

## Stress as related with Conduct and Achievement in Adolescent Students

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### ABSTRACT

Stress reactions occur when an environmental event taxes one's ability to cope. The study investigated the relationship of stress with conduct and achievement. A sample of 60 students (14-18 years) from Government schools was incidentally selected. Stress was measured with the help of a scale by (Tubesing and Tubesing, 1983) which assesses symptoms of physical, emotional and mental stress. Conduct was assessed in terms of the judgment of class teacher on a bipolar adjective checklist developed by the researcher about different behaviours of the student like punctuality, perseverance etc. Average marks obtained by a student throughout one academic session was used as a measure of academic achievement. The results revealed higher level of stress, specially emotional stress among male adolescents as compared to females; better conduct and academic achievement by females. Mental stress was found to be negatively correlated with achievement for both but with conduct for females only. Overall stress was found to be significantly negatively correlated with achievement in females; positive correlation between conduct and academic achievement was found. The study implies that out of different forms of stress, mental stress has more deleterious impact on academic achievement of adolescents; although females have been found to be higher in good conduct, mental stress undermines it too. Findings suggest a need for training of teachers and parents to help their wards in developing the skills to manage mental stress.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Conduct, Achievement, Adolescent Students*

Stress is a common part of everyday life. Most of the adolescents face multiple problems in their lives and the sources may be internal or external, hampering the major functioning of the body. Selye said that “**Without stress, there would be no life**”. It is the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it (*selye, 1974*). It is also “a condition typically characterized by

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symptoms of mental and physical tension or strain that can result from a reaction to a situation in which a person feels threatened and pressured.” (Webster new world dictionary)

Stress is perceived in different ways and different thing to different individuals. It is perceived as events or situations that cause individuals to feel tension, pressure, or negative emotions including anxiety and anger. It is important that stress can have both positive and negative effects on adolescents depending on situation. It means that stress may be a normal, adaptive reaction to threat. Its role is to signal and prepare individuals to take defensive action.

Students in adolescent age undergo a transitional phase, which is an intermediate phase of childhood and adulthood. Sources of stress in adolescents include normative stressors (i.e., developmental challenges inherent to adolescence, such as puberty, school transitions, increased academic demands etc.), non-normative stressful life events (e.g., divorce of parents, deaths etc.), and daily hassles (e.g., chronic stressors such as parent–child conflict and academic pressure) (*McNamara, 2000*). Although parents and teachers are often sensitive to the occurrence of non-normative stressful events in adolescents’ lives, the normative stressors and the experience of accumulated daily hassles (in particular, school-related stressors, irritations, pressures, and annoyances), predict their mental health (*Carter, Garber, Ciesla, & Cole, 2006*).

*Altaf & Kausar, (2013)* found that there was non-significant difference between male and female university students on scores on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), but significant difference between junior and senior students on the PSS. Academic stress was found to be higher in younger students than older students. *Misra and Castillo, (2004)* conducted a study, in which they concluded that perception and reaction to stress is different in both genders i.e. male and female while *Jogaratham and Buchanan, (2004)* found a significant difference between male and female students on the time pressure factor of stress. *Sulaiman, Hassan, Sopian and Abdullah, (2009)* studied that males and female students experience different level of stress and an explanation may be because females are more likely to be emotional than males in reaction to their environment. *Vijaya and Karunakaran, (2013); Khan et al.; Prabhu, (2015)* have also found moderate to high level of stress in boys as compared to girls.

Stressed children show signs of emotional disabilities, aggressive behavior, shyness, social phobia, depression, muscular weakness, constipation and often lack of interest in otherwise enjoyable activities. It has been found that stress symptoms as loss of energy, elevated blood pressure, depressed mood, increase in craving, difficulty in concentrating, impatience, nervousness and strain (*Malach-Pines & Keinan, 2007; Ongori, 2007; Agolla & Ongori, 2009; Agolla, 2009*).

Students are the most vulnerable to stress resulting in a series of destructive behaviour such as negative attitude, disobedience, irresponsible, disrespectful behaviour, hitting others, use of slang

language and abuse. Conduct is a manner of acting, controlling oneself and behaving in a specified way especially towards others or in a particular place or situation. Good Conduct at school might lay the foundation for the formation of good habits throughout life. These desirable and value based behaviors are the pre requisites for a good character. Character development is the primary goal of Indian education system. The girls tend to have higher level of internalizing problem behaviors (emotional symptoms e.g. anxiety, depression, fearfulness, somatic complaints) and boys tend to show higher level of externalizing problem behaviors (inattention, hyperactivity, Conduct Problem) (*Bonnie, Sidney & Donald, 1995*). *Hossain, (2013)* found in her study that there exist gender differences in specific attributes of problem behavior. *Sultana et al, (2013)* found that punctuality problems tend to have negative impact on student's academic achievement. *Hossain, (2013)* found least or negligible correlation between academic achievement and conduct problem. *Hussain & Suleman, (2014)* found in his study that classroom favourable environment has a significant positive effect on the academic achievement scores of secondary school students.

