Abstract

Mental health difficulties contribute to problems with achievement and relationships at school. It’s all the more alarming when it is reported that; 80 percent of students suffering from a mental health disorder do not receive needed services. Along with this era of science and technology and the rapid development of information, competitiveness among the students has become increasingly intense, as a consequence, students have become busier and stress is a natural consequence. It’s stated that; stress can lead to academic decline, poor relationships with peers and family members and overall dissatisfaction with life, and increase the likelihood of substance abuse and other potentially damaging behaviours. If one turn to the pages of daily information, one will able to see daily atrocities that have been committed in Garo Hills in the state of Meghalaya. It’s witnessed as many youths are engaging with disreputable activities, taking bullets and guns instead of sitting in the classroom with the pen and paper. If it is analysed in most of these cases, youths are involved who
diverted their activities due to lack of support in the educational setups. They are stressed because of the miss-matched goals, the gap between cultural goals and the means people have available to achieve those goals. Hence, their mental, emotional, and behavioural problems are real, painful and expensive; these disorders are not only source of stress for adolescent alone but also for the family, community, society and the whole educational system in the short and long term. Hence, successfully identification of the stress factors is the sole aim in the mind of the authors of the particular age group, is to influence scholars, policy makers, educational planners, teachers to be aware in the process of formulation of curriculum and in imparting knowledge which could bring either positive or negative effect in the process of carrying out the educational process.

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 20 percent of students around the world have mental health problems (Sidek, 2009), and our schools have traditionally focused on academic learning rather than mental, emotional, and behavioural development. Provost (2006) stated that the prevalence and complexity of students’ mental health issues has grown in recent years nationwide. It has become a critical to all aspects of life, and more of during the formative years where it can adversely affect personal and social functioning of an individual’s life. In fact the onset of most mental disorders occurs during adolescence or youth adulthood (Health Canada, 2002; Kessler et al., 2005; McGorry et al., 2007). Mak et al., (2008) reported as, mental health difficulties contribute to problems with achievement and relationships at school. National Institute for Health Care Management (2005); Knopf, D. K., Park, J., & Mulye, T. P. (2008); Waddell et al., (2013); stated that an alarming 80 percent of students suffering from a mental health disorder do not receive needed services. Hence, an unaddressed mental health issue can negatively impact student’s academic performance and can spill over to the larger classroom environment, thereby affecting other students (Adelman et at., 2005).

The milieu of secondary education has always been regarded as a stressful environment to students (Sidek, 2009). Along with this era of science and technology and the rapid development of information, competitiveness among the students has become increasingly intense, as a consequence, people have become busier and stress is a natural consequence. In recent years, “stress has become an important topic in academic circle” (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Probably, because of the fact that life in general is flooded by many stresses. This is so, because, “academic work is never without stressful activities” (Agolla & Ongori 2009).

Therefore, stress is one of the serious issues since it affects student’s life; its effect could be reflected in student’s social and academic life. It impairs their mental concentration, problem solving, decision making, and the ability to get work done in an efficient and effective manner (Barling et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 2010). Saddock et al., (2000), found that stress can lead to academic decline, poor relationships with peers and family members and overall dissatisfaction with life, and increase the likelihood of substance abuse and other potentially damaging behaviours.

1.1 Justification of the Study

In today’s complex society with its rapidly changing values, stress is an inevitable event in the life of young children and adolescents. The social-emotional climate of the school, the
instructional programme having complicated text books, heavy demands of home tasks, failure of instruction to meet individual needs, undue emphasis on examination, student-teacher relationship, student-authority relationship etc. are very stressful for most adolescents, which intern gives a new turn to young adolescents who perceive education as burden-sum and show their back to the educational system for ever and engage themselves with the organisation/system that seems to be less stressful. Due to the existence of similar kind of situation in the state of Meghalaya in Garo-Hills today, if one turn to the pages of daily information one will able to see daily atrocities that have been committed. It’s witnessed as many youths are engaging with militancy taking bullets and guns instead of sitting in the classroom with the pen and paper. The society witnesses terrorism, corruption, rape, kidnapping, various types of demands, merciless killing, drug-addict, young prostitution, various types of violence etc. If it is analysed in most of these cases, youths are involved who diverted their activities due to lack of support in the educational setups. They are stressed because of the miss-matched goals, the gap between cultural goals and the means people have available to achieve those goals. Again, modernization has changed the concept of standard of living which was simple living and high thinking. Now it is converted into high living and simple thinking, which means to get everything in life with minimum efforts. Hence, their mental, emotional, and behavioural problems are real, painful and expensive. These disorders are not only source of stress for adolescent alone but also for the family, community, society and the whole educational system in the short and long term (Lawrence SN. 1996; Jacobson L, Churchill R, Donovan C, Garrarda E, Fay J. 2002). As a research statement stated by Aktekin et al., (2001); Sherina et al., (2003) that, early detection and intervention may prevent and minimize the exert effects of stress on the students in the future. Moreover, in India and more of in Garo Hills (Meghalaya) particular, very little is known about stress, which suggests that; it requires urgent investigation to explore the issue. As, Chen (2004) has reported; stress has become an important topic in academic circle as well as in our society. Hence, it’s an issue need to be addressed before it is too late.

