

# Chapter – I

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Problem

Education is a powerful means through which all sorts of development and changes, in an individual and society, are possible. Education decides and designs the future of man and society. It works as an instrument of economic, social and personal development and upward mobility. The type and level of education (formal) determines the type of occupation for a person which by and large depends upon the academic excellence or academic achievement. Academic achievement is the end product of formal education and considered as a yardstick of the quality of education and skill acquired by an individual. It happens to be one of the core determinants of career planning and success in the professional life of children. As such parents, teachers and children themselves are quite concerned and worried about the level of academic achievement.

The level of academic achievement mainly depends upon the socio-psychological-economic environment, especially, the family environment which is, to a great extent affects the academic

achievement of a child. Family environment comprises the favourable or unfavourable conditions existing in a family where a child grows in. Favourable and peaceful family environment may help a child to perform better and an unfavourable family environment may lead to a poor academic performance. A number of studies have examined and reported the significant relationship of academic achievement with other psycho-social variables. Agarwal and Kapoor (1998) reported that nutritional status and home environment are positively related to educational achievement in young primary school children. It has also been reported that the parents who provide direction and guidance at appropriate time to their children contribute to their children's performance at school. Daulta (2008) also reported similar results.

Family environment not only influences the academic achievement but also affects the mental condition of a child. A congenial family environment supports a child to maintain a good mental health. On the other hand, uncongenial family environment forces a child to develop several unpleasant mental conditions viz. tension, anxiety, stress etc., which leads to poor academic performance. Stress indicates the response to events that disrupt or threaten to disrupt one's physical or psychological functioning. It is a kind of physical or mental pressure (worry) caused by any type of problems in any individual which interferes with normal functioning. There is often little consistency in different people's reactions to stress. In some individual, stress may find expression in physical (bodily) conditions while in others it may be reflected in their psychological condition and in yet another it might result in a profound deterioration in performance. Responses to stress involve physical, psychological and behavioural systems. Stress may create several types of adjustment problems in the children if it is not managed on time and that may lead to acute stress disorders.

Stress is mainly developed due to anxiety, the diffused, vague, very unpleasant feelings of fear and apprehensions. Anxious person worries a lot, particularly about the unknown danger. In addition, an anxious individual shows several symptoms, like rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, loss of appetite, diarrhea, fainting, dizziness, sweating, sleeplessness, frequent urination and tremors. All the physical symptoms accompanied with unknown fear; an anxious person does not know the reasons for the fear. The characteristics of anxiety include feelings of uncertainty, helplessness and psychological arousal. A person who experiences anxiety complains of feeling nervous, tension, irritation and uneasiness. He/she faces difficulty in falling asleep at night and gets fatigued easily. It is normal for a person to experience anxiety when faced with stressful, threatening situations, but it is abnormal to feel strong, chronic anxiety in absence of an obvious reason. Therefore, anxiety up to certain limit helps the person to achieve more but absence of anxiety or its existence beyond a certain limit may hinder achievement.

Since the family environment is a function of physical and cultural environment and as is pointed out above these affects the psychological functioning of an individual. It is, therefore, necessary to study the relations among family environment, stress, anxiety and academic achievement in different geographical and cultural situations. Again it is necessary to ascertain whether individuals coming from different communities show any differences in these relationships.

In the present study, three important variables have been chosen which usually affect the academic achievement of secondary students. The variables under study are family environment, stress and anxiety.

### 1.1.1 Family Environment

Family being the first and major agency of socialization has great influence and bearing on the development of the adolescents. It is considered the basic unit of society, to meet the needs of the individuals. Family is a major source of nurturance, emotional bonding and socialization. It is perceived as a unit of two or more persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, adoption or consensual unions, generally constituting a single household, and interacting and communicating with each other. According to Maciver, family is a group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children (as cited in Bhushan & Sachdeva, 2012, p.97). Nimkoff defined family as "a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without children, or of a man or woman alone, with children" (as cited in Basavanthappa, 2008, p.114).

