INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is the mirror where one can see the reflection of the world. The modern world which is said to be a world of achievement is also a world of stress. In education stress comes from many sources: stress can come directly due to various pressures related to learning and performance such as competition among students, examination and fear of failure, economic factors particularly lack of resources to pursue child's interest or even to have access to extra source of learning, ambivalent situations within the self etc. Some pressures causing stress could be external to education. A student may have insecurity at home due to family conflicts, divorce, illness of an important family member, death, financial problems etc.

Stress is common in the lives of students. Stress is common to all and it is part and parcel of life. Stress refers to how the body and mind respond to physical or emotional stressors. Continued exposure to stressors, especially of negative type, will often lead to mental and physical symptoms such as anxiety, depression, heart palpitations muscular aches and pains. Eventually, if one cannot find a way to effectively regulate stress, various physical and mental disorders may develop which may be serious enough to cause disability and even death.

Stress is not always a bad thing. Stress is simply the body’s response to changes that create taxing demands. Lazarus, building on Seleye’s work (1975) suggested that there is a difference between eustress, which is a term for positive stress, and distress, which refers to negative stress. In daily life, we often use the term “stress” to describe negative situations. This leads many
people to believe that all stress is bad for you, which is not true (Harry Mills 2008).

Stress has a positive impact on one’s behaviors. All human beings experience stress and develop positive ways of dealing with those stressors. This leads to another dimension of behavior i.e., one’s capacity to cope with stress. It is the coping capacity that decides whether it is too stressful or not. This is a highly personalized situation. Each individual's capacity to cope with stress differs very much. Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman suggested in 1984 that stress can be thought of as resulting from an “imbalance between demands and resources” or as occurring when “pressure exceeds one’s perceived ability to cope. Stress management was developed and premised on the idea that stress is not a direct response to a stressor but rather one’s resources and ability to cope the stress response and are amenable to change, thus allowing stress to be controllable.

Some authors have said that education is all about coping with stress and challenges. One has to learn to deal with stress; i.e., learn to understand what stress is, identifying common sources, and then adapt to some form of stress reduction mechanisms. This means one has to find ways of reducing stress. In order to effectively manage stress one must become aware of the amount and types of stressors in his or her everyday life.

One of the first steps toward recognizing stress in school children is to understand its definition. Patterson and Mc Cubbin (1983) use a very technical, yet generic definition: “stress is the organisms physiological and psychological response to stressors, particularly when there is a perceived imbalance between environmental demands (life changes) and the individual’s capacity to meet these demands (pp.255-256).
1.11 GENERAL PERSPECTIVE ON STRESS

In this model at first, a person's environment interaction determines whether or not a stressful event will occur. The environment consists of both physical and social conditions; personal variables include perception and cognition, the learning that occurs through experience, and personality. These variables account for some individual differences in how people assess situations as threatening. In the figure, the physiological response is connected to the stressful event by a double line to emphasise that the response is intimately tied to the stressful event. The physiological response may lead in any of the three directions: to coping, to stress related illness and to behavioural disturbance. Without coping efforts, illness and behavioural problems are likely; even with coping mechanisms they may occur. Life events are stressful only if the person experiences them as such. What determines whether the person will perceive an event as stressful depends on
his or her past experience, capabilities and characteristics, ways of viewing and interacting with the world.

1.1.1 STRESS AND ADOLESCENCE

In the modern industrial societies the passage from childhood to adulthood is marked by a long transitional period known as Adolescence. Adolescence is the developmental transition between childhood and adulthood entailing major physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes. Adolescence is a period of rapid physical and biological changes which may lead to confusions, tensions, frustrations and feelings of insecurity. Adolescence is the stage of turmoil and confusion and adolescents face a large number of problems and they have a lot of needs. The period is marked with heightening of emotions like anxiety, fear, love, anger etc. Most of the adolescents have interpersonal and intrapersonal problems concerning vocation, education, health, family matters, society, personal and psychological matters, financial matters etc. which result in maladjustment and ill health. It is considered as a period of stress and strain.

