

Parents' perception about children's academic stress and child care related issues

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The present study intends to understand the parents' perception about children's academic stress and child care related issues. A group of 139 parents, 68 fathers and 71 mothers, participated in the study voluntarily and they were selected following convenience sampling technique. In order to achieve the objective of the study, a specially designed semi-structured questionnaire was used. Findings disclosed that about one-third of the fathers (29.4%) and one-tenth of the mothers (9.9%) frankly admitted that they could not provide quality care and guidance to their children and in this regard significant difference was observed between fathers and mothers ($p < .05$). More than four-fifth of the parents stated that they should be friendly with their children so that children feel comfortable to share their personal issues with them. More than one-fifth fathers (27.9%) and one-fourth mothers (16.9%) applied corporal punishment as they believed it is necessary to discipline them and/or for better academic performance.

Keywords: parents, perception, academic stress, child care

Education is considered very important in Asian cultures especially in India. A number of studies have found that Asian parents and teachers attach great importance to education and as such, their expectations exert a strong influence on students (Lew, 2006). Education is taken seriously to the extent of sacrificing immediate happiness and taking much pain. Parents take much pain and also invest their recourses and earnings in their children's education. Parents expect a lot from their children and pressurise them for better academic performance. Therefore, it is very important for parents to know that putting too much pressure on children will lead them into serious mental or health problem.

Parental expectations play an important role in explaining the issue of academic stress (Calaguas 2012) and child care related issues. Academic stress is a major issue that affects the students' mental health. But parent's perception about their child's mental health issue is of great concern as parental support and understanding can help children cope with these stressors. Even among children as old as adolescents, those with competent parents perform better across a variety of domains, including psychological development, pro-social behaviour, and academic competence (Bogenschneider et al., 1997).

Parental involvement has been shown to be a key indicator of academic success (Wright, 2009). Parents' level of negative self-feelings and negative perceptions may have relationship between parental educational aspirations for their children and their children's current level of academic performance (Bhattacharyya & Deb, 2011; Kaplan, 2001).

In the case of child care issues, at the top of the list what parents consider quality care is to be loving and nurturing caregivers, followed by specialised training, and a safe and clean environment (NACCRA, 2006). Today most parents are busy due to their hectic work schedule and hence they are unable to extend quality care to their children. The child's first and most powerful micro system is that of the home/family environment in which parents play the major roles. Parent's perceptions, attitudes, and levels of satisfaction about

work and child care are strongly related to children's adjustment and development (Galinsky et al., 1993).

When child care is unavailable, unaffordable, or of poor quality, parents feel less competent and unsuccessful in their parenting, experience more stress, and report reduced coping abilities (Thornburg, 1997). Studies show that many students face a highly stressful educational environment with many experiencing academic stress associated with the expectations of parents, teachers and themselves.

Parents' expectations are shown in their child-rearing attitudes and practices (Tan, 2010). Parents use corporal punishment either to discipline their children or for better academic performance (Juby, 2009). If children show poor performance or are not up to their parent's expectations, some parents express their dissatisfaction and anger through showing harsh behaviour towards the child, shouting, neglecting the child or even using abusive words. While some parents view that being friendly with their children would make them at ease so as to share their personal issues with them, also they try to understand their child's pressures and problems and know the reasons of his/her failure or low performance. While others are of the view that, as a student, their children are meant to study and academic stress or pressure is not much of a serious issue that needs to be catered to.

Still, other parents are there who feel that academic stress is detrimental to their child's performance and are in search for sources to help their child. Latest evidence indicates that a good number of parents and teachers have reservation about some of the rights of the children as outlined in the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (Deb & Mathew, 2012).

In the given situation, it was important to understand parents' perception about students academic stress and child care related issues. Therefore, the necessity of the present study was reinforced. Parents need to have an understanding to these questions in order to move forward in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship. Parents have much to learn about how parent perceptions of schools and involvement in education affect children. Both sides have a role to play in improving academic environment and also the mental health of students.

Site: The study was carried out in Kolkata. The city of Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, is the capital of the State of West Bengal located in Eastern India with a hinterland of over 220 million residents. Kolkata is also known as the 'City of Joy'. The urban agglomeration of Kolkata itself is home to more than 14 million people, making it India's third-largest metropolitan area after Mumbai and Delhi (Census of India, 2011). People from various neighbouring states move to Kolkata for educational, vocational, and employment purposes. Kolkata's schools are administered by the state government or private, including religious and philanthropic organisations. The medium of instruction in schools is predominantly Bengali or English and, to a lesser extent, Hindi and Urdu. The literacy rate in West Bengal (77.1%) is slightly higher than that for India overall (74.04%) literacy rate (Census of India, 2011).

