

Personality Factors as Determinants of the Stress Experienced By the Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is an age of opportunity for children, and a pivotal time for us to build on their development in the first decade of life, to help them navigate risks and vulnerabilities, and to set them on the path to fulfilling their potential. During adolescents there are high rates of drug abuse, suicides, social withdrawals, alcohol abuse or sudden angry outbursts. The present study aims at investigating the personality factors as determinants of the stress experienced by the adolescents. Anything that poses threat to our wellbeing is a stress for us. Stress is experienced by everyone from time to time. Not all stress is bad, thus, there is both eustress and distress. According to Baum (1990), stress is any uncomfortable emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological and behavioral changes. Hans Selye defined stress as a non-specific response of the body to any demand for change. Adolescence has been considered, almost by definition, a period of heightened stress (Spear, 2000) due to the many changes experienced concomitantly, including physical maturation, drive for independence, increased salience of social and peer interactions, and brain development (Blakemore, 2008; Casey, Getz, & Galvan, 2008a; Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008b). Although new-found independence can be stimulating it may also lead to feelings of being overwhelmed by change, which has historically led some researchers to characterize adolescence as ridden with 'storm and stress' (Hall, 1904). Thus, being pushed under the pressure of increased competition mostly in career opportunities, parent/ peer/ teacher's pressure, there is lot of stress among adolescents and there is high need to focus on this issue amongst them. Many factors affect stress, personality is one major amongst them. Specific inherited characteristics, early experience in life, and particular, learned cognitive predispositions make individuals more or less susceptible to the effects of stressors. Intensity of stress response are greatly dependable on age, gender, intelligence, and numerous characteristics of personality, such as hardiness, locus of control, self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, hostility (component of type A personality) and type D traits (negative affectivity and social inhibition). The increasing number of suicide rates indicates that there is stress among adolescents, so we can work on the personality traits which help in reduction of stress amongst adolescents such as

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resilience, hardiness etc. Thus, to understand the relation between personality and stress, it is essential to recognize the impact of individual differences on stress. Quantitative method is being used by the researcher. Appropriate data analysis will be done.

Keywords: *Stress, Personality, Adolescents*

Adolescence has often been described as a period of storm and stress, a period of marginality, and a period of transition without turmoil (Petersen, 1988). The total years of Adolescence are from 13- 18 years. Most individuals move through early adolescence without a great deal of stress, but a sizeable minority encounter significant turmoil during this stage in adolescent development (Irvin, 1996; Petersen, 1988). Adolescents face important developmental tasks including identity formation (Erikson 1968), the development of social skills, autonomy, responsibility, and the development of a set of values (Irvin 1996). These developmental tasks impact the level of stress adolescents experience and influence emotional states, including anger. Other significant developmental events during this period include increasing cognitive development, developing a sexual identity, adjusting to a more mature body, developing academic competence, and exploring career options (Flavell 1963; Kegan, 1998). One of the major challenges faced by adolescents today is the extreme consciousness with physical appearance. A lot of adolescents are seen investing a lot of time and money into their physical appearance in order to look and portray a certain image as is promoted by media and society. Because the adolescents are experiencing various strong cognitive and physical changes for the first time in their lives, they may start to view their friends, their peer group, as more important and influential than their parents/ guardians.

Stress disrupts individual's wellbeing not only physically but also psychologically. It is basically an inability to cope up with the basic life events. Stress can be good for people, if it's acute, as it plays an important role in motivating people to complete the desired task but if the stress is prolonged it can harm the individual's sense of life and wellbeing. It causes indigestion, sleep disturbances, insomnia, heart issues, high blood pressure, headaches, body aches, depression, fatigue, anger, anxiety and various other issues. Selye (1976, p. 64) defines this stress as 'a state manifested by a syndrome which consists of all the nonspecifically induced changes in a biologic system.' Stress affects individual's at all levels. Stress, in part, defines the developmental stage of adolescence. The adolescent or by chance if any individual is facing a set of demands with insufficient resources to cope with them may respond in many harmful and maladaptive ways. Erikson (1968) is most often associated with the theoretical position that developmental crisis present challenges to youth.

