Secondary students has been a topic of interest for many years. And when Social and gender perspective add to it, there is a need of exploration to its challenge. Thus, the current study aims at analyzing the social and gender difference on academic stress among the boys and girls of +2 class in different Senior Secondary Schools of Bihar (N= 200) within the age group of 16 to 18. Balaji Rao Academic Stress Scale (2008) was used for assessing the academic stress. This test material consist 40 items & stress was measured on a 5-point scale. The analysis of data was made by using descriptive and correlational analysis. The results revealed that the boys' students are having higher academic stress than their girls' students' counterparts, which can be interpreted on the basis of modernization, complex social situation, undue expiration, on the basis of differential social milieu, future settlement perspectives and parental demands. To explain about social perspective urban students are having more academic stress than the rural students. The results can be due to development of coping skills, self-confidence and Self-management in differential social backgrounds. These findings may have implications for the conservation of personal resources as well as for stress management interventions through orientation, training, counseling, and guidance to foster coping skills in their academic endeavor.

Index Terms—Academic stress, Gender perspective, & Coping skill.

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern life has now become a world of stress whether in its positive or negative sense of the term. From among different types of stresses academic stress is a common part of students' life. This academic stress among college students has been a topic of interest for many a year. And when gender

perspective adds to it, there is a need of exploration to its challenge. Again, research findings also indicate that culture plays a vital role in taking up the academic stress of the adolescent boys and girls.

Stress is inevitable to human lifestyle of recent age. It can be defined as one's response to events that disrupt or threaten to disrupt one's physical or psychological functioning (Lazarus & Folman, 1984). Since it exerts negative effects on both physical health and psychological well-being, it has become an important topic of research in psychology (Agolla, 2009).

When stress is perceived negatively or become excessive it can affect both health and academic performance of the S S School in its long run. It reflects perception of their academic frustration, academic conflict, academic pressure and academic anxiety. S S School students experience high stress due to various elements, like, parental aspiration and pressure, family relationship, gender role, socio-cultural perspectives, interest, motivation, pressure of works and socio-economic status of the parents etc.

The most significant academic stressors reported were items that are time-specific or subject specific (Carroll's, 1963). As observed by Murphy and Archer (1996). Some researchers found that collegiate stressors included: academics, social relationships, finances, daily hassles (for example, parking and being late) and familial relationships (Larson, 2006). Within each domain conflict, insufficient resources, time demands, and new responsibilities had characterized stress.

Academic stress is a term used to define stress involving in studies, examination and career building. It is a mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even unawareness of possibility of such failure. Stress has

been seen tightening its grip on the students, as they have to compete at every step of their academic career in this fast-moving world. This shadow of academic stress darkens for the students of 10+2 who have to step out of schools into the world of competition to choose their respective careers. Besides dealing with the physiological and emotional changes, an adolescent has to come up with parental expectations, his career and school, which at times tend to have a negative effect on him. Family, which serves as a first school for the child, appears to be an important source of rising expectations. Parents have an important positive or negative influence on the academic aspirations and achievements of children.

Academic pressure is a significant source of stress for much school students (Hashim, 2003; Olpin, 1997; Tyrrell, 1992). The negative effects of stress have been observed by Boccella, 2007; Keates, 2007; & McMahan, 2007. Studies reported that students themselves said about the causes of their school-related stress and then looked at ways to reduce it. While searching for the ways and means to reduce stress they reverse the negative trends by developing healthier school environments that promote student engagement and well-being. Identified sources of academic-related stress have included fear of falling behind with coursework, finding the motivation to study, time pressures, financial worries, and concern about academic ability (Tyrrell, 1992). The other causes of stress may be dating, academics, extra-curricular activities, peers, parental pressure etc.

Stress is associated with physiological symptoms like characteristic of sympathetic nervous system activity. These symptoms relate to the flight response and the psychological symptoms of stress, like the subjective (how a person feels) and the behavioral (how a person acts) manifestation. Although there is some overlap in these areas. The symptoms vary among individuals because of the differing sensitivities of organs to the experience of stress. Krishan LaL (2014). The other causes of academic stresses are admissions process, large projects, assignments, standardized tests, huge amounts of homework, unclear and too many assignments (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003), and uncomfortable classrooms (Kohn & Frazer, 1986), to get good grades (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996), competitions with other students, failures and poor relationships with other students (Fairbrother &

Warn, 2003), relations with faculty members and time pressures may also be sources of stress (Sgan-Cohen & Lowental, 1988). Sometimes life stressors, such as social issues or family life, "family pressure," "divorce," and "parent/sibling illness" also create stress in academic career.

