# INFLUENCE OF PARENTING ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF INDIAN ADOLESCENTS

**Mom Mitra De,**
Department of Education, Surendranath College for Women, Kolkata.


**Debjani Sengupta,**
Department of Education, University of Calcutta, West Bengal.

*Abstract*

*The broad objective of the study was to examine the parent-child relationship that contributes to the social support system of an adolescent that eventually affects his/her Mental Health. The study specifically explored the relationship between parenting and stress from academics of the teenagers of Kolkata Metropolis. A group of 302 adolescents from Kolkata consisting of 150 boys and 152 girls aged 14-18 years participated in the study. They were selected through incidental purposive sampling technique. The tools used were a standardized test on parenting and a questionnaire that measured the stress from studies. Results show prevalence of above average positive parenting of the entire sample under study. The level of stress from academics was found to be within average limit. Parenting was found to have an inverse relationship with the level of stress. The study has extensive implications on the different facets of society at large. Out of many, the two most mandatory causes ie. environmental and psychosocial the study finds solution to these two causes arising basically out of poor parent-child relationship and excess load arising in and from academics. It also serves as an eye opener as to how parenting may affect the Mental Health of the adolescent.*

*Key Words: Parenting, Adolescents, Mental Health , Kolkata.*

**Background of the Study**

Humans are said to have a basic need to feel accepted by their caregivers, to feel safe and protected. Parents across cultures, nations and communities may behave differently, but the child's perceptions and interpretations of their parents' behaviour work more or less in the same way around the world.( Bowlby,1969; Rohner,1986, Deckard,75).

Research studies have shown that security of attachment is an important criterion for the development of healthy, adaptive emotions and social behaviours. Parenthood presents many rewards and challenges that are unique to the role. Children influence parents and are in return influenced by their parents' distress and difficulties in parenting. The child expresses his needs to the parent in a predictable way; the parent also must determine, attend and fulfill the child's needs in a comprehensible and predictable way. (Deckard, 162).

Once the individual becomes a parent he/she is thrust into a world of great responsibility, challenges and into an area of immense potential for personal growth. Parenthood at times brings in a mixture of difficulties that are at times extraordinary. This transition into parenthood maybe joyful, exciting or even stressful. The child presents an ever changing bundle of demands, the dynamic nature of which may lead to stress in the parents. (Deckard, 27).

The acceptance of the child and the warmth of the parent towards the child is conveyed through child-rearing practices. Distressed parents and those in stress are more likely to be hostile, harsh and rejecting in their behavior towards their children. (Baker et al, 2000; Calam et al , 1999; Peris & Baker, 2000). A variety of studies across cultures and age groups have come to the conclusion that children who interpret their parents behaviours as emotionally rejecting are at greater risk for developing behavioral and emotional problems including various forms of psychopathology, such as conduct disorder, substance abuse and depression. (Rohner & Britner, 2002).

We may say therefore that parenting does not occur in vacuum. The family exists in an ever changing social, political, economical and cultural backdrop, and the combinations of any two or all of these influence child rearing practices. The child is placed at the centre of concentric circles or spheres of direct influences such as parents, siblings and peers. Environments such as the home, school and child's network of friends also affect the child. Influences arising out of cultural groups, nation, political and socio-economic system cannot also be ruled out. Thus the

complex ever changing connections over time are also responsible in influencing the child's grooming. (Brofenbrenner,1979; Deckard,115).

Adolescence is seen as a trend setting stage in some cultures and a deviance prone, immature in others. Although these are extreme representations, the truth remains that adolescents are pretty normal persons who craves to have a good family environment, achieve some meaningful goal in life, be autonomous and have a distinct identity. (Mitra & Sengupta, 2007). It is in this context that Erickson had said that an adolescent has no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity. (1968).

The present scenario of adolescents clearly shows that the condition of our youth has significantly deteriorated. Recent studies show that there is a significant rise in the problems faced by the adolescents including increased emotional disturbances, alcohol consumption, use of heavy drugs and youth drop outs that have accelerated I the recent years. (UNICEF, 2001). School students in India have been found to incur high stress and high rate of deliberate self-harm. It was found that students with academic problems and unsupportive home environment perceived life as a burden leading to higher rate of suicidal ideation. (Priti & Chauhan, 2009). Life for many in the present day world is a painful tug of war filled with mixed messages and conflicting demands from parents, teachers, coaches, employers, friends and oneself. At present youngsters growing up are negotiating a path between independence and reliance on others is a tough business, creating stress. The above circumstance can lead to serious mental health problems if the youngsters are ill-equipped to cope, communicate and solve them.(Joyce,2005).

