Psychological Influence of 'Out-of-School Activities on Young Adolescent's Perceptions (Study based on Chennai city only)

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Abstract

The biological event of puberty unleashes a powerful set of changes in the adolescent body that reflect themselves in a teenager's sexual, complete cognitive, language, social, emotional, cultural, and/or spiritual passion. Adolescence passion thus represents a significant touchstone for anyone who is seeking to reconnect with their deepest inner zeal for life. This is when the abilities are developed, and this development is based on the learning experience from both inside and outside home. Today, the world has become increasingly competitive, dynamic and multifaceted. This has led to the development of children's abilities through structured activities and classes, which is becoming more popular and mind boggling, in addition to regular or formal education. This design was used to gather information about the young adolescents participating and also those not participating in 'out-of-school' activities. Efforts have been taken by the researcher to scrutinize the available resources and list the various activities available for the young adolescents. Questionnaire method is adopted for data collection and statistical tools used for analysis include Mean, Ranking and ANOVA. Data is interpreted and ideas for maintaining out of school activities in young adolescent are suggested in the conclusion.

Keywords: Young Adolescent Stress, perceptions of young adolescent, out of school activities.

Introduction

Adolescence is a prime time in every individual's life. This is when the complete cognitive, language, social and emotional abilities are developed, and this development is based on the learning experience from both inside and outside home. Today, the world has become increasingly competitive, dynamic and multifaceted (Parentree-editors, 2010). This has led to the development of children's abilities through structured activities and classes, which is becoming more popular and mind boggling, in addition to regular or formal education.

Though these structured activities are taught in most schools as a part of the formal education system, extra coaching is required for mastering the task. Therefore, it is learnt outside the school hours as well. Depending on the availability of time, various types of activities like tennis, swimming and yoga could be undertaken during the early morning hours and other activities like dance, music, co-curricular and other sports could be learnt in the evening hours after school. This system therefore is called as 'out-of-school' activities. Encouragement to participate in 'out-of-school' activities is given to children right from the preschool stage, and the types of activities they are often enrolled in are - dance, music, arts,

sports and swimming. Once children reach middle or high school, there are usually many 'out-of-school' activities available like arts/crafts, music, dance, including team sports such as cricket, throw-ball, basketball, and volleyball, and academic interests such as foreign language club, brain gym, debate team, chess club, student government, student publications, environmental clubs, choir, and band (Wells, 2010) and tuitions.

As Wells (2010) has referred, 'out-of-school' activities range from sports to newspaper, editing to music, and theater. Many activities, like football and drama, enjoy extreme longevity, serving as a part of their school's program over a number of years. A particular sponsoring faculty member or class of students may offer others, like an ecology club or writers' workshop, for a shorter time span to reflect a community interest or involvement. For many students, 'out-of-school' activities present an opportunity to practice social skills and to experiment activities that may represent a career interest. For a child who is not gifted academically, the opportunity to excel in arts or sports may make a big difference to his or her self-esteem. Some 'out-of-school' activities, particularly sports, arts and music, provide an arena for competition. Some individuals participate in these activities because they provide opportunity for them to develop their own skills to high levels that is necessary to compete against others in valued domains.

In the present era, extracurricular achievements have been given immense importance to the extent that it plays a prominent role in the child's overall development, as not only academic achievements but also as performance in extracurricular activities, which is a major contributor to the child being an all-rounder. With such high expectations by the parents and society, children feel the urge to excel, be in par with their peers and live up to the expectations of the outside world. This in-turn, leads them to pushing themselves a lot harder than they can normally manage resulting in high levels of stress. Many 'out-of-school' activities, such as the school newspaper, photography, and drama, can lead to careers. 'Out-of-school' activities also help to form the student's profile for consideration in college admissions. A student's academic record and scores on standardized tests form the core of his or her college application profile. However, admission officers consider other factors, such as a demonstrated talent in athletics or arts or leadership in school or 'out-of-school' activities. Through these diverse activities, students can have fun, build a resume for college, increase creativity, improve organizational skills, learn time management and develop people skills (Wells, 2010).

Extracurricular activities are a means of tapping and exhibiting their talents. Sometimes these activities are chosen because they lead to career and are pursued according to the family traditions. Even when the activity is chosen for a career, academic performance is also required. Expectations of parents to make the kids excel in academics also make the children day packed with academics and extracurricular classes. Academics and other activities fills the child's day and might become cumbersome for the child by not giving enough freedom to explore in their own way, by letting them do what they want to do. This may sometimes lead to frustrations. Children undergo rigorous training because many contemporary parents feel it is their fundamental job to design a perfect upbringing for their offspring - a conception to college. A child's success quantified by "achievements" like speaking early, qualifying for the gifted and talented program or earning admission to an elite university—has become the measure of parental accomplishment. Despite knowing in their hearts that their children are overscheduled, many parents keep rushing because they fear that cutting back could harm their beloved child's future. This kind of child-rearing style in which parents become over-involved in every detail of their children's academic, athletic and social life is coined as

"Hyper-parenting" by Rosenfeld (2001). Additionally, the author has indicated that in hyper-parenting, parents feel compelled to "jump start" their children to achieve milestones early and to develop skills faster and pressure schools to do the same.

