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Research Article

STRESS AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN – A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

School children face a lot of emotional issues during the period of development. It is a stressful developmental period filled with major changes in physical maturity and sexuality, cognitive processes, emotional feelings, and relationships with others. This can bring more frustration and confusion that lead to Stress and a pattern of reactive behaviour in adolescents that affect their academic performance, cause anxiety and also affect their overall emotional and the physical well being.

A literature search was conducted with the following search terms, Key- words and phrases – ‘stress’, ‘School children’, ‘Adolescents’, ‘prevalence’, ‘effects’ and ‘Strategies’. The search was performed in the following databases – Pubmed, Medline Plus and Google Scholar. Considerable debate exists regarding the causes for the high prevalence of stress among school children. From this review we infer, that there are various factors which influence prevalence of stress among school children and adolescents. Rather than a single causative factor, there are multiple factors associated with the stress such as socio –demographic variables.

Research literature supports the necessity for the early identification of stress in school children and initiate suitable interventions. It is of paramount importance that guidelines specific to the Indian context are developed for the screening and monitoring of prevalence and occurrence of stress among school children.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the transitional stage of physical and psychological development between childhood to adulthood.¹ It is a stage of ‘Storms and Stresses’ and supreme importance phase in the life of human in which a person gets physical development, emotional feelings, mental maturity sexuality, cognitive processes and relationships. India contributes 21% of adolescent's population in the world and one-fifth of adolescent in age group of 10–19 years.² Stress is viewed as negative emotional, cognitive changes, behavioural and physiological process that a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors³. In 2014, Research Gate publication stated that Stress among school children were 35 – 37% in which boys were (17.19%) and girls were (15.67%).⁴ Stress in adolescence is due to information load, high expectations from parents and teachers, academic pressures, unrealistic ambitions, limited employment opportunities and high competitiveness which leads to frustration, moody, feeling overwhelmed, low self-esteem, lonely, worthless, depressed, avoiding others, constant worrying, racing thoughts, forgetfulness and disorganization.⁵

Research literature was reviewed with regard to prevalence of stress, its prevalence among school children and adolescents. A literature search was conducted with the following terms, keywords and phrases – ‘Prevalence’, ‘Stress’, ‘Adolescents’, ‘School children’. The search was performed in the following databases – PubMed, Medline Plus and Google Scholar.

This review commences with an overview of Stress among Adolescents, prevalence of stress among school children, effects of stress among school children, the Strategies to reduce the stress among school children and Variables associated with Stress among School children which includes the Socio-demographic variables.

An overview of Stress among School children

School children face a lot of emotional issues during the period of development. It is a stressful developmental period filled with major changes in physical maturity and sexuality, cognitive processes, emotional feelings, and relationships with others. Stress plays an important role in school children in which, it causes major physical and psychological burden among adolescents leading to educational problems, social

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isolation, lack of confidence, Negative talk, General sense of worry and frequent illness, excessive arguing, frequent irritability, Irrationality, Violence, Loss of appetite and Verbal threats.⁵ Research Journal of Pharmaceutical, Biological and Chemical Sciences reported that in Tamil Nadu out of 60 students, 36(60%) of students had moderate level of academic stress, 24(40%) had severe level of academic stress.⁶ Stress may lead to many problems such as poor grades, not studying or reading enough disorganization, Skipping classes, Wasting time and procrastinating, fail to manage money, homesickness, not resolving relationship issues and poor sleep habits.

Prevalence of Stress Among School Children

In a study conducted by on Stress among 335 high school students; result shows that the prevalence rate of Stress among school children were 58% having normal stress level, 39% having lower stress levels and 3% have high stress.⁷ Another study conducted on the prevalence of Stress on Perceived Psychosocial Stress among 60 Adolescent Girls Regarding Pubertal Changes at Punjab; Out of 60 adolescent girls, 51.6% of students had moderate level of psychosocial stress, 33.3% of students had mild level of psychosocial stress and 15% of students had high level of psychosocial stress.⁸

A descriptive study conducted on prevalence of stress, anxiety and its correlates among 1000 adolescents; 14.4% of boys and 17.2% of girls were having Stress. And 14.6% of boys and 18.8 % of girls were having anxiety.⁹ Stress due to academic pressure among Students were 63.5% and 66% of students feeling pressure from their parents for better academic performance, 32.6% of the students were having symptomatic of psychiatric cases (International Journal of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, 2015)¹⁰