Globalization in the early 90's, westernization of the Indian society, breaking down of Indian values with the joint family system and opening up of the Indian society has caused the students to lose hope and experience depilating failures as a result of the huge clash of cultures and the inability to cope with the same. (Schwartzberg, 1998). During the last two decades there have been drastic changes in the society and in close proximity of the adolescent, creating problems in the growth and development of the young people. To include some are competitive examinations, reduction of free time, interpersonal relationship skills and low self-training skills causing anxiety and stress. (Jadav & Iqbal, 2000). Their low tolerance and inappropriate management of stress have made the health issues more varied and serious. The trend is expected to become more serious. The adolescent in such a setting is seen to incur increased depression, suicidal attempts, drug use, clearly indicating the changes faced by them. Information overload,

mixed messages from media, press, teachers, family and society at large add to the confusing scenario of the absorbing young mind, coping and countering environmental stress. (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009)."

Likewise the adolescents in and around Kolkata Metropolis are also getting more and more vulnerable to risky behavior, falling prey to socially destructive behavior and personally devastating ways of coping with this stress. Resulting in the Indian newspapers to run colourful pages of joyous teenagers cheering over their board exam results as soon as the heat and the monsoon sets in each year. Together with this there are also reports of teenage suicide due to poor performance. (Mitra & Sengupta, 2007). It seems life has become cheap for these youngsters, as they have turned strangers to the caring sensitivity of their parents, leading to an alarming rise in the adolescent suicides in India.

Student suicide in India has been 6060 in number, out of which 2189 has been due to failure in examinations, with Paschimbanga topping the list with 940. (NCRC,2008). The entire country witnessed a 1.7% increase in suicide cases in 2009, with Paschimbanga accounting for 11.5% of the total cases in 2009, making it the suicide capital of India. These statistics also show how ill prepared the state is to tackle this menace, as there is not enough infrastructure to handle such a significant problem. (India Today, Aug 14th, 2010).

It is under such a backdrop that the present study has taken its shape. The broad objective of the study was to examine the parent-child relationship that contributes to the social support system of an adolescent that eventually affect his/her Mental Health. The study specifically explored the relationship between parenting and stress from academics of the teenagers of Kolkata Metropolis.

Although suicides occur daily in the country, but suicides of teenagers due to failure in examinations have been basically found to be an urban social problem. The adolescents in the study came from parents of varied educational and occupational backgrounds, where the minimum level of educational qualification of both the parents was found to be University graduates. The occupational backgrounds of the parents ranged from It professionals, doctors, scientists, teachers, bank employees to businessman etc. it was therefore felt that the expectation level of the parents, teachers and peers of these adolescents would be well above average level. This would ultimately be brought about by perceived parenting in this examination dominated culture while they were facing their board exams of X and XII, coupled with the entrance

examinations to the various colleges and universities all over the country. It was thus perceived that the parental pressure to excel and stand out for future financial gains was mainly an urban phenomenon than a rural one.

**Method**

**Sample:** The study was conducted with 302 urban adolescents (both boys and girls) in the age group of 14-18 years from classes IX,X,XI and XII.

**Instruments:** Personal data Sheet was used to collect personal, familial information of the participant with respect to age, gender, class, stream , school, address, family constitution and occupational and educational qualification of both the parents.

Perceived parenting Scale by Bharadwaj et al (1998) was used to measures the perceived parenting score of the participants. The scale included 8 models of parenting, that could be studied as the role of mothering and fathering separately as well as parenting as a whole. The final form has 40 items. The scale has high internal consistency. The reliability and validity coefficients was found to be ranging from 0.54 – 0.79 and 0.36 - 0.62 respectively across the 8 models of parenting studied. This particular scale was thought to be appropriate as it would measure Perceived Parenting from the adolescents point of view in an Indian cultural setting, where parenting as a whole could be measures separately. It was further chosen as it could be administered to children over 10 years of age and widely on large samples.