Method

Participants

Parents with an adolescent child was considered for the study. They were contacted in the schools when they came to attend the parent-teacher meeting to discuss about child's academic progress. Out of 200 parents, 139 parents agreed to spare half an hour time to respond to all the questions of the Structured Questionnaire.

Instruments

Structured Questionnaire for Parents (Deb, Sibnath & Bhattacharyya, Banhishikha, 2008): It was developed to gather information about demographic and socioeconomic background of the parents who has adolescent wards. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts who gave feedback on the utility of the questions, the face validity and language of the questions. The questionnaire has three sections, (i) background information; (ii) parental care and guidance; and (iii) academic performance and behavior of the child.

Section I: Background Information: This section includes the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the parents like name of their adolescent ward (which was optional), gender of the parent i.e. whether father or mother, age of the adolescent ward, educational level and occupation of both the parents. This section consists of five items in aggregate.

Section II: Parental Care and Guidance: This section has all total six items. The first item is about parent's satisfaction regarding quality care and guidance to their adolescent wards. The second item tries to search for the reason behind not providing quality care and guidance to the child. The next two items are about parents' friendly attitude towards their children and the reason behind not being friendly towards them. The fifth item questions the parent whether he/she has physically punished the child in the last six months and/or scold badly for any mistake and/or undesirable behaviour. The last item of the section finds out the parent's view about necessity of corporal and physical punishment to discipline the child and for their better academic performance.

Section III: Academic Performance and Behaviour of the Child: The first two items focuses on the feelings of the parent about their child's present academic performance and the reason of not being happy with their performance. Next few items questions on, who will decide the stream of higher studies of the child; whether the child feels stress for academic pressure and how the parents help the child to overcome the stress. Few items ask the parent whether

they feel embarrassed for the poor academic performance of the child and whether happy about the general behaviour and life style of the child and also the reason for not being happy with the same. When the parents are not happy with the general behaviour and lifestyle of the child, they were asked if they would like to consult with a psychologist for behaviour modification. Items on child's demand for costly materialistic items or pocket money and parent's ways to manage the same; and parent's anxiety for the child's free mixing with the friends of opposite sex, discussion with the child about such anxiety and its outcome; are also included in this section. This part of the questionnaire also tries to search for the parents' expectations from their child, such as, whether the child will take permission from the parents before taking any important decision in their life and the kind of expectations they have from their child. On the whole, this section is a collection of sixteen items.

For some items, the mode of response was dichotomous (yes/no), while others were multiple choice items.

Procedure

Data were collected from the parents following convenience sampling technique i.e., parents who come to attend the parent-teacher meeting in the school were approached and collected data who had given voluntary consent.

Data analysis

Analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows 17.0 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL). Fisher's Exact method was applied for finding out the statistical differences in responses of fathers and mothers.

Results

The present study also made an attempt to understand the perception of parents about children's academic stress and other welfare related issues. There were 68 (48.9%) fathers and 71 (51.1%) mothers in this sample. Majority of the parents were postgraduate (44.6%) and graduate (36.0%) respectively. More than two-third fathers and one-third mothers were in service and all of them had a child aged between 14-18 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Education and Occupation of the Parents (n=139)

Enquiry Area	Fathers (n=68)	Mothers (n=71)	Total (n=139)
Education			
Lower than graduate	9 (13.2)	18 (25.3)	27 (19.4)
Graduate	25 (36.8)	25 (35.2)	50 (36.0)
Post graduate	34 (50.0)	28 (39.4)	62 (44.6)
Occupation			
Service	50 (73.5)	24 (33.8)	74 (53.2)
Business	14 (20.6)	-	14 (10.1)
Housewife	-	43 (60.6)	43 (30.9)
Others	4 (5.9)	4 (5.6)	8 (5.8)
Age of child			
14-15	26 (38.2)	17 (23.9)	43 (30.9)
16-17	29 (42.6)	44 (62.0)	73 (52.5)
18+	13 (19.1)	10 (14.1)	23 (16.5)

So far as the child care is concerned, one-third of the fathers (29.4%) and one-tenth of the mothers (9.9%) frankly admitted that they could not provide quality care and guidance to their children and in this regard significant difference was observed between

fathers and mothers ($p < .05$). More than four-fifth of the parents (88.2% fathers and 90.1% mothers) stated that they should be friendly with their children so that children feel comfortable to share their personal issues with them. More than one-fourth fathers (27.9%) and about one-fifth mothers (16.9%) applied corporal punishment as they believed it is necessary to discipline children for better academic performance (Table 2).