Personality refers to the enduring styles of thinking and behaving when interacting with the world. It relates to unique and relatively stable qualities that characterize behaviour and thought. Different personality theories have come forth with emphasis on different aspects. Costa and McCrae (1992) have explained personality in terms of five traits namely; Neuroticism i. e. a

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tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, fear etc., Extraversion i. e. tendency to seek the company of others and experience positive emotions, being energetic, dominant, assertive, outgoing, talking, fun-loving, Openness i. e. tendency to be open to new experience, intellectually curious, appreciative of art, witty and sensitive to beauty, Agreeableness i. e. a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative and Conscientiousness i. e. a tendency to show self discipline, act dutifully and aim for achievement. The Big Five Model is one of the most comprehensive, empirical model of personality. Personality determines our reactions to the environment. Individual experience various new changes during adolescence that he/ she tries to understand in best possible way, which shows some transition into their personality characteristics. Erik Erikson (1959) stresses on rational, conscious ego processes in personality development. According to him, personality development is a lifelong process, and ego identity occupies a central place in development. Adolescents who experience an identity crisis do not seem to know where they belong or what they want to become. Individuals who cope with this crisis are able to face adulthood with confidence and a strong sense of self identity.

During adolescence individuals are passing through a transitional stage of physical and mental development. This transition involves biological, social as well as psychological changes. Cognitive, emotional and attitudinal changes which are characteristic of adolescence often take place during this period and this can be a cause of conflict on the one hand and positive personality development on the other. In search for a unique social identity for themselves, adolescents are confused about what is right and what is wrong. Erikson has labeled this stage as the 'identity crisis' stage. Adolescents know they are experiencing great deal of stress. They may recognize the situations and circumstances that create demands and they may have awareness of some of their thoughts, beliefs and values that are stress producing. During adolescence there is high rise in the prevalence of stress. Adolescents herald an increase in environmental stressors, for example, academic pressure, the making and breaking of romantic relationship (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 2002). Experiencing stress has an important function in adolescent development. Research on adolescent stress has shifted its focus on the study of traumatic events and chronic stressors, characterized by loss and threat, to normative challenges, demands, and developmental tasks (Nurmi, 2004; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Since adolescence is a age where personality needs to be focused as many challenges adolescence face because of that they experience stress like transition to college from school, peer pressure, relationship issues, identity concerns, body appearance, educational or career issues, increasing competitiveness etc. Adolescents vary considerably in their personalities from each other and respond to different types of stress in a considerably different manner. Thus, it is imperative to study and to understand how adolescents with different personality characteristics experience stress differently. On the basis of foresaid discussion on the topic of present study, the following hypothesis has been proposed. It has been hypothesized that –

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1. Personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) do not determine the stress experienced by the adolescents.
2. Gender has no effect on stress experienced by the adolescents.
3. Socio-economic status has no effect on stress experienced by the adolescents.
4. Age has no effect on stress experienced by the adolescents.
5. Family structure has no effect on stress experienced by the adolescents.

METHOD

The main objectives of the research are-

1. To find out which personality factor determines the stress experienced by the adolescents.
2. To find out whether socio-economic status has an effect on the stress experienced by the adolescents.
3. To find out whether age has an effect on the stress experienced by the adolescents.
4. To find out whether gender has an effect on the stress experienced by the adolescents.
5. To find out whether family structure has an effect on the stress experienced by the adolescents.

Sample

The sample was comprised of 80 adolescents falling in the category of 2 age groups. The age group (1) comprised of adolescents between 13 to 15 year of age, age group (2) comprised of adolescents between 16 to 18 years. The sample included school students (Ralli International school and City Vocational School), students from Delhi University and Amity university, Noida. The sample was compared on the basis of gender (male/ female), age and Socio-economic status i.e. Low (below 1 lakh per annum), lower-middle (between 1 lakh to 3 lakh per annum), middle (between 3 lakh to 5 lakh per annum) and High (above 5 lakh per annum) and the family structure (nuclear family and joint family) . Purposive sampling was used by the researcher.

Tools

In the present investigation, Personality characteristics of the adolescents were assessed by using NEO-PI-R scale constructed by Paul T. Costa, Jr and Robert R. McCrae (1991).it is a 60 item measure. Five dimensions of personality have been conceptualized by Costa and McCrae: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Stress faced by adolescents was assessed through Stress Scale by Dr. Vijaya Lakshmi and Dr. Shruti Narain (2014). This is a 40 item measure to assess the stress among people within age group of 12 to 25 years. It has four different subscales: (a) Physical stress, (b) Frustration (c) Anxiety (d) Pressure. Responses are rated on a 2 point scale and range between Yes or No. The score are summed up to get the total score on the four dimensions.