Academic Overload Questionnaire by Mitra and Sengupta (2005) was used in order to measure the academic burden that is beyond the individual's means to satisfy. This feeling of burden surfaces due to curricular, co-curricular activities, school homework, and regular class tests coupled with deadlines that the adolescents have to comply with, making their daily schedule air tight without any time for leisure of their choice. The questionnaire has five dimensions, which measures overload due to personal, familial, teacher, peer group and societal aspects. After administering the test on 659 adolescents the mean was 100.6 with a sd of 17.13. The norm of the questionnaire stood to be over 118 as highly academically overloaded, 83-118 as averagely academically overloaded and below 83 as below average academically overloaded.

**Results :**

| class | Academic Overload | | Perceived parenting | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | μ | σ | μ | σ |
| **IX** | 94.93 | 18.09 | 697.12 | 126.91 |
| **X** | 102.63 | 17.08 | 696.76 | 144.40 |
| **XI** | 99.30 | 16.37 | 713.65 | 141.89 |
| **XII** | 104.87 | 15.21 | 713.84 | 139.89 |

The above table :1 shows the Total Mean and Standard Deviation of the two variables across the four classes.

- Academic Overload in highest in the years they are appearing for the public exam years, i.e. classes X and XII.

- Perceived Parenting is the highest in classes and stable in classes XI and XII

**Figure : 1**

**PERCEIVED PARENTING ACROSS FOUR GRADES**
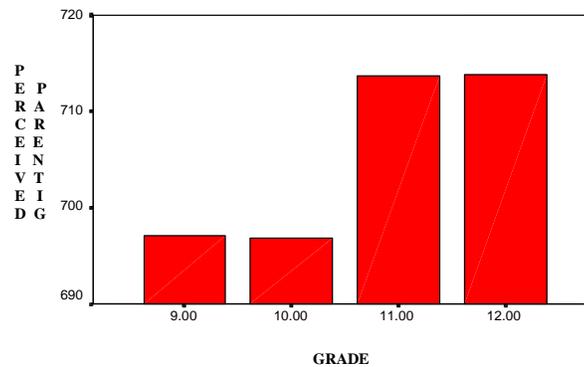


The level of Perceived Parenting is the highest in grades XI and XII.

Academic load experienced by the school children is high in grades X and XII

Table : 2   Correlation Table

|  | **(AO)** |
|---|---|
| **(PP)** | -0.013 |
| | P=0.819 |

The above table shows an inverse relationship between Perceived Parenting and Academic overload of the adolescents of Kolkata.

**The Figure : 2** below shows that the academic stress experienced by the school children in high in grades X and XII.

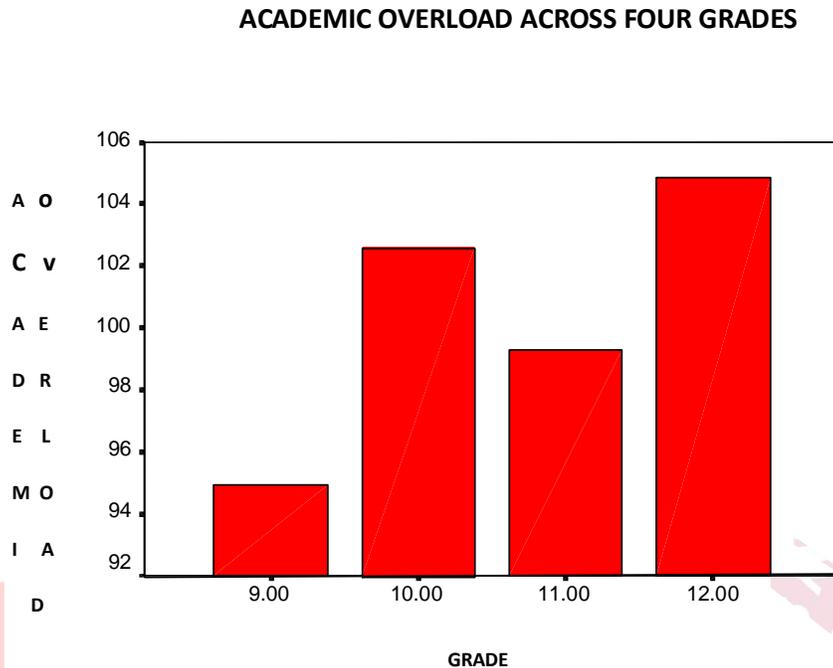**ACADEMIC OVERLOAD ACROSS FOUR GRADES**



Figure:2

**Discussion**

Results of the study show prevalence of above average positive parenting of the entire sample under study. This was probably because the parents in the present study seem to be fairly open in their parenting style resulting in breaking the ice between their teenage son or daughter and be one of their most trusted companion. Such an attitude from the parental side helped the teenager to perceive their parenting as positive.

