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ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS FOR BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The world is becoming more and more competitive day by day. Quality of performance has become the key factor for personal progress Quality of performance has become the key factor for personal progress. Parents desire that their children climb the ladder of performance to as high a level as possible. This desire for a high level of achievement puts a lot of pressure on students, teachers, school management and in general the education system itself. Academic achievement is an attained ability or degree of competence in school task, usually measured by standardized tests and expressed in grades or units based on norms derived from a vide sampling of pupils' performance. Studies reveal that even low or moderate levels of stress can interfere with task performance. Cognitive reactions of stress result in the inability to concentrate. Excessive stress hampers students' performance at all levels of education leading to physical, psychological, sociological imbalance. In the vicious circle of this stress a light of coping strategies should be predicted & exercised. This paper potentially predicts academic related stress on students. In particular, the relationships among the coping strategies used by students, social support, the parenting style used by students' mothers and fathers, students' experience of anxiety, and academic-related stress are examined.

KEY WORDS: *Academic Performance, Academic Stress, Coping Skills.*

INTRODUCTION

"*The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another*."

-William James

Education is the process of developing the capacities and potentials of the individual so as to prepare that individual to be successful in a specific society or culture. From this perspective, education is serving primarily as an individual development function. Education begins at birth and continues throughout life. It is constant and on going. Schooling generally begins some where between the ages four and six when children are gathered together for the purposes of specific guidance related to skills and competencies that society deems important. In the past, once the formal primary and secondary schooling was completed the process was finished. In today's information age, adults are quite often learning in informal setting throughout their working lives and even into retirement. Education, in its broadest sense, may be defined as a process designed to inculcate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to enable individuals to cope effectively with their environment. Its primary purpose is to foster and promote the fullest individual self-realization for all people. Achieving this goal requires understanding of commitment to the proposition that education is a primary instrument for social and economic advancement of human welfare.

Academic Performance/Achievement

Day by day the world is becoming more and more competitive. Quality of performance has become the key factor for personal progress. Parents desire that their children climb the ladder of performance to as high a level as possible. This desire for a high level of achievement puts a lot of pressure on students, teachers, schools and in general the education system itself. In fact, it appears as if the whole system of education revolves round the academic achievement of students, though various other outcomes are also expected from the system. Thus a lot of time and effort of the schools are used for helping students to achieve better in their scholastic endeavors. Academic achievement is the indicator of the candidates' level of acquired knowledge or skill, which has been gained as a result of training or experience. High academic performance is not possible in the absence of intelligence but the presence of high intelligence is no guarantee of high academic performance. The importance of scholastic and academic achievement has raised important questions for educational researchers. Children are the future of the nation. It is the duty of every country to provide educational opportunities to all its children. Therefore all efforts should be directed through the system of education for their academic enhancement and personality development. The importance of curiosity, intelligence, problem solving ability and personality traits cannot be denied because all these factors are responsible for academic achievement.

Academic Stress

The word stress is defined as a state of affair involving demand on physical or mental energy. A condition or circumstance (not always adverse), which can disturb the normal physiological and psychological functioning of an individual. In medical parlance `stress` is defined as a perturbation of the body`s homeostasis. This demand on mind-body occurs when it tries to cope with incessant changes in life. A stress condition seems relative in nature.

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Causes of Stress for the present status of student learning

Reasons for this situation in student learning can be attributed to the various factors such as:

- Changes in the nature of adolescent
- Less number of standard institution at graduate level
- Role of parents (aspirations of parents)
- Increasing competition due to incompetent standards and
- Lack of counseling and guidance at the secondary and higher secondary level.

Extreme stress conditions, psychologists say, are detrimental to human health but in moderation stress is normal and, in many cases, proves useful. Stress, nonetheless, is synonymous with negative conditions. Today, with the rapid diversification of human activity, we come face to face with numerous causes of stress and the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Academic Causes of Stress in Child

Not surprisingly, much of the stress of school/ Junior college is related to what students learn and how they learn it. Following are the main sources of academic stress for students:

