

# A STUDY OF STRESS AND COPING STYLE: A CASE OF SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Abstract

*The present study aimed to assess the stress, social support systems and coping styles among school children. Stress means pressure and an uneasy experience; it may be you, other individual and surrounding environment. Stress is generally defined as the body's nonspecific response or reaction to demands made on it, or to disturbing events in the environment. It is noteworthy that persistent over stress will impair students' academic achievement, personal and professional development. Method: 164 students of both genders in the age range of 6-17 years were randomly selected from Chandigarh. A self developed Interview schedule was administered to examine the different dimensions referring to social support, stress and coping styles. Results: On the basis of content analysis it was found that the main sources of stress were related to academics i.e. getting up early in the morning, pressure to study, having to concentrate for too long for home/school work, not having enough money to buy things, and parental unrealistic aspirations. Prayer, friends and visit to religious places were the main coping strategies used by both the genders.*

**Key Words:** Stress, coping style, school, students.

## Introduction

Children are the hope of the future and the builders of tomorrow, but in reality we do not “what is child” We are ignorant of his deeper needs and inner movements.

The importance of psychological well being in children for their healthy emotional, social, physical, cognitive and educational development is well recognized. A typically Indian child starts his/her life in the womb with intrauterine growth retardation due to factors like malnutrition and anemia.

## Current Indian Scenario:

Children under the age of 16 years of age constitute over 40% of India population and information about their mental health needs is an imperative and child protection has remained largely unaddressed. 19% of the world children's live in India i.e. every fifth child in the world lives in India. Every third malnourished child in the world lives in India and every second Indian child is underweight. Three out of four children in India are anemic and every second child reported facing emotional abuse and in 83% of the cases parents were the abusers. Mental health problems in children are associated with educational failure, family disruption, poverty, disability, offending and anti social behavior. Among children problems such as child

abuse and neglect, conduct disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, attention deficit disorders and suicide are all becoming more common. (Ruter & Smith, 1995, Zubrick, 1989, Costello, 1998).

The existing resources to meet the mental health needs of the children, manpower, as well as preventive, diagnostic and treatment services are very limited. The emotional and behavioral disorders can be seen up to 20% among school going children (Borich and Tombari, 1997). Higher parental aspirations and overt disappointment at lower than expected performance lead to a greater stress on the child (Finalayson, 1971). Debold (1995) has shown that this is worse for girls This could probably be because, in a male dominated society, priority for female education is low and they are more likely to be pulled out of school if they perform poorly.

Stress among school students is believed to be caused by numerous problems such as school related problems, financial problems, family problems and environment related problems. According to Zulkifli (1988), teenagers always face problems in adjusting. Stress and anxiety in school children are just as prevalent as in adults. Negligence of parents, high expectations in academic or other performances, abused childhood, growing up tensions and demand for familial responsibility etc. the main causes of childhood and teen stress. Parent who are not emotionally available for their children or lack positive coping mechanisms themselves, often spur stress in their offspring.

India is living in an examination oriented age where children are often categorized on the basis of their academic performance which is the sole criteria of seeking admission to highly competitive professional courses. Hence failure in examinations is viewed as a catastrophe. Confronted with the hopeless, stress, anxiety, suicide, besides this, poverty and scholastic underachievement are the two major reasons for drop out (Patel and Desouza, 2000; Haq and Haq, 1999). Drop out has a number of undesirable consequences including child labor and poor physical health of the child (Patel and DeSouza, 2000). Parental pressure besides, societal and peer pressure to perform better is also very high among school students.

**One of the Charitable Trust revealed the following facts:**

1. 73% of students felt that they cannot talk to their parents about their problems while 56% felt that they cannot talk to their friends
2. 31% did not understand much in class and 28.5% students did not know how to study effectively
3. 40% students found it difficult to concentrate on their studies and 37% expressed examination fear and fear of failure.

It is realized that the schools and parental aspirations make children sick, unhappy, hyperactive, and failing individuals. They are behaving the way system desires, not as per needs of the children. Classrooms are killing creativity in children and inducing psycho-somatic disorders. The ongoing globalization is creating

confusion among the students because the avenues of further studies are too many, but they are confused as most of the students are highly ambitious and achievement motivated.

