

ACADEMIC STRESS IN SCHOOL STUDENTS AND COPING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress among school students has become a serious issue and has gained prominence among researchers and policy makers. Parents pressurise their kids for unending improvement in academic performance and this pressure is the most important cause of academic stress among students. The competitive environment at the school demanding the student to always prove something also poses tremendous pressure among students. Examination related anxiety is also directly related to academic stress among students. The paper examines the sources of academic stress in school students and strives to provide some realistic and practical solution to the problem.

KEYWORDS: *Academic Stress, School Students, Parents, Competitive Environment.*

Introduction

In the today's fast paced world, everybody is plagued by one or the other stress and our school students also face different stressors during their academic life. Students have to address various demands during the course of their academic life. Students confront these demands by putting in different kinds of efforts and by mobilizing various resources. If the student is unable to handle such challenges successfully then this causes stress. Also the student is not trained to cope with various stressors. High expectations of parents and school, parental busyness and negligence of their kids, physical or mental abuse, competitive pressures and various other demands are some the causes of the stress in the life of a student. Student's life is filled with over-demanding situations like taking continuous class pressures, pressure to perform in examinations, competition with their class mates, teacher's comparison of students, parental pressures, fear of failure in *so many* curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, societal and peer pressures. These pressures may be so taxing on the minds of the students that they may be unknowingly confronting high levels of stress.

Academic stress is a significant predictor of academic achievement and performance in a student's life. There may be varying degrees of academic achievement and performance depending on the level of stress confronted by the student. This academic stress also results into various physical, mental and psychological problems in the students. This can also lead to depression, anxiety and nervousness and can have substantial impact on not only short term but also have far-reaching life - long consequences. On this backdrop, academic stress is a serious issue which is gaining attention among researchers and policy makers have to formulate specific policies to tackle the issue. The paper examines the sources of academic stress in school students and strives to provide some realistic and practical solution to the problem.

Review of Literature

Stress is the response to a change that involves a physical, mental or psychological adaptation. Stress can result into anxiety, discomfort, and nervousness and create barriers in our ability to concentrate and focus and can interrupt performance and achievement. School students also have confronted various changes and demands which can be very difficult to balance. Mannapur B. et al

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(2010) witnessed that stress as a term in Psychology and Biology, has become very common and popular in the recent decades. Hans Selye was the first person to employ the term 'stress' in 1930. Reem Rachel A. (2009) studied medical students and established that there was a significant amount of stress among medical students and in that female students manifested considerably high perceived stress. Auerbach and Grambling (1998) maintain that stress can result into severe problems if not managed properly. Besides, if a person experiences chronic stress, the person probably suffers from physical as well as psychological or mental disorders.

Academic stress is the anxiety and stress that is prevalent in schools and education. Students confront tremendous pressure while pursuing his or her school education. Student life is full of activities like studying, class and home assignments, continuous evaluation, examination, lab work, quizzes etc. Student faces the stress of accomplishing all these curricular activities, finding time for co and extra-curricular activities and balancing the time and this results into academic stress for the students. Keinan and Perlberg (1986) contend that the frustration, anxiety, and depression are among the probable effects of high levels of stress. Mckean et al. (2000) claims that the interaction between stressors and individual's perception and the consequent reaction cause stress and produce anxiety and depression. Environmental stress happens as an outcome of environmental stimuli or demands perceived by an individual that are beyond his or her ability to deal with (Shirom, 1986).

Fairbrother & Warn (2003) researched the academic stress and identified stressors like assignments, class competition, failures and poor associations with fellow classmates and teachers among students. Academic stressors consist of the student's perception of all-encompassing knowledge and resources required and insufficient time to develop it (Carveth et al, 1996).

Students report the greatest sources of academic stress result from studying and taking continuous examinations, competition for grades among students, and lot of content to cram in inadequate time (Abouserie, 1994). If stress is negatively perceived or turn out to be extreme, then it may result into physical and psychological impairment among students. Students cope with stress by maintaining effective time management, building social support system, positive reassessment, and resorting to leisure pursuits (Murphy & Archer, 1996). The pressure to excel in the examinations and time earmarked makes academic atmosphere extremely stressful (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006). This not only affects social relationships within the school but also outside it and this in-turn impacts the student's life in terms of vow to accomplishing multifarious goals (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

Unnecessary homework, vague school and home assignments, uncomfortable lecture rooms (Frazer and Kohn, 1986), evaluation deadlines (Misra and Mckean, 2000), relationships with teachers, deadlines (Sgan-Cohen and Lowental, 1988), economic pressures, relationship with classmates, opposite gender, family and friends (Wright, 1967), eating and sleeping disorders, solitude and miserable future career projections are some academic stressors acknowledged by various researchers. Gender inequalities appear quite obviously in academic stress.

