



Academic Stressors and Anxiety In Children : the Role of Parental Support

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ABSTRACT

In our society academic achievement is considered as a key criterion to judge ones total potentialities and capacities. Hence academic achievement occupies a very important place in education as well as in the family. In today's scenario, high academic achievement is the way to get social prestige. If a child fails to achieve academically, parents will be criticized for not monitoring their children properly, and children will be condemned for not fulfilling their filial duty. Due to this children are overburdened and that will lead them to academic stress and anxiety. Stress and anxiety are the two sides of a same coin and child is a coin. The role of parents is to demolish the effect of stress and anxiety on the coin. Children are safe and secure under the canopy of care and protection of their parents. This article indicates that heightened student anxiety levels and parental emotional support was a protective factor that contributed to better mental health among children. Keywords: Parental support. Academic stress. Student stress. Anxiety and coping

KEYWORDS :

Introduction

Man aspires to high levels of scholastic success which is a way to achieve social mobility, respect and family pride (Gow, L et al. 1996). This emphasis on educational achievement results in high demands and great stress on children (Bossy, S. 2000). Stress refers to the consequences of the failure of a human body to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats to the organism, whether actual or imagined. Today stress levels among children have been going up dangerously due to the pressure of their academic activities and that will lead them to academic stress. Academic stress, conceptualized as a disturbance induced by a student's appraisal of academic stressors, is common in children and often leads to psychological and somatic distress (Lee, M., & Larson, R. 2000).

Academic stress is a common risk factor that adversely affects students' physical and mental health, namely: - stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, asthma, anxiety and negative emotions respectively (Aheneku, & Aheneku 2000). These symptoms are frequently found among students with high academic stress.

Anxiety is another distressing and aversive feeling and is quite common in childhood. It is a feeling of dread fear or apprehension, often with no clear justification. It differs from true fear, in that it is typically the product of subjective, internal emotional states rather than a response to a clear actual danger. Some anxiety inevitably arises in the course of daily life and is normal, but persistent, intense, chronic or recurring anxiety not justified by real life. Fonseca and Perrin (2001) quoted that-

"Anxiety is arising from the anticipation of a real or imagined threat to the self"

Supportive environment at home can reduce academic stress and anxiety in the child. It has been asserted by psychoanalysts, that an individual's wellbeing is dependent on the type of nurturance and home influences. A child requires sheltered environment at home and if it does not get the required environment, it feels insecure and becomes tense and anxious. The lack of warmth, overprotection and hostile home - atmosphere generate anxiety in a child (Horney, K. 1939). Parents are significant figures in a child's micro - system and play an important role in enhancing their child's competence to face challenges.

Objectives

- To study the causal link between stress and anxiety.
- To investigate the main causes of academic stressors and anxiety.
- To discuss the role of parental support in reducing academic stress.

Does Higher Levels of Stress Lead to Higher levels of Anxiety?

Stress and anxiety in children are just as prevalent as in adults. Re-

searches reveal that children are anxious about how others evaluate them (Dong, Q. 1994). This kind of fear is common among students with academic attainment that will be evaluated by people, who play a significant role in their lives. Normally the academic stress of students comes mostly from examination, test, excessive homework, parents and teachers' expectations. Filial piety is a highly valued cultural virtue among the Indians, and that stringing for and attaining academic success is a way for children to demonstrate filial piety. If children fail to achieve academically, then they will be condemned for not fulfilling their filial duty. These types of burden will induce academic stress in the children. Hence we can predict that children having higher levels of academic stress would have higher levels of anxiety.

Why do Academic Stressors and Anxiety Occur?

Not surprisingly much of the stress of school is related to, what kids learn and how they learn it. Here are some main sources of academic stress for kids (Burnett, P.C., & Fanshawe, J.P. 1997):-

- Work that is too difficult ? Excessive home work
- Learning styles mismatch
- Intense competition with other students?
- Parents and teachers' expectations
- Test anxiety

1. Work that is too difficult: There is a lot of pressure for children to learn at a younger age as compared to the children in past generations. For example:-while a few decades ago K.G. was a time for learning alphabets, numbers and basics. Now most of kindergarten is expected to read, with test scores being heavily weighted and publicly known, schools and teachers are under great pressure to reduce high test scores, that pressure can be passed on to children.