School is a central organising experience in most adolescent’s lives. It offers opportunities to learn information, master new skills and sharpen old ones to participate in sports, the arts and other activities; to explore vocational choices and to be with friends. It widens intellectual and social horizons. Some adolescents, however, experience school not as an opportunity but as one more hindrance on the road to adulthood. A central concern during adolescence is the search for identity, which has occupational, sexual, and value components. Erik Erikson described the psycho-social conflict of adolescence as identity versus identity confusion. The “virtue” that should arise from this crisis is fidelity.
Adolescence is a period of human development characterised by a complex set of developmental tasks or demands that move the young person from childhood to young adulthood. Adolescents are confronted with managing the physiological changes of puberty, integrating increased cognitive capacity with life experience, achieving expectations of increasing independence from parents and family, developing appropriate social roles with same and opposite sex peers, completing academic requirements, choosing and planning for an occupation, and evolving a set of values to guide adult roles. Today’s adolescents are subjected to stress and pressure in many activities and encounters throughout the day. They are faced with increased personal decision and responsibilities. They are concerned with rejection by their peer group and friends.

The adolescent years are a time of unprecedented change, both physical and social. Change results in stress and so despite what is, often, said instead of these being the happiest years of one’s life, they may be the most stress filled (Cohen and Cohen, 1984).

1.1.2 STRESS IN SCHOOLS

Stress in any context influences all of the settings connected to it. A child who is hyperactive at home does not alter his or her behaviour drastically when entering other environments. The indicators of human stress, such as crime and mental illness that occur in the community are also evident in the schools. Excessive stress presents a special problem for teachers and students because it impedes the teaching learning process. Not only stress has a negative influence on an individual’s psychology but also it tends to create a high level of socio psychological anxiety in groups. In effect, a pattern of high stress in schools can create a school burnout cycle in which all the participants spend their energy on issues related to fear.
There is a normal range of stress in any school or classroom. Tasks must be completed, new information acquired, and various skills applied to new problems. It is the unhealthy level of stress emanating from within the school context and from the source of functioning that the participants bring with them to school. Students, teachers and other school staff often bring in the psychological stress that is a part of their lives outside the school. For example, a child may be under a great deal of stress at home because of her or his parents marital problems. In such case the child is negatively influenced by the behaviour of others. Teachers who are suffering from excessive stress as a result of personal or financial problems do not usually leave their personal lives at home. In fact, evidence suggests that a teacher's personal life orientation is a major influence on the social and psychological makeup of the class room.

Within school and classroom settings there are many potential causes of stress: teacher behaviour, class room organisation, curriculum focus, student relationships, program philosophy, discipline code, and parent involvement. It is natural for some stress to evolve from school and class room actions. Excessive stress that pervades the school ecology, however, is damaging not only to students and teachers but also to the total community.

1.1.3 COPING WITH STRESS

The term coping has been used to denote the way of dealing with stress, or the effort to master, reduce or tolerate the demands created by stress. Students cope with stress in many ways, but most of them have certain style of coping. Pellitteri (2002) reported that people higher in emotional intelligence were also more likely to use an adaptive defence style and thus exhibited healthier psychological adaptation.
Coping may come in two forms which address separate dimension of a stressful situation but are often complementary: problem focused and emotion regulation. The latter regulates a person's emotional reaction to a situation because stressful events generate a number of powerful and at times contradictory emotion focused coping attempts to relieve the problem by changing or improving the situation.

Generally, coping is understood as a good way to handle problems with the individual reaching out and within for resources to come to terms with difficulties. However, coping can also be a source of strain. Adolescents may adopt coping behaviours that propel them into their stressful circumstances, which may in turn add to their burdens of responsibility and difficulties.

Adolescents appear to acquire coping behaviours and styles from at least four different sources:- previous personal experience in handling similar situations, vicarious experience associated with observing the success or failure of others, especially family members, perception of their own physiology and influences they make about their vulnerability and social persuasion by parents, peers, and significant others (Patterson & Hamilton 1987).

Coping behaviour has been viewed as one important component of psychological competence by which an adolescent is able to balance and manage the developmental tasks of this stage of the lifecycle. The coping process is particularly important in adolescence because the young person is confronted with many life stressors and strains for the first time and not yet developed a repertoire of coping response from which to draw. Adolescents are often at high risk, because their intense energy coupled with minimal experience in that it shapes the coping style of adulthood. Adolescent coping is not simply a matter of knowing what to do. It involves a flexible
orchestration of cognitive, social and behavioural skills dealing with situations that contain elements for ambiguity, unpredictability and stress.

