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### Stress among Students Engaged in Out-Of-School Activities in South India

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#### KEYWORDS

Stress; out-of-school activity; south India; students; over-scheduled

#### A B S T R A C T

The activity patterns of 1820 young south-Indian adolescents between the age group of 12 to 14 years were studied to investigate the relationship between participation in out-of-school activities and activity induced stress. Regardless of the beneficial effects gained by students who participate in 'Out-of-school' activities, it is necessary to find out if it causes any detrimental effect on them due to overscheduling. The tool 'Activity stress indicator' was modified exclusively based on the "The over-scheduled child" tool developed by Rosenfeld and Wise. The study was conducted in Chennai during the period of January 2011 to April 2011. The collected data was analyzed using appropriate statistical tests with SPSS version 16. Results indicated that majority of the female adolescents have higher activity related stress than the male adolescents ( $p=0.018$ ). Further, children who participated in competitions in out-of-school had greater stress compared to the non-participants in competitions ( $p=0.017$ ). The key finding of the study illustrates that activity stress was significantly higher among over-scheduled participants than those who had moderate to minimal activity levels ( $p=0.021$ ). Thus, appropriate interventions must be planned in order to reduce the stress levels caused by overscheduling of out-of-school activities among young adolescents.

#### Introduction

'Out-of-school' activities (which include co-curricular and extra-curricular activities) can teach children the real world skills that encourage life-long interests, spirit of teamwork, leadership skills, responsibility and discipline. They train children to multitask and micromanage (Deliz, 2010) as they juggle the demands of school, friends,

and family (Davidson, 2006). 'Out-of-school' activities also allow children to boost their self-esteem as they learn to perform in something they enjoy. They may find friends that share their common interests and also meet children from other backgrounds (Deliz, 2010). Academically, regular participation in 'out-of-school'

activities also leads to better grades and also reduces absenteeism (Wilson, 2009).

As the present generation has also become so explorative, expressive and keen on pursuing their talents, the levels of participation also seem to have risen remarkably, and as children feel the urge to make a place in their area of interest where competition levels are really high too. High levels of competition mean more efforts to excel, which further means more hours into activity participation, leading to over-scheduling and stress. No matter of the age, students can become frustrated if they are overworked with school, co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Older students sometimes juggle jobs as well. Students need time to study, relax with peers and join family time. Further, engaging children in extracurricular activities at an early age can cause burnout. This disadvantage can grow into resentment as well. As a result, children might want to quit the sport or activity due to fear of disappointing their parents (Moss, 2010).

Thus, we aim to analyze the impact of 'out-of-school' activities among children which will in turn throw more light on the composite detrimental effect of participating in 'out-of-school' activities.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Participants**

In India, the academic examination which decides the specialization for an individual's career prospect is taken up during 15-16 years (late adolescents) and cannot afford time for 'out-of-school' activities. The children below 12 years are too young and cannot verbalize the feeling of stress towards participation levels in various activities. Therefore, the researcher decided

that the young adolescents in the age of 12-14 years are appropriate age group to study the influence of participation in 'out-of-school' activities. A total of 1820 young adolescents were selected from different schools using multistage sampling technique, of which only 1326 young adolescents with mean age of 13.04 years participated in this study excluding the non-respondents and non-participants. The study was conducted in Chennai during the period of January 2011 to April 2011.

From the experiences of the pilot study, a systematic data collection procedure was designed. A written consent about young adolescents' willingness to participate in the study was obtained, by having them sign on a form which explained the purpose of the study.

### **Tools**

An activity stress indicator was developed from the tool "The over-scheduled child" developed by Rosenfeld and Wise (2000). Though the items in the quiz were apt and applicable to measure the stress among children, the quiz was not a standardized instrument, as a common structure was not used to elicit response, and it measured only the parents' view about the over-scheduling of children. Moreover, the statements were not comprehensive enough to cover all the expected aspects of stress related to activities. Whereas, the investigator was interested in the degree of stress experienced by the young adolescents relating to activity.

Therefore, after seeking prior permission from the authors, the items were modified to suit the need of the present study. The degree of activity stress was interpreted based on one standard deviation ( $\pm$ SD). Stress levels had four classifications, namely mildly stressed, moderately stressed, notably

stressed and highly stressed. The reliability of the tools used for the study was checked using Cronbach's alpha (Hair et.al, 2005).

### **Statistical analysis**

The data obtained through the questionnaire were coded, classified and tabulated for statistical analysis. Further, the data were processed and analyzed (student t test and anova) using SPSS (Statistical package for Social Sciences) Version 16.  $p < 0.05$  was considered as statistically significant.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results presented in the Tables 1, 2 and 3 show the activity stress of the young adolescents taking part in 'out-of-school' activities by comparing the gender differences, status of participation, participation in competitions and mothers' employment status.