The present paper is an attempt to provide an understanding into the nature of their relationship and to help in identifying the potential contributors of stress, so as to offer suggestions based on its identification. Since, stress threats are differently felt by different students at different levels of academic and their up-brings. Therefore, successfully identification of the stress factors is the sole aim in the mind of the authors, to have this important information of the particular age group, to influence scholars, policy makers, educational planners, teachers to be aware, in the process of research, formulation of curriculum and in imparting knowledge which could either effect positively or negatively in the process of carrying out the educational process. Hence, this is an important issue in the field of education to study the prevalence of stress factors causing young adolescents in their problematic behaviour.

1.2 Objectives

II. To identify the environmental stress amongst the secondary school students of Garo Hills (Meghalaya).
III. To direct researchers to formulate the question items according to identified dimensions.

1.3 Methods

The investigators used the review of related literature in order to identify the various factors which could be the possible cause for the students stress in their academic and socio-cultural activities.
2. Review of Literature

- Educational Environment

Many researchers studied the stress experienced by students and the demographic factors affecting it. Farnsworth, (1997) found Anxiety and Depression are common mental health problems among student population. Chiang (1995) proposed that school is one of the main sources of stress among adolescents. Such stress comes from too much homework, unsatisfactory academic performance, preparation for tests, lack of interest in a particular subject, and teacher’s punishment. Cheng, (1999) stated that; high expectations of teachers, parents, and self is usually an agony for students studying in schools. Liu, (2009) reported that; frequently, learning has been described by students as a “joyless” experience due to “endless”, “stressful”, and “demanding” academic life. Iype, (2004) stated that psychologists in India have speculated that academic stress leads to adolescent distress. For instance, a study conducted by a mental health organization in 150 educational institutions in New Delhi found that 40% of students feel overwhelmed by exams. Another study conducted by a non-governmental organization with 850 students found that 57% were depressed and 9% had considering committing suicide as a result of academic stress reported by Pasmantier (2005). Linn & Zeppa (1984) found that stress can lead to academic decline, poor relationships with peers and family members and overall dissatisfaction with life. Laurence, Williams, and Eiland (2009) conducted a survey of (453) students, (25%) reported elevated depressive symptoms, the study indicated the exams, fear of falling, shortage in clinical time, decrease in self-esteem and prompt reduction in time spent in recreational activity have been associated with higher stress. Wong, Cheung, Chan and Tang (2006) conducted a web-based survey of depression, anxiety and stress in first year tertiary education students in Hong Kong, the results indicated that (27.5%) of the sample (7915 students) had a moderate severity or above of depression, anxiety and stress.