Adolescents are rarely dealing with a single demand. Over time, they must contend with an ever changing set of demands coming from their own development, as well as the development of other family members, the family unit and from the community. There are two types of demands: stressors and strains. Stressors are events that occur at a distinct point of time, and call for change. Strains are the unresolved hardships of prior stressors. Coping strategies are: attempting to avoid all stress is neither possible nor wise. The body and mind appear to need an outlet for their energies. If they don’t have proper and productive outlets, these energies turn destructively inward. Specific stress can be relieved by switching the stress to another part of the body or mind. If you are feeling tired after studying, get out and take a long walk or run – switch the stress from mind to body. Physical activity, from running to exercise to relaxation techniques, can help to relieve the muscle tension caused by stress and thus reduce the ill effects caused by stress in general.

Often, mental stress is coped with effectively by “thinking about something else”, not worrying about a problem while in a highly stressed state. Risk taking is another dangerous and ultimately ineffective method of coping with the negative side of stress. Using risks to cope with stress is merely adding more stress to your life. Trying to reduce the uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings caused by excess stress through the use of drugs or alcohol is counterproductive and can be dangerous. Instead of lowering stress, you actually increase it. Don’t underestimate the value of time. The fatigue and depression that so often result from the stress of a major event eventually go away because of the body’s natural ability to restore adaptive energy. The process is automatic, but it takes time.
Clarifying adolescent values know when they are experiencing stress because they are going along with something they really don’t believe in. Sort out what they feel are their values and those that they have been trying to internalise but are not really comfortable with. It is more stressful when they try to compromise their values than when they take a stand for what they believe. “Stress is the spices of life”. The highs and lows of the stressful teen years are part of life. Enjoy the highs and try not to dwell on the lows (Cohen and Cohen, 1984). Talk to someone about stress if there are too many lows and not enough highs. Coping strategy focuses on helping students to manage their stress most effectively. Small, repeated irritations or little hassles accounts for much of the stress in our lives. Therefore, doing something about them can be one of the most effective ways of lowering the load of stress we feel.

1.2 NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the present situation we see that students are facing a lot of stress due to the over loaded curriculum and the socio familial conditions prevailing in the present society. Students are finding it difficult to cope with the stress related conditions and concentrate on their learning. The researcher being a higher secondary teacher felt the need to study the reasons behind the stress and develop a proper strategy for reducing the stress to enable students to cope with the stress.

Some students when stressed by academic demands use ineffective mechanisms for coping. They may use “defensive avoidance”, for example, avoiding studying and putting off writing assignments. Teachers can help students develop more effective mechanisms for coping through “stress inoculation”-managing their courses so that students have information about what to expect, giving feedback on their progress and providing a degree of control over course activities.
Feedback is information about current performance that can be used to improve future performance. When giving properly, feedback can encourage positive stress that motivates students to action and can discourage the negative stress that inhibits action.

Students feel stress and cope more effectively with stress if they belong to academic community. Teachers can play a key role in introducing and welcoming students to that community. While teachers are not therapists, they can be helpful to stressed students. By demonstrating friendly attributes teachers can become aware when students are stressed and help them cope more effectively. Specifically, they might help students with stress reactions, maximise the outcome of meetings with students, recognize severe stress that warrants referral to professional mental health counsellors, and disclose their own thoughts and feelings about the course work.

Students are finding it difficult to cope with the stress related conditions and concentrate on their learning. Stress can affect students mentally as well as physically. Students may find it hard to keep their mind on their work, to cope with frustration or control their temper they might get distressed. Stress that goes on for a long time can be exhausting. Understanding and support from other people can make it much easier to cope. The purpose of this study is to help students to increase their learning by reducing stress among students.

To assist students faculty a number of strategies can be recommended:- improving study habits, managing time wisely, learning positive self talk, learning how to relax and giving a student supporting group. If a student tries strategies for coping and still experiences the negative aspect of stress, then teacher should encourage students to seek professional counselling or therapy. This suggestion will more likely be received and acted upon if a good relationship between teacher and students already exists and if teachers are
aware of what stress is and how it is managed.

