

Assessment of Stressors among School Going Adolescent Girls of Urban Meerut: A Qualitative Study

Dr Antara S¹, Dr. Chhavi Kiran Gupta², Dr Rahul Bansal³

¹(Senior Research Officer, THSTI, Faridabad, India)

²(Asst. Professor, Dept. of Community Medicine, SMC, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India)

³(Prof. & Head, Dept. of Community Medicine SMC, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India)

Abstract:

Background: Adolescence is the stage when they extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general. Life's major changes are experienced during adolescence like academic pressure, gaining expectations and independence from parents, intimate relationships with peers, physical maturation, starting romantic relationships, etc. Keeping this in mind, the present focused group discussions were carried out to explore various perspectives of stressors experienced by adolescent girls of urban Meerut during their school life.

Materials and Methods: The current qualitative study utilized FGDs (Focused Group Discussion) method on two homogenous groups of school going adolescent girls of 14 to 18 years.

Results: The emerged themes from the focused group discussion were- Physical appearance as a stressor among adolescents; Carrier, schooling and coaching as a stressor among adolescents; Peer pressure as stressor to fit in; and Parents and their expectations as a stressor.

Conclusion: The adolescent period (especially of girls) should be handled with delicacy. They should be educated in the school itself about handling various stressors of their life like stress from physical appearance, parents' expectations, peer pressure, decision about future aspects (from schooling, coaching, subjects to career).

Keywords: Stressor, Adolescent, Peer Pressure, Physical appearance, Parental Pressure, focus group, qualitative

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I. Introduction

Adolescence is characterized by rapid physical growth and significant physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual changes^[1]. Adolescence is also the stage when they extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general^[2]. Life's major changes experienced during adolescence like academic pressure, gaining independence from parents, intimate relationships with peers, physical maturation, starting romantic relationships, expectations from parents, etc. are accompanied by a drastic increase in the frequency at which stressful events occur. These changes and stressful events during adolescence may elevate to maladaptive behavior and problems. Categories of stressors yielded include schooling, interpersonal relationships (i.e. peer pressure, romantic relationships, and relationships with parents), home life, financial pressure, uncertainty about the future, and the presence of emerging adult responsibility^[3]. Academic anxiety has become a significant stressor for the Indian adolescents. Due to high parental expectation, societal demands, anxiety of social disapproval, peer approval, uncertainty in the job market and ever rising level of aspirations, this group is becoming highly vulnerable. Many adolescents become victim of stress, anxiety, frustration and depression due to radiant anxiety transmitted by their parents^[1]. The use of social networking sites among adolescents has dramatically increased since the past few years. Time spent online correlated significantly with anxiety; markedly the amount of time spent on Facebook predicted higher levels of anxiety^[4]. Social Networking Site users who have more online support reported higher stress and lower life satisfaction^[5].

Generally it is observed that male and female children grow simultaneously and once they reach to puberty age, societal restrictions are imposed and male and female children adopt different familial roles. There are several reasons to give high priority to adolescents in general and girls in particular. They constitute a large section of the population. Lack of "connectedness" with parents and other adults prevents transmission of health messages and crucial skills leading to adoption of risky behaviour^[1]. Adolescent girls report higher stress levels in relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners than boys do. Events from relationship with peers, intimate partners, or family members explain depressive symptoms among the girls.

Girls react more negatively when facing similar levels of distress. In brief, interpersonal stressors, like conflicts with peers and family, are a source of distress among them^[3]. Left unattended, these concerns may impact academic, familial, and social realms of life^[6].

Family and peers can be the main sources of support for adolescents and, therefore, protect them from experiencing distress^[3]

There is a scarcity of qualitative research investigating about the various stressors affecting adolescents and their behavior. One of the best way to understand the magnitude of this crucial age is from their own voices, opinions and concerns in this age group. Keeping this in mind, focused group discussions were carried out with the objective to explore various perspectives of stressors experienced by school going adolescent girls of urban Meerut.

II. Material And Methods

This current qualitative study explored adolescent girls' perspectives on various stressors experienced in their life. A framework analytical approach as described by Kreuger and Casey^[7]; and by Ritchie J and Spencer L^[8] was used. For this, FGDs (Focused Group Discussion) were done on adolescent girls of 14 to 18 years. Analysis was done using an inductive process determining various stressors from participants' perspectives.