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Procedure

For this study, each subject was approached personally. Research questionnaire was administered on the adolescents within the age group of 13-18 years. They were assured that their responses will only be used for research purposes and their identity will not be revealed. Subjects were instructed to give honest responses. Instructions were read out to the participants. For the NEO-PI-R scale, subjects were instructed to read each item carefully and darken the response that best represented their opinion about themselves; the Stress Scale also had the same set of instructions. The responses were very helpful in discussion of results. SPSS software was used to analyze the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was tabulated group wise and subjected to t-test and Regression analysis. The result of the Regression has been reported in Table (1).

Table (1), Showing Linear Regression (Criterion Variable is Total Stress)

Serial number	Predictors	R	R square	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Neuroticism	0.401	0.161	0.239	2.154	0.05*
2	Extraversion			0.220	1.499	0.138
3	Openness			0.144	0.909	0.367
4	Conscientiousness			0.151	1.006	0.318
5	Agreeableness			0.336	0.336	0.738

p<0.01**, p<0.05*

It can be observed from the above table (1) that R Square value is 0.161. Thus, the personality dimensions (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness) accounts for 61.1% of the total variance in Total Stress. The correlation of t criterion variable is 0.239 which is significant ($F(5/74) = 2.83, p < 0.05^*$). One out of five personality variables was found to influence total stress i.e. neuroticism ($B = 0.239, p < 0.05$).

We partly reject the hypothesis as neuroticism plays a significant role in determining the stress experienced by the adolescents whereas other personality dimensions like extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness does not determine the stress experienced by the adolescents. Now days, adolescents are generally stressed and busy, negative emotions and a sense of despair are experiences which a majority of adolescents are undergoing. According to Costa and Mc Crae, neuroticism is a tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, fear etc and during adolescents individuals are highly influenced by their peers and many seem to be high on anxiety and anger and lacks the capability to distinguish between right or wrong which makes them think negatively in various situations making them feel more stressed. Because the adolescents are experiencing various strong cognitive and physical changes for the first time in their lives, they may start to view their friends, their peer group, as more

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important and influential than their parents/ guardians. Neuroticism emerged as the most significant predictor of stress experienced by adolescents, having positive predictive relationship with the stress i.e. as the level of neuroticism increased in the adolescents, their seem to be increase in the level of stress experienced by them. This can be supported by a study which states that university students face demands of academic challenges, financial pressures, and the need for career decisions, which act as stressors that have the potential for creating significant psychological distress (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1979). Adolescents are confused about what is right and what is wrong. Erikson has labelled this stage as the 'identity crisis' stage. G. Stanley Hall has denoted this period as one of "storm and stress" and according to him, conflict at this developmental stage is normal and not unusual. Extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness did not seem to be a significant predictor of total stress among adolescents. As the individuals who are more open to experience the new changes in life, who are very outspoken and have better tendency to seek the company of others and experience positive emotions, being energetic, dominant, assertive, outgoing, talking, fun-loving, intellectually curious, appreciative of art, witty and sensitive to beauty, have a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative and who have self discipline, act dutifully and aim for achievement are least likely to experience stress during adolescents or even their life time.

Table (2), Showing Comparison of age groups on Total stress

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
13-15 years	23	64	8.69	2.178	0.05*
16-18 years	57	60.05	6.73		

p<0.01**, p<0.05*

Table (2), shows the comparison of age group on the total stress experienced by the adolescents.. The age group includes adolescents of 13- 15 years of age and adolescents of 16- 18 years of age. It is observed that there is a significant difference in the stress experienced by the adolescents of different age. The pattern of stressors during each phase of adolescence, i.e. early, middle and late adolescence differs. An early adolescent (13–15 years) may consider academic life stressful whereas a late adolescent (16–18 years) may be much worried about future jobs etc. Adolescence is a very crucial age in one's lifetime. It is the building block of individual's future. There are many challenges that individual face during this time including problems related to inter-personal relations, choosing best career for him/ her, extreme focus on their physical appearance to look their best to gain better acceptance from the society etc. The college classroom also presents various challenges that can negatively impact students' psychological and physical health and make them experience tremendous stress. During the first year in particular, students are faced with numerous educational and personal stressors that can negatively impact upon their health and well-being (Hudd et.al, 2000; Lumley and Provenzano, 2003; Perry, 1991, 2003). The process of adjusting to a novel and often stressful academic setting, including increased pressure to succeed at unfamiliar tasks, greater academic