Studies by Nevius (2005); and Ross & Heath, (2002) indicated that stress has adverse effect on some students' mental health. But Science has long recognized that some level of stress can be adaptive and even healthy (Seyle, 1956); however, chronic student stress has been consistently associated with negative outcomes (Grant, Compas, Thurn, McMahan, & Gipson, 2004; Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2005). For the majority of students in this study, academic stress is constant. More than 70 percent of students reported that they often or always feel stressed by their schoolwork, and 56 percent reported often or always worrying about such things as grades, tests, and school acceptance. This can be explained that due to the stress they became conscious and so performed better in their academics.

Academic stress also includes the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it (Carveth et al, 1996). Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). When stress is perceived negatively or becomes excessive, students experience physical and psychological impairment.

Studies have also been conducted to know the relationship between gender and academic stress (Singh, 1972). Ansari and Krishna (1972) found males to be more anxious than females. Whereas Ekta Sharma & S. Jaswal revealed no significant gender related difference among student as far as academic stress is concerned. Results showed even there is no relationship of the type of the study (science & humanities) or sex of the child with their anxiety level. It is in contrast to the findings of Gakhar (1987) who reported science student were superior in intellectual level & achievement than arts students. Parental aspirations, fear of failure are some of the factors that make students anxious. Moreover, these days' girls are given equal opportunities and thus are

expected of performing equally well when compared to boys (Singh, 1972) and males to be more anxious than the females (Ansari and Krishna, 1972).

The result of Jaswal&Ekta also indicated non-significant sex differences with reference to parental aspirations in both science & humanity group. However, findings of Kotar (1988) indicate that majority of fathers aspire for more often mechanical vocations followed by scientific and then business vocations for their sons than daughters. On the contrary Kaur (1991) concluded that parents of girls took more interest in their studies as compared to that of boys. The study points out that no gender differences exist with respect to parental aspirations in both the streams of the study. Observations regarding the differences in parental attitude of science and humanities students; No significant differences in the attitude of parents of humanities boys and girls were observed (chi square value is 1.25). On the other hand, differences among parental attitudes of boys and girls in science stream were statistically significant (chi square value being 12.37 at 0.05 level). It could be inferred that parents of boys studying science have more positive attitude towards their sons' studies as compared to parents of girls studying science. Though boys and girls are being given equal opportunities and incentives but still significant number of parents is positively inclined towards sons, may be because of social expectations, acceptance of depending upon sons in various life situations rather on daughters. Results are in line with findings of Iyyampillai et. al. (1998) who found that for boys, parents feel that education is a basic necessity and is hence given professional education as medicine, engineering, which have higher probability of getting job and fetching larger income as they are the potential bread winners of the family. Methods to reduce stress by students often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits (Murphy & Archer, 1996). The only scientific research that specifically related leisure satisfaction to academic stress was that of Ragheb and McKinney (1993) who established a negative association between academic stress and leisure satisfaction. Institutional level stressors are overcrowded lecture halls, semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work (Awino&Agolla, 2008). Hatcher and Prus (1991) also referred to these stress

factors as academic situational constraints. Their study took into account a variety of factors that can diminish a student's academic performance. An undergraduate study done by Neumann et al (1990) concludes that college students may in fact experience the burnout phenomenon due to learning conditions that demand excessively high levels of effort and do not provide supportive mechanisms that would facilitate effective coping. Studies showed that students used stimulants like tea, coffee, and drugs and even sometimes illegal stimulants or drugs, to boost their performance, being affected by academic stress (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2007; McCabe, Boyd, & Teter, 2009).

However, the relationship between gender & academic stress is controversial one. Hence it appears that there are factors other than family, parents, gender of the children, which are contributing to academic stress among adolescence, is not the one. It could also be concluded that family does not pressurize the adolescence to be something in his life. They only motivate them. The adolescent themselves is conscious of their career & want to achieve maximum within a limited period. This often leads to academic stress both for boys & girls.

Types of role stress present among the engineering and management students in India was explored in a study conducted by Rakesh Kumar Agarwal and Shailendra Singh Chahar (2007). Role overload, role stagnation and self-role distance were found to be the major stressors experienced by the students. Male students experienced more role stagnation than females.

The study by Murphy & Archer (1996) and Archer & Lamnin, (1985) did not show any significant differences on any of the role stressors between first year students and their seniors, or between management and engineering students. The findings can be understood on social and educational environment prevailing in the country. Teachers often emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, so they often neglect the emotional feelings of students during the teaching process, which can cause emotional stress and learning problems for students. In addition, students may feel unfamiliar situations like nervousness, worry, frustration, abasement, depression, etc. The instability of these emotions easily initiates unusual behavior, which then affects the learning achievements and adjustment. Some of

the studies also concluded that collegiate stressors included: academics, social relationships, finances, daily hassles (forexample, parking and being late) and familial relationships (Larson, 2006). Within each domain conflict, insufficient resources, time demands, and new responsibilities had characterized stress.

