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### EDUCATIONAL STRESS AND STRATEGIES FOR REDUCTION: A PICTURE OF MEGHALAYA

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#### ABSTRACT

The National Policy planners have considered Higher Secondary school stage of school education as crucial as it is at this stage that necessary skills and competencies are acquired which enable the students to enter the world of work or to go for higher education. But it is revealed that 24% of adolescents falling under age group of 12-18 years are drug abused and 18% are malnourished in India. It is because of the several problems and one of the most reflecting problems is academic stress which leads them to aggression and antisocial behavior. They are often led or driven into vocations and careers unrelated to their aptitude and suitability under parental and societal pressure especially with regard to traditional careers like engineering, medicine, teaching etc. which leads them to aggression, deviancy and anti-social behavior and higher crime rates as well as increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. So therefore the need of soft skills and life skills education is felt to make the students aware about their individual capacities and weaknesses for better adjustment of their inner self with the outer world to achieve success. And a very elegant way of offering the skills to the students can be done by integrating all the core elements of those with school subjects to reduce stress among them.

**Keywords:** Stress, Adolescents, Higher Secondary Students, Life Skills, Soft Skills.

#### INTRODUCTION

The International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century mentioned human beings live in four pillars namely- physical, intellectual, mental and spiritual (CABE, 2005). Accordingly, future citizens of India should be physically strong and sound, intellectually competent, mentally and emotionally matured and intelligent and spiritually intelligent. The National Policy planners have considered Higher Secondary school stage of school education as crucial as it is at this stage that necessary skills and competencies are acquired which enable the students to enter the world of work or to go for higher education. These are the years of transition; indeed most crucial years of life. But unfortunately about 230 million Indian falling under the age group of 10-19 years are adolescents who undergo stresses, difficulties and maladjustment psychologically, socially and educationally. Due to the numerous pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents are having difficulty coping and are requesting educational programs in school to help teach them how to cope with such stresses (Bugalski et al, 2004).

## HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: A CHALLENGE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Secondary education is an important sub-sector of entire education system. At this stage, adolescents are keen to be recognized as useful productive and participating citizens of society. They recognize their own capacities and inner talents and learn to set targets in the field of education and develop an aim for life by being equipped of choosing the stream for further studies. In India, results of the Secondary Examination are vital for individuals since this is the main determining criteria for future admission to a high quality senior secondary school and a preferred academic stream. Competition taken as ferocious as performance in Higher Secondary examination determines university entrance and admission in courses like Medicine, Engineering and Management which are the most preferred choices for parents because these qualifications are seen to guarantee future job prospects. It is relevant to mention here that in one year alone in India, 2320 children, or more than six children per day, committed suicide because of failure in examinations (NCRB, 2000). This shocking figure underlines the seriousness of this problem. India's Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) at the secondary level of 40% is inferior to the GERs of the global competitors in East Asia (average 70%) and Latin America (average 82%) (World Bank, 2009). Whereas secondary education is the single largest supplier of labor force in most of the developing countries including India. The relevant question in this context are-

- 1) Are the higher secondary students finding difficulty to fit in the existing curriculum?
- 2) Are we ignoring the emotional and psychological aspects of the late adolescent students?
- 3) Why so much of tension, fear and anxiety among the students appearing Board Examination?

As again one of the data from National Household Survey (NHS) revealed that 24% of the drug abusers were in the age group of 12-18 years (Adolescent Education Programme). Among adolescents, 18 percent are malnourished in India (WHO, 2006). Therefore, Secondary and Higher Secondary Education addresses problems unique in human development, without requisite education to guide their development not only would young people be ill prepared for tertiary education, or for the workplace, but they would also be susceptible to juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy, thereby exacting a high social cost. Hence the challenge to secondary education is enormous. It is an unfinished agenda that all countries will face up to as they develop (IIEP, 2000).