Academic achievement is one of the most important goals of education in this competitive age, a key criterion to judge one's total potentialities and capabilities. Therefore it is more pressing for the students to have high academic achievement. Achievement itself on varying degree depends upon various factors like gender, locale (rural/urban) and intelligence (*Lal, 2014*), public vs private school (*Husain, Kumar and Husain, 2008*), personality, socio-economic status, attitude, study habits, mental health etc. *Bankston and Zhou, (2002)* found that there were no significant gender difference in stress and academic achievement of senior secondary school students. *Kumari and Gartia, (2012)* found that stress and academic achievement are not mediated by gender. *Dornbusch et al. (1987)*; *Tinku and Biswas, (1994)* reported that girl students tended to get higher grades and get more marks than Boys. *Leung, (2007)* showed gender difference on academic performance where girls were more disturbed by "academic inefficacy and fear of failure" and boys were more affected by "expectations and demands from significant others" and academic demands and overload". *Babar et al., (2004)*; *Williamson, Birmaher, Ryan and Dahl, (2005)* found that academic stress and examinations stress are more dominant stressor in students. Health and academic accomplishments can both be hampered if stress levels are very high and if stress is negatively perceived (*Campbell & Svenson, 1992*). Most of the studies have found a negative correlation between stress level of adolescence and their academic performance (*Felsten and Wilcox, 1992*; *Malik & Balda, 2006*). *Bargia et al. (2002)*; *Spira & Fischel, (2005)* found that attention problem has negative impact on academic achievement.

In India, the factors responsible for the outcomes such as emotional stress and internalized problems are due to elevated levels of academic and social stress (*Verma et al., 2002*; *Krishnakumar et al., 2005*; *Lai & Wong, 1992*). The majority of adolescents in the stressed and unstressed groups were in the age group of 14–16 years. Stressed adolescents perceived academics as burdensome (*Sreeramareddy et al., 2007*; *Sapru, 2006*).

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Some contradictory studies reveal a significant positive relationship between stress and academic performance (*Bankston & Zhou, 2000*). Perhaps, stress puts a pressure on adolescents to perform better. *Sarmany, (1994)* stated that low Grade Point Average (GPA) students used less effective stress coping strategies, and significantly girls showed higher level of stress than boys.

The purpose of the present study was to find out the relationship of stress with conduct and achievement. In the light of above discussion few research questions were posed to be answered: Are there gender differences in stress, academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students? Are there gender differences in the relationship of stress with academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students?

### ***Objectives:***

- To find out gender differences in stress, academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students.
- To study gender differences in the relationship of stress with academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students.

### ***Hypotheses:***

- H1: There will be gender differences in stress, academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students.
- H2: Stress and conduct will be negatively correlated.
- H3: Stress and academic achievement will be negatively correlated.

### ***Participants:***

The sample of the present study comprises of 60 students from govt. schools of Kanpur (30 males and 30 females). The age range was 14 to 18 years. All of the students belonged to lower middle class and were studying in schools situated in rural or semi urban areas. The average family income was Rs. 30,000 per annum.

### ***Variables:***

#### **Predictor variable:-**

**Stress-** In the present study stress has been defined as a form of physical, emotional and mental symptoms of stress.

#### **Criterion variables:-**

- (1) **Conduct-** Conduct is a manner of acting, controlling oneself and behaving in a specified way especially towards others or in a particular place or situation.
- (2) **Academic Achievement-** *Good (1973)*, defined academic achievement as knowledge, attitude or skill developed in the school subject usually designed by test score or by marks assigned by teacher or by both.

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### Measures:

- **Stress scale-** Stress is measured by hindi adaptation of an inventory developed by *Tubesing and Tubesing (1983)*. This inventory consists of 27, 14 and 12 items for physical, emotional and mental stress respectively. Three point rating scale has been used. Reliability and validity was found to be satisfactory in various studies on students (20-35 years) preparing for competitive examination (*Gautam 2006*) and adults (*Sheeba 2008*).
- **Conduct-** Conduct of the student has been assessed in terms of the judgment of class teacher for variety of positive behaviours manifested in school. Twelve bipolar adjectives like punctual- irregular, disciplined- undisciplined, lazy- hard working, obedient- disobedient etc. revealing behavior of students in school were selected on the basis of opinion of parents, teachers and experts of Psychology. The inter item correlation range was found to be .15-.70. The items could account for 57.91% variance. The Cronbach alpha was found to be .89.
- **Achievement-** In the present study academic achievement has been assessed on the basis of performance of students in midterm and full term examination in one academic session.