It is clear from Table 1 that both male and female young adolescents participating in 'out-of-school' activities have notable levels of activity stress.

The mean values indicate that females experience notable levels of activity stress (Mean = 26.401) whereas males experience moderate levels (Mean = 25.418), further indicating that female participants experience higher levels of activity stress than males. In order to establish the significant difference between the gender groups in their activity stress during participation in 'out-of-school' activities, 't' test was used. However, 't' value explains that there is a significant difference between the male and female participants of 'out-of-school' activities ( $t = 2.363$ ;  $p = 0.018$ ) in their stress relating to activities.

Table 2 indicates that young adolescents who are participating and not participating in competitions of 'out-of-school' activities have notable levels of activity stress. The mean values indicate that young adolescents who participate in competitions in 'out-of-school' activities experience more activity stress (Mean = 27.851) than the young adolescents who do not participate in competitions (Mean = 26.252) in 'out-of-school' activities. Both groups experience notable levels of activity stress.

Further 't' test was used to test the significant difference in their activity stress, where the significant 't' ratio indicates that there is a difference between the participants and non-participants of competition in 'out-of-school' activities ( $t = 2.370$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) in their stress relating to activities.

It could be observed from Table 3 that participants of 'out-of-school' activities whose mothers are either employed or not employed have notable levels of activity stress.

The mean values indicate that young adolescents participating in 'out-of-school' activities whose mothers are employed experience slightly more activity stress (Mean = 26.447) than those whose mothers are not employed, but both the groups experience notable levels of activity stress. However, the results of the 't' ratio explains that there is no significant difference between participants of unemployed and employed mothers ( $t = 1.351$ ) in their stress due to activity participation.

Thus, Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the differences in activity stress of young adolescents participating in out-of-school activities with respect to their gender, status of participation and mother's employment status.

**Table.1** Differences between male and female participants of ‘out-of-school’ activities in their activity stress

Psychological Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	‘t’	‘p’ value
Activity Stress	Male	552	25.418	7.287	.310	2.363	.018
	Female	774	26.401	7.597	.273		

**Table.2** Differences between participants and non-participants in competitions of ‘out-of-school’ activities in their activity stress

Psychological Variable	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	‘t’	‘p’ value
Activity stress	Non-participants in competitions	435	26.252	7.352	.352	2.37	.017
	Participants in competitions	890	27.851	7.546	.252		

**Table.3** Differences in participants of ‘out-of-school’ activities with employed and unemployed mothers in their activity stress

Psychological Variable	Mother’s working Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	‘t’	‘p’ value
Activity stress	Unemployed	966	25.823	7.532	.242	1.351	.177
	Employed	360	26.447	7.339	.386		

**Table.4** Mean values of activity stress of the young adolescents participating in different levels of ‘out-of-school’ activities

Levels of participation	Activity Stress		
	N	Mean	SD
Minimal Participation	178	25.415	8.280
Moderate Participation	579	26.228	7.325
Overscheduled Participation	569	30.123	7.537

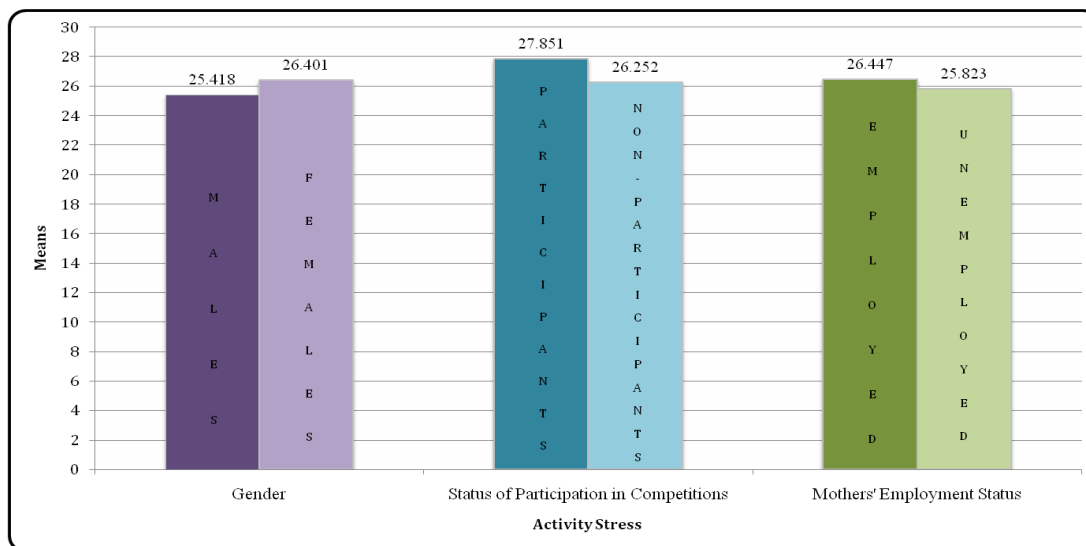
**Table.5** Comparison of activity stress of young adolescents participating in different levels of “out-of-school” activities

