

ANTECEDENTS OF STRESS AND PERCEIVED STRESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract: Stressors affecting students are characterized as academic, financial, time, health related and self-imposed. Stress can be caused by environmental factors, psychological factors, biological factors, and social factors. College studies demand a specific direction of career movement depending upon student's inclinations, academic performance, socioeconomic resources and opportunities available. The domain in which the stress occurs may determine the degree of stress experienced and how it is dealt with. In addition, there may be spreading of stress in various spheres such as college, family and personal domains. The present paper attempts to identify the stressors in a sample of youth during the terminal phase of graduation. An empirical study is conducted by administering a questionnaire among a sample of students studying for final year graduation. The antecedents and symptoms of stress are identified. Different domains of personal stress and academic stress are analysed. Level of perceived stress is assessed. The study findings highlight the need for initiating programmes for stress management and for improving mental health of students in higher education institutions.

Index terms: Antecedents of Stress, Perceived Stress, College students

1.INTRODUCTION

Stress is a reaction or response to any kind of change. It is the physical and emotional response to situations, which are perceived as new, frightening, confusing, exciting or tiring. Stress does not necessarily get precipitated by external demands, but can also be generated from within by our hopes, fears, expectations and beliefs. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress is a mental or physical phenomenon formed through one's cognitive appraisal of the stimulation and is a result of one's interaction with the environment. The experts in the field of mental health and education have clearly accepted the view that education is a stressful and challenging process for students. The students need to be socially integrated with other students, participate in school activities, respond to academic requirements and be attached and committed to the educational institution. The education system in India is more job-oriented than life oriented. Academic stress is viewed as chronic stress due to the nature of academic demands which is associated with negative health outcomes of depression and physical illness.

Rapid industrialization and globalization, break up of joint families, increasing competition in the academic and career front, exposure of the youth to global mass media and un employment (Kumar,2012) are all putting newer challenges to youth. The internet and mobile culture is promoting a virtual community where face-to-face communication and meaningful personal relationships are replaced by virtual friendships through social networks. The involvement in temporary romantic relationships, pre-marital sexual relations and violence is increasing among youth. Experience of dangerous neighborhoods, greater exposure to negative behavior models and fewer life choices endanger the mental health of disadvantaged youth. This may result of having to cope with a variety of stressful events at the same time. Individuals react differently to different situations. Antecedents, response and management of stress has a lot to do with the individual's mental wellbeing and happiness. The understanding of the stressors among college students is an important area of research. The present paper attempts to identify the stressors in a sample of college students during the terminal phase of graduation.

11.OBJECTIVES

- To understand the socio-demographic details of the respondents.
- To elucidate the symptoms of stress experienced by college students.
- To identify the causes of stress among college students.
- To assess the causes of academic stress among college students.
- To analyse the perceived stress among college students.
- To evaluate whether there exists any significant difference in perceived stress with respect to the gender of college students.
- To evaluate whether there exists any significant difference in perceived stress with respect to the type of family of college students.

111.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of studies have dealt with various aspects of students' mental health. Mehta (1989) in a study of appraisal of stress and coping behavior in 258 college students found that respondents reported moderate to severe levels of distress for both academic and personal stressors. Females reported greater distress than males in the academic situation. Agolla& Ongori, (2009) have identified stress symptoms as lack of energy, taking over the counter medications, high blood pressure, feeling hopeless, increase or decrease in appetite, difficulty in sustaining concentration, restlessness, anxiety and so on. An individual experiencing one of these factors is likely to be a victim of stress.

There have been many studies which have reported significant levels of stress among students. There is evidence that students who are stressed are increasingly suffering mental health problems. In addition, the consequences of stress can be devastating for some individuals (Abouserie, 1994). However, it is important to consider that not all the stress that students may experience is negative. Stress can have a positive effect in enabling individuals to respond effectively in an emergency (Schafer, 1996).

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design is descriptive. Multi stage random sampling method is adopted. Two districts are selected and two colleges located in each district selected by the lottery method. Sample for the study are final year graduation students.75 students are chosen randomly from the four selected higher educational institutions. Sample size is 300.The tool of primary data collection is questionnaire. The questionnaire include questions on socio demographic details, causes of stress, symptoms of stress, frequency of experiencing symptoms of stress, different causes of academic stress and person of choice for seeking emotional support during stress. Perceived stress scale (Cohen,S.,Kamarck,T.,&Mermelstein,R.1983) is used to assess perceived stress. Data analysed by SPSS. Frequencies and percentages computed. Tables are used to present the data.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Socio-demographic details

- The mean age of the respondents, is 21.84.
- Among the respondents 40% of the students are studying for Science,30 % for Commerce, and 30% for Arts.
- Among the respondents, 58% belong to nuclear family, 42 % belong to joint family.
- 58% of respondents are females and 42% of respondents are males.
- 54% of the respondents were Christians, 36% Hindus, and the remaining 10% are Muslims.
- Regarding the occupation of the parents, among the respondents, for 44% both the parents are employed, for 46% only the father is employed; only the mother is on paid job for10%.
- 80% of the respondents stay with both their parents, 4% with their grand parents, 2% with their father, and 2% with their mother,12% stay in hostel.

