Self-Concept: A Determinant of Academic Stress and Perceived Parenting

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Abstract

The present investigation was undertaken to understand the relationship between Academic Stress and Perceived parenting on the Self concept of the adolescents. The study has its roots in a highly competitive examination system that focuses on marks rather than on an ability to think and grow. The pressure to perform and make a career begins early gaining momentum in the teenage years, with parents adding their bit on how they evaluate themselves. It has therefore been assumed for the present purpose that the level of Academic Stress is dependent on several psychosocial factors. Subsequently the objective of the present study is to find out the relation between Perceived Parenting and Academic Stress and its impact on the Self Concept of the adolescents and vice-versa. A sample of 302 adolescents from kolkata aged 14 – 18 years participated in the study. They were selected through incidental purposive sampling technique. The tools used were an Academic Stress Questionnaire developed by the researchers and a standardized test for measuring Perceived Parenting and Self-Concept. The findings of the study reveal an inverse relationship between Self Concept and Academic Stress. Perceived parenting was found to have a direct and positive relationship with the Self Concept of the adolescents. No significant statistical difference in relation to gender was found in the level of Self Concept, Academic Stress and Perceived Parenting of the Adolescents. It is concluded that Self-Concept plays a significant role in the level of Academic Stress and in their perception about parenting. The study has strong implications on the effects of parenting on the self-image of the adolescents.

Key- Words: Academic Stress, Perceived Parenting, Self-Concept, Adolescents.

Today’s adolescent is living both in the best of times and in the worst of time in India. They possess longer life expectancies and luxuries inconceivable less than a century ago with television, computers, satellites, air travel etc. However the temptations and hazards of the adult world descend on them so early that too often they are not cognitively and emotionally ready to handle them effectively. Every stable society transmits values from one generation to the other, but today we adults are very concerned about the values being communicated to Indian adolescents.

In many ways today’s adolescent inhabit in an environment that is less stable than that several decades ago. High divorce rates, pregnancy rates, suicide rates, drug use, increased
geographic mobility of families contribute to this lack of stability. (Santrock, 2007). Yet growing up has never been easy. The developmental tasks faced by today’s adolescents are no different from those faced by adolescents fifty years ago. Adolescence is a time of evaluation, decision making, commitment and finding a place in the world than being a time of rebellion, crisis and deviance. (Santrock, 2007). Adolescents are a heterogeneous group (Cohen & others, 2003; Wigfield & others, 2006), where most of them successfully negotiate the lengthy path to adult maturity, but a large minority do not. Socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, gender, age and lifestyle differences influence the developmental trajectory of every adolescent. (Spencer, 2006).

Contexts are the social settings in which development occurs, play important roles in adolescent development. These contexts include families, peers, schools and culture. (Santrock, 2007). These social contexts also contribute to the development of an adolescent’s self-esteem. (Dusek & McIntyre, 2003; Harter, 2006; Turnage, 2004). Studies have shown that increase in family cohesiveness increases adolescent cohesiveness over-time. (Balwin & Hoffman, 2002), where family cohesiveness was based on the amount of time the family spent together, the quality of their communication and the extent to which the adolescent was involved in family decision making. (Santrock, 2007). The marital relations, parenting and adolescent behavior can both have direct and effects on each other. This means that there is reciprocal socialization within the members of the family. Marital satisfaction is often related to good parenting that ultimately results in healthier children and adolescents, (Grych, 2002). Close relationship with parents function as models or templates that influence the construction of new relationships in future. (Gjerde, Block & Block, 1991). Adolescents with secure attachment histories have been found to be more socially competent, that included providing the necessary support for effectively engaging in the peer world in turn providing foundation for more extensive complex peer relationships. (Santrock, 2007).