Psychological Variable	Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	‘p’ value
Activity Stress	Between Groups	559.32	2	279.66	4.993	0.021
	Within Groups	74101.23	1323	56.010		
	Total	74160.55	1325			

**Table.6** Duncan’s multiple range test to test the comparison of activity stress between three levels of participation

	Levels of participation	N	Subset 1	Subset 2
Activity stress	Minimal	178	25.415	
	Moderate	579	26.228	
	Overscheduled	569		30.123

**Fig.1** Activity stress of the young adolescents participating in ‘out-of-school’ activities



It is apparent from mean values in the Table 4 that young adolescents participating in ‘out-of-school’ activities have moderate levels of activity stress at the minimal participation level, notable levels of activity stress at the moderate participation level and higher stress for overscheduled young adolescents. Their mean values being, minimal participation (Mean = 25.415), moderate participation (Mean = 26.228) and overscheduled young adolescents (Mean = 30.123).

In order to establish significant difference between the groups participating at different levels in ‘out-of-school’ activities on their activity stress, F test was used. The results of the F ratio explain that there is a significant difference observed among the young adolescents participating in different

levels in “out-of-school” activities [F = 4.993 (2, 1323); p=0.021] in their activity stress.

The Duncan’s multiple range test confirms the results found by the F test which indicates that the young adolescents who are overscheduled due to ‘out-of-school’ activities experience activity stress to a greater extent than the young adolescents who participate at the minimal and moderate levels, as seen in subset 2 and subset 1.

The present study results confirm that overscheduled participants have more activity stress and there is also gender difference in the experiences of activity stress. It is evident that females experience slightly higher activity stress than males. The stress experiences of females could be

explained to the fact from another study which reported that females exhibit more intense participation than males. Similar findings are reported by Smith (2009) who found that more female than male students involved in structured activities. Another reason that could be attached to stress of female young adolescents is that, females are more emotion focused than males as depicted by Ginsburg (2007).

With reference to participation in competitions, the participants experienced more stress than those who did not participate in competitions of 'out-of-school' activities. Similar findings linking the participation in highly competitive extracurricular activities and stress has been reported by Scanlan *et al.*, (2005) and Small and Smith (1996). Participants who attend activities have rigorous training to participate in competitions, miss classes at school, struggle to find time to complete school home-work are likely to experience activity stress.

The levels of participation in 'out-of-school' activities is identified as minimum, moderate and overscheduled, which were derived from the duration of participation spent in activities. Zaff *et al.*, (2003) have noted that the duration of participation is the main link between activity involvement and youth development. Marsh (1992), Marsh and Kleitman (2002) and Mahoney *et al.*, (2008) have pointed out that the indicators of youth development was initially positive for low and moderate levels of participation but the youth development actually leveled off and became negative for high levels of involvement. Cooper *et al.*, (1999) also indicate that at the highest levels of participation, the achievement scores dropped dramatically. Coleman (1961), Marsh (1992), Marsh and Kleitman (2002), Gilbert (1999) and Noonan (2001) have also

raised similar concern about overscheduled adolescents and their academic activities.

Participants who are overscheduled with 'out-of-school' activities experience more activity stress. These results are harmonious with the findings of Melman *et al.*, (2007) who indicated that greater the amount of time spent in participation of activities, higher was the anxiety experienced. Interestingly, these findings are in contradiction with the study by Wainscott (2006) who revealed that being involved in outside activities and the number of hours spent were significant determinants of not being depressed. Another study by Dunn *et al.*, (2003) concluded that higher activity levels were not associated with greater stress symptoms. The results of the present study are justifiable because any individual with a heavy schedule of activities is likely to be stressed even with all the cushioning provided to counter the negative impact of the busy schedule. It could be that individuals involved in variety of activities of different categories may experience slightly lower stress than young adolescents with intense participation in more than one particular category (Larson *et al.*, 2006; Larson and Verma, 1999). With the percentage of activity participation increasing day by day, the stress experienced in the process of learning these activities has become inevitable for the present generation who live in the era of activity mania. Hence, appropriate interventions must be planned in order to reduce the stress levels caused by overscheduling of out-of-school activities among young adolescents.

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