Another critical issue related associated with academic stress is the fear of failure. Schafer (1996) labels fear of failure as obvious and capable of de-motivating and fearing the students. Nevertheless, sometimes this fear can become so dangerous that it can produce excessive mental, physical and emotional distress, and makes the student feel that he/she cannot cope with situation. There are some students who are resilient and are able to handle these stresses and achieve their academic goals. Difficulty in adapting to social network and poor inter personal associations with classmates and teachers also result into academic stress (Hughes et al, 2006). Some students coming from homogeneous cultural upbringing into totally heterogeneous and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds also causes restlessness and academic stress (Clift and Thomas, 1973). The manifold increase in the number of management colleges has increased the number of management graduates creating a pool of professionally qualified youth leaving no dearth of talent and ideas (Shekhawat, H. et al, 2012).

McKean (2000) surveyed 249 college students at a Midwestern university and revealed that anxiety, unproductive time management and a want of satisfying activities outside college were strong indicators of academic stress. The study also manifested that female students were able to manage time more effectively in comparison to male students but female students also experienced high levels of stress and anxiety. Huan, et.al (2005) examined the secondary school students from Singapore and studied the role of optimism along with gender on students' perception of academic stress. The results exhibited negative relationship between optimism and academic stress in the school students. But gender was not found to be a significant predictor of academic stress.

Bisht (1989) defines academic stress as a condition where demand related to academics exceeds the available internal as well as external resources as perceived by the student. Academic Stress is a crucial factor which is responsible for variation in academic achievement. It also results into various health hazards and physical and mental problems. Academic stress acts as a negative predictor of academic performance in school children. Academic Stress is a psychological stress with some perceived frustration related to academic failure or even an anticipated awareness of probability of such behaviour (Gupta and Khan, 1987).

Objectives

The main objectives of the research are as given under:-

- To understand academic stress in school students and find out the various stressors for students.
- To present probable strategies to tackle or cope up with academic stress in school students.

Methodology

Research Type:

- Exploratory Research
- Type of Data/Data Source used: Secondary Data/Data source.

The present study is based on secondary data. The required information has been derived from various research papers, books, articles from Newspapers, Magazines, and from numerous web-sites which deal directly or indirectly with the topics related to academic stress in school students. Relevant information was subsequently analyzed to address the objectives of present study.

Main Text and Findings

For the purpose of the study on academic stress in school students, we have chosen 4 factors as academic stressors and now we will discuss them in detail.

- School Factors
- Family Factors
- Environmental Factors
- Self

Let us now discuss them.

School Factors

There are various factors which are responsible for stress experienced in school student but one of the most critical factors among them is the school itself. Such stress comes from too many school and home assignments, sub-standard academic achievements, preparation for continuous examinations, apathy towards a specific subject, and negative reinforcement of fear of teacher's punishment. Very high expectations from students and comparison students with their fellow class mates create utmost pressure and stress for students. Clift and Thomas (1983) testified that course work assignment and keeping students under continuous examination puts tremendous stress on students. Stress related to examinations and preparing for examinations followed by overload of class assignments were significant predictors of academic stress (Shirom, 1986).

Students seemed to be under high stress emanating from class and subject overload and procedures employed for academic evaluation and less stressed by factors related to family, social and self (Zeidner, 1992). Theoretical and concept oriented curriculum, unsuitable timings of school, very high student-teacher ratio, non-encouraging physical environment of lecture theatres, lack of healthy teacher-student interface, unreasonable disciplinary rules, mental or physical punishment, unwarranted school assignments, teaching pedagogy, apathetic teachers, exaggerated laying emphasis on weaknesses than strengths (Masih & Gulrez, 2006).

Moreover, some other factors are related to academic stress: academic load, attending class (Agolla & Ongori, 2009), continuous tests and examinations, school syllabus (Shah, Hasan, Malik, & Sree rama reddy, 2010), insufficient reference materials (Shah et al., 2010), projects related to courses (Conner, Pope, & Galloway, 2010).