During the course of puberty the expectations of adolescents and their parents often seem to be violated as the teenagers change dramatically. Parental are often seen to clamp down and put more pressure on the adolescents to confirm to parental standards. But since the journey from childhood to adulthood is a long journey with many hills and valleys they do not confirm to adult standards immediately. Neither high intensity demands for compliance nor an unwillingness to monitor and be involved in the adolescent’s development is likely to be a wise parenting strategy. Parents who recognize that adolescents take a long time “to get it right” usually deal more competently and calmly with adolescent transgressions than do parents who demand immediate conformity to parental standards. Whereas there are others who virtually do the opposite and let them do as they please in a permissive manner. Parents sometimes may perceive that all conflict with their adolescent is bad, but studies have shown that a moderate degree of conflict with parents in adolescence is not only inevitable but may also serve a positive developmental function. (Santrock, 2007).

The way parents feel about themselves their situations and their children goes hand in hand with the way parents behave towards their children. The security of attachment is very important for the development of healthy, adaptive emotions and social behaviours, parental sensitivity and responsiveness are important components of the attachment relationships along with children’s attributes. (Kirby, 2011). Adolescents carry with them a sense of who they are and what makes them different from everyone else. The self-understanding in adolescence is not completely internal in nature rather a social-cognitive construction. (Bergman, 2004; Hare, 2004; Harter, 2006; Santrock, 2007), which means that adolescents developing cognitive capacities interact with their socio-cultural experiences to influence their self-understanding. This development of self-understanding does not take place in social isolation. They turn to their parents, friends for support and self-clarifications. Peers to adolescents are the reflected self-appraisals, the social mirror into which adolescents anxiously stare. (Rosenberg, 1979).

Fluctuations in self-esteem during adolescents were related to life events and family cohesiveness. (Baldwin & Hofmmen, 2002). Youth who find it too difficult to move between worlds can become alienated from their school family or peers. However those who are able to navigate effectively between different worlds can develop bicultural and multicultural selves and become culture brokers for others. (Santrock, 2007). The high self-esteem may refer to accurate justified perceptions of one’s worth as a person and one’s successes and accomplishments. On the other hand low self-esteem can develop into other problems. (Usher & Others, 2000; Zimmerman, Copeland & Shope, 1997). It has been implicated that depression, suicide, anorexia nervosa, delinquency and other adjustment problems. (Fenzel, 1994). The seriousness of the problem depends not only on the nature of the adolescent’s low self-esteem but on other conditions as well, like difficult school transitions, troubled family life or other stressful events that can intensify an adolescents problem. (Santrock, 2007). High narcissism, low empathy and being sensitive to rejection combined with low self-esteem were linked to adolescents’ violent thoughts. (Harter & Mccarley, 2004).

Rapid global change is altering the experience of adolescents, presenting new opportunities and challenges to young people’s health and well-being. Adolescents’ experiences around the world may differ depending upon their gender, family, schools and peers. (Brown & Larson, 2002, Larson & Wilson, 2004). Changes driven by technological opportunities have a huge impact on economy, community as well as on families. We have rocketed into a new way of life, and these changes have had powerful effects on the experience of growing up. Today’s children are in a very difficult situation than their parents or grandparents. The present world is the world of achievements is also a world of stress, and has therefore rightly been called the “Age of Anxiety and Stress”. (Pestonjee, 2009). Youth today are living in an increasingly anxiety ridden atmosphere. (Nalini, 1997). They live in a world when nothing seems to be guaranteed with certainty and at the same time are expected to perform at every font, the main being academics. (Bhansali & trivedi, 2008). Most of the problems concentrated on academic anxiety are followed by anxiety.
regarding their future. Academic stress was caused due to the examination system, burden of homework and attitudes of parents and teachers. A generation where everybody lives and breathes competition, they are constantly encouraged to compare themselves with peers. Parental pressure is also responsible to create stress as the emphasis is not given to acquire knowledge but to excel. When the adolescents are unable to meet their parent’s expectations, it is that physical, Mental Stress, frustration, aggression, rejection, depression, undesirable behaviors and suicide takes place. Peer pressure, pressure from family and media play a big role in building perceptions of adolescents. (Sun, 2009). Suicide is on the rise amongst adolescents because of their pressure that is just killing. Statistics from the National Crime records Bureau (NCRM) report has revealed that West Bengal has for the third consecutive year earned the dubious distinction of being the state with the largest number of students committing suicide. The state is however ill-prepared to tackle this menace. (Dasgupta, 2010).