### **PURPOSE:**

The parent, teachers and community play a significant role in making the better future of the children and for this the nature of parent-child interaction and the attitudes held by the teachers is very important. Hence, the project (promoting psychological well-being globally) is a collaborative endeavor of school psychologists from several countries, developed by the International Initiatives Committee (Chair, Bonnie Nastasi). The sole purpose of the project is to develop definitions of psychological well-being and psychologically healthy schools/communities, based on perspectives of key stakeholders (teacher, student, school, community) within participating countries, hence the objectives of the current study are:

### **Objectives:**

1. To identify the stress levels among school students.
2. To identify the difference of stress levels among male and female among school students

### **METHODOLOGY:**

#### **SAMPLE:**

The sample comprised of 64 school students, aged 6-17 years. All the participants of the current study were purposively selected randomly from the different Government and Private schools located in Haryana, Punjab and Chandigarh (Provincials of North India). All the subjects belonged to different socio-economic, religious and IQ levels. All the participants were from nuclear families living in semi-urban and rural areas of the selected provincials.

#### **TOOL:**

The questionnaire developed by Nastasi, (2009) was applied on the selected subjects for data collection. It consisted of many questions pertaining to nature (Good or Bad) of key stakeholders (teacher, student, school, community) within participating countries.

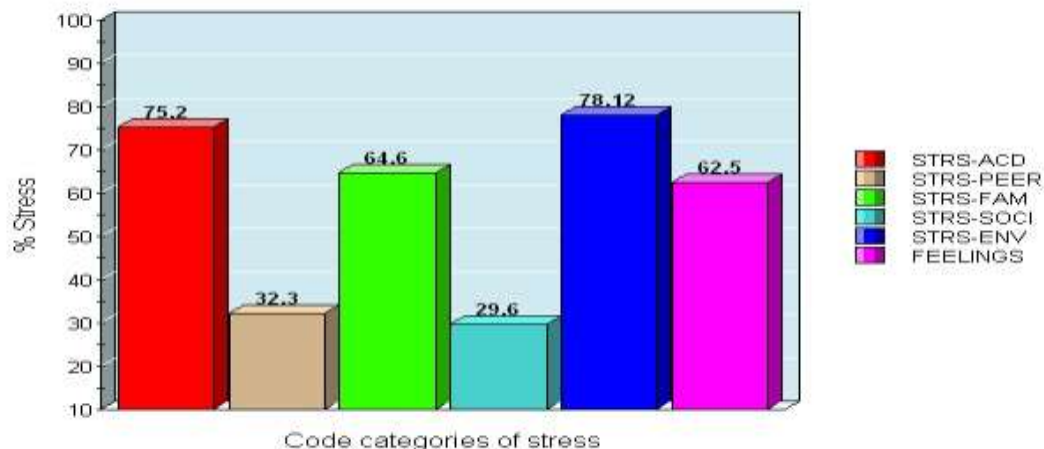
#### **PROCEDURE:**

First of all the questionnaires shared by (Nastasi, B. K. 2009) were translated in to the local language and then a formal permission was obtained from the Head of the respective schools to collect the required data for the ongoing study, followed by healthy rapport also developed with the participants and assured for the confidentiality of the results. The consent and assent forms of the students and an agreement letter from the schools have also obtained. The selected questionnaire translated in Hindi language circulated among the participants and motivated to fill up all the information in details without any hesitation. All the participants encouraged to express their ideas/views, without critique. Finally, the obtained stories of stressors and coping strategies are to be coded for type of stress, type of coping strategies, feelings expressed, and reference to adjustment difficulties related to experience of stressors.