Family Factors

Another crucial source of academic stress is the family that entails the excessive expectation placed on kids by their parents to fare well academically (Deb et al. 2011). Parents put extreme pressure on their kids to sit for long duration to study and prepare for tests and examinations and acquire high percentage and excellent results in examinations. Deb et al. (2011) establish that the prevalence of

parental pressure depend on educational background of the parents, occupation of father and mother, frequency of tuitions, and academic achievement. Non graduate fathers were observed to be extremely likely to compel their kids regarding better results. Children from non-disrupted families manifested higher stress than kids of disrupted families. Moreover, kids of disrupted families get less consideration and guidance from parents regarding academic issues in comparison to non-disrupted families. This unexpectedly reduces academic stress – thus emphasizing the negative effect of the parent's watchfulness and inducement on the academic lives of kids (Ganesh and Magdalin, 2007).

Environmental Factors

The environment especially social environment plays an important role in the formation of stress. Stress can happen not only in a complex and competitive environment but may also happen in a repetitious and mundane one (Feng, 1992). In countries like Korea, Japan and China, students have to undertake exceedingly competitive examinations during the completion of their schools so that they can get admission in esteemed senior secondary institutions (Woronov, 2007). Students prepare for these competitive examinations as if they are going for a war and there is a special Japanese term 'juken senso' which means 'examination war' (Hill, 1996). The pressure to excel in these exams is so intense in Japan that students devote some year/s post school to prepare for these competitions and optimise their opportunities for achievement (Hill, 1996; Schoolland, 1990).

Self

Various studies related to academic stress in students in Japan revealed that students manifest high degree of depression, attitude and behavioral problems, and suicidal tendencies (Schoolland, 1990). A study that was piloted on Korean high school students five months prior to university entrance examinations established that more than 50 percent seniors testified that they are feeling extremely stressed, and that levels of stress, depression and biological symptoms were very high as compared to students in the United States (Lee & Larson, 1996). If we compare boys and girls on stress then boys testified more stress than girls but girls manifested more biological and physical symptoms as compared to boys (Lee & Larson, 1996).

Probable Strategies to deal with Academic Stress

Having thoroughly studied academic stress, finding various stressors and their role on school students, we now devote the remainder of the paper on possible strategies to deal with academic stress. Teachers are the role models for students and they understand the nature of student problems and teachers should take the role of "custodians" for children very earnestly (Sedlak, 1993). Teachers and school psychologists can play a crucial role in ascertaining children who are confronting academic stress, anxiety due to continuous examination, and family expectations and pressure and provide students the support in school on regular basis concerning ways to cope up with academic stress and anxiety. They should regularly interact with the students; elucidate the doubts as soon as they find them in students and preparing a schedule for studies by talking with the students. Schools may organize special lectures, workshops and counseling sessions for parents on issues such as parenting problems, regularity of their kids' supervision on studies, positive feedback and reinforcement, and overburdening kids for exceptional performance. It is imperative that school may consider appointing student counselors or school psychologists according to the number of students so that they can guide students on different academic and personal issues. The appointment of school psychologists in schools in India, nonetheless, is going to pose its own challenges. A study accompanied around 15 years before revealed that only 9 percent schools of India had some sort of counseling services (Bhatnagar, 1997). A recent study of 83 member states of the UN revealed that there is serious dearth of school psychologists in India (Jimerson et al., 2009). It is assessed that in the highly populated countries like India, China and Indonesia at least 379 million kids don't have any access to school psychologists (Jimerson et al., 2009; Ying et al., 2012). In country like India counseling psychologists, are inclined to work in clinics and from there then tend to render counseling support services to schools rather than being located inside the premises of school environments. If they are confined in the school environments then they are able to deliver crucial services like student's assessments and evaluation, definite mediations for individuals as well as groups, school staff training, and encouraging physical and mental health and holistic wellness. So it is very important for school authorities to appoint student counselors or school psychologists for the benefit of students. The promotion of child and adolescent mental health is a worldwide challenge, but a potentially rewarding one (Funk M et al., 2006). It is important that Adolescent Friendly Health Services be made an integral part of the health system. A comparative study on utilization of adolescent health services found that school based services were better utilized than health facility based services (Santelli JS et al., 2003)

and parental involvement contributed to help seeking behaviour (Joshi BN et al., 2006). A holistic approach should be adopted which should focus on a broader range of health issues and not just sexual and reproductive health. This would entail convergence of all the appropriate medical specialties. Utilization of such services could be improved by intensive information, education and communication (IEC) and involving the parents or guardians.

