From Strain to Serenity: The Role of Deliberate Communication in Mitigating Stress Among School Children; A Review

Nehchal Sandhu
Assistant Professor, Institute of Social Science Education and Research (PU-ISSER), Panjab University, Chandigarh, INDIA.

ABSTRACT

Stress amongst children is prevailing and is a huge problem in the present times. Trying to adapt, maintaining good grades, planning for the future, and managing many things (extra co-curricular activities, sports, etc) often cause stress for many children. Students typically experience the stress of syllabus, high levels of competitive situations, and their failure to manage with the high expectations. Miscommunication and non-communication of parents often add to and create more burden on the already stressed-out children. The present paper reviews already existing research on the effect of communication strategies on reducing stress in school children.

Keywords- stress, communication, parenting.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary educational landscape, the prevalence of stress among students has emerged as a significant and pressing concern. The dynamic nature of academic environments, coupled with the myriad of challenges students face, has fostered an atmosphere where stress has become a pervasive issue. The modern student is confronted with the daunting task of not only adapting to the rigors of academic life but also excelling in a highly competitive and demanding setting. Balancing academic pursuits, planning for the future, and managing various responsibilities away from the familiar confines of home can often prove to be overwhelming. Moreover, the stressors are compounded by the weight of syllabi, intense competition, and the struggle to meet ever-heightening expectations.

One often overlooks the aspect contributing to the stress burden is the miscommunication or lack of communication between children and their parents. The disconnection in understanding and expectations can create an additional layer of stress for students, impacting their overall well-being and academic performance. Recognizing the critical role that effective communication plays in alleviating stress, this paper aims to explore the impact of communication strategies on mitigating stress levels among students. By delving into the potential benefits of improved communication between students and parents, educators, and peers, this research seeks to provide valuable insights that could contribute to the development of targeted interventions to foster a healthier and more supportive educational environment. In doing so, we hope to pave the way for a holistic approach to student well-being, acknowledging the interconnectedness of communication and stress reduction in the educational context.

Cambridge Dictionary defines stress as an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future. In psychology and neuroscience, a distinction is commonly made between short-term (or 'acute') stress arising from factors that have a clear start and end point (e.g., a child being frightened by a dog in the park) and long-term (or 'chronic') stress arising from factors that have no clear end or recovery phase (e.g., poverty, parental neglect) (Epel et al., 2018). Parent–child communication is a fundamental component of family functioning, both from an empirical perspective (Ochoa et al., 2007) and a conceptual perspective (Stamp, 2004). Parent-child communication has been reduced in the digital world, where everyone is busy on their electronic devices. Children have been overburdened and stressed by inefficient communication with parents at home. Effective parent communication plays a crucial role in a

child's overall development, including their ability to cope with stress. Children should feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns without fear of judgment.

To survive, individuals must learn to interpret environmental cues and apply that knowledge to guide their behaviour. The impact of childhood stress on these processes remains unclear, but there may be an influence. There are distinct correlations between learned values, applied knowledge, exposure to stressful events, and perceived social isolation. Children's learning is not solely shaped by exposure to stress or feelings of social isolation. However, individuals who undergo numerous stressful events and experience social isolation may encounter difficulties in applying acquired knowledge. These findings suggest that one potential mechanism linking early experiences to later behaviours could involve changes in the utilization of value information, rather than solely in the learning process. (Smith & Pollak, 2022).

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Asamenew Demessie Bireda& Jace Pillay (2018) investigated the connection between four child well-being variables (depression, self-esteem, substance use, and school adjustment) and the perception of parent-child communication. The results of this study highlight how crucial open parent-child communication is to adolescents' well-being and stress.

Anzi, E.,Owayed, F., (2005) delved into academic achievement and its relationship with stress, sanguinity, and pessimism in Kuwaiti scholars. Results indicated a positive correlation between academic achievement and sanguinity and a negative correlation between academic achievement and both pessimism and stress.