### Procedure:

Before collection of data, prior permission of principal and class teacher was taken. Researcher introduced herself to the students to create an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and support. It was emphasized that questionnaires given by researcher have nothing to do with their assessment of intelligence and examination results. All the queries of participants were answered before starting the administration of scales. The instructions were given clearly. Participants were assured that the information they provided would be kept strictly confidential and used for research purpose only.

## RESULT AND INTERPRETATION:

*Table 1: Showing descriptive statistics of different variables.*

Variables	No. of items	Scale range	Scale mean	Obtained range		Obtained mean		S.D	
				M	F	M	F	M	F
Stress total	53	0-159	79.5	13.00-	11.00-	41.57	33.13	17.35	13.00
1. Physical	27	0-81	40.5	81.00	67.00				
				8.00-47.00	8.00-34.00	20.33	16.80	9.87	6.59
2. Emotional	14	0-42	21.00	4.00-30.00	2.00-21.00	12.73	9.87	5.84	4.44
3. Mental	12	0-36	18.00	0.00-21.00	0.00-20.00	8.50	6.47	4.16	4.67
Conduct	12	12-84	48.00	48.00-82.00	69.00-84.00	71.13	75.97	9.57	3.74
Achievement				41.95-86.75%	51.50-91.50%	61.46%	70.25%	11.08%	11.13%

M=Male adolescents

F= Female adolescents

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Table 1 reveals the mean, range and standard deviation of different dimensions of stress (physical, emotional and mental), academic achievement and conduct. As shown in the table, scale mean of stress scale is 79.5 while the obtained mean of male students is 41.57 and of female students it is 33.13. It shows that the obtained mean of both male and female students is lower than average. As different dimension of stress scale are concerned, the obtained mean of male adolescents in physical, emotional and mental areas were found to be 20.33, 12.73, 8.50 respectively which are much lower than the scale mean (ie.40.5, 21.00, 18.00 respectively). The obtained mean of female students in physical, emotional and mental areas were found to be 16.80, 9.87, 6.47 respectively which are also lower than the scale mean. The scale mean of conduct scale is 48.00 while the obtained mean of male adolescents is 71.34 and of female adolescents, it is 75.97 which are much above the average. The obtained range of achievement in male and female students is 41.95-86.75% and 51.50-91.50% respectively. Whereas the obtained mean is 61.46% and 70.25% for male and female students respectively. It means the achievement of female students is better than the male students. The standard deviation (SD) for achievement in male and female students was found to be 11.081% and 11.134% respectively. In conduct scale the standard deviation of male and female students has been found 9.57 and 3.74 respectively; likewise for stress scale the SD value in male and female students was 17.35 and 13.00 respectively. The SD for three dimensions of stress scale (ie. Physical, emotional, mental) for male and female students is 9.87, 5.84 & 4.16 and 6.59, 4.44 and 4.67 respectively. Therefore the descriptive statistics reveal that stress level is higher in males but academic achievement and conduct level is higher in female students.

**Table-2 showing gender differences in different variables**

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	t
Stress	M	30	41.57	2.130*
	F	30	33.13	
a) Physical	M	30	20.33	1.629
	F	30	16.80	
b) Emotional	M	30	12.73	2.137*
	F	30	9.87	
c) Mental	M	30	8.50	1.779
	F	30	6.47	
Conduct	M	30	71.13	2.574**
	F	30	75.97	
Achievement	M	30	61.46	3.068**
	F	30	70.25	

\*(p<.05), \*\*\*(p<.01)

Table2 shows gender differences in different variables. The t value of stress inclusive of physical, emotional and mental stress among three type of symptoms only emotional symptom has been found to be significant (t=2.130, p<.05) and gender differences were found in emotional symptom of stress (t=2.137, p<.05). Likewise the difference in conduct (t=2.574, p<.01), and

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achievement ( $t=3.068$ ,  $p<.01$ ) is also significant. These results reveal that male adolescents experience greater emotional stress than females. The conduct and academic achievement of female adolescents is better than male adolescents. Thus the hypothesis one which states that “There is gender difference in stress, academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students” is accepted.

**Table-3 Showing correlation coefficient among different variables in males and females.**

Variables	Conduct		Achievement	
	M	F	M	F
Physical Stress	-.108	.036	-.211	-.317
Emotional Stress	-.188	-.164	-.188	-.329
Mental Stress	-.405*	-.271	-.377*	-.499**

Table-3 shows the correlation coefficients between different variables. The mental stress have been found to be significantly negatively correlated with achievement in both male and female adolescents but in conduct for males only. This finding implies that mental stress might have detrimental impact on conduct and achievement of students irrespective of gender. Moreover, the relationship of physical and emotional stress with conduct and achievement is also negative, although the magnitude of correlation did not reach the level of significance. Therefore conduct and achievement is negatively correlated with stress. Hence hypothesis two stating that “Stress and conduct are negatively correlated” and hypothesis three stating “Stress and academic achievement are negatively correlated.” are also accepted. This means that if stress increases the level of conduct and achievement is reduced.