It is under such a backdrop that the objective of the present study was set to understand the relationship between Academic stress and perceived parenting with the Self-concept of the adolescents. In a country like India which is the home to 327 million young people in the age group of 10-24 (WHO, 2007), where every fifth person is an adolescent, the responsibility lies on us citizens for developing this vast human resource in the best possible ways and channelize their unlimited energy, vitality, the strong urge to experiment and create a better world to live in.

Design of the study

Participants

The study had 302 participants from Indian urban adolescents (150 girls and 152 boys) of junior secondary and senior secondary English medium school students. The data was collected through incidental purposive sampling technique. The constitution of the participants consisted of multi-lingual and multi-religious teens having mother tongue as Bengali and Hindi. The mean age of the participants was 16 ranging from 14-18 year olds. The particular group was selected for the study as it was assumed that children studying in standard schools and average to good schools was actually prone to academic stress, being located in one of India’s leading metropolitan city. It was also assumed that the problem was basically an urban social problem, as the parents of the adolescents came from varied educational and occupational background where their least minimum qualification was found to be university graduates. Their occupation ranged from IT professionals, Scientists, Doctors, teachers, bank employees to Businessman etc. With such a background the adolescents were expected to incur high expectation and deliver high competence level. Such a situation ultimately affecting their Perceived parenting in this highly competitive examination system that focuses on marks than on an ability to think and grow. Moreover this particular age group faced the board exams of grades X and XII together with entrance exam to various esteemed institutions. Therefore it was felt that the pressure to excel and to standout for future financial gains in the form of a flourishing sophisticated career was mainly an urban phenomena than a rural one.

Instruments

The instruments used included a Perceived Parenting scale that had eight models of parenting as designed by Bharadwaj, Sharma & Garg(1998). The test can be studied as the role of mothering and fathering separately as well as parenting as a whole. The final form of the scale has 40 items related to the eight different models of parenting and are spread in a meaningful manner. The reliability and validity coefficients were found to be ranging from 0.54 - 0.79 and 0.36 - 0.62 respectively across eight models of parenting studied. Scoring was done quantitatively on a five point scale as suggested by Likert.

An Academic Stress questionnaire was used which was constructed by the researcher in order to measure the academic burden beyond the individuals’ means to satisfy. This feeling of stress surfaces due to curricular, co-curricular activities, homework and regular class tests coupled with deadlines that the adolescent have to comply with, making their daily routine airtight with no free time to be spent as they wish. The final questionnaire stood to have 33 items with five dimensions. The mean and standard deviation of the test was found to be 100.6 and 17.13.

A Self-Concept questionnaire was used to measure the self-concept of adolescents. The questionnaire was constructed by R.K. Saraswat which has six dimensions namely physical, social, temperamental, educational, moral and intellectual. The test has 48 items with 8 items falling under each dimension. The scale has high internal consistency. The reliability was found to be 0.91 for the total self-concept measure. The very questionnaire was used as it was developed to be administered within the age range of 14-18 years to both boys and girls of classes IX, X, XI and XII.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(AS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(AS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(PP) X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC(Y)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AS - Academic Stress ; PP - Perceived Parenting ; SC - Self Concept
Table 2: Significance of Difference between the means: gender wise and grade wise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>IX Male</th>
<th>IX Female</th>
<th>X Male</th>
<th>X Female</th>
<th>XI Male</th>
<th>XI Female</th>
<th>XII Male</th>
<th>XII Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>104.6</td>
<td>100.7</td>
<td>100.8</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>103.1</td>
<td>106.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.314</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.299</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>172.4</td>
<td>170.2</td>
<td>177.2</td>
<td>173.9</td>
<td>165.8</td>
<td>163.7</td>
<td>165.7</td>
<td>164.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.309</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AS- Academic Stress, SC-Self-concept, PP-Perceived Parenting