Misra and Mckean (2000) found positive association between anxiety, academic stress and trait anxiety being a significant predictor of academic stress. In 2005, Kumar and Jejurkar found that academic factors were responsible for higher level of stress among students. In similar line Altmaier, (1983) reported that Stress is marked by overly high performance standards, with high levels of worry, self-criticism of attention while preparing for or taking exams. Rangaswamy (1982) Compared to a sample of ‘normal’ adolescents, the high-achieving students were found to experience greater adjustment difficulties and emotional disturbances. His findings clearly indicate that high academic expectations can lead to academic stress, which, in turn, lead to expressions of somatic and psychological distress. Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann, Murray, Phan, Soukas, & Okozuka, (2000) stated that the academic workload requires that students face a series of peak periods such as finals, there is a relatively constant underlying pressure to complete an upcoming assignment. Saunders & Balinsky, (1993) reported that stress in schools has been related to poor academic performance, coping problems, poor family relations, and dropping out from school. Nelson, Dell’Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, (2001), found that school is where many students experience a time of increased demands, expectations, and stress. Nelson, et. al,( 2001) states; increased coursework stresses students with higher academic success may be related to higher self-expectations for maintaining their high academic standing. Verma et al., (2002) concluded that schoolwork was a source of severe discomfort, and caused students to feel lonely, disappointed and worried. In Rangaswamy’s (1982) finding reported that; the effects of academic stress appear to be most severe in students who performed well in school. Aaron et al., (2004) reported in his finding that South India has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world, and it was found that one of the contributing factors is academic
failure. He stated; Suicide however, is an extreme manifestation of distress, which suggests that for every reported suicide, it is likely that many mental illnesses go undiagnosed, and even more distress that is overlooked. This is an issue that needs to be systematically explored, so that effective interventions and education reforms can be implemented.

Rees and Redfern, (2000); Ellison, (2004); Ongori and Agolla, (2008); Agolla, (2009) concluded that many scholars in the field of behavioural science have carried out extensive research on stress and its outcomes and they concluded that the topic needed more attention. Agolla & Ongori, (2009); Hussain et al., (2008); Kumar & Jejurkar, (2005); Masih & Gulrez, (2006); Shaikh et al., (2004); Sulaiman et al., (2009); Busari (2000,2002, 2011) gave a concluding statement as; it is imperative to carry out research on academic stress because of the fact that several studies have already documented the effects of stress on students. Although, more studies should still be conducted on the subject matter to be able to thoroughly understand academic stress as it affects students, so that better intervening programmes be developed. Hence, Chen (2004) reported stress has become an important topic in academic circle as well as in our society.

- **Family Environment**

Research on childrearing practices indicates that parents with high levels of stress are more likely to engage in harsh discipline practices such as those found in authoritative parenting, stated by Lansford et al., (2009); Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, (2009) in their findings. Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, (2009) found parents who experience high levels of anxiety are more inclined to attribute negative attitudes toward their children, using such expressions as “My child is manipulative” or “My child deliberately annoys me”. These beliefs likely contribute to the harsh discipline practices that will cause stress on their children. As a result Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, (2009) reported children of these parents are more frequently prone to experience social, academic, and even substance abuse. Furthermore, Rapee, (1997) stated children raised in these homes are more likely to develop depression or anxiety disorders.

Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, (2009) in their research reported that parenting styles is related to a variety of outcomes in the lives of students such as psychological problems and academic performances. Chen, Liu, and Li (2000) reported that students who receive parental warmth from their parents will allow them to develop feelings of security, confidence, trust and positive orientation towards others. Chen et al., (2000) found that, parents who are viewed as warm and responsive will have children who will develop cooperative behaviours and will have social competence. In contrast, Chen, et al., (2000) found that children who have parents who show hostility and neglect are more incompetent and have deviant behaviour such as aggression and other adjustment problems. Keshavarz & Baharudin, (2009) found that children who have authoritarian parents are more withdrawing, mistrusting and unhappy. In this connection Chen, Dong, & Zhou, (1997) found that these children also tend to be self oriented and have negative attitudes towards the world, which may lead to deviant behaviours and problems adjusting to change. Liu and Chen, (1997) reported that the control or punishment they impose will only increase the psychological stress on their children. Milevskey et al. (2007) found that permissive mothers were a risk factor for lower self-esteem and poor life-satisfaction in adolescents. These children are also more likely to experience adjustment problems later in life stated by Fite, Stoppelbein, & Greening, (2009) in findings.

Marfatia (1973) found that lack of parental love, over strictness or over disciplined, attitude especially that of father, constant quarrel between the parents, alcoholic parents, low family income, loneliness and lack of recreational outlet are some of the causes responsible for
maladjustment among the adolescents in various areas home, emotional and school. Barren and Earls (1984) found that negative parent-child interaction and high family stress are associated with poor behaviour adjustment in children. Negative parent-child interaction included low parental warmth and affection. Increased parental irritability and criticism, family discord, strife and physical abuse, affect the child’s life. Rogers et al., (2009) concluded that; Placing excessive pressure on children and interfering with their studies may lead to children having lower academic competence and, consequently, lower academic achievement.