5.2. Symptoms of stress

Table 5.1. Experience of symptoms of stress by students in past week

Symptoms	Percentage of respondents who experience this symptom almost daily	Percentage of respondents who experience this symptom at least once in a week
Inability to start work	36	52
Lack of concentration	44	46
Constant fatigue	42	42
Restlessness	22	10
Irritability	26	32
Difficulty in sleeping	82	10
Stomachache	68	22
Twitches	0	0
Neck stiffness	2	4
Nail biting	76	22
Headache	48	20
Overeating	8	4
Withdrawal from others	10	2
Loss of appetite	48	18
Feeling of hopelessness	2	8
Crying	10	26
Anger	14	32
Aggressiveness	4	8
Grinding teeth	2	6
Night mares	4	16
Nausea	0	4
Jaw pain	0	0
Chest pain	0	0
Rapid/Difficult breathing	0	2
Abdominal pain	42	28
Diarrhoea	2	4

5.3. Occurrence of stress symptoms

Approximate number of occurrence of symptoms of stress in the past week are shown in Table.5.2.

Table5.2. No. of symptoms of stress happening at least once in a week in the past week

No. of symptoms of stress happened in the past week	Frequency	Percent
0-2 symptoms	54	18
3-4 symptoms	60	20
5-10 symptoms	78	26
11-15symptoms	66	22
16-20symptoms	24	8
21 -25 symptoms	18	6
Above 26 symptoms	0	0

The frequency and number of symptoms students report are indicative of the severity of stress in their lives. Higher the students stress level of students, the association between stress and the prevalence of symptoms per week is large. In the study conducted by Khes, &Christoday (2010), symptoms of stress were present in 20% of the student population and the level of stress ranged from mild to extremely severe.

5.4. Antecedents of Stress

The major antecedents of stress mentioned by respondents are: Academic issues, Peer relationship issues, Financial difficulties, Romantic relationships, Family problems, Physical appearance concerns and Aspiration for latest technology and Career concerns.

Table5.3. Causes of stress

Major cause of stress	Frequency	Percent
Academic issues	105	35
Peer relationship problems	24	8
Financial difficulties	45	15
Romantic relationships	15	5
Family problems	33	11
Physical Appearance concerns	36	12
Aspiration to possess latest technological devices	39	13
Future Career Uncertainty and related anxiety	3	1

In Table5.3. The causes of stress among college students are: Academic issues (35%) , Peer relationship issues (8%), Financial difficulties(15%),Romantic relationships(5%) ,Family problems(11%),Physical appearance concerns(12) and Aspiration to possess latest technological devices(13%) and Career concerns(1%)

5.5. Causes of academic stress

The primary cause of academic stress for 32% is pressure from study. Workload is the primary cause of stress for 18%. For 10% worry about grades is the crucial stressor. Self-expectation is the key academic stressor for 14%. Parental expectation is the critical stressor for 24% of the respondents. For 2% delay in publishing examination result is a major cause of stressor.

5.5. Emotional support network chosen to relieve stress

Students resort to approach peers, parents, teachers, tuition teachers, siblings, relatives, counsellors or significant others for seeking emotional support to handle stress. In Table 5.4. The person of choice of students for seeking emotional support to relieve stress is presented.

Table 5.4. Person of choice for seeking emotional support to relieve stress

Person mostly contacted for emotional support to relieve stress	Emotional support	
	Frequency	Percent (%)
None	3	1
Peers	120	40
Parents	72	24
College teacher	24	8
Counselor	27	9
Tuition teacher	30	10
Siblings	12	4
Relatives	6	2
Other adults	6	2

- 78 % of the respondents opined that, they first turn to their peers/friends, when they are very stressful. Among the respondents:
- 16 % reported that, they first turn to their parents for help when they are very stressful.
- 3% reported that, they first turn to their grandparents for help when they are very stressful.
- 2% reported that, they first turn to their teachers for help when they are very stressful.
- 1% reported that, they first turn to their siblings for help when they are very stressful.
- Only 30% of the respondents have the service of a professional counselor in their college.
- 98% of the respondents expressed positive attitude towards having a professional counselor in their college.