Review of Literature

'Out-of-school' activities are defined as activities that are inclusive of both extracurricular – ones performed by students that fall outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school education, and also co-curricular – ones that are performed by students outside school, but usually complementing the regular curriculum (e.g. tuitions). Eccles and Gootman (2002); Larson (2000); Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) refer to 'out-of-school' activities as those that are characterized by structure, adult-supervision, and an emphasis on skill building. These activities are generally voluntary, have regular and scheduled meetings, maintain development based expectations and rules for participants in the activity setting (and sometimes beyond it), involve several participants, offer supervision and guidance from adults, and are organized around developing particular skills and achieving goals. These activities are often characterized by challenge and complexity that increase participants' abilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Larson, 1994). In general, 'out-of-school' activities share the broad goal of promoting positive development among participants (Mahoney, Larson and Eccles, 2008).

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Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the nature of participation in 'out-of-school' activities among young adolescents.

2. To identify young adolescents who are overscheduled based on the time spent on 'out-of-school' activities.

Operational Definitions of Selected Variables

Ordinal Position: Actual order in which the child was born / birth order

Co-curricular Activities: Activities being learnt outside school, but usually complementing the regular curriculum, (e.g.) tuitions.

Tuition: Private coaching given to students to understand and learn the academic subjects and to score better grades.

Extracurricular Activities: Activities performed by students that fall outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school education. Extracurricular activities exist at all levels of education.

'Out-of-School' Activities: Extracurricular and co-curricular activities that students attend before and after school hours, which include both weekday and weekend participation.

Competitive 'Out-of-School' Activity: A competitive 'out-of-school' activity is virtually any activity where skills and qualities are openly compared to those of others.

Levels of Participation: The extent of participation in 'out-of-school' activities (in minutes per week or per day) that would be classified as minimal, moderate and overscheduled participation.

Overscheduled Children: Children identified as participating excessively in 'out-of-school' activities.

Stress: Stress refers to short-term behavioral changes such as mood swings, acting out, changes in sleep patterns. Some experience physical disturbances including stomachaches and headaches. Other types of symptoms like trouble concentrating or completing schoolwork. Still other symptoms like being withdrawn or spending a lot of time alone. Stress symptoms may also include nightmares, over reactions to minor problems and drastic changes in academic performance.

Activity Stress: Stress experienced due to participation in out-of-school activities.

Personal Efficacy: It is the ability to succeed in certain situations. People with strong self-efficacy are those who believe that they are capable of performing well. These people are more likely to view challenges as something to be mastered rather than avoided (Bandura, 1994).

Perceived Social Support: Perceived social support refers to a recipient's subjective judgment that providers will offer effective help during times of need (Barrera, 1986).

Coping: It refers to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce or minimize stressful experiences.

Tools Used for the Study

Survey method was adopted to collect the information from the young adolescents. For the purpose of measuring the selected psychological variables, suitable standardized scales were used and for a few variables the scale was developed by the investigator. The questionnaires consisted of following sections:

- Personal Data Sheet
- Details Regarding Activity Participation
- Activity Stress Indicator
- Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)
- Children's Coping Strategies Check List (CCSC)
- Personal Efficacy Scale.

Research Methodology

A research is a investigation undertaken in order to discover new facts and get additional information. It is the plan of action for a research, which explains in detail how the required data is to be collected, analyzed and interpreted.

Research Instrument
Questionnaire is the research instrument used for the survey. In this method, a questionnaire prepared in sequence which is used to elicit response from the sample population based on the objectives of the study.

Sources of Data
Collection of information mainly depends on two sources.

i.) Primary data
ii.) Secondary data

Sampling Design
Sampling design refers to the sampling process in which, the samples are selected for a specific purpose with a pre-determined basis of selection. For the purpose of the study sample of 100 from students were collected,

Sampling Procedure
"Convenience sampling" method adopted based on the availability and approachability of respondents.

Limitations of The Study

1. Social and religious settings of sample were not considered.
2. A comparative study on activity stress between those attending individual and group activities 'out-of-school' was not included.
3. The differential influence of co-curricular and extracurricular activities of 'out-of-school' on the activity stress of the participants was not studied.
4. There are many variables that influence of students, but the study is to selected sub dimensions only.
5. The respondents' age group of 12 – 14 years consisting of both boys and girls students.

Cronbach's Alpha Value

The reliability of the tools used for the study was checked using Cronbach's alpha (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 2005). The Cronbach's alpha value was determined for each of the tools used in the study. The reliability coefficients for the Cronbach's alpha were found to be highly significant. The reliability coefficients are presented in the Table.