About half of the fathers (50%) and three-fifth of the mothers (60.6%) were not happy about academic performance of their children. At the same time, the same percentage of fathers (50%) and two-fifth of the mothers (38%) stated that their child feels stressed because of academic pressure. Without any hesitation, half of the fathers (50%) and more than one-fifth of mothers (22.5%) stated that

they felt embarrassed for moderate and/or poor academic performance of their child.

However, more than four-fifth (80.9% fathers and 87.3% mothers) of the parents were happy about the general behavior and lifestyle of their child. About one-fourth fathers (25%) and less than one-fifth mothers (16.9%) stated that their child demands for materialistic items like costly dress, mobile set and more pocket money.

Mixing up with opposite gender was a cause of anxiety for one-fourth fathers and less than one-fifth mothers. An overwhelming percentage of parents (89.75 fathers and 90.1% mothers) had expectation that their child will take their permission prior to taking any major decisions in their life (Table 2).

Table 2: Counts and Percentages of Participants Who Responded "Yes" to the Questions: Comparisons between Fathers and Mothers (Fishers' Exact Test)

	Fathers (n=68)	Mothers (n=71)	p-value *
Enquiry Area			
2.1 Do you think that you could provide quality care and guidance to your child?	48 (70.6)	64 (90.1)	0.005*
2.3 Do you think that parents should be friendly with their children so that children feel like to share their personal issues?	60 (88.2)	64 (90.1)	0.789
2.5 Did you physically punish your child in the last six months and/or scold badly for any mistake and/or undesirable behaviour of your child?	19 (27.9)	12 (16.9)	0.154
2.6 Do you think that corporal/physical punishment of children is necessary to discipline them and/or for better academic performance?	16 (23.5)	9 (12.7)	0.123
3.1 Are you happy with your child's present academic performance?	34 (50.0)	43 (60.6)	0.235
3.4 Do you think that your child feels stressed because of academic pressure?	34 (50.0)	27 (38.0)	0.174
3.6 Do you feel embarrassed for moderate and/or poor academic performance of your child?	34 (50.0)	16 (22.5)	0.001*
3.7 Are you happy about the general behaviour and life style of your child?	55 (80.9)	62 (87.3)	0.356
3.10 Do you think that your child is demanding for materialistic items like costly dress, mobile set, more pocket money etc.?	17 (25.0)	12 (16.9)	0.298
3.12 Are you anxious for free mixing of your child with the friends of opposite sex?	17 (25.0)	12 (16.9)	0.298
3.15 Do you expect your child to take permission from you before taking any important decisions in his/her life?	61 (89.7)	64 (90.1)	1.000
3.16 Do you have any expectation from your child?	58 (85.3)	61 (85.9)	1.000

* $p < .05$

In order to cope with academic stress majority of the parents asked their children for some exercise and meditation (55.9% fathers and 40.7% mothers), followed by not to think too much about it

repeatedly (20.6% fathers and 44.4% mothers) and spending little more time with friends (17.6% fathers and 11.1% mothers) and so on (Table 3).

Table 3: Ways to Help Child to Cope with Stress (among those who thought that their children are stressed because of academic pressure (Q3.4))

	Fathers (n=34)	Mothers (n=27)	p-value *
Coping Strategies			
Advised not to think about it repeatedly	7 (20.6)	12 (44.4)	0.056
Asked to spend some time with friends	6 (17.6)	3 (11.1)	0.718
Take the child to others family	7 (20.6)	0 (0.0)	0.014*
Asked for some exercise/meditation	19 (55.9)	11 (40.7)	0.306
Others, please specify	1 (2.9)	6 (22.2)	0.037*

Base: Those who said 'yes' in Q.3.4; * $p < .05$

About half of the fathers (50%) and three-fifth of the mothers (60.6%) stated that they are not happy about their children's academic performance.

At the same time, the same percentage of fathers (50%) and two-fifth of the mothers (38%) stated that their child feels stressed because of academic pressure. Without any hesitation, half of the fathers (50%) and more than one-fifth of mothers (22.5%) stated that

they feel embarrassed for moderate and/or poor academic performance of their child. However, more than four-fifth (80.9% fathers and 87.3% mothers) of the parents were happy about the general behavior and lifestyle of their child. In order to cope with academic stress majority of the parents advised their children for exercise and meditation in addition to spending little more time with friends and so on.

