

A Study of Perceived Stress and Coping Styles among Mid Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Background: The term adolescent is derived from the Latin word “adolescere” meaning to grow, to mature. It is characterized by rapid physical growth, significant physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual changes. They are not only in large numbers but are the citizens and workers of tomorrow so must be stress-free and healthy.

Aims & Objective: To study (1) Comparative measurement of level of stress; (2) Preferred method of coping style.

Materials and Methods: Study was undertaken in randomly selected two schools one each of central board (private) and state board (government) of Ahmedabad city. 72 apparently healthy students from each school having age 14-16 years were recruited for study after thorough physical examination. Perceived stress measured in 72 students using “perceived stress scale (PSS 14)” developed by Cohen. Coping methods measured by “revised version of coping questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus”.

Results: All students scoring high on PSS 14. Their mean stress score approaching higher limit with no significant difference between two schools. Central board (private) school students adopting positive coping methods while students of state board (government) school adopting negative coping styles ($p < 0.05$). Males are scoring high than Females on stress score and later having positive coping strategies while former peruses negative.

Conclusion: All students must be counseled for their high level of stress with special focus on Government school students so that their approach to deal with stress can be changed.

Key Words: Coping Questionnaire; Perceived Stress Scale Mid Adolescents; Positive and Negative Coping Style

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent is considered as a bridging period from childhood to adulthood. Biological, cognitive, moral, as well as social development occurs during this period. It can be identified as one the vulnerable period of life when the various mental and physical health problems may be seen which may lead to stress. The term “stress”, as it is currently used was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”. However more specifically it has been defined as, “state of psychological and / or physiological imbalance resulting from disparity between situational demands and individual’s ability and / or motivation to meet those demands” (American institute of stress).^[1] “Stress spares none not even those who advise how to prevent it (Shah and Kanwar, 1999).”^[2] In 21st century it especially affecting adolescents of metropolitan city as they are least stormy in that segment of youth which is gifted and well trained in the pursuit of expanding technological trends, and thus able to identify with new roles of competency and invention, which may lead to stressful situation. The effects of acculturation have proved to be significant on intelligence and academic achievement (Panda and Nath, 1992).^[3] Stress adversely affects physical and psychological health of the adolescents while productivity and functioning of entire world. Stressors may lead to ill health, anxiety, dissatisfaction, irritation and depression. One can have stress free condition only after death; however stress can influence positively as well. It is part of ones response to any challenge, any demand or any change. It can generate the impetus necessary to convert thought into action and can motivate an individual to accept a challenge (shailja).^[4] Various environmental factors like economic uncertainty or technological uncertainty mainly due to overpopulation leading to competition are also important in causation of stress. We can guide the adolescent how to withstand, how to react on and most importantly developing positive attitude and coping style while facing the stressful conditions. This is possible only at this

tender age of mid adolescent.

Aims & Objective: To study (1) Comparative measurement of level of stress; (2) Preferred method of coping style.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our present study was cross-sectional, conducted in Ahmedabad, as being a metropolitan city it offers variety of opportunity for career and hence competition is tough for the students. We randomly selected two schools, one each of ‘central board (private)’ and ‘state board (government)’ of Ahmedabad city. 72 students from each school were included. Out of total 144 students 87 were male n 57 were female. Prior consent from school principal, students and from their parents was taken. The study involved exploring the stress level and coping strategy of randomly selected 11th standard mid adolescents (14-16 years) students. Mid adolescents have variety of issues such as separate identity from parents, new relationship to peer group and opposite sex, desire for experimentation etc. can lead to stress. Thorough physical examination was done prior to commencing the study to avoid bias. For measuring the stress level ‘perceived stress score 14 (PSS-14)’ developed by Cohen was used⁵. It constitutes 14 questions that ask about one’s feelings and thoughts during the last year. In each case, one is asked to indicate his/her response by placing an “x” over the circle representing how often you felt or thought a certain way. All participants asked to treat each question as a separate question. Study group was advised not to count up the number of times they felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate. Coping methods measured by “revised version of coping questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus⁶”. The Ways of Coping (WOC-Revised-how to cope up with stress) is a questionnaire containing a wide range of thoughts and acts that people use to deal with the internal and/or external demands of specific stressful encounters. The response format in the revised version is 4-point Likert scale (0 = does not apply and/or not used; 3 = used a great deal). It involves which kind of

method of coping person is using in a particular stressful condition. It may be positive or negative coping style. Along with these socio-economic background and education of parents were also considered. Each question were read out clearly in the class and

Any doubt in student's mind was cleared before commencing the study. Vernacular language was also used for state board students and there was no time limit to full fill the questionnaire.