### EDUCATIONAL STRESS AMONG THE HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

Stress is very subjective experience depends largely on background experiences, temperament and environmental conditions. Adolescence is a confusing time in a child's life and so they experience some level of stress from day-to-day. Not only are academic challenges and responsibilities placed on the adolescents, but students are likely beginning to formulate life goals. The effects of stress in a student's life can have serious impacts on their ability to perform, progress, or succeed in school. Academic achievement is highly valued by Asians because it is

perceived as one of the few avenues for upward mobility and expanded options (Gloria, 2003). According to a study conducted by the Delhi-based Hindustan Times, north India, nearly 70 percent of Indian students after class VIII experience severe academic stress, especially during exam time with nearly 10 percent having contemplated suicide at some point during their academic years. In another case, on April 14, when examiners began evaluating 400,000 answer sheets of the UP board exams written by high school students, it was found that, one examinee threatened an examiner saying that he is no ordinary student and told him to wait and see what he can do if he fails him (Education World, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that adolescents who attempt suicide or threaten examiners often had problems in school. Adolescents have reported that school is the number one cause of stress in their lives (Chandra et al, 2006) and higher levels of stress have been related to higher levels of smoking (Finkelstein et al, 2006), suicide, Depression, Drug abuse, Behavioral problems (LaRue et al, 2008), engagement in high-risk sexual behaviors at an early age. In schools, adolescents often see themselves as being evaluated in terms of their academic performance and the pressure to excel is an important measure of their success in school (Child Psychiatry Hum Dev, 2006). Therefore, the harsh reality at present is that India is witnessing the high drop-out rate, especially after Class 10.

Troubled by history and geo-politics, the North East has remained one of the most backward regions of the country. The trauma of partition in 1947 not only took the region backwards, but also placed hurdles on future economic progress. Meghalaya is one of the states of this region having higher literacy rate (75.48) than the average National Literacy rate (Population Census of India, 2011). But again it is paradoxical that on the one hand there is growing unemployment and lack of awareness about career options and on the other hand there are many new avenues and areas for employment. Adolescents are often led or driven into vocations and careers unrelated to their aptitude and suitability often under parental and societal pressure especially with regard to traditional careers like engineering, medicine, teaching etc. There is almost a complete lack of career guidance to adolescents and their parents. Many adolescents start getting depressed due to academic failures and hence the drop out rate is increased since 1992-93 (North Eastern Region Vision 2020). A recent study done by NCERT (GOI, 2006) through Learning Achievement Survey, 2004-05 reported very low learning achievement of children in schools in North East region in India. It is in this context that the need for an educational intervention has been strongly felt. This need is particularly felt in Meghalaya, because the school curriculum does not include the crucial elements of mental health as well as reproductive and sexual health such as physical, psychological/mental development especially in the context of mental and sexual development during the period of adolescence in a holistic manner.

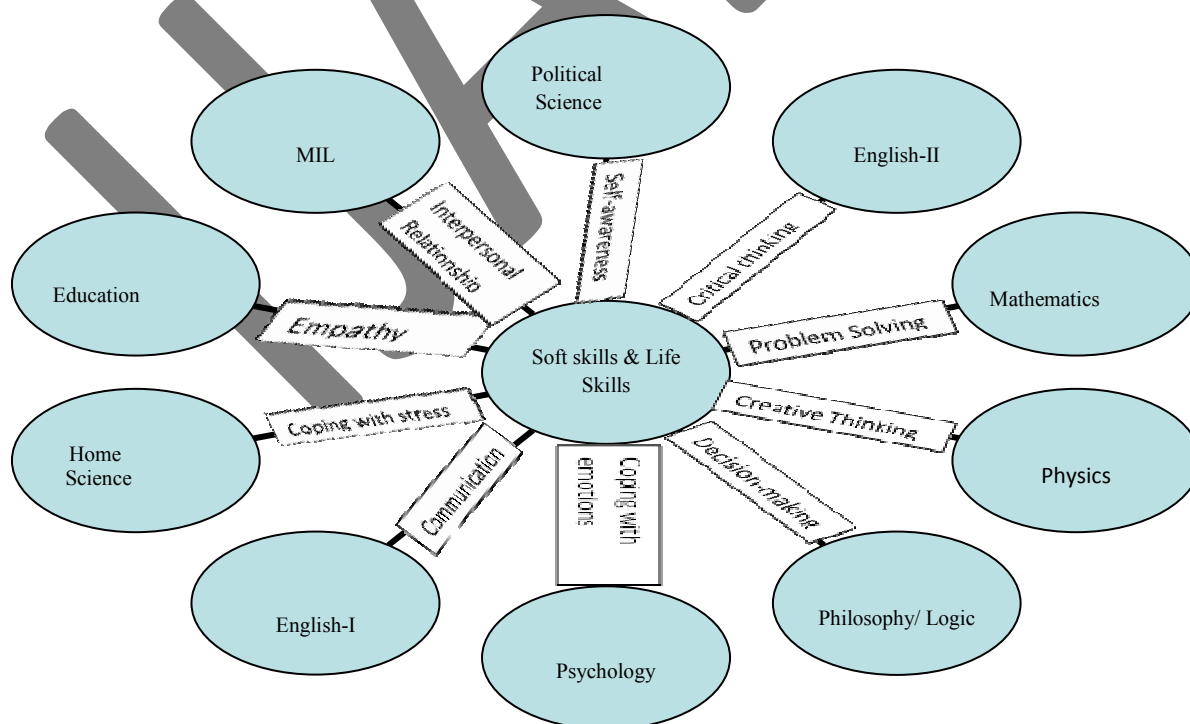
### **SOFT SKILLS AND LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION: STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS**

