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## Perceived Physical and Psychological Stress among Higher Secondary School Students: A Pilot Study

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### Abstract

Stress is the combination of psychological, physiological and behavioural reactions. 'Stress' is either an external event or an internal drive which threatens the normal functioning of an individual, resulting in impaired health or altered behaviour. Stress emerges for young people as they enter adolescence, a transition that brings rapid emotional changes. Teens must confront the challenges of developing healthy relationships with peers, meet the expectations of school and the responsibilities of family, and negotiate life in their neighbourhoods. The present study was conducted in Kovaipudur of Coimbatore district. The purpose of this study is to find the perceived physical and psychological stress among the higher secondary school students. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. A sample of 45 high school students (both male and female) was collected randomly for the pilot study in Kovaipudur area.

**Keywords:** Stress, School Students, psychological stress, behaviour, Depression

### Introduction

Stress is simply a fact of nature -- forces from the inside or outside world affecting the individual. The individual responds to stress in ways that affect the individual as well as their environment. Because of the overabundance of stress in our modern lives, we usually think of stress as a negative experience, but from a biological point of view, stress can be a neutral, negative, or positive experience. In general, stress is related to both external and internal factors. External factors include the physical environment, including your job, your relationships with others, your home, and all the situations, challenges, difficulties, and expectations you're confronted with on a daily basis. Internal factors determine your body's ability to respond to, and deal with,

the external stress-inducing factors. Internal factors which influence your ability to handle stress include your nutritional status, overall health and fitness levels, emotional well-being, and the amount of sleep and rest you get. In recent years concern about the adverse effects of stress during adolescence has increased. Students spend most of their proportion of their time in the school environment. The high percentage of stress experienced may likely to originate from school. High school students are very conscious of the need to present a profile to prospective colleges. Largely due to increased competition for higher studies, peer group pressures, academic excellence, financial problems and so on. The family environment also remains as a reason for the stress for the school students. The milieu of

secondary education has always been regarded as a stressful environment to students. 20 percent of children around the world were estimated by World Health Organization to have mental health problems. Niemi PM and Vainiomaki PT (1999), Chronic and excessive stress lead to physical, emotional and mental health problems. It is noteworthy that over exposure stress causes physical, emotional and mental health problems. Shannon M. Suldo, Elizabeth Shaunessy, and Robin Hardesty (2008) Psychological models focus on the concept of perceived stress, which refers to interactions between an environmental precipitant (external stress); the physiological reactions of the body (distress); and a person's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural response to this interaction. Stress is perceived when an external event causes aversive physiological and cognitive distress in an individual that exceeds his or her emotional and behavioural repertoire designed to negate the harmful effects of external stressors. The conceptualization of perceived stress allows for consideration that certain individuals may possess resources, such as coping, that allow them to experience external stress without experiencing compromised functioning.

### **Review of Literature**

Mates, Donna, Allison, Kenneth R (1992) Relationships with parents and family, work, and lack of money were found to be important sources of stress. Major coping responses included substance use and diversionary activities. Differences between academic streams (tracks) in sources of stress and coping responses were examined.

Because of the long-term nature of schooling and family relationships, these can be seen as examples of chronic life stress. Diane de Anda, Sergio Baroni, Lori Boskin, Lisa Buchwald, Jan Morgan, Jeanee Ow, Julie Siegel Gold, Robert Weiss (2000) The stressors highest in frequency reflected concerns about one's future goals followed by several school-related items. No gender differences were found in degree of stress or most frequent stressors. The frequency with which coping strategies were employed was low, with no ethnic differences and females employing adaptive coping strategies more often than males. Gender and ethnic differences were found with respect to specific adaptive coping strategies. Comparisons with regard to stressors and coping strategies were also made between students reporting high levels of stress and those reporting moderate to low levels of stress. Martin, Kazarian and Breiter (1995) stated that children and adolescents who report high levels of perceived stress are at high risk for negative outcome such as depression. Carter, Garber, Ciesla and Cole (2006) although parents and teachers are often sensitive to the occurrence of non normative stressful events in adolescents' lives, the normative stressors and accumulated daily hassles (in particular, school-related stressors) that teenagers experience without such fanfare also predict their mental health. Pastey and Aminbhavi (2006) conducted a study on "Impact of Emotional Maturity on Stress and Self Confidence of Adolescents". Sample of the study consisted of 105 adolescents studying in XI and XII class from Dharwad. Emotional maturity, Self Confidence