Participants

A sample of 17 adolescent girls aged 14 to 18 years participated in two focussed groups of 90 minutes each in the school located in an urban area of Meerut. These 17 girls were according to age- one participant of 14 years, four participant of 15 years, six participants of 16 years and three participants of 17 and 18 years each; according to class/ grade and stream- five participants from Xth grade and twelve participants (six from Science and Commerce stream each). The two focused groups comprised of seven and ten participants respectively and selected according to purposive sampling (Table 1 & 2).

Procedure: Data Collection and Analysis

Purposive sampling technique was used for selection of school. The study was done after obtaining clearance from Institutional Ethical Committee of Subharti Medical College, Swami Vivekananda Subharti University followed by a written permission and consent from the Principals of the school and assent from the parents. Both the FGDs were recorded in the tape recorder after informing the participants, taking consent and assuring them of maintaining the confidentiality. The refreshments were provided to the participants in the break to keep them energized. The FGDs were conducted within the school premises (library) to give a secure, comfortable and favorable environment to the participants. The participants were seated in a circle fashion with the moderator and the note taker. A sociogram was drawn to note the less active and more active participants.

A framework analytical approach as described by Kreuger and Casey^[7]; and by Ritchie J and Spencer L^[8] was used. Both the audio recorded FGDs were transcribed verbatim. The FGD was conducted in English language but to maintain the flow of discussion participants were not stopped while speaking in Hindi. And, whenever needed, verbatim was translated from Hindi to English. The grammar of the participants was taken as it is.

Each transcript was coded inductively by the researchers. This was followed by identifying a thematic framework: sifting through the data, identifying meaningful and relevant quotes; placing the quotes under the appropriate thematic category; mapping; and finally interpretation^[8]. Segments of text which were related to a common theme were sectioned together and in this manner budding themes were identified.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Profile of participants of Group A

Variables		Freq	%
Age (n=7 girls)	18 years	1	14.3
	17 years	1	14.3
	16 years	3	42.8
	15 years	2	28.6
	Total	7	100
Class (n=7 girls)	XII – Science	2	28.6
	XI – Science	2	28.6
	XI – Commerce	1	14.3
	X – Class	2	28.6
	Total	7	100.0

Table 2: Profile of participants of Group B

Variables		Freq	%
Age (n=10 girls)	18 years	2	20
	17 years	2	20
	16 years	3	30
	15 years	2	20
	14 years	1	10
	Total	10	100
Class (n=10 girls)	XII – Science	1	10
	XII – Commerce	3	30
	XI – Science	1	10
	XI – Commerce	2	20
	X – Class	2	20
	IX – Class	1	10
	Total	10	100

III. Result

The emerged themes were as:

Theme 1 Physical appearance as a stressor among adolescents

Theme 2 Carrier, schooling and coaching as a stressor among adolescents

Theme 3 Peer pressure to fit in as stressor

Theme 4 Parents and their expectations as stressor

Theme 1: Physical appearance as a stressor among adolescents

Adolescents stated various factors like pimples on face, repeating the same clothes/ outfit, dark complexion, being too fat or too thin, etc. which stress them day and night. This stress of being imperfect due to one thing or the other and an attempt to overcome such devoid they stress themselves, felt low and always started remaining conscious.

Theme 1 Quotes:

- “Yesterday, earthquake came and my friends started teasing me that I’m responsible since I’m fat. They even said that earth will have cracks and will break because of me. Sometimes I also laugh but inside my heart it does pinch and affect me but I don’t want to show. Taunt is coming and coming and I’m like adjusting and adjusting.”
- “Socializing and partying is burden for me many a times, especially dresses, dancing and looks. Body shaming and being judgmental on looks, dresses, etc gives a lot of pressure.”

Theme 2: Carrier, Schooling or Coaching as a stressor among adolescents

Adolescence is the time for carrier oriented choices. Specially, in today’s competitive environment schooling doesn’t seem to be sufficient for conquering the competitive world most adolescents live in. Hence adolescents struggle not only in the choice of stream and choice of school but also in choice of coaching, etc. This struggle leads to a cumulative stress in their life which is becoming more and more pertinent with each passing day.