Connell, Spencer, and Aber(1994) reported that family support and involvement were largely significant predictors of academy-related issues among African-American scholars. Their studies states that if parents are involved in their child's life and school related activities , it makes the child feel better about themselves and also affects how much they participate in school. Being involved in school then leads to better grades and well and better adjustment to school.

According to Stormshak et al., (2000) negative parenting practices, low positive parental involvement, and low parental warmth have been found to contribute significantly to children's disruptive behaviour problems (e.g., opposition, aggression, and hyperactivity); and low levels of parental praise (e.g., expressing affection, offering reward) have been related to children's internalizing behaviours, for example, anxiety and social withdrawal (Cole and Rehm 1986).

In the ecological system approach the Bronfenbrenner family is regarded as one of the variables in the microsystem which can contribute to children's development most directly and immediately. Urie

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a theoretical framework that examines human development within the context of various environmental systems. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the multiple layers of influence that shape an individual's growth and development. Bronfenbrenner identified several nested environmental systems, each with its unique influence on an individual. These systems are organized into five levels, often referred to as the "Ecological Systems Theory" which are Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem. Microsystems are an immediate environment that directly influences an individual. It includes the relationships and interactions a person has with their family, friends, school, and other immediate surroundings. (Paquette, D., & Ryan, J., 2001). The microsystem is the closest layer to the individual and has the most direct impact on their development. This layer involves the connections between elements of the microsystem. It explores how the various components within the microsystem interact with each other. (Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. J., 1994). The exosystem includes external environments that indirectly influence the individual. This might include the workplace of a parent, which can affect the child indirectly through the parent's experiences and interactions at work. The macrosystem encompasses the broader cultural, societal, and institutional influences on an individual. It includes societal values, customs, laws, and cultural norms that shape the individual's development. The Chronos system involves the dimension of time and how events and transitions over the life course can affect development. It considers how changes and continuity in the individual's environment over time impact their development. This theory emphasizes the important functions of the family and parenting. (Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W., 2000).

III.   FUTURE SCOPE

3.1 Communication strategies

Poor Parental communication has a direct influence on increasing children's stress, which may be prevented by open and supportive communication by being encouraging, active listening, empathetic responses, clear expectations, regular check-ins, open communication channels, etc between parents and children. Establishing a supportive environment for children involves creating a foundation where they feel comfortable turning to their parents for guidance. Active listening, as highlighted by Venkatachalam (2019), plays a crucial role in reducing stress by attentively noting both verbal and nonverbal cues. This fosters trust and demonstrates to the child that their feelings are acknowledged and valid.

Additionally, showing empathy in communication involves understanding the child's perspective and validating their emotions, reinforcing a

sense of being heard and supported. Clear communication of expectations and boundaries helps alleviate anxiety, providing structure and predictability, ultimately enhancing problem-solving skills. Encouraging children to express concerns and brainstorm solutions fosters autonomy and resilience.

Consistent communication patterns, such as regular check-ins and discussions about daily activities, contribute to a child's sense of connection and security. Positive reinforcement, acknowledging and rewarding positive behaviour, cultivates a positive parent-child relationship, fostering a supportive environment. On the other hand, limiting negative communication, such as criticism or harsh language, is essential as negative interactions can contribute to stress and impact a child's self-esteem. Minimizing screen time during important communication moments and creating tech-free zones facilitate more meaningful interactions. Expressing unconditional love reinforces that a parent's support is not contingent on a child's behaviour or achievements, emphasizing an open channel for concerns. Establishing a balanced schedule with quality family time, contributes to a sense of security and support within the family unit. (Ragni,2022).

IV. CONCLUSION

Communication strategies like storytelling, communicating for the development of academics of the child and informal communication in verbal cues have effect on children's stress. Further, past studies also showed that communication is highly efficient in managing stress. (Ray, S., Goswami, V. & Kumar, C.M., 2022). Effective communication in child development, positive parent-child communication is associated with better cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes for children. Simple yet effective techniques like deliberate communication have seen to be effective, Hence, every parent, irrespective of gender, should have deliberate, effective communication with children, moving away from their mobiles and spending quality time with the children when at home.