A cross-sectional study on the relationship between academic stress and depression; 612 adolescents diagnosed with depression during the study period, 45.7% had moderate depression, 25.4% had mild depression, 19.6% had severe depression, and 9.3% had minimal depression and 75% of the adolescents had severe academic stress.¹¹ A descriptive study conducted on the effect of stress on obesity on depression among 250 adolescents in Malaysia; 50% adolescents having stress due to decrease physical activity and increase food intake and females are eating more food due to stress than males.¹² Another cross sectional study on Depression, anxiety and stress among 750 higher secondary school students of Manipur; The prevalence rate was students having 19.5% of depression, 24.4% of anxiety, and 21.1% of stress.¹³

A cross sectional study conducted among 397 school adolescents; The prevalence of stress was 87.6% were having severe stress and 89.7% of female students having stress and 86.4% of male students having stress.¹⁴ A descriptive study conducted on Stress among School Going Adolescents; The level of stress among school adolescents of 17-18 years was 80% in which 62% were male, 60% feels their home environment was causing stress to them and 78% are sharing all kinds of problems to their parents, 56% feels their parents are interfering in their privacy, 60% feels that their parents are restrict, 80% are worried when they get low marks, 74% blame themselves for their failure in examinations.¹⁵ A cross sectional study survey stated that in Chandigarh, the prevalence rate of stress among school children was 47.2%.¹⁶

Effect of Stress Among school Children

In today's life, School children faces high levels of stress in many areas in their life especially in studies due to academic pressure and heavy competition. A study conducted on school children who belongs to science group had more stress when compared to other subject group and which affects the children in mentally, physically and emotionally.¹⁷ A cross sectional study conducted on investigation of learning stressors among school children reported that 30% of female children had negative thoughts of themselves due to intrapersonal related stressors and 30% of school children had high stress due to feeling of inability and sharing personal issues with their friends.¹⁸

Strategies to Reduce the Stress Among School Children

In a study conducted on reducing the stress among school children by Cognitive Behaviour Therapy; the level of stress was reduced from 21.9% to 14.37% after the intervention.¹⁹ Another study on effects of yoga among school children; it is reported that the score of stress was reduced among experimental group from 20.23% to 15.43%. In which Yoga also helps to reduce the stress among school children.²⁰ And a study conducted on effects of play therapy among school children in hospital; The level of stress was reduced from 58.6% of moderate stress to 39.1% of moderate stress.²¹ Thus, These reviews implies that these type of interventions will help to reduce the stress among the school children

Variables Associated with Stress Among School Children Socio- Demographic Variables

Among the various studies conducted on Stress among school children, Socio- demographic variables, such as gender, Age, Type of family, Economic status and stress factors, etc., A study conducted on School children age group of 11 to 17 years had 45.5% of stress.²² Another study conducted on the prevalence of stress of school students in Delhi was 87.6% and 89.7% of female students having stress and 86.4% of male students having stress with no significant difference in gender.²³ Another conducted a study on factors leading to stress among school children in Puducherry; the prevalence of stress was 72.88% of age group of 13 to 15 years and 62.50% had teacher related stress, 67.2% of children reported as the school was burden and 67% of children reported a complaints of not having sufficient freedom in classroom.²⁴ A study reported that 66% of school students had stress from their parents for the better results and academic excellence.²⁵ Child Adolescent Psychiatry Mental Health 2014 reported that the prevalence rate of adolescent psychiatric disorders due to stress and anger in the community is 6.46% and in the school is 23.33%.²⁶ In Puducherry, the prevalence rate of academic stress among high school students was 37%. In India, Puducherry had been observed consistently to have a high suicide rate of 45.5 per 1,00,000 population due to stress, (National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 2010).²⁷

Summary of Review and Need for Further Research

From this review it is apparent that studies on the international front are many, but there are relatively less studies on the intervention on stress among school children in Tamil Nadu. The number of studies were found in north India over this topic are specially sparse. This review indicates that, the prevalence

of stress among school children, World Health Organisation, WHO estimate shows that up to 20% adolescent have one or more mental or behavioural problems. And many studies conducted in different parts of the world show that prevalence of behavioural and emotional problems in adolescents ranges from 16.5% to 40.8% and in India it is in the range of 13.7% to 50%.²⁸

However, gaps remain in relevant aspects, encouraging further studies in specific subgroups of School children to evaluate the impact of each variable on the risk for developing stress among school children. From this review we infer, that there are various factors which influence prevalence of stress among school children and adolescents. Rather than a single causative factor, there are multiple factors associated with the stress such as socio-demographic variables.

Research literature supports the necessity for the early identification of stress in school children and initiate suitable interventions. It is of paramount importance that guidelines specific to the Indian context are developed for the screening and monitoring of prevalence and occurrence of stress among school children.

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