In India, a family is defined by the Civil Procedure Code, 1908, in order XXXII – A6 as follows:

- a) (i) a man and his wife living together,  
(ii) any child or children, being issue of theirs; or of such man or such wife,  
(iii) any child or children being maintained by such man and wife;
- b) a man not having a wife or not living together with his wife, any child or children, being issue of his, and any child or children, being maintained by him;
- c) a women not having a husband or not living together with her husband, any child or children being issue of hers, and any child or children being maintained by her;

- d) a man or women and his or her brother, sister, ancestor or lineal descendant living with him or her; and
- e) any combination of one or more of the groups specified in (a), (b), (c), or (d) of this rule.

The normative family composition types in India are the nuclear family, joint family and extended family. The nuclear family is a family unit and household comprising the couples and their unmarried children. This type of family structure appears to become the norm in most urban areas. In many rural areas, the traditional joint family system is still very strong, where a child grows in the company of his /her own siblings, cousins and grandparents. The extended family is a family which includes a wide variety of members viz. sibling, grandparents, grand-children, aunt and uncle, nephew and niece, legal guardian, and foster children. Thus, a family is a primary group of members who are intimate, have frequent face-to-face contact and obligations to each other, have norms in common and generally share common residences and widespread influences.

The family environment involves the circumstances and social climatic conditions within families. Since each family is made up of different individuals in a different setting, each family environment is unique. Family environment is one of the important variables, which has strong impact on children's academic achievement. This impact continues throughout their school years. Many background variables affect the family environment viz. socio-economic status, occupational status, family income, parental educational qualification, parental attitudes and behaviour, caste/category, rural/urban residence, etc. It plays a vital role in explaining the academic achievement of the children and adolescents as well. The level of parent's education is allied to their

child's intellectual strength and with the academic entail and pressure exerted upon the children. Parental attitudes, behaviour and involvement in learning activities will encourage their children in academic success.

A child's family environment has a strong impact on their educational achievement. Nyarko (2010) reported that parental involvement in their child's academic activities positively affects their academic performance. It is a more powerful force for academic success than other family background variables. Every child is unique and they are utterly important assets of the society. Right from the birth, the child is much influenced by many factors. Child's harmonious development is the eventual goal of education, After all, the whole process of education is child centered and the learning experiences provided to them contribute towards the achievement of the end.

A congenial family environment has more significant positive effect on high level of scholastic achievement of the students. Salunke (1979) stated that the academic achievement of the students was positively related to their home environment. Likewise, a positive relationship between parents and children increases the child's will and persist in challenging and intellectual tasks.

### **1.1.2 Stress**

The experience of stress is common to all people and a certain amount of stress is a part of our normal life. This experience is influenced by a number of internal and external factors. Such events or factors that bring stress are called stressors. It occurs when personal control is low. Stress is a reaction to any stimulus that upset our normal function and disturbs our mental and physical health. It has both

positive and negative qualities. Each and every day, we face different stressors. Some degree of stress thrive people in their situation but excessive stress have negative physical and psychological effects.

Originally, the word stress was used in the context of physics and described the amount of tension or force placed on an object to bend or break it. Hans Selye was the first to apply the notion of stress to human beings (Seaward, 2006). He developed much of the foundation for what we know today about stress and is also known as the father of stress research.

B. L. Seaward (2006) defined stress as “the inability to cope with a perceived (real or imagined) threat to one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, which result in a series of physiological response and adaptations” (p.4).

Stress can be defined as the physical and psychological response to perceived environmental threat and challenges. It can come in different ways in an individual’s life. Stress can be cause by biological factors, psychological factors, environmental factors and social factors. Franken *et al.* (1994) argued that stress is also viewed as the body’s reaction, both neurologically and psychologically, to adapt to a new condition (as cited in Elias *et al.*, 2011, p.646). However, it can be simply defined as emotional disturbances or changes caused by stressors.

Adolescent is a critical period. The milieu of secondary education has always been regarded as a stressful environment to students. In this stage, students have many obstacles to overcome in order to achieve their optimal academic achievement. Different stressors such as health problems, nutrition, time management, failure in academic or sports, sleep deprivation, job responsibility, financial problems, loss of a family

member, social activities, class attendance, parents' high expectation etc can threat to the student's academic achievement. Therefore, students should have to manage the ensuing stress to reach their highest state of ability.