Theme 2 Quotes:

- “For me the stress is of taking leaves. Leaves allowed in school are only 5% which means 10 or 15 holidays only. If we have to do coaching then we have to take more leaves. Every Saturday and Sunday is coaching. So, we have to take leave from school on every Saturday. But they will not allow us. It’s a big stress. I have to handle schools, tuitions or Coaching.”
- “I feel like if I’m thinking of being an artist, there is only 20% chance to be like M F Hussain, otherwise I’m going to go down. So, it’s better to go for a fixed carrier like if I do a degree like CA or something, I’ll get a job. So, individuals like me do want to play safe also. This is double stress. Carrier, future, they give stress”

Theme 3: Peer group or pressure to fit in as a stressor among adolescent

Adolescents stated that fear of being 'left out' or not 'fitting in' stressed them. Thus, they tend to follow everything which makes them look cool & happening in front of their peer groups. They also mentioned that in an attempt to fit in, they sometimes choose paths their inner selves don't approve of. Being active on Social Media, downloading different apps, following different social networking sites and different TV series including adult TV series, bunking classes, etc were some of the day to day behavior which were inculcated in adolescents' routine due to peer group pressure. These were a great cause of internal stress & conflict.

Theme 3 Quotes:

- *"I think I have seen whole series of Game Of Thrones because my friends were saying and pressurizing me to watch this. They talk about it. So, either you get irritated by those talks or you just start seeing those TV series to fit in yourself in the talk and you get slowly used to it. You basically try to fit in even though not interested."*
- *"When my friends came to know that I have never bunked, they pity on me saying- Oh! My God! You have never bunked and then tease me. I know that bunking is not a good thing, I have my principles. But these teasing are awful."*
- *"In my group in class, there are many girls who have boyfriends and even their parents don't know about them. If you are the one not having boyfriend then you are felt degraded that you are not pretty enough!"*

Theme 4: Parents and their expectations as stressor

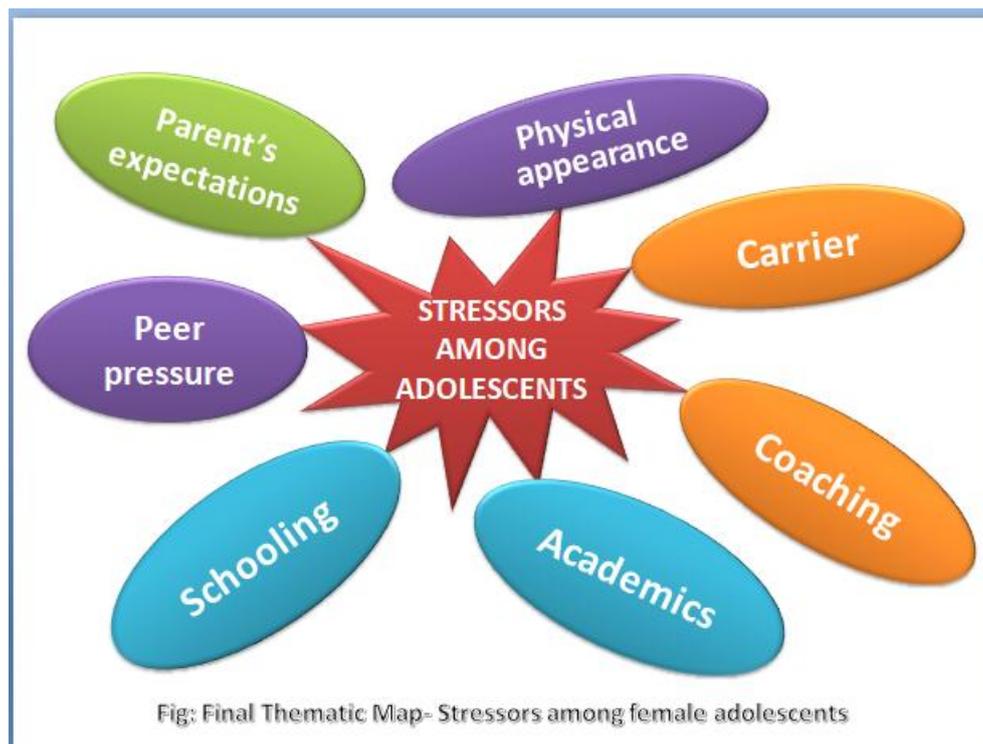
Most of the adolescents mentioned that instead of finding support from their parents, parental expectations lead to a huge burden. Some participants mentioned that directly or indirectly parents conveyed their expectations to the adolescents and compared them with others. This kind of parental behavior was a constant stress for adolescents whenever they tried to do any work. It was sad to hear that one of the adolescent was diagnosed with Migraine – the reason being comparison with other siblings in terms of percentages and burdening them with their expectations. The parents, knowingly or unknowingly, stresses their children to maintain family repo and to bring out best from them. So, before taking any step, the adolescents starts feeling stress internally as whether their step is as per satisfaction of their parents or not.

