

Effect of Parental Pressure on Mental Stress and Achievement of School-Aged Children in Myanmar

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Abstract

This research investigates the effect of parental pressure on mental stress and academic achievement of school-aged children in Myanmar. A total of 580 middle school students were studied from four basic education high schools and one basic education middle school in Mandalay, Myanmar. They were given the Perceived Parental Pressure Scale and the School Anxiety Scale, with the help of scores obtained on Raven's Progressive Matrices, the subjects were divided into three intelligence level groups. The Perceived Parental Pressure Scale is a 15-item tool with a 3-point scale format to measure the child's perceptions of parental high standard for academic achievement. The School Anxiety Scale contains 28-item tool with 4-point scale format to assess the level of intensity of the school anxiety state. Raven's Progressive Matrices, is a nonverbal intelligence test consisting 36 matrices or designs which demand the subject's completion to determine his or her level of intelligence. Results show that there was a negative correlation, i.e. $-.09$ between intelligence and parental pressure. Correlation between intelligence and achievement was moderate with a value of $.36$. Moreover, the difference between the effect of parental pressure on mental stress and achievement of high intelligence groups and that of low intelligence groups was not significant by analyzing with the ANOVA, but with medium intelligence groups it served as a driving force to achieve. Then, the female subjects responded to parental pressure more than male and they achieved success in education higher than the males. According to the findings, if the parents want to push their children to achieve their target, it would be effective with children who are average in intelligence under medium intensity pressure.

Key words: parental pressure, mental stress, achievement of school-aged children

1. Introduction Stress in Children

People prefer to believe that mental stress is an adult matter, and it has nothing to do with children. Their life is stress free and they enjoy life without any burden or worry. But it is not true.

Researchers, who are interested in psychological stress in children, found that children also experience mental stress as adult do. Do they face more stress than their predecessor? No one really knows the answer, but it does seem that their stressors have increased. They experience more stressful environment.

Even though the negative effect of stress is talked about more loudly, not all stress is bad. Selye used the term eustress to describe the positive features of stress.

Competing in an athletic event, writing an essay, or going to a museum, all require the body to expend energy. Selye doesn't say we should avoid these pleasures in life.

Some stress is even good for us. It keeps own body and mind alert and even boost performance level. But too much stress can be overwhelming. This is especially true for children.

Causes of Stress in Children

Children experience stress for a number of reasons. The causes can be loosely grouped into four categories. Physical stressors are caused by factors such as poor nutrition, inadequate sleep, extreme temperature, illness and disease, lack of light, growth spurts and ability leaps.

Changes in a child's life such as a new routine, different caregiver, unfamiliar environment, disruption in home life or entry into a new developmental stage can be stressful. Any change, no matter how positive, will create stress.

Feeling, both positive and negative, can be stressful. Extreme emotions of joy or excitement can just as difficult to cope with as feelings of fear, confusion or anger.

Too much of anything can be stressful. An over-abundance of activity, freedom, stimulation, and challenge or boredom can be difficult for a child to handle.

Literature Review

Recently, many researches had been done concerning child stress and its relationship with school performance. Life for many children is a painful tug of war filled with mixed messages and conflicting demands from parents, teachers, friends and oneself. It is a tough business. It can cause stress for children who are ill-equipped to cope, communicate and solve problems.

Parent involvement in child's affair can be a source of stress. If parents pressed children too much to do something, it would be a burden if the child cannot cope with the situation. But not all the effect of stress is detrimental. Sometimes it keeps child's mind and body alert and even boosts performance level. Parent involvement in moderation or right amount could be beneficial to the child.

Monitoring the use of children's out-of-school time and daily activities, is a positive correlate of student achievement (Clark, 1983) and has been demonstrated to be critical for reducing adolescents involvement in substance abuse (Baumrind, 1991).

Student grades are significantly and positively related to parental monitoring of homework completion and keeping close track of student's performance in school (Clark, 1983).

