

STRESS AMONG SCHOOL GOING ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Adolescence is a period when individuals become independent from their parents. The period of adolescence itself is recognized as a period of 'stress and storm'. Stressful life events of both major and minor magnitude in the lives of adolescents are significantly related to their emotional behavioural problems. Studies on prevalence and pattern of stressors in adolescents using semi structured interview techniques and sound methodology is limited in developing countries. Knowing the magnitude of problem will help us in policy making.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Adolescents from 8th, 9th and 10th standards of four schools in two districts of Kerala were selected by random sampling method. Students with Children Behaviour Questionnaire score CBQ more than 9 and their parents were analysed for the level of stress using Checklist of stressful life events CLSLE and were compared with that of control group.

RESULTS

Out of 720 subjects screened 120 16.6% were found to be disturbed based on CBQ scores. CBQ score was significantly higher in disturbed group compared to undisturbed group. CLSLE scores shows disturbed group had higher stressors in "general", "school or academic" and "self" areas compared to control group. Stressors that are commonly reported by both the groups are decline in academic performance, breaking up with close friend, argument between father and mother and punishment by parents.

CONCLUSION

School going adolescents are exposed to stress. The academic pressure is one of the major precursors for the stress. Introduction of stress management techniques in school curriculum can be helpful. This study emphasis that stressed feelings among adolescents should not be neglected, but has to be properly intervened, so as to avoid a larger destruction.

KEYWORDS

Stress, Adolescence.

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BACKGROUND

The period of adolescence is one of rapid growth, change, relocation and self-discovery, which are defining qualities of stressful experience.¹ In theory, most prevailing models of developmental psychopathology recognize the potential importance of psychosocial stress in the aetiology and maintenance of both internalizing and externalizing disorders in youth.² Both long-standing and recent social adversities precede and increase the risk for emotional and behavioural psychopathology during the school-age years.

It was found that negative life events reported by parents were associated with children's psychological maladjustment and physical health problems.³ Also, a significant relationship was found between major life events in the parents' lives and children's affective balance.⁴

Naturally occurring stressful experiences have long been implicated in the development of psychiatric and somatic disorders. Understanding the nature and effect of stressful events has therefor been a major concern of health care workers. There are some studies to suggest that the effects of life stress in children and adolescents may be similar to those in adults. Hudgens demonstrated a relationship between life stress and depression among adolescents. Similarly high number of stressful life events were found associated with enuresis⁵ and psychiatric disorders. More recent studies have been done by Good Year et al. and Kashani et al. report an association between emotional disorders in children and undesirable life events.^{6,7}

Review of Indian literature on stress and psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents revealed there is virtual lack of studies in this area. Rangaswamy and

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Kamakshi⁸ studied the role of stress in 30 adolescent hysterics aged 13-17 years, using the Coddington's Social Readjustment Rating Scale. This study has been the only systematic study in the field of life events in children in India and reported that majority 85% of adolescents had a significant life stress before the onset of symptoms. Study on life events in psychiatrically sick children by Santa Malhotra revealed that psychiatrically sick group scored high in the stress score as compared to the control group.

Stress experience faced by early adolescent the efforts to deal with stress to find solutions and the adjustment in the various areas are central to understanding psychological distress and psychopathology during adolescence. Coddington demonstrated in a study carried out on group of children and adolescents that undesirable or negative life events accounted for a significant correlation between the stress and the mental health problems. Puskar, Lamb and Bartolovic surveyed 222 normal adolescents attending a rural high school.⁹ The students reported experiencing stressful events related to school, family, friendship and health. The study is important in view of the contribution towards understanding stressor faced by rural adolescents.

Studies in India in the area has been scarce. The available studies are in various age ranges and subgroups of adolescents. Stress faced by adolescents have shown inconsistent findings in the nature stressors faced by adolescents. Study in this area has implications in both school and clinical settings to teach effective problem-solving skills. The present is an attempt to study the association of stress in the disturbed adolescents.

Stressful life events of both major and minor magnitude in the lives of adolescents are significantly related to their emotional behaviours.^{10,11} The role of psychosocial stressor in generating and maintaining psychosocial disturbances is an important area that needs to be studied to understand normal development of psychopathology. Ever increasing in discipline, disobedience, indulgence in agitation, rebellion, suicides and adopting newer models of behaviour, may only be cry on the part of adolescents for help and attention. The present era is one of rapid and extensive social and cultural changes. This is more so in India. Today's youth is confronted not only with managing the changes accompanying psychological development but with the unprecedented changes of the impact of population explosion, knowledge, technology, communication and human aspirations. All adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the strains of this rapid social changes. Nearly two fifth of the nation's population belongs to 10-20 year of age. Hence it is time and significant to study this particular group of individuals and to assess the level.

Aim- To study the nature and extent of stress among school going adolescents. To compare the extent of stress present among the disturbed adolescents with the undisturbed control group.