Inventory and Students Stress Scale were administered. The findings revealed that the adolescent the boys tend to have significantly higher stress than the girls and the girls tend to have significantly higher self confidence. Huan *et al.* (2008) conducted a study on “The Impact of Adolescent Concerns on their Academic Stress”. The Adolescent Concerns Measure and the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory were used. Results obtained showed that only the scores on the personal concerns subscale were positively associated with the academic stress arising from self and other expectations, in both adolescent the boys and the girls. For the girls, school related concerns were also predictive of academic stress arising from other expectations. They also obtained significantly higher scores on the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory than the boys.

### **Need and Relevance of the Study**

Stressors can also be of individual nature, as with physical, psychological and developmental stressors. Physical stressors such as being ill can be stressful, especially when illness and health problems are serious, such as with physical or developmental disabilities, traumatic injury, recurrent pain and chronic illness (De Anda *et al.*, 1997; Moos, 2004). According to Moos (2004) Adolescent stress is from within and from the various social spheres in which the adolescent operates. Rapid physical changes make them self-conscious. Common source of worry among the girls are acne, facial hair and being too thin or fat; and the boys are conscious of their beard, gruff voice and muscular stature. The adolescents face a number of psychological

and emotional problems such as that of identity, inadequate self-concept and variety of role expectations. At this stage, an individual is neither a child nor an adult. This leads to emotional conflict among adolescents. Psychological conflict is a common phenomenon in adolescent’s life. It is a specific state of adolescents being and is produced by external or internal pressure or strain. Wilburn and Smith (2005) conducted a study on “Stress, Self Esteem and Suicidal Ideation in Late Adolescents”. The results revealed that both stress and self-esteem were significantly related to suicidal ideation and low self esteem and stressful life events significantly predict suicidal ideation. This study is conducted to find out the physical and psychological stress among the higher secondary school students. Physical Symptoms like back pain, stiff neck, headaches, Gastrointestinal disturbances - constipation or diarrhoea, Fatigue Increased blood pressure ,Heart palpitations Sleeping problem – Insomnia, Shortness of breath, Weight gain or loss, Teeth grinding. Some stressors are particularly associated with certain age groups or life stages. Children, teens, working parents, and seniors are examples of the groups who often face common stressors related to life transitions to look out for. Stress management involves controlling and reducing the tension that occurs in stressful situations by making physical and psychological changes. Furthermore, this study helps the high school students to cope with the stress related problems.

### **Methodology**

The Data was collected from high school students (both male and female) using Structured Questionnaire and it was tested for reliability. The scale had reliability co-efficient with over all consistency of 0.685 (Cronbach's alpha) for 19 items. Only 45 samples were initially collected for pilot study. Both Primary and

Secondary Data was collected for the study. Simple random sampling method was used for collecting the primary data. Five point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0).

### Objectives

1. To Study the relationship between Gender and Physical stress.
2. To Study the relationship between Gender and Psychological stress.
3. To Study the differential effect of stress on Gender.

### Hypothesis

H<sub>0a</sub>: There is no significant relationship between Gender and Physical stress

H<sub>1a</sub>: There is a significant relationship between Gender and Physical stress

H<sub>0b</sub>: There is no significant relationship between Gender and Psychological stress

H<sub>1b</sub>: There is a significant relationship between Gender and Psychological stress

H<sub>0c</sub>: There is no significant difference between male and female on stress

H<sub>1c</sub>: There is a significant difference between male and female on stress

### Gender and Physical Stress

Stressors for adolescents are compounded because they are fast developing the skills to deal with life stresses and are going through many physical, emotional and social changes.

Shilpa Taragar (2009) the male students experienced higher stress than female students. It means there was a significant difference between the male and female students on stress.