**RESULTS**

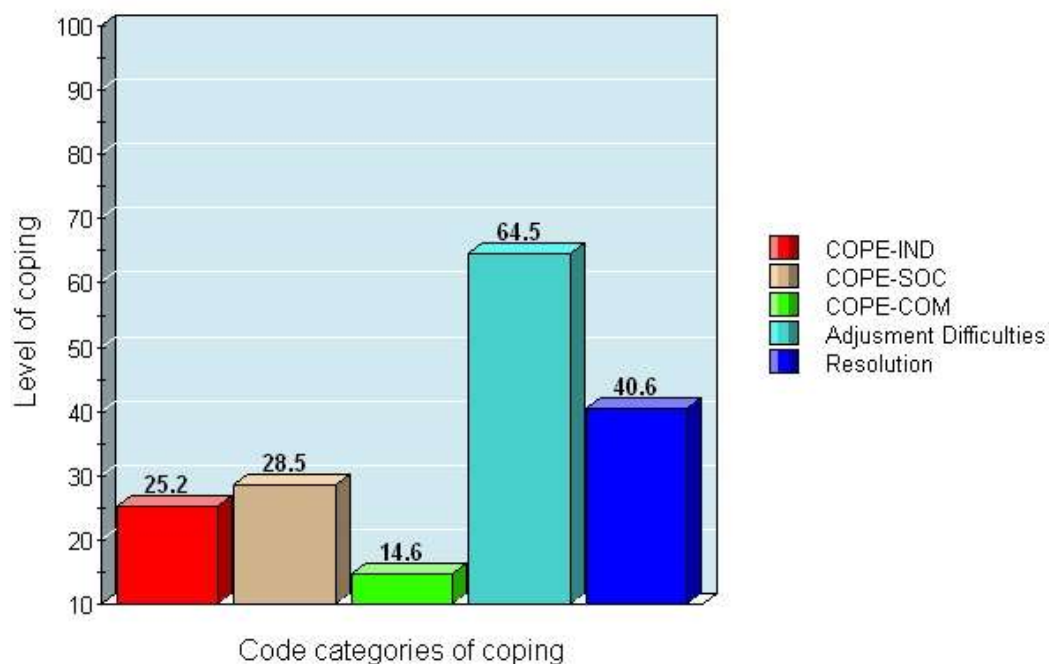
**FIG-I:**

**Bar diagram showing different level of stress**



**FIG-II:**

**Bar diagram showing different coping strategies**