## DISCUSSION

Stress is a common problem for both male and female students in schools and the way it is managed may be reflected in their academic performance (*Salami, 2001*). The obtained finding of the present study reveal that the stress level of male adolescents is higher than female adolescents. Regarding symptoms of stress (i.e. Physical, emotional and mental), the significant gender difference was found only in emotional stress, male students were found to experience higher level of stress than female students. Several studies have also found moderate to high level of stress in boys as compared to girls (*Vijaya and Karunakaran, 2013*), specially in school students of 14 to 18 years (*Khan et al., Prabhu, 2015*).

The probable reason of greater stress especially emotional stress in male adolescents can be explained in terms of greater expectations of parents from their sons as compared to their daughters. *Wen, (2009)* found that male students feel stronger stress from family factor than female ones. Due to gender role socialization, not only parents and elders have high expectation from male adolescents, they also have higher expectations from themselves. *Noakes & Rinaldi (2006); Crick, et al., (1999); French, et al., (2002)* found that boys tend to engage in more conflicts related to status or dominance.

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Further data reveal that the conduct and academic achievement level of male adolescents is poorer in comparison to females. *Cole, (1997); Duckworth and Seligman, (2006)* found significant gender differences in school achievement favouring girls over boys. It seems that male students are less committed to their studies and pay less attention in class to get maximum benefit from classroom teaching. *Fergusson, Lloyd & Horwood, (1991)* also pointed out that the higher rates of disruptive, inattentive behaviours in boys impairing male learning and leading to lower rates of academic success for boys. *Kalhotra and Sharma (2013)* found that males are disobedient in their behaviour as compared to females. *Kumar and Shravan (2006)* pointed out that boys of govt. and private aided school differed significantly from girls in obedient/disobedient tendency, i.e., boys were found to have more disobedient. *Seligman and Duckworth, (2006)* found that middle-school girls edge out boys in overall self-discipline. This contributes greatly to their better grades across all subjects, also girls are more adept at “reading test instructions before proceeding to the questions,” “paying attention to a teacher rather than daydreaming,” “choosing homework over TV,” and “persisting on long-term assignments despite boredom and frustration.” They are also of the opinion that girls are apt to start their homework earlier in the day than boys and spend almost double the amount of time completing it. These are evidences supporting our finding that male who exhibit disruptive behaviour problems and particularly attentional problems or attention deficits are at increased risks of academic under achievement and difficulties (*Anderson, Williams, McGee & Silva, 1989; Fergusson & Horwood, 1995; Fergusson, Lynskey & Horwood, in press; Frick et al, 1991; Hinshaw, 1992a; Hinshaw, 1992b*).

The result also indicate that the mental stress have been found to be significantly negatively correlated with achievement in both male and female adolescents but with Conduct for males only. *Blumberg and Flaherty, (1985); Felsten and Wilcox, (1992)* found negative correlation between the stress levels of students and academic performance. The students mentioned higher level of stress before exams as parents and teachers impose their high expectations on them. It is possible that on being constant pressure of achieving high grades, the students might have several mental symptoms of stress i.e. boredom, lethargies, confusion, poor concentration, forgetfulness, headache, and became anxious about the thought of results before appearing in the exam. This is to be mentioned here that these symptoms of mental stress have been measured in the present study. Stress symptom before exams are very frequent in adolescent which might lead to low achievement in school.

Our findings imply that the pressure over the adolescents can affect their academic performance negatively. Parents should identify the level of stress and counsel them accordingly. In this stage motivation of parents and teacher is very important. Teachers and parents should inspire their wards to cope with stress. Findings suggest a need for training of teachers and parents to help their wards in developing the skills to manage the mental symptom of stress. The finding of negative association of stress with conduct in males and not in females imply that socialization



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of females to perform good conduct and behaviour does not let them deviate from set norms even after the experience of stress. This seems to be true for the respondents of the present study.

### CONCLUSION

Stress is an unavoidable part of daily life. When there is a change in life, we adjust ourselves to fit in the new condition. This research is carried out to assess the stress and its relationship with academic achievement and conduct of adolescent students in government schools. The finding of the research is that the stress in all three forms (physical, emotional and mental) is negatively correlated with academic achievement and conduct of both male and female adolescents. To improve academic performance of students and their conduct parents should inspire their children to develop self-discipline and balance state of mind. Counselling programmes should be provided to develop confidence among adolescents for better adjustment in classroom, family and society. We require a comprehensive and multidimensional approaches for development of adolescent career and academics. Yoga meditation reading are simple effective methods to help reduce academic stress among adolescents.

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