Secure attachment between parents and children is often facilitated by responsive and emotionally attuned communication. Children who experience consistent and sensitive communication tend to develop secure attachment, which is linked to positive socio-emotional outcomes.(Bowlby, 1979). The more the parents communicate with the children, the more the children will improve their communication abilities and will relate better to the people around them. (Masih, P. P & Gulrez,N. K.,2006). Hence the importance of communication in the parent-child interaction cannot be negated which is a significant factor in the development of the qualitative relationship of interaction between parents and children.

REFERENCES

[1] Bireda, A. D., & Pillay, J. (2018). Perceived parent–child communication and well-being among Ethiopian adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *23*(1), 109-117.

[2] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: research perspectives. Developmental Psychology, 22(6), 723–742.

[3] Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes.

[4] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Harvard University Press.

[5] Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21st century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings. Social Development, 9(1), 115–125.

[6] Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. J. (1994). Nature-nurture reconceptualized in developmental perspective: A bioecological model. Psychological Review, 101(4), 568–586.

[7] Ryan, D. P. J. (2001). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *Retrieved January*, *9*, 2012.

[8] Cole, D. A., & Rehm, L. P. (1986). Family interaction patterns and childhood depression. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 14, 297–314.

[9] Epel, E. S. , Crosswell, A. D. , Mayer, S. E. , Prather, A. A. , Slavich, G. M. , Puterman, E. , & Berry, W. (2018). More than a feeling: A unified view of stress measurement for population science. Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology, 49, 146–169.

[10] Goddard, Wayne & Melville, S (2004). Research Methodology: An Introduction. Lansdowne: Juta and Company Ltd

[11] Ochoa, G. M., Lopez, E. E., & Emler, N. P. (2007). Adjustment problems in the family and school contexts, attitude towards authority, and violent behavior at school in adolescence. Adolescence, 42(168), 779–794.

[12] Patricia Luciana Runcan, Corneliu Constantineanu, Brigitta Ielics, Dorin Popa (2012) The Role of Communication in the Parent-Child Interaction,Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 46(1) P 904-908,

[13] Redman, L.V. & Mory, A.V. (2009). The Romance of Research. Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Co.

[14] Stamp GH. Theories of family relationships and a family relationships theoretical model. In: Vangelisti AL, editor. Handbook of family communication. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2004.

[15] Stormshak, E. A., Bierman, K. L., McMahon, R. J., & Lengua, L. J. (2000). Parenting practices and child disruptive behavior problems in early elementary school. *Journal of clinical child psychology*, *29*(1), 17-29.

[16] Mousikou, M., Kyriakou, A., & Skordis, N. (2023). Stress and Growth in children and adolescents. *Hormone research in paediatrics*, *96*(1), 25-33.

[17] Smith, K. E., & Pollak, S. D. (2022). Early life stress and perceived social isolation influence how children use

value information to guide behavior. *Child Development*, *93*(3), 804-814.

[18] Ray, S., Goswami, V., & Kumar, C. M. (2022). Stress-The hidden pandemic for school children and adolescents in India during COVID-19 era. *Current psychology*, 1-10.

[19] Winiarski, D. A., Engel, M. L., Karnik, N. S., & Brennan, P. A. (2018). Early life stress and childhood aggression: Mediating and moderating effects of child callousness and stress reactivity. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, *49*, 730-739.

[20] Stress has become part of students' academic life due to the various internal and external expectations placed upon their shoulders (Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018) Reddy, K. J., Menon, K. R., & Thattil, A. (2018).

Academic Stress and its Sources Among University Students.Biomedical and Pharmacology Journal, 11(1), 531-537.

[21] Subramani, C., & Venkatachalam, J. (2019). Parental expectations and its relation to academic stress among school students. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews (IJRAR)*, *6*(2), 95-99.

[22] Ragni(2022) The Efficacy of Parent Training Interventions with Parents of Children with Developmental DisabilitiesInt J Environ Res Public Health. 2022 Aug; 19(15)

[23] Masih, P. P & Gulrez,N. K. (2006). Age and gender differences on stress. Recent trends in human stress management, P 97-104.