RESULTS

The background characteristics (age, number of siblings, birth order and family size) showed that the participants were comparable across schools. Mean age of the students was 15.7 ± 0.2 yr. 80 students belonged to forward caste, 50 belonged to backward community, 10 students were scheduled tribes and 4 students belonged to the category of scheduled caste. Regarding education, fathers of CBSE school students were more educated (62 had postgraduate degree, 8 had undergraduate degree and 2 were studied till 12th) than State board students' (52 studied till 12th only, 15 undergraduate and 5 had postgraduate degree). Most of mothers of both the school students were housewives.

Table-1: Mean Stress Score on PSS-14

School	Stress Score (Mean \pm SD)
Central Board School (n=72)	39.37 \pm 5.33
State Board School (n=72)	40.88 \pm 4.72

Unpaired T-test was applied and difference in mean was not statistically significant (P=0.0740)

Table-2: Coping Strategies

School	Positive Coping Score (Mean \pm SD)	Negative Coping Score (Mean \pm SD)
Central Board School (n=72)	21.85 \pm 4.22	23.50 \pm 4.85
State Board School (n=72)	20.46 \pm 4.58	28.31 \pm 4.55
T-test	P = 0.0603	P < 0.0001

Table-3: Gender Based Mean Stress Score and Coping Strategies

Gender	Stress Score (Mean \pm SD)	Positive Coping Score (Mean \pm SD)	Negative Coping Score (Mean \pm SD)
Male (n=87)	42.58 \pm 5.94	19.56 \pm 4.36	30.55 \pm 4.27
Female (n=57)	38.48 \pm 5.29	21.64 \pm 3.98	22.87 \pm 3.69
T-test	P < 0.0001	P < 0.05	P < 0.0001

DISCUSSION

Stress and coping are internally webbed within all individuals and is ongoing process. So it is of great concern for all individuals whether adolescents or parents.^[4] From Table 1 it is evident that students of both the schools are having high level of stress. Although there is no cut off limit of level of stress score in this PSS-14, Mean level of stress score is approaching the highest score of 56 and as per Cohen higher the value, higher is the stress. There is no significant difference in stress level of compared school students. Our finding is comparable to study done Augustine et al.^[9] Gender differences have been found in a number of studies. Female adolescents reported more sensitivity to interpersonal stressors and to those related to peer values regarding clothes and appearance (Coleman, 1990; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave & Bush, 1979). Males, on the other hand, indicated future expectations to be a significant stressor (Coleman, 1990).^[11] In direct contrast, other researchers claim to have found no gender differences with regard to environmental stressors (Ferguson 1981).^[12] Here we haven't look for type of stress i.e. whether its economic stress or educational stress etc. but it can be presumed that high competitive nature of CBSE Private schools preparing the students for professional entrance examinations leads towards higher level of stress in them. However in government school students low socio economic status plays major role as a stressor. A study conducted among 207 children from rural poor community of United States at the age of 11 and 19 years has shown that those who had adverse environment (including low income) exhibited impaired reactions to stress and an early manifestation of physical symptoms of stress.^[7] Another study in US adults has also reported a positive association between perceived stress and socio economic status.⁸ Other factors such as tensed relation with other students, change in the health of family, recently changed living conditions can also add up the stress. Table 2 shows which type of coping strategy (positive or negative) is being used both school students. State board school students

scored high on negative methods such as Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self-Controlling, Escape-Avoidance. While CBSE students using positive coping styles such as Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility, Planful Problem Solving, Positive Reappraisal. This difference is very much significant on calculated t' value. Regression model has showed coping as the independent predictor of perceived stress.^{19]} Table 3 suggests males are more stressful than females and later are using more positive coping strategies. There is paucity of research regarding gender based difference of stress level and coping strategies; however Our these findings are consistent with a study by De anda and Baroni (2000)^[10] who reported females more often seeking social support and assistance from peers (positive coping) than males while coping to stress. CBSE school students reflected better adoption of the coping strategies which possibly due to these students being more attached by their families receive constant guidance from their parents and can better cope up, add to that interaction between the parents and adolescents may be closer and free which provide scope for independent decisions. Their parents have also showed higher level of education as compared to counterparts. Adoption of negative coping style by students of state board (government) school possibly because of improper parenting, less parent-child interaction and lack of personality development. So they are to be focused for early interventions.

CONCLUSION

- Students of both settings having mean stress score on a higher side.
- Central board private school students have positive coping methods.

- Males are scoring high than Females on stress score and later having positive coping strategies while former peruses negative.

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