With the changing educational trends, versatility in educational courses, availability of qualified personnel, the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming more and tougher. So there is a need to make the students aware about their individual capacities and

weaknesses for better adjustment of their inner self with the outer world to achieve success through soft skills and life skills are to be imbibed by Indian youth to show their real potential at intra and international. For this purpose the ten core Life Skills which can be embedded in the present curriculum of Higher Secondary schools are as follows:

1. **Self-awareness:** Learning about me as a special person.
2. **Critical thinking:** Making objective judgments about choices and risks.
3. **Problem solving:** Generating solutions to difficult problems or dilemmas.
4. **Creative thinking:** Generating new ideas about things that are taken for granted.
5. **Decision making:** Making difficult decisions
6. **Dealing with emotions:** Coping with emotional stress.
7. **Effective communications:** Developing ability to express opinions, desires and needs.
8. **Coping with stress:** Identifying sources of stress.
9. **Empathy:** Avoiding prejudice and discrimination of people who differ.
10. **Interpersonal relationships:** Forming new relationships and surviving loss of friendship.

A very elegant way of offering soft skills training to students is to embed it with school subjects as shown in fig.1. Teachers can enhance their student skills by giving extension lecture for 15-20 minutes and letting them do presentation. The further discussion can be done after teaching each subject to enhance the core skills in the following way-



**Fig 1: Integration of Core-Skills with Higher Secondary School Subject**

**Political Science-** Students may develop a high self esteem knowing their rights and duties and contribution towards their society.

**English II-** Through letter and essay writing task Critical thinking can be developed by giving several topics on social problems like early marriage and cause of HIV/ AIDs etc.

**Mathematics-**A teacher can establish problem solving attitude among students to face the challenges by giving difficult problems to be solves.

**Physics-** Different Laws and theories helps develop approaches to creative thinking in students which help them in the field of technology and business science.

**Philosophy-** Decision making becomes an easy task for the students in their every stages of life when learn about values. Various examples can be set by concerned teachers in their discussion.

**Psychology-** Learning about the stages of mental development, pupils can able themselves to control their emotions and develop responsible attitude.

**English I-** Effective communication skill is developed through learning language by discussing different prose and poetries from their books.

**Home Science-** Learning about the basics of 'Human development' and 'Food and nutrition' they may cope up with the stress situations in their work place.

**Education-** Knowing different communities and their cultural values pupils develop empathy towards others.

**MIL-** Students may able to develop interpersonal relationship if they have good command over local languages.

**CONCLUSION**

Personality development is a significant aspect in the evolution of a student in the echelons of higher education. In order to prepare young people for life and work in a rapidly changing world, educational system has to be reoriented to impart and enhance range of soft skills and life skills in the students. Teachers also at the same time have to be sensitized or trained in detecting signs of problems in children.

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