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EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND STRESS AMONG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

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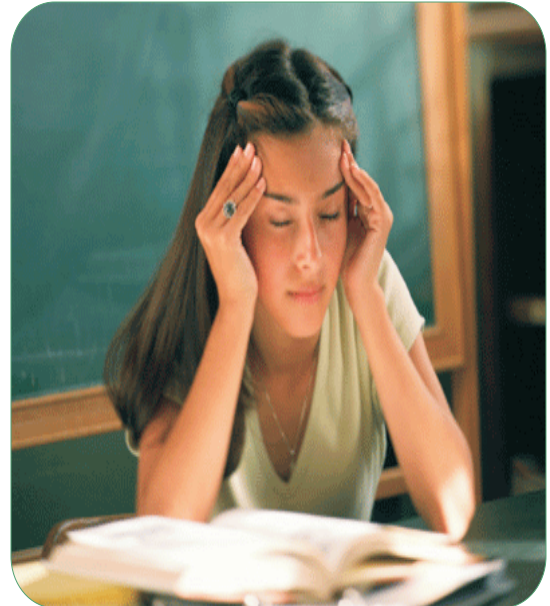
ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted in Hisar district of Haryana state. The sample consisted of 160 adolescent students (80 boys and 80 girls) of 9th and 10th classes from Govt. High Schools. Emotional competence of these adolescents was assessed with the help of Emotional Competence Scale developed by Bharadwaj and Sharma (2007). The stress of the adolescents was assessed with help of Stress Scale developed by Lakshmi and Narain (2008). Results of the present research study revealed that adolescents who were below average in emotional competence experienced greater pressure, physical stress, anxiety, frustration and overall stress than those who were above average in emotional competence. Regression analysis revealed that that emotional competence is predictor of stress and there exists negative relationship between emotional competence and stress among adolescents. The findings of the present research study have implications for adolescents, parents and teachers.

KEYWORDS :Emotional competence, stress, adolescent students.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional competence as defined by Goleman (1999) is a learned skill for realizing ones' own and others'



emotions, for motivation of self and for managing emotions in others. More specifically, emotional competence refers to individual differences in identifying, expressing, understanding, regulating, and using emotions (Petrides and Furnham, 2003). The difference between emotional intelligence and emotional competence is still not clear but the emphasis of emotional intelligence is primarily on in-born ability while emotional competence emphasize the skills acquired through cultural and contextual interferences as one develops (Lau, 2006). Thus, emotional competence is one of the essential social skills to recognize, interpret, and respond constructively to emotions in oneself and others.

The word emotions have been derived from Latin word 'emovere'

which means to excite to 'stir up'. Competence refers to an individual's capacity to successfully manage developmentally relevant challenges (Masten et al., 2006). Emotional competence is the personal and social skill that leads to superior performance in the world of work. Emotional competencies are linked to and based on emotional intelligence. A certain level of emotional intelligence is necessary to learn emotional competencies.

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes one feel frustrated, angry or nervous. Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Pressure turns into stress when an individual is unable to cope up with pressure. Stress can affect how one feels, thinks, behaves and how his or her body works. Common signs of stress include sleeping problems, sweating, loss of appetite and difficulty in concentrating. One may feel anxious, irritable or low in self-esteem and worry constantly. Anxiety is individual's particularized response to stress (Anonymous, 2015a).

Emotional competence can lead to improve health through avoiding stress that would otherwise result from suppressing emotions. Emotional competence helps in developing ability to react, not only to personal emotions but also to those experienced by others. By understanding emotions such as anger, grief and fear, one can respond correctly when someone else experiences those emotions. Without understanding of one's own emotions, it is difficult to understand others through their emotions. Lack of emotional competence causes different emotional issues, which in turn leads to decline in physical and mental health and increase in stress levels (Anonymous, 2015b).

Keeping in view the importance of emotional competence in coping with stress, study was planned with the objective to examine relationship between emotional competence and stress among adolescents.

It was hypothesized that emotional competence will be predictor of stress experienced by adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Locale of the study and sample selection

The present study was conducted in Hisar district of Haryana state. The sample constituted of 160 adolescents in the age range of 14-16 years, 80 from rural area and 80 from urban area. This sample included 80 adolescent boys and 80 adolescent girls studying in 9th and 10th classes in Government High Schools offering co-education to boys and girls.

Measures and Method for Data Collection

An interview schedule was developed to obtain information on socio-personal variables of adolescents. Emotional competence was assessed with the help of Emotional Competence Scale developed by Bharadwaj and Sharma (2007). The scale has 30 items to measure five emotional competencies, where each competency could be measured by six items selected for the purpose on a five-point scale 1 to 5.

Stress among adolescents was assessed by Stress Scale developed by Lakshmi and Narain (2008). The scale has 40 items and measures four dimensions of stress: pressure, physical stress, anxiety and frustration.

RESULTS

Comparison of stress among adolescents on the basis of level of emotional competence

Total Z-scores of different emotional competencies were totaled to get emotional competence score. These emotional competence scores for boys and girls were converted into T-scores

corresponding to their emotional competence as per scale. Three levels of emotional competence were computed on the basis of standard deviation- below average, average and above average.

Stress was assessed in four areas pressure, physical stress, anxiety and frustration. Total scores in these four areas were computed and summed up to obtain overall stress.