2. Excessive Home Work: Kids are being assigned a heavier homework load, than in past years and that extra work can add to a busy schedule. This extra burden leads children to academic stress and as the intensity of this stress increase, it converts into anxiety.

3. Learning Styles Mismatch: There are different styles of learning - as some learn better by listening, others retain information more exactly if they see information written out, and still others prefer learning by doing. If there is a mismatch in learning style and classroom teaching or if child has a learning disability (especially an undiscovered one), this can obviously lead to a stressful academic experience.

4. Intense Competition with other Students: The standard of excellence is defined by others in the group, although students might obtain good grades, they are disappointed and doubt their own abilities when their test scores are lower than those of their peers. The learning environment of students in grades 5 and 6 is particularly competitive. Student must outperform their classmates to gain admission into high-achieving secondary schools and constant com-

parisons of academic results with those of classmates are made. Such fierce competition has a negative impact on the sense of efficacy of students, especially when they are unable to surpass their classmates.

5. Parents and Teachers Expectations: Mainly academic stress and anxiety is the result of high expectations of parents and teachers. Parents are very willing to invest in their children's education, and they often socialize their children to study diligently and to strive for academic achievement as such success is related to family shame and pride.

Teachers also expect work to be completed on time. Students may underestimate the amount of time it takes to complete reading and writing assignments. Thus academic stress is related to fears of academic inefficacy and parental demand.

6. Test Anxiety: Unfortunately, studies show that parental pressure and professional background are responsible for increasing test anxiety among students and also revealed that greater level of test anxiety can actually hinder performance on exams (Singh, A., & Broota, A. 1992). Reducing test anxiety can actually improve scores.

Role of Parental Support in Reducing Academic Stress

"If you bangle raising your children I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much."

- Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

The importance of parental involvement as an accelerating and motivating factor in their children's education is world wide- accepted fact. A study revealed that parental affection, family atmosphere and family problems are the significant determinants of students' anxiety (Singh, B. (2004,). Parental emotional was found to have a main effect on children's emotional well- being and to buffer student academic stress. In other words, parents who showed care and concern could calm their children's agitated feelings.

- Help the child anticipate stressful events, such as, a first examination etc.
- Adults can judge the optimal level of preparation by encouraging the child to ask questions if he or she wants to know more.
- Provide supportive environment where children can play out or use art materials to express their concerns.
- Help children to identify a variety of coping strategies (Example:-"Ask for help if someone is teasing you,""walk away"). Coping strategies help children feel more effective in stressful situations.
- Practice positive self - talk skills (example:- "I'll try", "I think I can do this") to help in promoting stress management.
- Parents should keenly observe the behaviour of their children, so that they can rightly judge them or the allocate resources required by them.
- Multi-dimensional participation (Behavioural, intellectual, personal) of parents help their children in their academic development.
- Parents should adopt the techniques of calm discussion and proactive teaching. They can help to change behavioural problems. Long discussions between parents and children; cultivate a sense of respect, calmness and peace of mind in children.
- Anxiety is often the result of negative thinking. Before tests and exams parents should remind their children of their strengths. This will help to boost their performance level.
- Parents can provide support in the form of giving children emotional and informational support, i.e. Becoming involved in children's education by coaching and guiding them in their school work and spending more time with them.
- Parents should not compare their children with others; they should respect the individuality of their children.
- Parents and teachers are the builders of the personality of a kid, so they can make efforts to develop positive self concept in them.

Thus we can conclude that anxiety is a distressing and aversive feeling. Students having the high academic stress may suffer from physical and mental disorders. Parents may be one of the leading factors of stress. If parents provide adequate care and affection to their children,

there is a probability of reducing stress in children. Thus the optimum support of the parents can reduce the academic stress and anxiety in the children. It can also improve the academic achievements.

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