Developing a strategy for reducing stress will enable students to concentrate better on their learning and increase their achievement. In the present era we find students facing a lot of stressful conditions which prevent them from confronting problems in their academic life and concentrating on their learning to attain higher achievement. The researcher hopes that this study will help students to build better coping skills for managing stress.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is intended to develop a coping with stress strategy for reducing stress among higher secondary school students. The study was conducted on a representative sample of plus two students of Kerala. Thus the problem is entitled “DEVELOPING A PACKAGE BASED ON COPING STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS”

1.4 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The key terms used in the statement of the problem are defined in the following manner.

Package

Package refers to a set of related programs for a particular task. For the present study it means properly planned training and activities intended to reduce academic stress of students.

Developing

Developing refers to, “To become bigger or organised, expand or enlarge, to grow larger, fuller or complete”. In this study the word “developing” according to the investigator is preparing stress coping
Coping Strategies

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as "individual’s efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resource of the person."

Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimise stressful events (Research Network on socio-economic Status and Health 2006).

The present strategy deals with the general classification of coping strategy as Physical coping, Psychological coping, Emotion focused coping, Cognitive coping, Test coping, and Classroom coping Strategies.

Academic Stress

Academic stress is a mental distress with respect to some apprehended frustration associated with academic failure, apprehension of such failure or even an awareness of the possibility of such failure (Gupta and Khan, 2007).

Higher Secondary School Students

Students who are studying in the plus one and plus two classes. For the present study, the investigator intends to select plus two students.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the facilities and programmes provided to the higher secondary school students to reduce academic stress.

2. To find out the Academic stress among higher secondary school students for the total sample and relevant sub sample Viz;
a) Gender (Boys/Girls)
b) Locale (Rural/Urban)
c) Type of management of School (Govt./Aided/Unaided)
d) Subject (Science/Commerce/Humanities)

3. To compare the Academic stress among the higher secondary school students on the basis of
   a) Gender (Boys/Girls)
   b) Locale (Rural/Urban)
   c) Type of management of School (Govt./Aided/Unaided)
   d) Subject (Science/Commerce/Humanities)

4. To develop a package based on coping strategies for reducing academic stress among higher secondary school students.

5. To test the effectiveness of the prepared package based on coping strategies for reducing academic stress among higher secondary school students.

6. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared package based on coping strategies over the present stress coping approach with respect to academic stress and coping ability of higher secondary school students.

7. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared physical stress coping strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with respect to physical stress of students at higher secondary level.

8. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared psychological stress coping strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with
respect to psychological stress of students at higher secondary level.

9. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared Emotional stress coping strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with respect to Emotional stress of students at higher secondary level.

10. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared cognitive stress coping strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with to Cognitive stress of students at higher secondary level.

11. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared Exam stress coping strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with respect to Exam stress of students at higher secondary level.

12. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared classroom stress coping strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with respect to classroom stress of students at higher secondary level.

13. To compare the effectiveness of the prepared conflict resolution strategy with that of the present stress coping approach with respect to conflict stress of students at higher secondary level.

14. To compare the effectiveness of package based on coping strategies with that of the present stress coping approach in enhancing retention capacity of higher secondary school students for the total sample and sub samples based on gender and subject.

1.6 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The study is designed with the following hypotheses:

1. The facilities and programmes given to higher secondary school students to reduce academic stress are meagre.
2. Higher secondary school students have high academic stress with respect to
   a) Gender
   b) Locale
   c) Type of management of school
   d) Subject

3. There exists significant difference in academic stress among the higher secondary school students with respect to
   a) Gender
   b) Locale
   c) Type of management of school
   d) Subject

4. The prepared package based on coping strategies will be effective for reducing academic stress among higher secondary school students.

5. Physical Stress Coping Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing physical stress of higher secondary school students.

6. Psychological Stress Coping Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing psychological stress of higher secondary school students.

7. Emotional Stress Coping Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing Emotional stress of higher secondary school students.
8. Cognitive Stress Coping Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing cognitive stress of higher secondary school students.