Parental discipline characterized by setting clear standards, enforcing rules, and encouraging discussion, negotiation, and independence is associated with positive academic outcomes (Patterson, 1992).

In contrast, permissive (under control) and authoritarian (over control) parenting are negatively correlated with student achievement, as measured by grades and standardized test scores.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed at finding the effect of parental pressure on mental stress and achievement of school-age children. (14 years).

Generally speaking, parental pressure on the children to achieve academically could have an adverse effect. Parental involvement would be a source of stress. Pushing

the children what parents think he should do would be overwhelming if the child does have neither effective coping strategy nor ability in academic tasks.

But children might not experience equal mental stress from the same situation. It would depend on the perception of the child on the situation. Some would interpret parental pressure as source of stress, but some do not. They would perceive parental involvement as warmth and care, when the parents are taking interest in their academic matters, or helping them as they need. For those children, parental pressure might become a drive, a push for them to try harder in their school works and achieve higher.

Subjects

A total of 580 students from schools situated at three different areas of Mandalay were used as subjects. 250 students (150 males and 100 females) from two popular high schools Number 1 and Number 8 from the down town area, 230 students (91 males and 139 females) from one high school Number 13 and one middle school Number 12, and 100 students (54 males and 46 females) from one high school Number 26 from the suburban area. All the students were attending 8th standards and were of 14 years in age.

Measures

Parental Pressure

The Parental Pressure Scale was constructed by the author for use in this study. It consisted of 15 statements with a test-retest reliability of 0.69.

School Anxiety

The School Anxiety Scale, which was to be used in this study, was developed by the same author. It consisted of 28 items, with internal consistency reliability of .88.

Intelligence

To assess the intelligence levels of the children, Raven's Progressive Matrices was used in this study.

4. Research Results

Results of Analysis

The scores obtained on Perceived Parental Pressure Scale were tabulated in Appendices for each subject at different school. School Anxiety Scores for each subject was shown in Appendix. Raven's progressive Matrices Scores for all subjects at different schools were presented in Appendices. Subjects were divided into three groups based on the scores obtained on RPM's and parental pressure scale.

The correlations between measures used for the study were determined and tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1
Correlations between measures

	School	Sex	Mental Stress	Intelligence	Parental pressure	Achievement
School	-					
Sex	.23***	-				
Mental Stress	.15***	.16***	-			
Intelligence	-.18***	.14***	-.01	-		
Parental pressure	.07	-.03	.11**	-.09*	-	
Achievement	.04	.36***	.12**	.36***	.18*	-

*p < .05. **p < .01, ***p < .001.

An ANOVA was computed to determine the effect of parental pressure on mental stress and school achievement with high IQ students. The results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Means and standard deviations of mental stress and achievement for three different parental pressure groups with the result of ANOVA (IQ - High)

Scale	1 Low parental Pressure	2 Average parental pressure	3 High parental pressure	F Value
Mental Stress	56.39 (13.95)	60.54 (16.68)	52.50 (13.19)	1.38
Achievement	251.61(21.77)	248.58(34.15)	246.10(15.97)	0.12

The effects of parental pressure on mental stress and achievement with average IQ in terms of means and standard deviations were shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Means and standard deviation of mental stress and achievement for three different parental pressure groups with the results of ANOVA (IQ - Average)

Scale	1 Low parental Pressure	2 Average parental pressure	3 High parental pressure	F Value
Mental Stress	61.97(16.04)	65.19(15.99)	68.13(19.38)	1.61
Achievement	205.50(49.80)	226.49(40.21)	221.17(39.84)	4.31*

*P < .05

ANOVA were computed to determine the effect of parental pressure on mental stress and achievement with low IQ students. The results were shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Means and standard deviation of mental stress and achievement for three different parental pressure groups with the results of ANOVA (IQ - Low)

