

Stress, Adolescence and Academic Performance

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Abstract

A matter of timely concern is the problem of stress alleviation in adolescent teen agers, faced with various aspects like facing academic competition from peers in the classrooms, delinquency problems due to being unable to perform to expectations of parents and teachers, given to other unsocial habits – drugs, alcohol, smoking; parental support, demographic and fiscal needs.

Another matter of major concern is faculty burnout – inability of faculty to perform up to expectations due to academic overload, non availability of properly trained or insufficient faculty in educational institutions besides other minor hassles, indirectly affecting good students.

Psychologists strongly feel some of these problems could be easily done away with by faculty and parents showing empathy towards their students or children in such instances, which are being identified at the right time.

Some of the causes of adolescent stress and its effects have been presented.

Keywords Stress, adolescence stress, causes of adolescent stress, faculty burnout, Empathy, poor academic performance

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I. Introduction

It was Nelson Mandela who once said “*Education is the great engine of personal developmentand is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*”. All over globally, matters being given the most attention by all governments are the processes by which the entire population could be made literate. India has a vast population to cope with. India’s GER {Gross Enrollment Ratio} has risen from 26.3% in the period 2018-2019 to its present level of around 29% in 2021-2022 for the age group 18-23. It is being aimed at around 50% by 2035, which is probably attainable, as at present about 50% are already at the higher secondary stage! 50% are women! India’s problems are different. Most of this is in the villages – India lives in its villages.

Developing countries would have to face investments of a large amount to upgrade their existing infrastructures to modern standards, if they were to step up their GERs and also the quality of education being offered in their countries. This is not going to be an easy affair, particularly taking into consideration their backwardness of ICT and other rural facilities {1} Imparting education to the masses is not that easy an affair for the developing countries, as they are faced with other demographic and fiscal problems. Developing countries would have to face investments of a large amount to upgrade their existing infrastructures to modern standards, if they were to step up their GERs and also the quality of education being offered in their countries. They need to keep pace with further developments taking place in the advanced countries, in terms of gadgets and ICT systems.

India’s problem is of a different kind. Rural India still feels a little isolated from the normal Diaspora, in that financial affordability, stress from various angles – language {medium of education}, different societal levels, good and bad of adolescence stages of children growing up in different locales, advanced teaching methods {gadgets}, and the capability of the teaching profession to adapt itself to the various demands of such a diverse scenario!

Stress Development - Causes and Formation in Adolescents

Stresses induced may be of many kinds, depending on circumstances, environment and the schools infrastructure {2}. Some of the common or most prevalent causes for such stress development in the adolescent stages are mostly intrinsic, classified as pertaining to:

- mental and physical wellbeing of students
- establishing self-identity, sexual habits and roles, personal priorities

- peer relationships and their reflections
- academic performance, inability to maintain parent/teacher expectations
- academic achievement disturbed --smoking , alcohol and drugs abuse
- totally disturbed influences concerning family – running away and delinquency, fiscal reasons

Several other variables that were identified as the subjects and curriculum followed at school being at variance when compared with the expectations, various teaching methodologies adapted, teacher student ratios, school's policies, additional extra-curricular support programs and the access to and use of quality facilities. Further, it has been reported in that study that girl students experience more stressors and react more fiercely than their male counterparts {3}.

Academic settings also play a major role on student academic achievements. Research points to stress leading to sadness, frustrations, and nervousness, a feeling of rejecting life leading to suicidal reactions. Academic-related stress leads to reduced academic performance, depression, and lack of motivation to complete school assignments and even increasing drop out of students from classes and school.

Stress could also arise out of student's family social economic conditions and increased instructors' academic expectations; and can be a negative factor in decreasing cognitive functions of the student, apart from inducing sleep apnea and reduced social participation. As indicated earlier, stress definitely has an impact on academic performance among ethnic groups; racial ethnic and socio economic achievement gaps amongst developed and developing nations {4, 5}.

Faculty Burn Out and Academic Output Leading to Stress Affecting Student Performance

Early burn out affects performance of teachers and their behavior in the class room does not achieve the results expected, which in turn psychologically affects the attitudes of the good performing students towards intellectual deprivation. While assessing the performance of a group of students in a class, indirectly points out to the non-performance of the teacher! In such cases the root cause for all the upsets points out to the following:

- Teachers particularly in self financing institutions are challenged with heavy work overload, like they are given too much of teaching, administration, institute's discipline control, and many other non-academic activities thrust upon by the managements which are also reflected in their preparations and performances in the classroom !
- Secondly the University administration, and the powers that be, should involve the staff during decision making processes, and be supportive to the supervisory activities of the junior faculty and staff members rather than impressing their authoritative powers over them – could lighten the atmosphere in the school
- Provide more autonomy in the work places, transparency in increments and promotions and staff inclusions, so as to nurture ethics in the entire system of working, so that much of the stress and burn out factors are reduced
- Most importantly be supportive / facilitative than authoritative or even creating divisions amongst them; Divide and rule, makes the better one leave and the management continues to run the institution with the rut

In some cases, teachers and school managements are also responsible for the stress created in adolescent students, who are of a progressive nature. Stress creates a variety of positive and negative emotions which affect faculty cognition, their well being and performance; and they employ a variety of procedures to overcome stress and to regulate their emotions. In extreme cases, such regulation strategies fail and the net result is a poor show and performance of the teacher in the class room {7}; indirectly causing a stress on the student community to finish their assignments and their studies before the time limit or end of semester schedules.

Empathy and Education

Norma & Seymour Feshbach have aptly described the Teacher and the Student relationship as analogous to a 'Therapist and a Client' {8, 9}. Empathy plays a crucial role in reducing the impact of stress in students particularly in the adolescent stage. It is well known that a teachers' empathetic word of advice would have a better influence on the student to experience better realization and understanding, creating a better communication link to develop the student's attitude towards academics and motivate them towards performing better{10}. Empathy transcends all layers of human understanding, lending a helping hand to others, service offering, creating political awareness and tending those afflicted with fears and pain. Empathy could be transferred through body gestures, and even a courteous smile and the like.

II. Conclusions

To conclude, it would be the major responsibility of the parent, the teacher and the institution {primary, secondary or tertiary}, to ensure that adolescent teenagers are given the necessary inputs to become better citizens! Excellent academic environments, comfortable and caring homes, and teaching faculties with a feeling and aptitude to contribute, are what are needed in today's world. Empathy or a word of support from those involved towards the adolescent could go a long way in clearing the stress component!

Stresses could be termed intrinsic or extrinsic, as all factors are intermingled, one depending on the other; as indicated; *Intrinsic/ Extrinsic - Gender, Socio-economic, School, Teacher, Society, Neighbourhood – Sleep Apnea, Fatigue, Memory Loss, Performance Loss*

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