Table-1: Cronbach Alpha.
Reliability coefficients of the selected tools

Sl. No.	Tools	Cronbach Alpha value
1	Activity Stress Indicator	0.73
2	Personal Efficacy Scale	0.78
3	Children's Coping Strategy Checklist	
	a) Distraction Coping	0.81
	b) Avoidance Coping	0.68
	c) Support Coping	0.61
	d) Active Coping	0.72
4	Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	
	a) Total	0.90
	b) Subscale Range	0.81 to 0.92

The above reliability co-efficient may be considered satisfactory.

Particulars of participation in different types of 'out-of-school' activities by the young adolescents

Table-2: Ranking; Number of 'out-of-school' activities participated by the young adolescents

Sl. No	Categories of Activities	Male	Female
		Ranking of Activities	Ranking of Activities
1	Games	1	1
2	Tuition	2	2
3	Arts / Crafts	5	3
4	Brain Gym	4	5
5	Music	6	4
6	Language	3	7
7	Dance	7	6

Table explains the frequency of participation in various categories of activities by the young adolescents. The above table explains that sports are the most attended activity for both male and female young adolescents. The second highly attended activity too is the same for both

male and female participants, which is tuitions (extra coaching for academic subjects). The least attended activity is dance for males and learning languages for females.

Table-3: Percentage; Weekday - Weekend participation in different categories of 'out-of-school' activities

Categories of Activities	Gender	Days of Participation		
		Weekday	Weekend	Both
		%	%	%
Games	Male	19.3	18.7	62.0
	Female	35.8	20.4	43.8
Music	Male	43.7	25.7	30.6
	Female	39.8	25.7	34.6
Dance	Male	22.4	51.8	25.9
	Female	27.2	42.8	30.0
Arts/Crafts	Male	26.5	34.1	39.4
	Female	35.0	30.0	35.0
Brain Gym	Male	27.8	27.8	44.3
	Female	33.1	28.9	37.9
Language	Male	40.7	12.3	46.9
	Female	50.4	11.8	37.8
Tuition	Male	38.6	3.9	57.5
	Female	44.5	4.0	51.6

Data pertaining to the days of participation (weekday or weekend or both weekday and weekend) in different types of 'out-of-school' activities by the young adolescents indicates that in activities like games, arts, brain gym, learning new languages and tuitions (extra coaching for academic subjects) they participated both during weekdays and weekends. Attending activities throughout the week is common among both male and female young adolescents for these activities is indicated in above table. With reference to weekday participation, it is seen that learning music is more during weekdays for both males and females (43.7% and 39.8% respectively). When the weekend participation in activities is considered, it is clearly observed that weekend participation was customary for learning dance. Again these weekend classes for dance was common with both male and female young adolescents with the percentages being 51.8 and 42.8 respectively.

Table-4: Ranking Reasons for 'out-of-school' activity participation

Reasons for activity participation	Male	Female
	Rank	Rank
Interest	1	1
To improve talent	2	2

Enjoyment	4	4
Like learning new things	5	3
Your talent is identified	6	5
Helps with school work	8	7
Friends	3	9
Parents Choice	7	6
Selected by the school	11	10
Like meeting new people	9	8
Don't Know	13	13
I am Forced to learn	12	12
I am bored at home	10	11

Table shows the most common reasons for young adolescents participating in 'out-of-school' activities as 'Interest' (85.3% females, 84.1% males) being the most common reason; followed by 'to improve talents' (80.6% females, 77.7% males) and also 'like learning new things' (78.2% females, 72.5% males). The table also indicates that a higher percentage of males also state 'friends' (76.08%) as being a reason for their participation in 'out-of-school' activities.

Table-5: T-Test; Differences between participants and non-participants of 'out-of-school' activities

Groups	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**'t'**	**'p' value**
Non-participants	94.289	12.333	.606	5.216***	.000
Participants	97.944	12.481	.342		

***Significant at .001 level

It is observed from the Table, that young adolescents participating and not participating in 'out-of-school' activities. The mean values indicate that participants of 'out-of-school activities had higher personal efficacy (Mean = 97.944) than those young adolescents not participating (Mean = 94.289) in 'out-of-school' activities. To establish the significance of the difference, 't' test was used. However, the results of the 't' ratio explain that there is a significant difference between the participating and non participating young adolescents in 'out-of-school' activities ($t= 5.216$; $p < 0.001$) in their personal efficacy. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that young adolescents who are participating and those not participating in 'out-of-school' activities would differ significant. These results are supported by Maser (2007); Blomfield and Barber (2009) who indicated that students who participated in extracurricular activities were more likely to have higher academic achievement, higher self-concept, higher academic self-concept and lower frequencies of problem behavior, than those students who did not participate.

Conclusions

1. Age and gender significantly influence the levels of participation in 'out-of-school' activities.
2. Male and female young adolescents participating in 'out-of-school' activities do not differ significantly.
3. Participants of 'out-of-school' activities differ significantly from the non-participating young adolescents..
4. Young adolescents participating in competition in 'out-of-school' activities differ significantly from young adolescents who are not participating in competition.
5. Participants in 'out-of-school' activities, whose mothers are employed significantly differ from young adolescents participating in 'out-of-school' activities whose mothers are unemployed. Participants with employed mothers have a higher mean value.

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