5.6. Perceived Stress

5.6.1. Level of Perceived Stress

The subjectively experienced stress independent of a specific and objective occasion is assessed by Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R.1983). In the Perceived Stress Scale, each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from never (0) to almost always (4). Positively worded items are reverse scored, and the ratings are summed, with higher scores indicating more perceived stress. Perceived Stress Scale 10 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items: Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are the positively stated items. The negative items are scored as the same value given in the response and then sum. Scores around 13 are considered average. Scores of 20 or higher are considered high stress. The level of perceived stress among the respondents is shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5. Level of Perceived stress

Levels of stress	Frequency	Percent
Low stress	108	36
Average stress	120	40
High stress	72	24

From Table 5.5, it is understood that, The level of stress for 36% of respondents is low; 40% of respondents have average stress. 24% of the respondents have high level of stress.

5.7. HYPOTHESIS

5.7.1. Perceived Stress and Gender of the respondents

H₁: There exists significant change in perceived stress with respect to the gender of respondents.

H₀: There exists no significant change in perceived stress with respect to the gender of respondents.

Z test is done to know whether any significant change in perceived stress with respect to the gender of the respondents.

Table 5.6. Perceived Stress with respect to the Gender of respondents

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	z value	p value
Perceived Stress	Male	126	30.55	6.08	-1.340	0.192
	Female	174	31.48	5.52		

In Table 5.6, the comparison of Means and Standard Deviation of perceived stress and with respect to the gender of the respondents is shown. The mean value of perceived stress among males and females are 30.55 and 31.48 respectively. Comparing the mean scores, the females have more perceived stress. Independent sample z test is conducted to compare the perceived stress with respect to the gender of the respondents. The p value is 0.192. Since the p value of perceived stress with respect to the gender of the respondents is greater than 0.05, the result shows that there is no significant difference in perceived stress with respect to the gender of respondents.

5.7.2. Perceived Stress and Type of family of the respondents

H₁: There exists significant change in perceived stress with respect to the type of family of respondents.

H₀: There exists no significant change in perceived stress with respect to the type of family of respondents.

Z test is done to know whether any significant difference in perceived stress with respect to the type of family of the respondents.

Table.5.7. Perceived Stress with respect to the Type of Family of the respondents

Variables	Type of Family	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	z value	p value
Perceived Stress	Joint	126	31.59	5.34	1.869	0.081
	Nuclear	174	30.60	6.69		

In Table.5.7. The mean value of perceived stress of respondents belonging to joint family is 31.59 and that of nuclear family is nuclear family is 30.60. Comparing the mean values, the respondents belonging to joint family, has highest perceived stress. z test is conducted to compare perceived stress of the respondents belonging to different type of family. The z value of perceived stress is 1.869. The p value of the perceived stress is 0.081. The p value of the perceived stress is greater than 0.05. There is no significant difference in perceived stress with respect to the type of family of the respondents.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Colleges should be student friendly institutions. Institution rules ought to be flexible according to the individual situation of the student, without compromising discipline. A good teacher -student relationship should be maintained in the colleges. Regular mentoring should be done in colleges.

A student counsellor should be appointed in all educational institutions. A counselor could help the students by providing psychological support and professional guidance. Individual case work with students can bring to light the source of stress and thereby professional can assist the students to ventilate their problems and empower them to help themselves.

Provision for mental health education and life skills training should be provided in all educational institutions to improve the psychosocial competence of the students.

Facilitate development and practice of hobbies and soft skills.

Encourage positive thinking, exercise, healthy eating, Yoga and relaxation sessions.

Stress inoculation programmes, stress management programmes, personality development workshops, communication skills training should be done in colleges.

Sessions on time management techniques, healthy study habits, career guidance seminars, could be conducted in the colleges so that the students can improve their personality, aptitude and skills.

VII. CONCLUSION

Stress poses a great threat to Quality of Life. It has become widely accepted that youth face stressful events that have the potential to severely disrupt their lives and negatively affect their psychological adjustment and health. The study elucidates the causes of stress among college students. The research findings would help the individual students, teachers, educational institution administrators and mentors to alleviate the effects of stress on the students and strengthen their psycho social competence and coping skills. The study findings highlight the need for mental health interventions addressing the issues of stress management. A small amount of mental ill health can and does adversely affect the country's development since youth are valuable resources of nation. The youth needs special attention in order to become productive and contributing members of the society.

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