Discussion

Findings of the current study reflect an inverse relationship between adolescents’ self-concept and the level of Academic stress. This implies that the stronger the self-esteem of the adolescents the lower the level of Academic Stress faced by them. The study also found out that the higher the Perceived Parenting Scores the stronger are the Self-concepts in the adolescents. Self-esteem is an important component of Self-Concept that represents how we feel about or value ourselves. The psychological well-being and quality of adjustment of the adolescent is the result of his/her parental interaction. The quality and quantity of communication between the parents and their teens have been thought to be influenced by many factors, and one such well researched is the parenting style. The participants of the study had high Self-concept and Perceived parenting scores, which could mean that good or positive parenting helped the adolescents to communicate effectively, take control of their lives and in doing so enhanced their Self-concept. (Mitra, 2007).

The study also revealed that as the level of self-concept of the adolescent becomes high the level of academic stress goes down. This is so as the self-esteem protects the individual from distress, it helps the person to bounce back in terms of highly stressful or academically loaded situations. This can become possible only when the individual figures out ways to overcome the problem instead of avoiding them. Thus we see that good parenting is the foundation of a house made of strong personality with a roof of high self-concept that protects the individual from Tsunamis and hurricanes in the form of stress. (Mitra, 2007).

The findings of the study showed that there is insignificant statistical difference in relation to gender in the level of self-concept, academic stress and perceived parenting of the adolescents. This implies that children normally think and feel about themselves the way they are made to feel and think from their childhood days. In this aspect a lot depends upon how the ‘significant others’ in their lives think about them and interact with them. The social setting in the metropolitan cities of India is based on equilibrium, which establishes an equal dominance of boys and girls in many spheres during the early years of life. In an urban setting the girl child gets equal opportunity regarding studies, exposure to games etc than an adolescent boy. Although some marginal differences may exist between the two, but after statistical analysis the difference just vanishes.

This is in confirmation with several studies where the self-concept of the adolescents was found to be very high irrespective of gender and age. (Block & Robbins, 1993). The higher the perceived level of parental warmth, the higher the self-concept. (Parish & McClusky, 1992). It was also found that students with high self-esteem are less stressed than those with low self-esteem. This may be due to the fostering of social resources and effective coping when self-esteem is high. (Abouerise, 1994). One should learn to relax and study hard, not panic and do well. The stress should be given on preparation and not on pressure. (Anupama, 2004). Parents in the cosmopolitan cities view both the boy and the girl child as equal and strive to achieve the expectations of their wards. Each one is taught to be self-sufficient. This is why the adolescents of either gender found no differences in their view of parenting.

India’s fast changing economy and social realities have placed this critical age group at cultural crossroads of traditional socialization and non-traditional cultural and economic imagery. For the minority of adolescents who suffer a serious erosion in self-esteem the task of coping with present realities and future possibilities may indeed represent a crisis—one that even triggers suicidal thoughts. Most adolescents see the process of identity as not an aversive, disruptive crisis but as a normal and a necessary part of life. (Shaffer, 1988). The exposure to different and at times alien cultural patterns and models within a traditional environment puts the adolescent group in a unique situation that requires apical skills to guide and manage their growth and development. (Bezbaruah, 2000).

Although good parenting plays a very important part in the process of developing the self-concept of the adolescent and keeping stress at bay, we must also not forget that adolescent’s education should lay emphasis on life skills development in order to gear them up to meet the challenges and optimize their opportunities to live a healthier, happier, productive and a fulfilling life.

References