Due to fast growth and development of adolescence, students may sometimes experience incompatibility of their mental development with their physical changes or with the social environment and they suffer from problems of inadequate adaptations. These problems may further cause psychological trouble. The development of adolescence is influenced to a great extent by the level of stress they encounter during the learning process. Learning and memory can be affected by stress. Too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems. Meanwhile, high academic pressure on students is likely to have a negative impact on academic achievement.

Adolescence is a dangerous period of time where young people experience self organization and role confusion. Stress can be caused by events that are pleasing as well as events that create crises in their lives. When changes occur we usually experience some level of stress. For them, stress mainly occurs from academic tests, interpretational relations, life change, career exploration etc. Such stress may usually cause psychological, physical and behavioural problems. Thus, they should enhance their stress management abilities so as to live a healthy life and achieve academic achievement.

Adolescent students feel maximum stress when examinations are near. All students seem to be more emotionally vulnerable at examination time. Student feel that they can understand and memories the study materials required, but fail to recall at the critical juncture. This symptom is a product of stress. It is normal to feel little tensed



before an examination. But, extreme level of stress can affect negatively on students' academic achievement. Many researches were conducted to assess the relationship between stress and academic achievement of students and it is found that stress affect students' academic achievement (Elliot, Shell, Henry, & Maeir, 2005; Choi, Abbott, Arthur & Hill, 2007). Therefore, it is important to understand and march for steps to reduce excessive level of students to enhance their academic achievement.

### **1.1.3 Anxiety**

The pace of modern life has increased dramatically in recent decades. Anxiety is increasingly prevalent in modern society. The twentieth century has been called the age of anxiety but the concern with anxiety phenomenon has been as old as the history of humanity (Spielberger and Vagg, 1995). Anxiety is a physiological, behavioural and psychological reaction all at once. It can appear in different forms and at different levels of intensity. Anxiety arises in the moment when people lose their sense of connection to themselves, others, nature, community etc.

The dictionary meaning of anxiety is a painful uneasiness of mind pertaining to impending or anticipated ill. It is a response to unknown and subjective danger. It also involves a projection of some kind of internal situation into an external object or situation. Anxiety may be termed as an affective state of mind (Freud, 1924). In addition, Webster (1956) argued that anxiety is a painful or uneasy state of mind. Epstien (1972) regarded anxiety is likely to be more diffuse and vague.

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental, emotional, and behavioral problems of adolescence in many countries (Khouzam,

2009). The reactions of anxiety may be viewed as complex neurophysiologic responses (Martin, 1971). However, the level of anxiety differs for many reasons among adolescents. It is considered as a block to an activity. A student who suffers from anxiety may not be able to devote his/her full energy in the academic task. But, reducing excessive anxiety is not only helpful for the student's health but also stimulates their mental wellbeing. Students who suffer from excessive anxiety may not be able to give full energy to their academic task and it interferes with the learning activities.

Anxiety is not a bad thing. But, it might deter learning or might also stimulate it. However, if the level of anxiety is too low, students would lack the motivation in their academics and they may be experiencing the same level of academic achievement as those students with excessive level of high anxiety. A high level of anxiety interferes with concentration and memory of the students which are critical for academic achievement. Therefore, a moderate amount of anxiety can make students receptive to learning by creating motivation.

Hussain (1977) reported that the academic performance of the group with moderate anxiety was significantly better than that of high and low anxiety groups. Anxiety had a curvilinear relationship with academic achievement. High anxiety had adverse effect on academic performance. Low anxiety also showed a lack of drive and motivation of the students. The interaction effect of anxiety and aspiration had no significant effect on the academic performance.

A little nervousness before a test can be good. It motivates the students to work hard and put forth their best effort on the examination. When students become too anxious, though, that anxiety can

undermine their confidence and interfere with their ability to solve problems. The lack of anxiety makes the adolescence careless of the rights and feelings of others. But most of the students learn to develop a degree of normal anxiety. Those students who suffer from high level of anxiety have difficulty in making progress in learning. A moderate amount of anxiety may thus actually facilitate the most effective learning. Previous studies also showed that high levels of anxiety interfere with academic achievement of the students (Gupta, 1978; Patel, 1979; & Yadav, 1989).

