



Stress, Belief in God and Prayer Habits in Adolescents

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT Adolescence is a time of stress in the life cycle of a human being. Belief in God and Prayer habits are believed to alleviate stress. The study examined the relationship between stress and belief in God and prayer habits. 203 adolescents were administered a questionnaire on stress. Data on their belief in God and prayer habits were also collected. T tests and correlational analysis were conducted. It was found that females had higher stress levels, belief in God and prayer habits. However, there was no correlation between stress, belief in God and prayer habits. The higher levels of stress in females is hypothesized to be a result of pressure to conform to societal role as a female.

Introduction

Adolescence is a period of change and this leads to stress. The adolescents go through physical and emotional changes. This is also a time when they start thinking about abstract concepts like God and prayer habits. They move from their more concrete forms of thinking and move on to abstract levels of thinking. Dimock (1936) studied a group of boys in the age range of 12 to 16 years and found that changes in religious beliefs were most pronounced between the ages of 12 and 13 years. Khaliq, Zabbi and Chatterjee (1984), report that religious identity begins to develop as early as 4 to 5 year and is nearly complete by age 15. This is also the time when they start questioning the belief systems of parents and start having an opinion by themselves. A belief is an attitude, which incorporates a lot of cognitive structuring. Most people believe in the existence of a supernatural power or divinity that is beyond control. Jersid(1963) points out that the percentage of young people expressing a belief in God though variable in different populations is very high. Research indicates that 96% of Americans believe in a God or a universal spirit. 75% pray regularly, 42% attend religious services, 67% are members of a local religious body, and a 67% feel that religion is very important in their lives (Mathew, Larson and Barry, 1993). Prayer is a solemn and humble approach to divinity in a word or thoughts usually involving beseeching, petition, confession, praise or thanksgiving. The belief in God and prayer habits is an indication of a person's spiritualism- materialism orientation. An individual's materialism-spiritualism orientation is supposed to determine his perception of his relationship to the universe and ways of responding to situations.

In a study by Seige, Anderman and Schrimshaw (2001) on religion and coping with stress, evidence for religion as a stress buffer and as a stress deterrent was found. Potential pathways by which religion may influence adjustment to illness were hypothesized to be by giving a interpretive framework for cognitive schema and enhancing social support. Paragment, Tarakeshwar, Ellison and Wuff (2001) found that positive and negative religious coping were associated with higher and lower levels of well being respectively. Thoreson and Harris (2002) suggested that religious and/or spiritual factors appear to be associated with physical and overall health but relation appears far more complex and

modest than some contended. In a study by Alferi, Culver, Carver, Arena and Antoni (1999), the relationship between religiosity, religious coping and distress were assessed. In Catholic women greater religiosity was associated with more distress and Evangelical women, greater religiosity was associated with lesser distress. According to Lapiere and Fransworth (1949), religion helps the individual in his adjustment to events that he is ill prepared. According to Clark (1963), each religion by its respective rituals offers a means of beginning and increasing connection with a greater power. Rosenberg (1962) found that children reared in dissonant religious context had more psychosomatic problems and anxiety. Mayo, Puryear, Richey (1969) report that religious males had less psychopathology.

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between stress in adolescents and its relationship to belief in God and prayer habits.

The hypotheses examined in the study were:

There will be significant differences in between the groups based on gender in stress, belief in God and prayer habit.

There will be negative correlation between stress, belief in God and prayer habit.

Materials and Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 203 adolescents. They were selected from two districts of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram and Kottayam. The students were taken from various study centres and colleges.

Tools

General Information Schedule

A general information schedule was developed to elicit information regarding name, age, and gender.

Stress Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed which consisted of 12 items using item analysis. The items included questions that included both physical and psychological aspects of stress. like, "Do you worry about the future?" and 'Do you fear failure?' Each item had response choice of 'yes' or

'no'. Each 'yes' got a score of 1. Maximum score was 12.

Belief in God

The subjects were required to fill choose the level of belief of God on a Likert scale. The options included "strong believer", to some extent, and atheist. The responses were scored 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Prayer habit

The subjects were required to choose their prayer habit on a Likert scale. The options included "regularly", "occasionally", and "never". The responses were scored 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Statistical techniques

Means and standard deviations were used to describe the data. T test for between group analyses. Pearson's correlation was used to find the association between variables.

Results

The sample consisted of adolescents aged between 16 and 19 years of age. Among the 203 participants, 98 were male and 105 were female.

Difference in the groups based on gender.

The total sample was divided into two groups based on gender. T test showed that the groups differed on stress, belief in God and prayer habit. (table 1).

Table 1: Differences in the variables based on gender groups

Variables	Group(N=203)	Mean+/-SD	t	P value
Stress	Males(N=98)	4.59+/-2.67	-3.03	p<0.01
	Females (N=105)	5.81+/-3.02		
Belief in God	Males(N=98)	2.78+/-0.51	-2.83	p<0.01
	Females (N=105)	2.93+/-0.25		
Prayer habit	Males(N=98)	2.55+/-0.54	-3.58	p<0.01
	Females (N=105)	2.79+/-0.41		

Correlation between the variables

A correlation analysis using the variables was conducted to understand their relationships. Table 2 shows the result of correlational analysis.

Table 2: Correlation between the variables

Variables	Belief in God	Prayer Habit
Stress	0.07	0.10
Prayer habit		0.39(**)

** : significant at 0.01 level

There was no significant correlation between the variables.

Discussion

The first finding in the study is that females had higher stress when compared to males and had better belief in god and prayer habits. Scharmi et al (2011) reported that female adolescents are prone to higher levels of stress than boys. This difference reported in previous studies too (Basow & Rubin, 1999, Murberg & Bru, 2004). Schrami hypothesizes that this could be due to socialization processes. Females are expected to confirm to gender stereotypes and societal expectations at a faster pace than their male counterparts. There is also tendency for girls to im-

bibe parental expectations. They are also more sensitive to evaluation by other (Rudolph, 2002). This is especially true in the Indian setting as the attainment of menarche is considered a significant change in the female body and mind and there is a lot of pressure to confirm to the societal role as a female.

Females also have more belief in God and better prayer habits than their male counterparts. This could be due to the societal expectations, or this could be a coping behaviour.

Stress was not associated to belief in God or prayer habits. The reason for this could be that the number of subjects who reported that they did not believe in God or did not pray regularly were very less, and hence a correlation may not be meaningful. A major finding was that all adolescents in the study believed in God strongly and had regular prayer habits.

Belief in God and prayer habit were associated with each other as these two variables are the same components of a single concept.

The study has a fairly larger sample of adolescents. However, the results may not be generalized due to the fact that most of the students reported that they believed in God and prayed regularly. Also these results are applicable only to educated adolescents who are ambitious, as all of them were eager to continue education. A socially and economic different group could have different finding.

Conclusions

Female adolescents experience greater amount of stress and have more belief in God and better prayer habits. This information could be used while devising counselling strategies for them. Majority of the adolescents in the study had strong belief in God and had regular pray habits.

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