Although adolescence is a time of attachment towards their peers than parents, we must also remember that the form and quality of relationships that develop with friends is actually an extension of the quality of relationships that has developed within the family. The parents of the participants of the study are well educated residing in a metropolitan city and are exposed to a number of varied situations, to which they definitely exercise control, but to the extent to which it is needed. Together with this they also give full support when allowing freedom too. At the

same time the parents also do not set unnecessary rigid standards, creating an atmosphere of comfort and understanding at home and ultimately resulting in above average perceived parenting. The global culture of a metropolitan city, education of the parents has also added to such open minded thought process.

It was initially assumed that teenagers of today are academically overloaded keeping in mind the deadlines in which they have to finish their work, sit for regular assessments, tutorial classes and various co-curricular activities that they have to live up to. Study results on the other hand have shown that the stress from academics of the participants under study was found to be within average limit. This implies that there is a significant section of the school children who are not all that academically overloaded with these various extra, out of school activities that they are engaged with. In fact they are more than happy to get themselves involved in these various activities, as they use it as an outlet for the vent up emotions in a much more useful and creative way. (Mitra & Sengupta,161).

The present study also revealed an inverse relationship with the level of academic stress and that of parenting of the adolescents. This means that the higher the level of perceived parenting in the adolescents, the lower the level academic stress incurred by them. In other words it may be said that good parenting id the foundation for a house made of strong personality, with a roof of high self-concept, that protects the individual from Tsunamis and Hurricanes in the form of anxiety and stress. (Mitra & Sengupta, 165). This positive self concept formed with the help of positive parenting helps the adolescent to deal with any stressful situation, together with the individual's coping mechanism.

Studies have shown that stress events are centered in the two most important domains of a teenager's life: home and school. They relate to issues of conflict and loss. Loss can reflect the real or perceived loss of something concrete such as a friend or money, and it can mean the loss of such intrinsic things as self-worth, respect, friendship or love. The majority of youngsters faces the stress of negative life events and find internal or external resources to cope and move on, but for the majority of others the events pile up and stressors are too great. (Joyce, 2005).

There are quite a number of youngsters who may develop a gnawing frustration that might blaze into aggression, insecurity, loneliness and a failing of being at the brink of crisis. Some parents may be at a loss to guide them as they themselves have no experiences in facing such problems. Although the role of biological factors in the overall development of the individual

cannot be denied, one must also accept the role of social stressors and the importance of positive parenting in this area. (Mitra & Sengupta, 2007). At the same time there are many adolescents who are able to face these challenges successfully and pass on smoothly into adulthood. (Sharma, 2006).

It is but natural that young people will have problems and will learn at their own rate, to struggle and to deal with them. But it is very important that parents and helping adults be aware of the factors that put a youth at a particular risk, especially when stressful events begin to accumulate for these vulnerable individuals. (Joyce, 2005). This is because predispositions, stressors and behaviors' weave together to form a composite picture of youth at high risk for depression and self-destructive behaviour. (Joyce, 2005).

India's fast changing economy and social realities have placed the critical age group at cultural cross roads of traditional socialization and non-traditional cultural and economic imagery. The exposure to different and at times alien cultural patterns and models, within a traditional environment puts the adolescent group in an unique situation that requires special skills to guide and manage their growth and development. This is especially true of out of school adolescents. (Bezbaruah, 2000). The adolescents of Kolkata being a micro cosmos within the Indian macro cosmos faces the same environment each day. (Mitra & Sengupta,179).

The term social support generally denotes how available and intimate are people's relationships with important others, including family, friends and acquaintances. Social support functions as an important stress buffer. The more social support people have, the less opportunity stress will get to affect then in negative way. (Mills et al, 2008).

Good parenting shows that their children are aware of the realities of life. That is one needs to be strong enough to face success and failure with great courage and optimism. Poor performance in an examination should not be seen as the end of the road. The adolescents should be helped to face the results, and this should be brought about by the joint effort of parents, teachers, educationists and media. (Mitra & Sengupta,180).

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