#### **1.1.4 Academic Achievement**

Education is the process of developing the capacities and potentialities of the individual. In this competitive world, academic achievement has become an index of a child's future. It is one of the important goals of the educational process. In addition, it is the outcome of education.

Crow and Crow (1969), defined "Academic achievement as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning i.e., achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him".

In our nation, academic achievement is considered as a key criterion to judge one's total potentialities and capacities in specific area. It occupies a very important place in education as well as in the learning process. The word 'academic' stands for those aspects of school that involve the study of books and the term 'achievement' refers to the end gained or level of success attained by an individual on completion of course test or examination. Achievement is defined as measurable behaviour in a standardised series of tests (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). The dictionary of

education defines 'achievement' as "accomplishment of proficiency of performance in a given skill or body of knowledge". Achievement thus, mean all those behavioural changes which take place in an individual as a result of learning experiences of various kinds; usually these changes are assessed in the form of an examination. Academic achievement generally refers to the scores obtained in the annual examination or refers to the level of success or proficiency in some specific area of academic work. Academic achievement describes learners' academic self-competence, conduct and grades (Kang, *et al.*, 1996). As well, Lent *et al.*, (2000) reported that academic achievement is a key mechanism through which adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are an important part of developing career aspirations.

Academic achievement is one of the most important aspects of students' academic career. It also determines their future life. Right from the beginning, formal education emphasize on academic achievement of the students. The school performs the function of selection and differentiation among students on the basis of achievement. While seeking admission to highly competitive professional courses or any good educational institutions the most important factor considered is a good academic achievement. Students perceive examination result as an indicator of their worth. The desire for high level of academic achievement put a lot of pressure on parents, teachers and schools as well as on the educational system in general and students in particular. The whole system of education revolves round the academic achievement of the students. Therefore, effort should be made at school for better academic achievement of the students.

Academic achievement of students is the product of various factors. Teachers and educationists acknowledge that one of the most

important variables that affect academic achievement of students is family environment. They face various types of non-intellectual factors like stress, anxiety and other psycho-social factors which may affect their academic achievement. Their capacities to cope with the circumstances play a determining role in academic achievement. Previous studies revealed that many factors such as lack of facilities in school, lack of teachers, indiscipline, unfavourable home environment, low intelligence, anxiety, pupils need to achieve and so on have been found to cause poor academic performance (as cited in Moula, 2010, p.213). Several other variables are capable of influencing the academic achievement of the students. Such variables may be the socio-economic background of the family comprising level of parental education, occupation, income etc.

## **1.2 Need and Importance of the Study**

To become a successful human being in the global world, academic achievement plays a vital role. Students' success is reflected through their academic performance. But, in any learning situations, various external and internal factors influence the academic achievement of the students. Thus there is a need to know the factors which contribute towards academic achievement and the factors which act as obstacles to it. It is also necessary to identify the causes and conditions which give rise to the phenomenon of high and low academic achievement. Hence, the present investigation is directly concerned with the factors related with the students' academic achievement.

Family is the important determinant which should not be neglected. A congenial family environment supports the students to enhance their academic achievement, whereas an uncongenial family

environment may lead a student to poor academic performance. Students with favourable family environment are generally successful and achieve high in academic achievement. Generally, little attention is paid to the family environment as a possible factor that affects students' academic achievement. Hence, there is a need to study the influence of family environment on secondary school students' academics.

Stress is common to all. For a student, stress may be caused by various events viz. Parents' high expectation, failure in academics, financial problems, social and health problems etc. Such events that bring stress are called stressors. Different stressors not only affect the students' physical and mental health but also affect their academic achievement and their life style.

Students' academic achievement also depends on their level of anxiety. Without anxiety, students would lack motivation in their study. It increases the intensity of a student's reaction to any situation. Even though, a moderate level of anxiety helps to improve academic achievement by creating motivation; but, an excessive level of high or low anxiety interferes with concentration and memory which are critical for academic success.

