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On 11th October 2014

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Estd. 1970

Gondia Education Society's
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GONDIA 441601 (MAHARASHTRA)

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Nagpur University, Nagpur

Academic Stress and Its Effect on Physical and Mental Health among Adolescent Girls

V. R. Anurathi

Research Scholar, Avinashilingam University,
Coimbatore, Assistant Professor,
Anna Adarsh college for Women, Chennai,

M. R. Thilakam

Professor, Department of Resource Management,
Avinashilingam University, Coimbatore.

Abstract:

Academic Stress refers to the pressure to perform well in examinations, which is generally manifested in a variety of psychological and behavioral problems. As a result physical and mental health has been declining among school students in recent years. Reports indicated that even sub-clinical symptoms of anxiety and depression can negatively influence their satisfaction and performance in life. Hence the prime objective is to study "*ACADEMIC STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS*". Purposive sampling technique was adopted among 30 students studying in Higher Secondary schools in Chennai. A structured questionnaire pertaining to the objectives of the study was framed and used. The results analysed through percentage analysis showed that majority (80%) of students faced mental symptoms of stress due to absence of sense of humour almost daily and many of them felt as if nobody is there to care for them (67%), whereas about the half the respondents (47%) had poor memory and 40 percent of the selected students could not pay attention in class due to tiredness almost daily. Nearly 47 percent of students sometimes felt lack of self confidence and poor concentration. On considering the physical symptoms of stress, it is apparent that majority (87%) of the selected students have revealed heart palpitations and diarrhoea / constipation, selected students felt chest pain almost daily (83%). More than three fourth of the students (77%) had nausea/vomiting, fainting and frequent urination almost daily, and 73 percent of the selected students almost daily had breathing problems and trembling (70%). Identifying real potential with proper usage of time and energy along with strong supportive network consisting of parents at home and teachers in school could effectively bring down the symptoms of stress and promote well being among students.

Key words - Academic Stress, Physical and Mental Health, Adolescent Girls.

Introduction:

In today's world, academic life of a student plays a major role in building their future. Adjustment issues persists among higher secondary students due to lack of efficiency in coping with the separation of family environment, fear of career development, stress management, basic study schedule, goal setting, forming relationship with friends and teachers in the school, emotions and in developing their self esteem as a whole. In today's world, education system puts lots of pressure on students to score more and more in the so called competitive society. Pressure from family members, society along with personal desire to secure high marks triggers students stress. If one does not manage stress one may face severe consequence in the form of health problems. Whether the effects may be acute or chronic, stress does affect one's health. What is stressful for them and how do they cope with it is a concern to individuals and researchers (Blanco and Gisela 2000).

Methodology:

The study sample consisted of 30 girl students studying in higher secondary schools at Chennai city by adopting purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The collected data included factors related to symptoms of stress experienced with respect to mental and physical health. Data was consolidated and subjected to statistical analysis. Percentage analysis was applied to find out major physical and mental symptoms of stress experienced among girl students.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1 reveals the mental symptoms of stress among students. It is evident from the table that majority of students faced mental symptoms of stress due to absence of sense of humour (80%) almost daily and felt as if no body is there to care for them (67%), whereas, 47 percent of the students had poor memory and 40 percent of the selected students could not pay attention in class due to tiredness almost daily. Nearly 47 percent of students sometimes felt lack of self confidence and poor concentration followed by 43 percent of them either going blank or had mind racing sometimes with a insecure feeling due to the competition that exists in scoring good marks.

Table 1

Mental Symptoms of Stress among students

Mental Symptoms	Almost Daily (N=30)		Some times (N=30)		Rarely (N=30)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
No sense of humour	24	80.0	1	3.3	5	16.7
Feel as if no body cares for me	20	66.6	8	26.7	2	6.7
Poor memory	14	47.0	12	40.0	4	13.0
Inattentive due to tiredness	12	40.0	9	30.0	9	30.0
Unable to do preferred work	11	36.7	10	33.3	9	30.0
Feel lack of self confidence	10	33.3	14	46.7	6	20.0
Mind racing or going blank	9	30.0	13	43.3	8	26.7
Poor Concentration	8	26.0	14	46.7	8	26.7
Confusion	7	23.3	12	40.0	11	36.7
Insecure feeling, due to competition	5	16.7	13	43.3	12	40.0
Pressure due to expectation from parents	5	16.7	11	36.7	14	46.7

Table 2, depicts the physical symptoms of stress seen among students. The results clearly implies that majority (87%) of the selected students have revealed heart Palpitations and diarrhoea / constipation , 83 percent of selected students felt chest pain almost daily. About 77% of students had Nausea/Vomiting, Fainting and frequent urination almost daily. Nearly 73 percent of the selected students almost daily had breathing problems and 70 percent of them had trembling. It is evident that 50 percent of the students stated to have head ache and fatigue , feeling of tiredness, some times followed by 47 percent of students had frequent cold/fever. Around 40 percent of the selected students sometimes had muscle aches of the neck , shoulder, back or stomach.

Table 2
Physical Symptoms of Stress among students

Mental Symptoms	Almost Daily (N=30)		Some times (N=30)		Rarely (N=30)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Heart palpitations	26	86.7	3	10.0	1	3.3
Diarrhoea / Constipation	26	86.7	4	13.3	0	0.0
Chest pain	25	83.3	5	16.7	0	0.0
Nausea / Vomiting	23	76.7	6	20.0	1	3.3
Fainting	23	76.7	5	16.7	2	6.7
Frequent urination	23	76.7	4	13.3	3	10.0
Breathing problems	22	73.3	6	20.0	2	6.7
Trembling	21	70.0	5	16.7	4	13.3
Loss of appetite / Weight loss	20	66.7	5	16.7	5	16.7
Dental problems/Mouth ulcers	19	63.3	8	26.7	3	10.0
Sweating	7	56.7	6	20.0	7	23.3
Sleeplessness	15	50.0	7	23.3	8	26.7
Muscle aches (Neck, Shoulder, back, B Stomach)	9	30.0	12	40.0	9	30.0
Frequent cold or fever	7	23.3	14	46.7	9	20.0
Fatigue or tiredness	5	16.7	15	50.0	10	33.3
Headache	4	13.3	15	50.0	11	36.7

Conclusion:

The pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu and Chafra. 2006: Polychronopoulou, Divaris, 2005; Misra and Mckean, 2000). This means that deterioration in health of the student is evident from the physical and mental symptoms of stress that directly affects the students performance. It could be inferred from the study that the students selected were found to have no diversification due to poor time planning, which resulted in top factors like No sense of humour with a loss of enthusiasm she once enjoyed , Feel as if no body cares for them that developed a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness and poor memory related issues makes them vulnerable to stress inducement. Researchers (Ongori, 2007, Ongori and Agolla 2008;) have long identified some of the stress symptoms like Heart palpitations, Diarrhoea / Constipation, Nausea / Vomiting, Fainting among others. An individual experiencing one of these factors is likely to be a victim of stress. However, academic work is never without stressful activities. The study reveal that some of the stressors perceived by the selected students are quite inherent in nature in that , they are common to academic life of the students, the schools should address potential sources of academic stress effectively to promote general health and well being of the students the future generation.

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**Avinashilingam institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore- 43**

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