- **Socio-economic Environment**

Students and families living in poverty are at greater risk of hunger, homelessness, sickness, physical and mental disabilities, violence, teen parenthood, family stress, and educational failure. These environmental factors are contributors to students those live in poverty being four times more likely to have learning disabilities than non-poverty students stated by Apple and Zenk, (1996) in their findings. If a student has not eaten for days and has clothes that don’t fit, how, he/she is expected to maintain focus in a classroom? Students coming from poverty are not provided the same tools as the wealthy; they are entering schools already behind those not living in similar conditions. Hudson and O’Regan (1994) found that financial concerns cause significant stress for students and produce high levels of stress. When students start to have financial troubles, their outlook on life may be dramatically affected. Many studies carried out like Hodgson & Simoni, (1995); Arnstein et al., (1999) and Saunders & Balinsky, (1993) have found that financial problems during school days were strongly related to psychological distress. McLoyd (1990) stated poverty is associated with increased levels of parental stress, depression, and poor health—conditions that might adversely affect parents’ ability to nurture their children. Parker et al. (1999) found low-income parents also report a higher level of frustration and aggravation with their children, and these children are more likely to have poor verbal development and exhibit higher levels of distractibility and hostility in the classroom. Evans and Garthwaite (2010) find lower levels of self-reported maternal stress and a drop in the probability of risky levels of biomarkers associated with stress.

Birch and Gussow (1979) claimed that poverty contributes towards educational failure, not because of poor children are all “culturally disadvantaged”, but because their health and nutritional status is inadequate to allow for the maximum mental development and for the realization of their educational potential. Blacksher, (2002) in his findings reported that families and individuals with low socioeconomic status suffer from high incidence when it comes to psychosocial characteristics, being cynical, hostile and having a low self-esteem. Delaney, Harmon and Redmond (2010) show that students with a low socioeconomic status underestimate themselves because of the socioeconomic status they inherited from the parents and the performance characteristics of the high school. In this connection Ho & Willms, (1996); Jeynes,(2003); Siliskas et al, (2010), cited in Zhao et al, (2011), explained this phenomenon, as parents who come from families with low socioeconomic status are less involved in their children's schooling and support them less compared to parents of children from families with a higher socioeconomic status, resulting in lower academic performance because of their least interest about the education.

- **Natural Environment**

School building design features and components have been proven to have a measurable influence upon student learning. Among the influential features and components are those impacting temperature, lighting, acoustics and age. Researchers have found a negative impact upon student performance in buildings where deficiencies in any of these features exist. In
addition, overcrowded school buildings and classrooms have been found to be a negative influence upon student performance, especially for minority/poverty students. During this past decade, there have been a number of studies that have demonstrated the deplorable condition of some of the school buildings throughout the country. In this connection Dantesy (2004) reported from the data gathered that dilapidating buildings, lacking mental stimulating facilities that are characterized with low or no seating arrangement will also be destructive and create stress in the students. A study by Coady & Parker (2002) had shown that distance to secondary school had consistently large negative effect on the probability of enrolling in secondary school. A study by Kitavi and Westhuizan (1997) in showed that students from poor families who cannot afford to pay for transport costs must walk long distances to school. In such situations by the time the students reach their schools they are already exhausted and less motivated to learn. In this regard Kitavi and Westhuizan, (1997) reported that the long distance to school can also lead to lateness and absenteeism and even some student can drop out. Studies by Mwinzi & Kimengi (2006); Jagero (1999); and Mensch & Lloyd (1997), indicated that being sent home frequently to collect fees balance interfered with students learning, and consequently their academic performance. The consequences of missing classes have far reaching effects on the students that include increasing probability of dropping out, discouraging hard work, and stressing the students while they are trying to cover missed lessons, hence increase chances of failing stated Mwinzi & Kimengi (2006) in their findings. Scharff & Brady (2006), found in their research to avoid lengthy walk to school some girls make their own lodging arrangement near schools that do not offer boarding facilities. In this connection Scharff (2007) stated that those self boarders are unsupervised by the school and are therefore at risk of theft and self abuse.