**Table 1: Relationship between the Gender and Physical Stress**

Question Number	Gender	Physical Stress					Pearson Chi-Square
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Q35	Male	20.8%	33.3%	25.0%	12.5%	8.3%	.139 NS
	Female	9.5%	47.6%	9.5%	33.3%	-	
	Total	15.6%	40.0%	17.8%	22.2%	4.4%	
Q36	Male	8.3%	70.8%	16.7%	-	4.2%	.487 NS
	Female	4.8%	66.7%	19.0%	9.5%	-	
	Total	6.7%	68.9%	17.8%	4.4%	2.2%	
Q37	Male	25.0%	58.3%	4.2%	12.5%	-	.014*
	Female	4.8%	38.1%	38.1%	19.0%	-	
	Total	15.6%	48.9%	20.0%	15.6%	-	
Q38	Male	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%	33.3%	33.3%	.174 NS
	Female	-	47.6%	4.8%	19.0%	28.6%	

	Total	4.4%	31.1%	6.7%	26.7%	31.1%	
Q39	Male	4.2%	12.5%	8.3%	25.0%	50.0%	.563 NS
	Female	-	14.3%	9.5%	9.5%	66.7%	
	Total	2.2%	13.3%	8.9%	17.8%	57.8%	
Q40	Male	33.3%	45.8%	8.3%	4.2%	8.3%	.364 NS
	Female	19.0%	33.3%	23.8%	14.3%	9.5%	
	Total	26.7%	40.0%	15.6%	8.9%	8.9%	
Q42	Male	8.3%	33.3%	33.3%	12.5%	12.5%	.036*
	Female	4.8%	28.6%	14.3%	52.4%	-	
	Total	6.7%	31.1%	24.4%	31.1%	6.7%	
Q46	Male	4.2%	16.7%	20.8%	29.2%	29.2%	.717 NS
	Female	-	14.3%	33.3%	33.3%	19.0%	
	Total	2.2%	15.6%	26.7%	31.1%	24.4%	
Q47	Male	-	12.5%	25.0%	16.7%	45.8%	.235 NS
	Female	4.8%	19.0%	14.3%	38.1%	23.8%	
	Total	2.2%	15.6%	20.0%	26.7%	35.6%	
Q48	Male	4.2%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	20.8%	.718 NS
	Female	-	9.5%	47.6%	19.0%	23.8%	
	Total	2.2%	13.3%	40.0%	22.2%	22.2%	
Q49	Male	16.7%	54.2%	8.3%	-	20.8%	.026*
	Female	4.8%	28.6%	47.6%	4.8%	14.3%	
	Total	11.1%	42.2%	26.7%	2.2%	17.8%	
Q50	Male	8.3%	45.8%	8.3%	20.8%	16.7%	.655 NS
	Female	-	42.9%	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	
	Total	4.4%	44.4%	11.1%	24.4%	15.6%	

\*-Significance 5%, NS- Not Significant

From the Table 1, it is inferred that majority of the male students of about 33.3% feel that they hardly have less time for exercise. Majority of about 47.6% of female students also feel the same. About 33.3% of female students feel that they have time for exercise. It is inferred from Q35 that female students are likely having more time for exercise than the male students. There is no significant relationship between gender and time for exercise. It is inferred from the Q36 that both the male and female students in majority have increased /decreased weight and there is no significant relationship between gender and weight change. More than 50% of male and female students feel that they are tired and have disturbed sleep patterns. It is inferred from Q37 that there is a significant relationship between tiredness

and disturbed sleep patterns. Majority of the female students of about 47.6% feel that they are sad and depressed. Depression was found more among female students than the male students. It is inferred from Q39 that both male and female students have good care from their surrounded people. Majority of the male students 45.8% agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed that they have much pressure because of their studies and examination. Majority of the female students 52.4% experience unnecessary tension than male students and there is a significant relationship between gender and tension.