Theme 4 Quotes:

- *"When I was in class 5th, I was not good at studies as my brother and sister. So, my parents used to pressurize me comparing with them and used to say- you are not good in studies, see your sister and brother, their marks are around 80s and 90s, be like them. So, in class 6th I was working hard and I got 99% and then I could not. It was too hard. I used to work hard but I could get only 97%, then 96% and it kept on decreasing and my parents used to pressurize me and ultimately in class 9th I got sick and was told that I have migraine and was due to overindulging myself and due to the stress in my head that I'm not like other children in my house, that guilt was there and is still present. That stressed caused me sick. In class 10th board exams I got 94% -less than my family people- that was also a stress but I try not to take any stress as my doctor advised me."*
- *"My parents' expectations are very high. To maintain repo of the family, they want me to prove that to our family. There are certain hints they give that they want this and not that."*

The final thematic map of various stressors among female adolescents as emerged is consolidated and shown in the figure 1.

FIG. 1: Final Thematic Map: Stressors Among Female Adolescents



IV. Discussion

Demographic Factors

In the present study, 17 adolescent girls aged 14 to 18 years participated in FGDs which was similar to the study by Maria C et al^[3] which included 15- 16 year old adolescents and Calancie O et al^[4] which included 13-18 year old adolescents whereas Coulter LM et al^[6] conducted their FGD among only young adolescents of 12-13 years.

The present study conducted two focus group discussions of 90 minutes each of adolescent girls only which was similar to Maria C et al^[3] in terms of duration but they conducted nine focus group discussions out of which only three FGDs were conducted among adolescent girls whereas Coulter LM et al^[6] conducted two FGDs of 30 minutes each- one among adolescent girls and one in adolescent boys and Calancie O et al^[4] conducted three FGDs of 90 minutes each among mixed males and female adolescent groups.

The present study was similar to the study by Maria C et al^[3] and Coulter LM et al^[6] in terms of being conducted in urban schools whereas Calancie O et al^[4] recruited their study participants from urban outpatient clinic.

Stressors Among Adolescents

In the present study, the stressors experienced by school going adolescent girls of urban Meerut were found to be physical appearance, career decisions, schooling, coaching, peer pressure and parents expectations which was similar to in their study by Maria C et al^[3] and Coulter LM et al^[6] which showed physical appearance/ body imaging as stressor among adolescents. Taking decision about choosing the career and the academic decision was also found to be one of the common stressor among adolescents in the study by Mishra CP et al^[11], Maria C et al^[3] and Coulter LM et al^[6]. Schooling, academic performance, coaching and thoughts of failure was also found to be the stressor among adolescents in the study by Mishra CP et al^[11], Maria C et al^[3] and Coulter LM et al^[6]. In addition to the present study, peer pressure for relationship status, for social media and trusting it was also seen as a common stressor in the studies by Mishra CP et al^[11], Maria C et al^[3], Coulter LM et al^[6] and Calancie O et al^[4].

Parent's expectations and conflicts played a major role in creating stress among adolescents in the study by Maria C et al^[3], Coulter LM et al^[6] and in the present study.

Since the present study was done in a highly selective group of students from English medium schools only, the results cannot be generalized on non school going adolescents and Hindi medium schools students. FGD (Focused Group Discussion) was done among only girls and thus the results cannot be generalized on

boys. Also, few hurdles were experienced while conducting FGD like noise during recess time and break in FGD due to prescheduled prayer in the school.

V. Conclusion

The current FGD provided important and imminent points about the various stressors experienced in the life of adolescent girls. Factors like physical appearance and pressure from peers have a strong impact on them. Any sort of deprivation in physical appearance stresses them. Parents' expectation was huge stressor among adolescent especially in decisions regarding their future aspects right from schooling, coaching to choice of career and subjects. This makes adolescent girls get easily influenced by the peers but ultimately gets stressed of the uneventful outcomes. Thus, the adolescent period (especially of girls) should be handled with delicacy by family members as they are going to be future adults holding their family. Also, adolescent girls should be educated in the school itself about handling various stressors of their life, not to get easily influenced and to be decisive.

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