Needleman, (1994); Spreen, Tupper, Risser, Tuokko & Edgell (1984); reported their finding that residential crowding and chronic noise, pollutants and poor housing quality all detrimentally affect children psychologically, cognitively or physiologically. According to Hathaway, et al. (1992), in their findings reported that natural light also has the highest levels of light needed for biological functions. In this relation Liberman (1994) also mentioned that light plays a role in maintaining health. Proper and accurate hearing is essential to student’s ability to learn in the classroom. Many studies have determined the level of noise in the classroom that interferes with student learning. As far back as 1917, Morgan concluded that noise distraction interfered with learning and that students reported being tense in noisy classrooms. Laird (1930) concluded that students learn more when the classroom noise level is reduced to 40 decibels. Earthman & Lemaster (1996) made a clear conclusion stating that older buildings usually do not have the main attributes of a modern building that are associated with a positive physical environment conducive to student learning. McGuffey & Brown (1978), Plumley, (1978); Chan, (1979); Garrett (1981); Bowers & Burkett, (1988); and Phillips (1997) have all found age of school building to explain a percentage of the variance of student learning. With regards to temperature Harner (1974) concluded based upon an analysis of existing research that temperature above 74°F adversely affected reading and mathematics skills. A significant reduction in reading speed and comprehension occurred between 73.4º F and 80.6º F. According to his analysis, the ideal temperature range for effective learning in reading and mathematics is between 68º and 74º F.

Overcrowding of school buildings occurs for many reasons. Whatever the reasons, the result is very troublesome for the students and teachers, as well as the organization itself. Corcoran et al. (1988) reported that overcrowding resulted in a high rate of absenteeism among teachers and students. Rivera-Batiz & Marti (1995) completed surveyed 599 students and 213
teachers in overcrowded schools to obtain their reactions to the overcrowded conditions. More than 75 percent of the teachers reported that overcrowding affected negatively both classroom activities and instructional techniques. Close to 40 percent of the students reported that they had problems concentrating in their classes when learning something new. The Public Advocate (December, 2000) for the City of New York investigated the effect overcrowding had upon the school district organization. Stated those in smaller classes’ students receive more individual attention, ask more questions, and participate more fully in discussions in a relaxed manner.

3. Identified Stress factors

Hence, the review of the related literature reveal that the educational environment, family environment, socio-economic environment, and natural environment are consistently found to be the strong predictor when it comes to stress, in educational outcomes and their mental health.

Figure shown below is the identified factors responsible for the stress amongst the adolescents:

![Identified Factors for Stress Amongst Adolescents](image)

As the mental health development occurs in a specific environment in which an adult is reared, the society in which he/she lives; the school setting he/she follows; the quality of living conditions; these circumstances are potentially important factors to take into consideration, because globalization, urbanization, over-population, competition, of modern life are adding to the mental problems, where everyone striving for academic excellence over one's own fellow students. Hence, during this period there is an increased morbidity in mental health problems, and compared to childhood there is an increased rate of depression, with more suicides and para-suicides among young adolescents (Lawrence SN. 1996; Jacobson L, Churchill R, Donovan C, Garrarda E, Fay J. 2002).

4. Conclusion

Stress is a common occurrence among adolescents causing health hazards, substance abuse, arrogance, laziness, un-interestedness, de-motivated, lack of physical and mental vitality etc. Under the stressful situations in the school, at home or in the society most adolescents respond by resorting to defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms are spontaneous reactions to stress which alleviate or reduce some of the tensions of stress. But they do not modify the overall stressful situations nor do they help the adolescents to gain relief from their stress.
permanently. Many adolescents simply talk, laugh or cry under stress. Talking it out, laughing or crying give temporary relief but the stress continues to affect the adolescent. Hence, sound mental health is essential for a fully functioning individual. Only a mentally healthy student can make rich contribution to his field of work. A mentally unhealthy student will direct all his energies to meet the imaginary threats and fears. He will find great difficulty in executing behaviour necessary to reach the goal. As it is being stated that; stress is the most significant and pervasive state of apprehensions and fears which affect students’ achievement (Thilagavathi, 1990; Namara, 1992), creativity (Dagaur, 1988; Badola, 1991) and self-concept (Deshmukh, 2000). In its severity it renders individuals completely helpless and ill equipped to face their problems. It becomes imperative, therefore, to undertake a study and to resolve the factors that are responsible for the emotional ill-health of secondary school students of Garo Hills, Meghalaya.

5. References


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