In a comparative analysis on academic stress among management and engineering students it is found that some potential sources include- when excessive ability of students is there and appropriate timely counseling is not given by the institutions, teachers and parents, or if they cannot obtain appropriate concern from their peers or siblings (Chen, et.al, 2006). Again, the pressure to earn good grades and to earn a degree is very high among them (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996). Piekarska (2000) pointed out that there is a relationship between the results of stress and psychological and personality characteristics of the individual. Rao and Subbakrishna (2006) of National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) conducted an appraisal of stress and coping behaviour, on a group of 258 male and female undergraduates. 'College Chronic Life Stress Survey' constructed by Towbes and Cohen (1996) focuses on the frequency of chronic stress, first-year students scored higher than other students. Rocha-Singh (1994) has examined sources of stress among undergraduates through similar studies.

According to Hirsch and Ellis (1996), the dynamic relationship between a person and the environment, in stress perception and reaction, is especially magnified in college students. The problems and situations encountered by college students may differ from those faced by their non-student peers. These core academic stressors that create stress in academic institutions can have both positive and negative consequences if not well managed (Stevenson & Harper, 2006). Academic institutions have different work settings compared to nonacademic and therefore one would expect the difference in symptoms, causes, and consequences of stress (Chang & Lu, 2007). It is important to the society that students should learn and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that will in turn make them contribute positively to the development of the general economy of any nation. It is important for makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006). This is likely to affect the

social relations both within the institution and outside which affects the individual person's life in terms of commitment to achieving the goals (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Knowing the causes of student's stress will make the educational administrator know how to monitor and control the stress factors that are responsible for the students' stress. Often, graduate students perceive that faculty exert great power over their lives and feel that they live in a state of substantial powerlessness (Altbach, 1970). Another source of stress is the difficulty of achieving social intimacy. It is difficult to find a mate or maintain a relationship with an existing one. Graduate students tend to lack the time and/ or the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships (Hartshorn, 1976). Fear of academic failure related to these tasks is a definite stressor (Kolko, 1980).

Thus, stressors affecting students can be categorized as academic, financial, time or health related, and self-imposed (Goodman, 1993). Academic stressors include the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it (Carveth et.al, 1996). Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). College students have many obstacles to overcome in order to achieve their optimal academic performance. The way, that home work, unclear assignments, and uncomfortable classrooms (Kohn & Frazer, 1986). In addition to academic requirements, relations with faculty members and time pressures may also be sources of stress (Sgan-Cohen & Lowental, 1988). It is important to the society that students should learn and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that will in turn make them contribute positively to the development of the general economy of any nation. Do these situations really cause problems and academic stress? Do the differences in learning methods and teachers' teaching methods, in addition to the assignments, tests, project and course selection, cause academic stress in students.

II. RATIONALE:

Research finding stated that stress in academic situations can have both positive & negative

consequences. If not well-managed (Stevenson & Harper, 2006) stress seems to be very common in college student life and can affect their career making. Hence it is essential to analyze the cause & effect relationship of academic stress in case of adolescent boys and girls as the stage is a stage of their future building. Especially the effect of culture and gender role on stress also to be taken into consideration as they might influence their academic pursuit.

III. OBJECTIVE

Hence the objective is to study & compare the academic stress of senior secondary school students (boys & girls in their urban & rural perspectives).

IV. HYPOTHESIS

The probable result may be the urban adolescent boys will be more prone to academic stress than that of rural.

V. METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of present study consisted of 200 urban and rural students (100 boys & 100 girls), 50 per cell, between 15 to 18 years of age of Government Zila School Muzaffarpur, Government Zila School Darbhanga, Government School Sitamarhi, Government School Sheohar in Bihar.

Test & scale

Balaji Rao Academic Stress Scale (2008) was used for assessing the academic stress. This test material consists 40 items & stress was measured on a 5-point scale.

Procedure

The Balaji Rao Academic questionnaire was individually administered on each subject in their own personal environment to ascertain their level of academic stress. The results were calculated by using appropriate statistical methods.

VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The analysis of data revealed the idea that urban students are having more academic stress than the

tribal students (Mean = 7.20 and 6.06, respectively). While analyzing the gender perspective it is found that boys are having more stress than their girl's counterpart (7.63 and 5.08, respectively). Further the significant correlational analysis ($p > .01$) among the subjects also indicated that the academic stress among the urban and rural adolescents irrespective of gender, prevails. Similarly, the gender difference irrespective of culture also found to be significant ($p > .05$). It can be interpreted on the basis of modernization, complex social situation, undue expiration, on the basis of differential social milieu, future settlement perspectives and parental demands. To explain about cultural perspective urban students are having more academic stress than the tribal students. The results can be due to development of coping skills, self-confidence and Self-management in differential social perspectives.

VII. IMPLICATION:

These findings may have implications for the conservation of personal resources as well as for stress management interventions through orientation, training, counseling, and guidance to foster coping skills in their academic endeavor

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