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competition, more frequent failure experiences, and important career decisions (Perry, 1991, 2003) can be exceedingly difficult. The transition from high school to college is also accompanied by various personal challenges of a stressful nature, such as changes in interpersonal relationships, living arrangements, and personal finances, all of which may predispose students to health difficulties (Lumley and Provenzano, 2003; Perry et al., 2001)., The mode of interaction of adolescents with their surroundings and oneself predict their stress levels. Stress arises when adolescents face new, unpredictable situations, anticipations of something odd, and the fear of losing something.

Table (3), Showing Comparison of Socio-Economic status on Total stress

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Below 1 lakh	26	59.93	6.47	0.918	0.363
1 lakh- 3 lakh	27	62	9.64		
3 lakh- 5 lakh	13	62.47	4.98	0.719	0.478
Above 5 lakh	14	60.79	6.88		

p<0.01**, p<0.05*

Comparison of Socio-economic status on total stress experienced by the adolescents can be obtained from table (3), where it is found that there is no significant difference between the 4 groups i.e. low (income below 1 lakh per annum), lower- middle (income between 1 lakh to 3 lakh per annum), middle (income between 3 lakh to 5 lakh per annum) and high (income above 5 lakh per annum) on total stress. This states that adolescents belonging to different social & economic class do not differ on the stress experienced by them in their life. Social status is the position of an individual within the social relationships whereas economic status refers to the financial conditions and facilities possessed by the parents. These parameters are widely researched in terms of an adolescent. In adolescence, socio-economic status may have less relationship with the different stress level experienced by the adolescents belonging to different class than at other life stages. Experiences of stress and its effects on adolescents are mostly same with same range of intensities which in a way justifies that any individual irrespective of any creed, class, caste or religion will be affected by the stress.

Table (4), Showing Comparison of gender on Total stress

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	40	62.70	5.39	1.829	0.071
Female	40	59.67	8.97		

p<0.01**, p<0.05*

From table (4), it is very clear that there is no significant difference in the stress experienced by the two groups of adolescents (male and female). Both boys and girls are equally prone to stress and tend to have the same level of worry regarding social adequacy, academics, and economics.

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Unlike earlier times, both male and females strive hard to look their best, to achieve best in life, both are at par in today's competitive world which seems to be the biggest stressors now days during adolescents. Both are at equal levels when considering to choosing the best carriers for them. Social demands put forward male and females are no more different. Both are equally involved in meeting everyday demands of life. The time is changing and inequalities are diminishing, mostly in relation to gender.

Table (5), Showing Comparison of family structure on Total stress

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Nuclear	46	62.66	7.55	2.072	0.05*
Joint	34	59.20	7.08		

p<0.01**, p<0.05*

Table (5) depicts that there is a significant difference in the stress experienced by the adolescents belonging to nuclear family and joint family. The family is always an important factor in adolescent mental health (Aggleton et al. 2000). Family size has dropped from more than five members per household in the 1970's to about 3:1 in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department 2001). Nuclear rather than extended family structures have become more common. From table (5), it can be observed that adolescents from nuclear family experience more stress than those from joint families. In nuclear families, parents work hard to meet all possible needs of the family and for that they work for long hours. This has resulted in the weakening of the family relationships. Adolescents who are facing the inner turmoil are unable to share their experiences and thoughts with their parents that disrupt their mental health and experience enormous stress. Healthy relationship at home and school is of central importance for a proper upbringing of an adolescent. A study conducted by Raymond Montemayor (1986) elicits that parents and adolescents who have good communication between them and when parenting style is helping the adolescents to communicate their stress have better relationship. And parents also facilitate the adolescents to combat stress.