Methodology- The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee of the Government medical college,

Kozhikode, India. The study was conducted in two schools each from Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala. In two schools medium of teaching was English and in other two, the local language, Malayalam. The four schools were selected following random sampling. Two divisions in each class were selected for the study. Following random sampling thirty students from each division were selected. 720 students underwent initial screening. Initially the class teachers of the two divisions of 8th, 9th and 10th standards were given the necessary instructions to complete the proforma A and B of CBQ of those 720 students who were randomly selected. Teachers were given a period of two weeks to complete the questionnaires. On the basis of cut off scores of 9 on CBQ, disturbed and non-disturbed groups were identified. The disturbed group were analysed for the level of stress using CLSLE. We have also compared the level of stress between the disturbed and non-disturbed group. Educational and socio-demographic details were collected. We excluded subjects who have physical/visual/hearing handicap. Informed consent was obtained from school principal, class teachers and parents. The data was analysed using SPSS version 16.0.

Tools Used

1. Proforma for sociodemographic and educational details.
2. Children behaviour questionnaire CBQ – Proforma A and B
3. Alexander's Passalong Test - to rule out mental retardation.
4. Checklist of stressful life events CLSLE.¹²

RESULTS

Out of 720 subjects screened 120 16.6% were found to be disturbed based on CBQ scores. CBQ score was significantly higher in disturbed group compared to undisturbed group. CLSLE scores shows disturbed group had higher stressors in "general", "school or academic" and "self" areas compared to control group. Stressors that are commonly reported by both the groups are decline in academic performance, breaking up with close friend, argument between father and mother and punishments by them.

Parameter		Mean ± SD or Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		14.04 ± 1.04	--
Gender	Boys	64	54%
	Girls	56	46%
Education	Standard 8	24	20%
	Standard 9	53	44%
	Standard 10	43	36%
Medium of education	Malayalam	36	30%
	English	84	70%
Economic status	Below poverty line	49	41%
	Above poverty line	71	59%
Residence	Rural	40	33%
	Urban	80	67%

Positive family h/of psychiatric disorders	14	12%
Table 1. Demographic and Educational Characteristics of Disturbed Adolescents		

	N	Mean
Control	5.5000	1.37810
Disturbed	14.4500	6.34823
Table 2. Comparison of CLSLE Scores- Control and Disturbed group		

DISCUSSION

In our study, we could find that adolescents can be screened by CBQ and in CBQ positive adolescents have alarmingly high level of stress as indicated by CLSLE score. A close examination reveals that the disturbed group reported significantly higher number of stressors in the "general" category which consists of socio cultural issues. The findings also indicate that the disturbed also report higher number of stressors in the areas of "school" and "self".

High numbers of stressors at school is consistent with previous findings reported by Andelson,¹³ where school related stressor constituted 60.3% of stressors in adolescents. Similarly results of a multinational investigation¹⁴ also reveal that "schooling" is a major concern for adolescents in the age group between 13 and 15 years. The similarity in academic or school stressors across various studies reported are indications of the importance of the problem leading to increased attention required by all professionals in this area. The present day society emphasis on academic achievement, learning new skills and preparation for future careers and there is added pressure from parents who identify with success of their children.

Stresses related to self, have special relevance to the Indian adolescents. Ramanuja opines that Indian child bearing practices are such that the assertion of individuality is not cherished. However, exposure to Western ideas through the educational system and the media, have been instilled in the Indian adolescents the need to individuate and the need to the given freedom of choice with less pressure from parents and school. It may be postulated that the control group of adolescents in the study are able to negotiate these situations which are stressful for the disturbed. This had implications to help the Indian adolescents to analyse and develop skills to face these situations appropriately.

The stressor that are reported by both groups are decline in academic performance, breaking up with close friends, argument between father and mother and punishment by parents. This is similar to investigation by multinational investigation.¹⁵

To summarise, the results of investigation indicates that both groups are faced with stressors and that disturbed group face more number of stressors than the control group. This may imply that competency traits may act as protective factors against stress.

The area of academic stress and its probable links to other stressors would prove important in understanding the

chain of stressors and also for planning effective intervention strategies.

Limitations- All students included in the study were day scholars. Boarders who form a considerable part of school going adolescents were not included. No attempts were made to study the coping mechanism employed by the students.

CONCLUSION

Adolescents spend most of their time in their school or college environment apart from the home. The environment at School, design of curriculum, examinations and social support definitely would influence the level of stress experienced by the adolescents. So to reduce the level of stress experienced due to various reasons by adolescent students, they need to be adequately addressed and can be done effectively from schools. These factors should be considered during policy making for making better mentally healthy adolescents. Interventions like appointing professional workers in all schools for giving psychological support and intervening at correct time, creating conducive school environment, giving importance to the extra-curricular activities providing life-skills training to the adolescents to help them handle the difficult situations in a positive way and periodical parents-teachers meet may help to alleviate the problems and developing a positive attitude among school going adolescents.

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