**FIG-III:**

### Bar Diagram Showing Coping Strategies among Boys

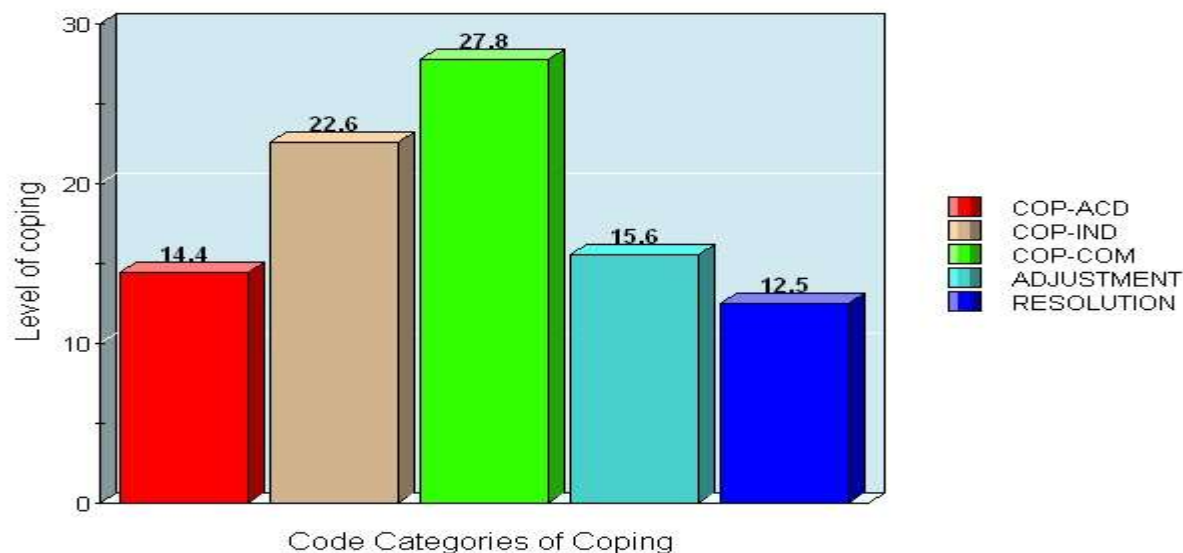
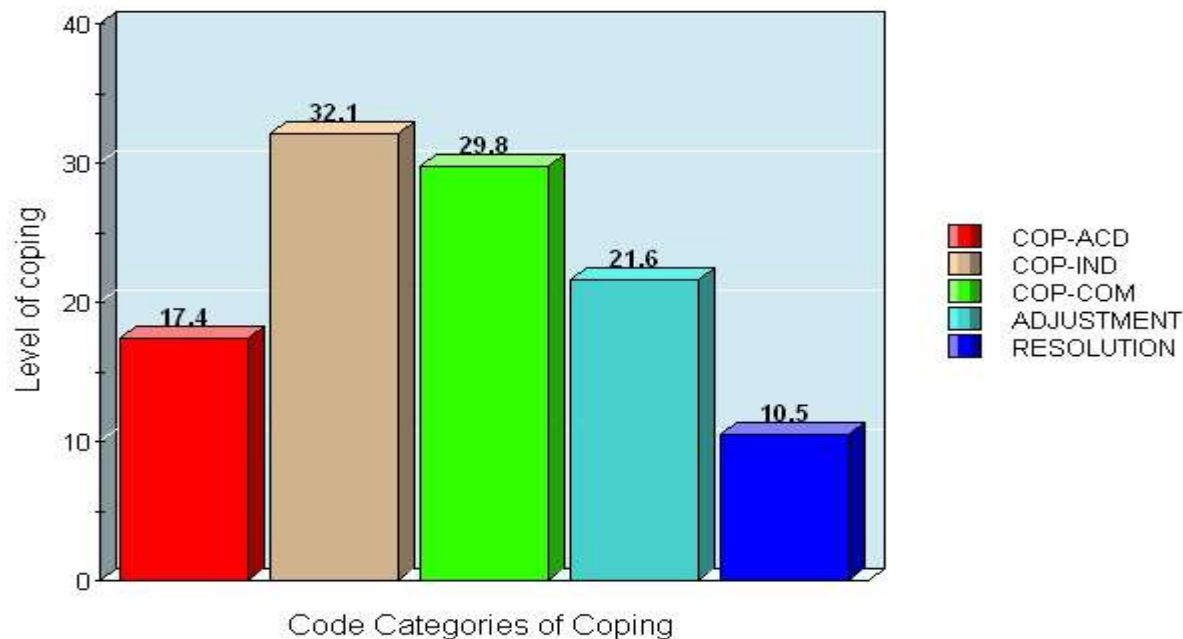
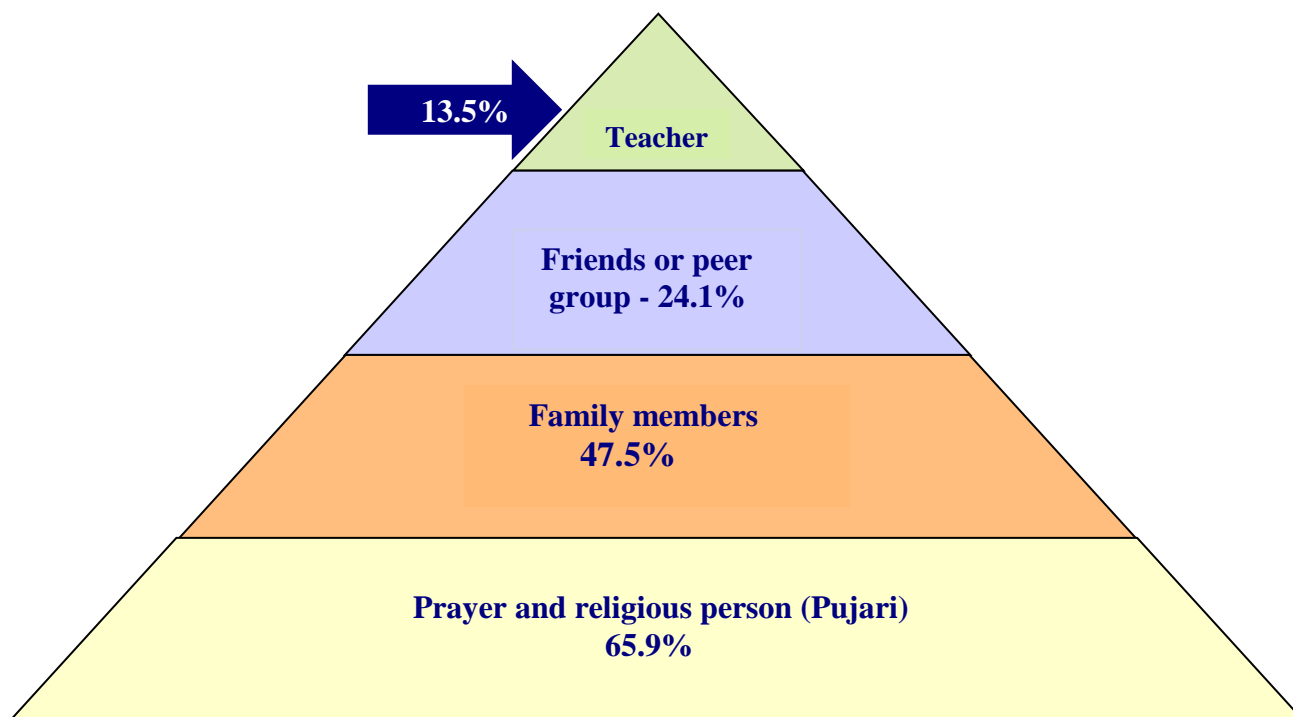