Discussion

Frank submission of parents indicates that one-third of the fathers (29.4%) and one-tenth of the mothers (9.9%) could not provide quality care and guidance to their children because of unavoidable reasons. However, vast majority of the parents felt that they should be friendly with their children so that children feel comfortable to share their personal issues with them. The reality is different. For example, in a recent study authors found that less than half of the adolescents (45.4%), irrespective of gender, felt comfortable to share their personal problems with the parents while the remaining 65.3% shared the same with friends and peer group members (Bhattacharya & Deb, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to sensitize the parents about this issue.

A large number of parents (27.9% fathers and 16.9% mothers) applied corporal punishment for disciplining their children and for better academic performance. This finding corroborate with another previous study carried out in Kolkata (Deb, 2004). Practice of corporal punishment is much higher in other countries. For example, Alyahri and Goodman (2008) found that more than half of the rural caregivers and about a quarter of the urban caregivers reported using harsh corporal punishment in Yemen. Millichamp et al., (2006) investigated the prevalence, nature, and context of physical punishment and other forms of parental discipline in Dunedin, New Zealand. Eighty percent reported receiving physical punishment at some time during childhood. Physical punishment on a regular basis was reported by 71% of study members. For many New Zealanders, experiences of physical punishment during childhood are very much the norm. Findings of a Spanish study indicate a high prevalence of corporal punishment of Spanish students, revealing that significantly more mothers than fathers used corporal punishment. Furthermore, more corporal punishment is related to more use of psychological aggression and less of positive parenting. Regression analyses revealed that corporal punishment was associated with an increased probability of antisocial traits and behaviors regardless of whether there was positive parenting and psychological aggression. These results highlight that, though many Spanish parents use corporal punishment as a disciplinary strategy, it appears to be related to negative outcomes for children regardless the parental context in which it is used (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2010).

About half of the fathers (50%) and three-fifth of the mothers (60.6%) are not happy about their children's academic performance. Perhaps they express their dissatisfaction while interacting with their children which might become a cause of mental pressure for their children (Deb et al., 2011). For improving academic performance, parents appoint three to four private tutors or even more for their children which cause academic stress. Interestingly, the same percentage of fathers (50%) and two-fifth of the mothers (38%) thought that their children are stressed because of academic pressure.

Although majority of the parents are happy about the general behavior and lifestyle of their children, about half of the fathers (50%) and more than one-fifth of mothers (22.5%) stated that they feel embarrassed for moderate and/or poor academic performance of their child. This might be another factor for which parents directly or indirectly give mental pressure to their children for better academic performance.

Parents are really worried about mixing up of the children with opposite gender since this relationship might affect academic performance of the children. An overwhelming percentage of parents

expect that their children will take permission from them prior to taking any major decisions in their life, which is very common cultural practice in India across parents of all sections of the society.

The most common advice given by the parents to their children to cope with academic stress include exercise and meditation, followed by not to think too much about it repeatedly and spending little more time with friends and so on. In fact, extra-curricular activities, exercise and meditation have been found to be beneficial to overcome general and academic stress as well as self-efficacy as revealed my previous studies (Décamps et al., 2012; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

Conclusion

About one-third of the fathers (29.4%) and one-tenth of the mothers (9.9%) failed to provide quality care and guidance to their children was revealed by the study. A good number of parents' applied corporal punishment for disciplining their children and/or for better academic performance. About half of the fathers and two-fifth of the mothers thought that their children are stressed because of academic pressure. Half of the fathers (50%) and more than one-fifth of mothers (22.5%) stated that they felt embarrassed for moderate and/or poor academic performance of their child. In order to cope with academic stress, parents generally suggested exercise and meditations.

Recommendations

The study intended to understand the parent's perception about children's academic stress and child care related issues. From the findings, it might be implied that parents should be sensitised on the issues of academic stress, quality care and guidance, and corporal punishment (Deb & Mathews, 2012). Teachers, school authorities and policy makers should be made aware of the need of parental awareness about academic stress and child care related issues, and hence school should act as a mediating role in reducing parental pressure and corporal punishment. An effective parent- teacher and parent child relation should be developed through schools so as to help parents create a better perception about their child's issues and performance; hence this would reduce unrealistic expectations and negative perceptions. Parents should also have an active role in child's academic activities and school. Further, the study also implies the need for creating awareness and enhancing parents with effective and positive parenting skills.

Implications of the study

The study would create awareness among parents about the issue of academic stress and quality care. Also it would enhance the need for better parenting skills and strategies. The study throws light on the issues of corporal punishment within homes which needs attention both from policy makers and society. The burden of academic stress and pressure faced by students today is a common issue and the study implies the need for effective strategies for parents for understand this issue.

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