9. Exam Stress Coping Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing Exam stress of higher secondary school students.

10. Classroom Stress Coping Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing class room stress of higher secondary school students.

11. Conflict resolution Strategy is more effective than the Present stress coping approach in reducing conflict stress of higher secondary school students.

12. The retention capacity of higher secondary school students trained using Package based on Coping Strategies will be enhanced significantly as compared to those students trained using Present Stress Coping Approach for their total samples and subsamples based on Gender and Subject.

1.7 METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

The purpose of the study is to develop a Package Based on Coping Strategies for reducing Academic Stress among Higher Secondary School Students. Hence the method adopted was Survey cum Experimental method. Survey method is used to find out the representative sample for Experimentation. In the Experimental method parallel groups were used for testing the effectiveness of the Package Based on Coping Strategies for the Higher Secondary School Students. The research design adopted for the purpose was Pre-Test, Post Test Non-equivalent group design (Best, 2005).
1.8 **TOOLS USED IN THE STUDY**

The investigator used the following tools to conduct the study.

1. Questionnaire
2. A standardised Academic stress scale
3. Package based on Coping Strategies
4. Stress Coping Scale
5. Package appraisal Questionnaire for Experts
6. Package appraisal Questionnaire for Students
7. Delayed Memory Stress Coping Scale.

1.9 **SAMPLES SELECTED FOR THE STUDY**

For the present study, the survey was confined to a sample of 900 students of Standard XII and 200 Teachers at the Higher Secondary level. The students selected for the study are of standard twelve of the Higher Secondary Schools in six districts of Kerala. Sample for the experimental part consists of 300 higher secondary school students.

1.10 **STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED IN THE STUDY**

The present study is aimed to develop the coping with stress strategy for reducing stress among higher secondary school students. The following statistical techniques were used for the study.

1. Percentage analysis
2. Test of significance
3. Analysis of variance(ANOVA)
4. Analysis of covariance(ANCOVA)
1.11 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study is an attempt to find out the reason for stress and give suggestion for reducing the stress. It is hoped that the study will throw light on coping with stress for the students. It will help to create awareness among teachers for reducing the stress among the students, it will help students to cope with the stress related conditions and perform better to increase their achievement. It will also help the Government to implement programmes for reducing stress among the higher secondary school students. This strategy will help the teachers to improve teaching learning strategies. It is also hoped that the study will yield convincing results on managing stress in this globalized society.

Also it is envisaged that the stress of the adolescent will be duly taken care of through this strategy.

The prepared strategy will be helpful to empower young adolescents in challenging situations. It will enable one to move towards a more positive and holistic approach. It helps the youth to understand self and enable to assess their skill, abilities and areas of development and also help them to adjust with their environment and make responsible decisions. Coping with stress strategy will also enable them to build up their values and to communicate effectively. It is also hoped that the stress strategy will be helpful to develop self awareness, empathy, ability to deal with emotions, interpersonal relationship etc. At this juncture this strategy will be beneficial for educationists, curriculum planners and administrators for implementing stress free education. The study is of immense use for depressed adolescent boys and girls in their school life.
The following are the limitations that are likely to be crept into the study. They are

1. Even though the study was meant for higher secondary school students, only students of standard 12 alone were considered.

2. In the present study experimental part was conducted only in one district (two schools) sample of 300 students.

3. The investigator limited the study to Academic Stress of adolescents only.

1.12 ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

The report of the study is arranged in six chapters.

Chapter I: It contains a brief introduction of the problem, need and significance of the study, statement of the problem, definition of key terms, objectives of the study, hypotheses, scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter II: This chapter gives light on the theoretical background of the Academic Stress and Stress Coping.

Chapter III: It presents a survey of related literature and studies conducted in the area selected.

Chapter IV: This chapter describes the methodology of the study in detail, variables of the study, design, population, tools used, samples selected, procedure adopted in the experiment and statistical technique used.

Chapter V: This chapter presents the results of analysis made in accordance with the objectives and hypotheses.

Chapter VI: This chapter gives a summary of procedures adopted, major findings of the study, the tenability of the hypotheses followed by conclusions based on findings and suggestions for further research.