BJ Cassey , Rebecca M. Jones et al (2010) indicate that the adolescence is the time of storm and stress. In spite of intense and frequent negative affect this period has been hypothesized to explain increased rates of affective disorders, suicide and accidental death. Yet some teens emerge from adolescence with minimal turmoil. Personality determines our reactions to the environment. Personality is one major factor that affects stress. According to Gordon Allport (1961), personality is a dynamic organization, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts and feelings. It has consistently been found to be a strong predictor of well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999). Adolescents face important developmental tasks including identity formation (Erickson, 1968), the development of social skills, autonomy, responsibility and the development of a set of values (Irvin, 1996). These developmental tasks impact the level of stress adolescent experience. Other

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significant developmental events during this period include increasing cognitive development, developing a sexual identity, adjusting to a more mature body, developing academic competence and exploring career options (Flavell, 1963; Kegan, 1998). Today, there is heightened increase in suicide rate among adolescents. Thus, it was very essential to study the personality characteristics of adolescents to help diminish the negative effects of stress experienced by the adolescents. Neuroticism plays a major role in creating and establishing negative feelings in an individual, makes them high on anxiety, anger, fear etc. this leads to inclusion of excess stress in adolescence. Adolescents belonging to 13-15 years of age experience more studies related stress as they have their first board exams during this phase. They become very apprehensive during this phase of life, there is problem of peer pressure, high feeling of competitiveness, relationship issues etc. while the adolescents of 16- 18 years of age are more concerned about their physical appearance and most importantly choosing the best career options for themselves, they even strive for acceptance from everyone in the society, community and the family. This urge to belong and being accepted by everyone makes them experience higher level of stress. Adolescents belonging to nuclear family experience more stress than those who belong to joint families as in joint families adolescents feel free to share their experiences and thoughts with many members of the family which seem to be bit problematic in nuclear families. A person can literally be taught to transform the major life demands into the minor ones. Most adolescents experience more stress when they perceive a situation as dangerous, difficult, or painful and they do not have the resources to cope. Some sources of stress for adolescents might include school demands and frustrations, negative thoughts and feelings about themselves, changes in their bodies, problems with friends and/or peers at school, unsafe living environment/neighborhood, separation or divorce of parents, chronic illness or severe problems in the family, death of a loved one, moving or changing schools, taking on too many activities or having too high expectations, family financial problems. Some teens become overloaded with stress. When it happens, inadequately managed stress can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, physical illness, or poor coping skills such as drug and/or alcohol use.

In light of this, at the preventive level, adolescents should be taught how to cope with stress. As suggested by Rodham et al. (2004), that is something could be implemented in schools through mental health awareness educational programmes and might also be prompted through media. Alternatively, positive youth development programmes which aims at promoting holistic development among the adolescents should be developed and widely implemented at schools. Environment at home plays important role in stress management of adolescents. The chances of Adolescents to Indulge in deviant behaviors are very high when they are not paid attention by parents and teachers. The onus is on the parents to take care of their Adolescents because they may succumb to pressures from schoolwork, peer relationships, mood swings because of stress. Ann.C.Crociter and Mathew (2001): Study linking parents work stress to Adolescents Psychological Adjustment. It reveals that the effects of parental work stress on Adolescents Adjustment appear to be indirect .Work stress is linked to parent's feelings of overload and

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strain, which in turn are related to less positive adjustment of adolescents. In the face of high work stress withdrawing from family involvement may be adaptive in the short run but ultimately problematic. The strength of those associations depends on parent's personality, coping styles, work and family circumstances. Jodi B.Dworkin et al (2003) : little theory and research exist on the developmental processes that occur during adolescents participation in extracurricular activities, community based activities. As a step in that direction they conducted study on high school students which reveals that the students shared about personal experience which includes experimentation, leadership qualities, setting goals, time management, emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships, they learnt to build team and work as a team, developing valuable connection with adults. Across domains adolescents described themselves as agents of their own development and change. Study conducted by Hains Anthony et al (1990) examined the effectiveness of a cognitive intervention to help adolescents cope with stress and other forms of negative emotional arousal. The trained adolescents showed significant reductions in levels of anxiety and anger, and also improvement in self-esteem. Thus it is hoped that this research will promote further study on the protective factors for adolescent experiencing stress. Although this has been conducted on a small sample of population. The findings should also be verified by taking larger sample incorporating more variables.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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