While stress affects brain, the rest of the body also feels the impact of that stress. So, we can say that if our body feels better then our mind also feels the same. Yoga, Exercise and certain physical activities create chemical called endorphins in brain which acts like a natural pain reliever and also recovers and gives sound that reduces stress. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga, acupuncture, massage therapy, tapping therapy and certain breathing exercises also produce endorphins. Aerobic exercise decreases tension, balances mood, improves sleep, and enhances self-esteem. Albert and Monika (2001) testified that even few minutes of aerobic exercise induces anti-anxiety effects. Brown (1991) concluded that students who were low in physical fitness will seek medical advice more in comparison to students who are high in physical fitness.

Summary of Studies Reviewed

Author(s)	Academic Stressor	Impact/ Predictors of Academic Stressor
Clift and Thomas (1983)	School Factors	Testified that course work assignment and keeping students under continuous examination puts tremendous stress on students.
(Shirom, 1986)	School Factors	Stress related to examinations and preparing for examinations followed by overload of class assignments were significant predictors of academic stress.
(Zeidner, 1992)	School Factors	Students seemed to be under high stress emanating from class and subject overload and procedures employed for academic evaluation and less stressed by factors related to family, social and self
(Masih & Gulrez, 2006)	School Factors	Theoretical and concept oriented curriculum, unsuitable timings of school, very high student-teacher ratio, non-encouraging physical environment of lecture theatres, lack of healthy teacher-student interface, unreasonable disciplinary rules, mental or physical punishment, unwarranted school assignments, teaching pedagogy, apathetic teachers, exaggerated laying emphasis on weaknesses than strengths
(Agolla & Ongori, 2009)	School Factors	some other factors are related to academic stress: academic load, attending class
(Shah, Hasan, Malik, & Sree rama reddy, 2010)	School Factors	continuous tests and examinations, school syllabus
(Shah et al., 2010)	School Factors	insufficient reference materials
(Conner, Pope, & Galloway, 2010)	School Factors	projects related to courses
(Deb et al. 2011)	Family Factors	Another crucial source of academic stress is the family that entails the excessive expectation placed on kids by their parents to fare well academically
Deb et al. (2011)	Family Factors	establish that the prevalence of parental pressure depend on educational background of the parents, occupation of father and mother, frequency of tuitions, and academic achievement. Non graduate fathers were observed to be extremely likely to compel their kids regarding better results.
(Ganesh and Magdalin, 2007)	Family Factors	kids of disrupted families get less consideration and guidance from parents regarding academic issues in comparison to non-disrupted families. This unexpectedly reduces academic stress – thus emphasizing the negative effect of the parent's watchfulness and inducement on the academic lives of kids
(Feng, 1992)	Environmental Factors	social environment plays an important role in the formation of stress. Stress can happen not only in a complex and competitive environment but may also happen in a repetitious and mundane one
(Woronov, 2007)	Environmental Factors	In countries like Korea, Japan and China, students have to undertake exceedingly competitive examinations during the completion of their schools so that they can get admission in esteemed senior secondary institutions

(Hill, 1996; Schoolland, 1990)	Environmental Factors	The pressure to excel in these exams is so intense in Japan that students devote some year/s post school to prepare for these competitions and optimise their opportunities for achievement
(Schoolland, 1990)	Self	Various studies related to academic stress in students in Japan revealed that students manifest high degree of depression, attitude and behavioral problems, and suicidal tendencies
(Lee & Larson, 1996)	Self	A study that was piloted on Korean high school students five months prior to university entrance examinations established that more than 50 percent seniors testified that they are feeling extremely stressed, and that levels of stress, depression and biological symptoms were very high as compared to students in the United States

Conclusion

In the paper, we have discussed academic stress and causes of academic stress or stressors. And here we have chosen 4 stressors viz. School factors, family factors, environmental factors and self. The present study is based on secondary data. The required information has been derived from various research papers, books, articles from Newspapers, Magazines, and from numerous web-sites which deal directly or indirectly with the topics related to academic stress in school students. The paper also discusses strategies to cope with academic stress.

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