- **Work that's too hard:** There's a lot of pressure for students to learn more and more and at younger ages than in past generations. For example, while a few decades ago kindergarten was a time for learning letters, numbers, and basics, most kindergarteners today are expected to read. With test scores being heavily weighted and publicly known, schools and teachers are under great pressure to produce high test scores; that pressure can be passed on to students.
- **Work that's too easy:** Just as it can be stressful to handle a heavy and challenging workload, some children can experience stress from work that isn't difficult enough. They can respond by acting out or tuning out in class, which leads to poor performance, masks the root of the problem, and perpetuates the difficulties.
- **Learning Styles Mismatch:** There are different styles of learning, some learn better by listening, others retain information more efficiently if they see the information written out, and still others prefer learning by doing. Mismatch in learning style can obviously lead to a stressful academic experience.
- **Homework Problems:** Students are being assigned a heavier homework load than in past years, and that extra work can add to a busy schedule and take a toll.
- **Test Anxiety:** Higher levels of test anxiety can hinder performance on exams. Reducing test anxiety can actually improve academic scores.
- **Social Causes of School Anxiety:** It's common for students of all ages to experience school anxiety, school related stress. This is often most apparent at the end of summer when school is about to start again, but it can occur year-round. Social, academic and scheduling factors play a major role, as do hidden environmental stressors.
- **Social Stressors:** Many students experience some level of stress or anxiety in social situations they encounter in school. While some of these issues provide important opportunities for growth, they must be handled with care and can cause anxiety that must be dealt with.
- **Parental Pressure:** Academic pressure by parents to a certain extent, serves as a motivating factor facilitating better academic performance by the children. Unfortunately, many Indian parents fail to keep up the 'golden mean' of academic pressurization. 'They tend to be very demanding and controlling, forcing their children to assimilate much more than they can, without realizing their potentialities and limitations. Due to this youngsters often suffer from frustration, physical stress, aggression, undesirable complexes and depression. Sometimes it may further react into suicidal attempts too. Students who are under performers, develop negative traits like jealousy, shyness, unfriendliness and retreat into their own world and become loners
- **Student Teacher Mismatch:** A good experience with a caring teacher can cause a lasting impression on a child's life - so can a bad experience. While most teachers do their best to provide students with a positive educational experience, some students are better suited for certain teaching styles and classroom types than others. If there's a mismatch between student and teacher, a child can form lasting negative feelings about school or his own abilities.
- **Friends:** Friends are one of their favorite aspects of school, they can also be a source of stress. Concerns about not having enough friends, not being in the same class as friends, not being able to keep up with friends in one particular area or another, interpersonal conflicts, and peer pressure are a few of the very common ways students can be stressed by their social lives at school. Dealing with these issues alone can cause anxiety in even the most secure students.
- **Lack of Family Time:** Due to a lack of available family time, many parents aren't as connected to their students, or knowledgeable about the issues they face, as they would like.
- **Not Enough Sleep:** sleep-deprived. This can affect health and cognitive functioning, both of which impact school performance.
- **Time Schedules and time management:** Over scheduled timing of schools and colleges can put students under the pressure. Student's daily schedule should be carefully arranged to give them some breathing space.
- **Excessive work load:** School and junior college schedules often stuff the students with a tremendous amount of work which they usually have to complete in their evenings and weekends and vacations. Unable to find time for themselves, they tend to lose interest in studies and their performance may go down.
- **Competition:** Competition is part of student life. From childhood into school, college, university etc every stage competition plays a major role. Competition involves academic performance leads to stress which becomes negative and unmanageable. The average and above average progress is made to feel inadequate. Under such intense pressure students may resort to

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devices like copying, and cheating during examinations. Severe competition may generate in many students various combinations of ruthlessness, defeatism, fear and anger, confidence and inferiority.

- **Poor Diet:** With the overabundance of convenience food available these days and the time constraints many experience, the average child's diet has more sugar and less nutritious content than is recommended. This can lead to mood swings, lack of energy, and other negative effects that impact stress levels.
- **Socio-economic status (SES):** Socio-economic status is also one of the most vital factors, which is considered as a determinant of one's nature of adjustment. The SES of the family does not only go with the chance of getting good education but it is also found to be related to the level of one's academic achievement, because higher socio-economic status means better educational facilities and more intellectual stimulation.

Strategies to Cope Academic Stress

Parents

- Parents need to spend time with children.
- Discuss about academics i.e. difficult subjects to learn
- Give students a stable home environment to learn joyfully.
- Monitor students eating habits.
- Negotiate home rules including consequences for rule breaking and stick to these rules for better discipline.

Teachers

- Continuous motivation and encouragement need to be given to students.
- Don't just talk to your students. Communicate with them.
- When children misbehave try to understand their behavior instead of merely punishing it.
- Do not discriminate students who scored low on the basis of gender, race, language, colour, religion etc.
- Individual talk benefits a lot than mere group discussion in case of students who are performing low in academics

"Listen to your young person," Hall says. "Acknowledge and accept his or her needs. Know that school is a long-term process. One immediate success or failure is not going to determine a child's life. Growth will happen. Parents can and must learn to accept that growth and the fact that it is going to be unpredictable. Show constant love and support to the student's inspite of academic failures.

CONCLUSION

Coping with stress is crucial for maintaining both physical and mental well-being, as well as for improving overall quality of life. Effective stress management can enhance cognitive function, boost productivity, strengthen relationships, and promote better sleep. Conversely, unmanaged stress can lead to various health problems and hinder personal and professional success. It is suggested that a domain-specific coping style may play an important role in the way students manage stressful academic events and perform at academics. High levels of stress are believed to affect students' health and academic functions. If the stress is not dealt with effectively, feelings of loneliness, nervousness, sleeplessness and worrying may result. Effective coping strategies facilitate the return to a balanced state, reducing the negative effects of stress. Establishing a student support system throughout formal studies is necessary to equip with effective coping skills. Efforts should include counseling helpers and their teachers, strategies that can be called upon in these students future careers. The most important message from teachers and parents towards students need to be that we are there, and that we love and support you always.

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