Though various studies had conducted in different parts of India and abroad, they reported varied of results. The investigator could not find any study related to this area in Assam, especially in the district of Jorhat. Considering the significance of family environment, stress, anxiety as major factors that may influence the students' academic achievement, it is imperative to assess the nature of these factors. It is also important to find out the relationship among these factors. Therefore, the present study is an attempt in this direction.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

The present study is an attempt to examine the nature and relationship between family environment, stress, anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school students. Therefore, the study is titled as **“Family Environment, Stress, Anxiety and Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students in Jorhat district, Assam”**.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To find out the family environment of the students.
2. To find out the level of stress among the students.
3. To find out the level of anxiety of students.
4. To find out the relationship between family environment and academic achievement.
5. To find out the relationship between stress and academic achievement.
6. To find out the relationship between anxiety and academic achievement.
7. To find out the relationship between academic achievement and other socio-economic variables viz. sex, category, religion, rural/urban residence, parental education and per capita income of the students.

8. To find out the interrelationship between family environment, stress and academic achievement.
9. To find out the interrelationship between family environment, anxiety and academic achievement.

## **1.5 Hypotheses of the study**

Based on the review of studies made earlier in relevant areas, the following hypotheses are formulated and tested through this piece of research.

- H<sub>1</sub> Family environment is positively related to academic achievement.
- H<sub>2</sub> Stress is negatively related to academic achievement.
- H<sub>3</sub> Anxiety is negatively related to academic achievement.
- H<sub>4</sub> There will be no relationship between academic achievement and socio-economic variables.
- H<sub>5</sub> Academic achievement besides being related to family environment and stress individually, is also related to the interaction effects of these variables.
- H<sub>6</sub> Academic achievement besides being related to family environment and anxiety individually, is also related to the interaction effects of these variables.

## **1.6 Delimitation of the Study**

Due to the paucity of time and resources at the disposal of the investigator, it is not possible to make an in depth study of all the



secondary school students in the entire North-Eastern Region, nor even in one state as a whole. Therefore, the present study is delimited to only XI standard students of Arts Stream of two sub-division of Jorhat district of Assam i.e. Jorhat and Titabor.

## **1.7 Definition of the terms used**

The operational definitions of the technical terms used in the present study are as follows:

### **Family**

The family is the oldest institution that man has devised to normalize and integrate one's behaviour as they strive to satisfy their basic needs. This institution is basically a unit in which parents and children live together. Family has been defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit or a group of people related by blood or marriage."

In the present study, family denotes nuclear, joint and extended family where the students live in with other family members.

### **Environment**

Environment is the sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth as well as of danger and damage. In brief, environment is the surrounding or conditions in which a person, animal or plant live in. According to Douglas and Holland, "Environment is a word which describe in aggregate, all the external forces, influences and conditions which affect the life, nature, behavior

and growth, development & maturation of living organism" (as cited in Mohan, 2007, p.1)

In the present study, environment means the home atmosphere of the students where they grows in.

### **Family Environment**

Family environment means the atmosphere of the family in which a child grows. It may be favourable or unfavourable. A congenial family environment helps the students to enhance their academic achievement. However, an uncongenial family environment may affect their academic achievement.

In the present study, family environment indicates favourable, moderate and unfavourable family environment of the students.

### **Stress**

Stress is a negative emotional experience associated with the behavioural, biochemical and physiological changes that are related to perceive acute or chronic challenges. Stressors are the events that stimulate these changes.

In the present study, stress indicates the students' response to events that disrupt or threaten to disrupt their physical or psychological functioning.

### **Stressors**

The wide range of stimuli that can potentially produce stress is called stressors.

In the present study, stressor means the events or situations causing stress in the life of students.

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety is a painful or uneasy state of mind (Webster 1956). Freud (1924) defined 'Anxiety' as an affective state of mind. Anxiety denotes a diffused, vague, very unpleasant feeling of fear and apprehension.

In the present study, anxiety means the state of feeling nervous or fear and unpleasant, vague and diffused feelings of the students.

### **Academic Achievement**

Academic achievement refers to scholastic achievement of the students. It is an indicator of students' academic performance in an examination.

In the present study, academic achievement stands for the students' standard of academic competence expressed in terms of marks obtained by them in the High School Leaving Certificate (H.S.L.C.) Examination.