FIG-IV:

### Bar Diagram Showing Coping Strategies among Girls



**SUPPORTIVE RELATIONS DRAWN IN ECOMAPS****DISCUSSION:**

Unfortunately, majority of modern parents/families are under pressure of materialistic society, many of them are seen to be unable to cope with the psychological demands. This pressure has now made the burden of parenthood greater than ever before. Many parents do not place much due importance on virtues such as gratitude, honesty, integrity, kindness, consideration and tolerance. The pursuit of wealth and worldly success are far more important to them. Due to such social pressure, parents and teachers, without thinking of the consequences, encourage and even force their children to work hard and compete for the so-called "SUCCESS". They impose their value systems on their children who are under pressure to be smart, popular and to excel, ignoring the need to establish an inner harmony with oneself.

Even though such psycho-social pressure is there and parental ultimate goal is to be brilliant beyond their capabilities, to be engineers when they are not ready for engineering or to be doctor when they have no medical aptitude. This unrealistic goals of their parents evoke in them sadness, grief, frustration, loneliness, guilt, regret, anger, fear, anxiety and more. An emotional turmoil develops inside the child's mind. In such state their thoughts tend to be negative-that is they think negatively about themselves and their future. Hope diminishes and they fall into the black-hole of worthlessness.

Nowadays, it has become fashionable for parents to compare the academic achievements of their children with other parents. But a child should not be evaluated only on the basis of his academic achievement. We

must accept him for what he/she is, and not what we expect him/her to be. All these do not mean parents should allow their children to grow up without training or to aim for excellence. Society should be aware of the potential of their children, what they can accomplish in future in their own way and in their own good time. Children are not mature enough to plan for the distant future.

Segregation/stratification is very common in school as well as in society and children/people are divided in different groups on the basis of their marks and economic condition. All the high scoring and bright children are put in one section and poor or low performing students are placed in another class made for poor performers/families.

Segregation is like introducing caste/class system in schools. As a result, the schools start detaining or failing underachievers in lower classes. Some schools or societies go to the extent of expelling/isolating poor performers/families out of the school or society. Segregation and detention practices are educational and social crimes prevalent in schools/society.

This type of stratification leads to inequality, discrimination, prejudice, and bitterness among all. Most of the times, the students and parents feel helpless and don't know how to react to this agony.

#### CONCLUSION:

No one can expect a school student to set his sight on going to university, deciding his career, or about his marriage. But one thing is certain, there is no such thing as a useless child. Every human being has some talent, some potential. Academically poor children may be born natural in sports, music or other fields. It is, therefore the duty of parents and teachers to recognize what a child is good in, his/her aptitudes, and pay particular attention to such gifts or talent, and encourage the children sense of fulfillment to develop him/her for the good of society.

Parents and teachers should try to recognize the natural ability of the children instead of imposing their ideas on them. Not all children are born to be engineers and doctors. Yet, when given every encouragement and support, their aptitudes will develop and they can grow to their fullest potential. All the teachers and parents should train the children according to their aptitude and nothing should be imposed.



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