Stress among adolescents was compared on the basis of their emotional competence. Emotional competence was taken as independent variable and mean score of different dimensions of stress and overall stress were taken as dependent variables. One-way ANOVA followed by Duncan multiple range test was used to examine differences in stress among adolescents. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of stress among adolescents on the basis of level of emotional competence (n=160)

| Dimensions of stress | Levels of emotional competence | | | F-values |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| | Below average (n=26) Mean±SD | Average (n=108) Mean±SD | Above average (n=26) Mean±SD | |
| Pressure | 6.50 ^c ±2.02 | 5.37 ^b ±1.83 | 3.62 ^a ±1.39 | 17.18** |
| Physical stress | 2.12 ^b ±1.21 | 1.60 ^b ±1.23 | 0.81 ^a ±1.23 | 7.06** |
| Anxiety | 6.96 ^c ±3.75 | 4.80 ^b ±2.38 | 2.65 ^a ±1.85 | 18.13** |
| Frustration | 3.62 ^b ±2.28 | 3.23 ^b ±1.87 | 1.77 ^a ±1.66 | 7.45** |
| Overall stress | 19.19 ^c ±7.76 | 15.02 ^b ±5.14 | 8.85 ^a ±3.47 | 24.17** |

Note: Means in the same row with different superscripts differ significantly at **1% level of significance

Results presented in the table clearly depict that there were significant differences in stress among school adolescents on the basis of their emotional competence. As shown in table, adolescents who were above average in emotional competence experienced significantly less pressure (Mean=3.62) as compared to adolescents who were average (Mean=5.37) and below average (Mean=6.50) in emotional competence. Adolescents who were above average in emotional competence experienced significantly less physical stress (Mean=0.81) as compared to adolescents who were average (Mean=1.60) and below average (Mean=2.12) in emotional competence. Adolescents who were above average in emotional competence experienced significantly less anxiety and frustration (Mean=2.65 and 1.77 respectively) as compared to adolescents who were average (Mean=4.80 and 3.23 respectively) and below average (Mean=6.96 and 3.62 respectively) in emotional competence. Adolescents who were above average in emotional competence experienced significantly less overall stress (Mean=8.85) as compared to adolescents who were average (Mean=15.02) and below average (Mean=19.19) in emotional competence. Adolescents who were below average in emotional competence experienced greater pressure, physical stress, anxiety, frustration and overall stress as compared to those who were above average in emotional competence. Linear regression between stress and emotional competence among adolescents

The results of regression analysis for predicting influence of emotional competence on stress among adolescents is presented in Table 2. The linear regression revealed significant negative interaction between emotional competence and stress ($\beta = -0.45$, $t=13.02$) which indicated that emotional competence is strong predictor of stress.

Table 18: Linear regression between stress and emotional competence (n=160)

| Stress | B | SEB | β | t-value | Total adjusted R2 | Regression sum of squares | F- value |
|---|-------|------|---------|---------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Emotional competence | 27.86 | 0.04 | -0.45 | 13.02** | 0.19 | 1212.77 | 39.53** |
| Significant at **1% level of significance | | | | | | | |

These results show that emotional competence is predictor of stress and there exists negative relationship between emotional competence and stress among adolescents.

DISCUSSION

Results of the present research study clearly demonstrated that adolescents who were above average in emotional competence experienced lesser stress in all the aspects of stress and overall stress than those who were average and below average in emotional competence.

The findings of the present research study get support from the previous research studies. Ciarrochi et al. (2002) reported that there is strong relationship between emotional competence and stress. Emotional competence moderates the link between stress and mental health, hopelessness and suicidal thoughts.

Seal and Andrews-Brown (2010) mentioned that emotional competence is the deeper subset of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the underlying foundation for emotional competence, and emotional competence is an expression of emotional intelligence. Researchers have shown that emotional intelligence can potentially moderate the effect of stress. Research findings of these researchers have demonstrated that emotional intelligence is related with lower level of stress and reduced chance of its adverse consequences (Naidoo and Pau, 2008). Pau and Croucher (2003) have reported in their study lower levels of emotional intelligence (particular ability to regulate mood) was associated with higher levels of perceived stress. George and Shari (2012) also indicated that low emotional intelligence resulted in high stress and high emotional intelligence resulted in low stress.

Regression analysis results revealed that emotional competence was predictor of stress and there existed negative relationship between emotional competence and stress among adolescents. It can be interpreted from these results that emotional competence is a strong predictor of stress, poor emotional competence leads to stress, while good emotional competence act as protective factor and helps in coping with stress and thereby reduces stress. It seems that there is a scope of reducing stress among adolescents by improving their emotional competence. Although it is not studied in this research study, emotional competence and emotional wellbeing are highly related and emotional wellbeing can be improved significantly by imparting intervention programme.

Kumari et al. (2016) also reported that after exposure to intervention programme, social and emotional wellbeing of experimental group children improved significantly indicating that intervention programme helped in promoting social and emotional wellbeing of school children for better living. Positive social and emotional wellbeing are indicators of stress free life and promoting coping skills.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from these findings that there is negative relationship between emotional competence and stress among adolescent students. Adolescents who were below average in

emotional competence experienced greater stress than those who were above average in emotional competence. Regression analysis revealed that emotional competence is strong predictor of stress. As emotional competence is a learned skill for realizing ones' own and others' emotions, hence, there is a scope of reducing stress among adolescents by promoting their emotional competence through intervention programmes. The findings of the present study have implications for adolescents, youth and their caregivers.

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