Scale	1 Low parental Pressure	2 Average parental pressure	3 High parental pressure	F Value
Mental Stress	59.54(16.16)	61.56(17.67)	63.18(16.28)	0.17
Achievement	178.00(60.89)	206.39(40.91)	213.59(46.35)	2.40

Perceived parental pressure scores for different sexes in relation to achievement were computed and shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Means, standard deviations and t value for the two different gender of student groups

Scale	1 Boys	2 Girls	t Value
Mental Stress	61.11 (17.02)	66.37 (15.82)	-3.86***
Achievement	209.04 (45.45)	239.34 (33.55)	-9.16***

*** p< .001

5. Discussion

Results show that there was a negative correlation, i.e. $- .09$ between intelligence and parental pressure. Correlation between intelligence and achievement was moderate with a value of $.36$.

Generally speaking, the effect of mental stress on achievement would be negative. The higher the mental stress on the student, the lower the achievement would be. But it was not true with intelligent students. Table 2 shows three different parental pressures with resulting perceived mental stress and achievement scores. Even though the three groups received three different levels of parental pressure, their perception of the parental pressure did not differ. F value for mental stress, as shown in table 2 was 1.38 , which was not significant.

The achievement levels were shown in the same table. The achievement level of the low pressure group did not differ from that of the high pressure group. The value was 0.12 which was not significant effect of parental pressure on achievement level of high IQ subjects.

For the high level intelligence group, they did not perceive parental involvement to achieve as mental stress. There was no adverse effect on their achievement level.

The picture was different with average level intelligence group. For three parental pressure groups, as shown in Table 3, the achievement level was highest with average parental pressure. The effect of parental pressure on the achievement was significant. The F value was 4.31 which were significant at $.05$ level.

With low IQ group, there was no difference in perceived parental pressure and its effect on achievement. As show in Table 4, the F values were not significant.

Then, the female subjects responded to parental pressure more than male and they achieved success in education higher than the males.

6. Conclusion

As shown in Table 1, there was a negative correlation, i.e. $- .09$ between intelligence and parental pressure. Correlation between intelligence and achievement was moderate with a value of $.36$.

Correlation between sex and mental stress was $.16$, which was significant. That was to say that depending on the sex of the subject, there was a significant difference in perception concerning with parental pressure.

To determine the effect of parental pressure, mental stress and achievement of school-aged children, a total of 580 students from four high schools and one middle school in Mandalay were given perceived parental pressure scale and school anxiety scale, with the help of scores obtained on RPM's, the subjects were divided into three intelligence level groups.

It was found that the effect of parental pressure and mental stress on achievement of high intelligence group and low intelligence group was negligible. But with medium intelligence groups it served as a driving force to achieve. The average parental pressure was found to be effective than high or low parental pressure.

It could be concluded that if parents want to push their children to achieve higher, it would be effective with average intelligence children with medium intensity of pressure.

Moreover, the female subjects perceived parental pressure more than male subjects and they achieved higher than the males.

As indicated in Table 5, perception of parental pressure was different for boys and girls. That was why they had different mean values of mental stress, and the difference between them as significant. There was also a significant difference in their achievement scores with a 't' value of 9.16.

7. Recommendations

The following have been recommended: The effect of parental pressure and mental stress on achievement of high intelligence groups and low intelligence groups was negligible because high intelligence groups were used to conduct these habits; on the other hand, children with low intelligence cannot absorb these pressure and stress. But children with average intelligence groups can accept the driving force of their parents' pressure and mental stress if ever they are given. Children with average intelligence can get effectiveness if they are given pressure with medium intensity.

Limitation

This research needs to find out the Parental Pressure that causes the high intensity of anxiety. (Parental pressure effects children's mental stress in their average level: it seems that the children at 8th standard can have the psychological tolerance if they are taken as subjects and so there is no difference in children's intensity of anxiety.)

Future Plan

Research should be extended on the children at the primary school level whether there is an effect in their achievement or not by means of mental stress.

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