**Table 2: Relationship between the Gender and Psychological stress**

Question Number	Gender	Psychological Stress					Pearson Chi-Square
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Q34	Male	12.5%	41.7%	29.2%	12.5%	4.2%	.037*
	Female	42.9%	19.0%	9.5%	28.6%	-	
	Total	26.7%	31.1%	20.0%	20.0%	2.2%	
Q41	Male	25.0%	54.2%	16.7%	4.2%	-	.037*
	Female	-	47.6%	42.9%	9.5%	-	
	Total	13.3%	51.1%	28.9%	6.7%	-	
Q51	Male	20.8%	37.5%	12.5%	20.8%	8.3%	.062*
	Female	-	23.8%	33.3%	19.0%	23.8%	
	Total	11.1%	31.1%	22.2%	20.0%	15.6%	
Q52	Male	70.8%	29.2%	-	-	-	.431 NS
	Female	81.0%	19.0%	-	-	-	
	Total	75.6%	24.4%	-	-	-	
Q53	Male	41.7%	54.2%	4.2%	-	-	.305 NS
	Female	23.8%	71.4%	-	4.8%	-	
	Total	33.3%	62.2%	2.2%	2.2%	-	
Q54	Male	54.2%	29.2%	16.7%	-	-	.194 NS
	Female	28.6%	52.4%	19.0%	-	-	
	Total	42.2%	40.0%	17.8%	-	-	
Q55	Male	8.3%	33.3%	29.2%	12.5%	16.7%	.507 NS
	Female	-	33.3%	19.0%	23.8%	23.8%	
	Total	4.4%	33.3%	24.4%	17.8%	20.0%	

\*-Significance 5%, NS- Not Significant

Majority of the male students are confident about their looks than the female students and there is no significant relationship between gender and looks. Both male and female students of about 50% are confident about their physical appearance. There is more of neutral opinion about the facial features by both male and female students. There is a significance relationship between male and female students in thin/fat body nature. Both male and female students have almost equal health worries.

### Gender and Psychological Stress

Depression is the only indicator of Psychological health, and certainly is not the only one associated, at least in some circumstances, with life changes and stress (Cooper, 1983; B. S. Dohrenwend & B.P. Dohrenwend, 1981; Holmes & Masuda, 1974). From Table 2, it is inferred that the feeling of insecure of getting good grades are more in both male and female students. But female students of about 28.6% disagreed this. This shows that their confidence towards it. There is a significant

relationship between gender and insecure of getting good grades. Majority of both male and female students have conflict with their study and play/recreation and it is also inferred that there is a significant relationship between gender and conflict of study and play/recreation. Majority of 75% of both male and female students are happy with their family members and there is no significant relationship between gender and happiness with family members. From Q53 it is inferred that majority of about 71.4% of female students are self confident than male students. About 54.2% of male students strongly agree with their positive attitude towards their ambition and about 52.4% female students also agree with the same. Only 23.3% of female students and 16.7% of male students face stressful situations and it is inferred that there is no significant difference between gender and stress. Masih and Gulrez (2004) studied “Age and Gender Differences on Stress”. Results revealed that there is no significant difference in terms of gender, so far as students stress is concerned.

### **Coping with Stress**

Everyone feel the stress sometimes. Something may be happening in their life such as starting a new job or school, arguments with family, friends or a partner, or they may be worrying about schoolwork or an upcoming exam. Stress is not the same as depression – but for some people, being stressed for a long time can end up leading

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to depression. There are ways of reducing and managing stress. In the meantime, try not to spend too much time worrying about the things that cause stress. Managing stress by self is difficult. So, it’s a good idea to talk to someone (e.g. teacher, school counsellor, doctor, other trusted adult) about the feeling. Relaxation training, which may include progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, meditation and education about tension/stress, can help in coping with stress.

### **Conclusions**

Stress experienced by adolescents comes from pressures outside themselves, such as family, friends, school, external, teachers and socio-economic status, but also within themselves which is a personal factor. When experiencing stress, it is the adolescent’s perception of a particular event which makes the event a stressor. Stress and low self-esteem were related to avoidant coping and depressive mood and that low self esteemed. How we perceive a stress-provoking event and how we react to it determines its impact on our health. We may be motivated and invigorated by the events in our lives, or we may see some as “stressful” and respond in a manner that may have a negative effect on our physical, mental and social well-being. If we always respond in a negative way our health and happiness may suffer. By understanding ourselves and our reactions to stress-provoking situations, we can learn to handle stress more effectively.

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