



Gender differences in perceived stress among select college students in Manipur

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Abstract: Ex-post factor research design was used for the study. The data for the study was collected using systematic random sampling. The sample comprised of 80 students aged between 18-25 years, out of which 40 consisted of male and 40 were female students. The questionnaires administered were demographic details, General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) (Golberg & Williams, 1998) and Perceived Stress Scale by (PSS) (Cohen, 1983). Data were analysed using SPSS17. Descriptive, correlational analysis and t-test were also used to analyse the data.

Keywords: Stress, general health and college students

Introduction

Stress is a part of everyday life. It is the body's reaction to changes that requires physical, mental and physiological changes. The common causes of stress factors for students are academic pressure, peer pressure, financial constraints, relationship problems, environmental conflicts, social adjustments etc. The problem increases when there is lack of awareness about stress and the use of unhealthy coping strategies arises to face the stressors. The psychological distress in students such as stress affects their academic performance and physical health. The environment plays a role in contributing to stress in students. The transition from high school to college, adolescents to young adult is a crucial stage which includes changes, risk and experiences. Stress is a part of everyday life which requires changes. Students are exposed to various stressors in the form of examination, relationship problems, financial constraints, academic performance, career and time management (Bhargava & Trivedi, 2018). One of the causal factor of stressor for student is the political and environmental conflict. Environment plays a vital role in the contribution of stress in students. In the present context, Manipur has a history of environmental conflicts for various reasons. Stress in students arises from environmental aspect. (Yikealo, Yemane & Karvinen, 2018). Students pursue their higher education outside the state due to various reasons such as better education facilities, exploring new environment, study subjects of their choice which is not available in the state and so on. For some, due to frequent bandhs, blockade and strike which compels them to leave the state for their further studies. Nonetheless, there are a vast number of students studying in the state. Many incidences have been encountered in the state till date such as bandhs, curfews and strikes resulting to close down educational system. This affects the student body at large, stress being one of the factors. The irregularity in the college functioning affects performance, creates low interest in studies, environment conflict and academic pressure results in stressful situation. Individual differ in the way they perceive stress and coping with it. The problem arises when there is lack of awareness about stress and how to deal with the stressors affectively. When the individual is unable to cope with stressors, some studies have reported that students tend to indulge in unhealthy coping strategies like drinking, smoking, running away from home. The area on psychosocial problems is unexplored and therefore not identified leading to insufficient assessment of the mental health of the students (Nsereki, 2014). In young adults common mental health challenges are anxiety, depression, drug abuse, suicidal ideation. Mental health should be given equal importance as physical health.

Each individual differ in the way stress is perceived. In the same way, men and women differ in the way they react to stress both psychologically and biologically. Previous studies revealed that women have a higher level of stress than compared to men. It was found that women had an overall high score on the level of depression, frustration, anxiety when reacting to stress (Calvarese, 2015). Women experiences more chronic stress than men (Mc.Dougough & Walters, 2001; Matud, 2004). Female College students were found to have higher score of perceived level of stress when compared to male students. (Shaw, 2017). Gender difference on the level of stress revealed that female university has higher stress than their counterparts (Zyl & Dhurup, 2016). Health interview survey among adolescent from 2008-2013 showed that adolescent girls had a higher scores on psychological distress, anxiety and depression. (Droogenbroeck, 2018). Contrary to the mentioned studies male students were found to have a higher level of stress than compared to female students (Chen, Wong, Ran and Gilson, 2009). In a study there was no difference between male and female on the level of stress among college students (Amr et al, 2009). Women were found to have lower perceived stress and higher optimism when compared to men (Sitz and Poche, 2006). In the studies reviewed there are inconsistency findings on the level of stress and psychological well-being among male and female students. There was a need to study on these variables to find out if there exist difference between male and female students on their level of psychological distress and level of stress. By studying these variables there could be further inputs and interventions to enhance positive psychological strengths.

Methods

Participants and procedures

Participants consisted of 80 college students in Manipur. The age range of the participants was from 18 years to 28years. They consisted of 40 male and 40 female. Systematic random sampling method was used to select the sample. The total time taken to complete the questionnaire was 10 minutes. The study was voluntary and participants were ensured anonymity and confidentiality in their responses.

The self-administered questionnaires were given to the participants and sufficient time was allotted to complete it.

Measurement

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

The scale is to assess the perceived level of stress. The Perceived Stress Scale was developed by Cohen (1983). It consists of 10 items. The Coefficient alpha reliability for PSS is 0.86 and the test-retest correlation is 0.85. The PSS is scored on a 5-point interval scale (0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often.) Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are reversely scored. The score ranging from 0 to 40, 0 being never stressed and 40 being highly stressed.

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12).

The scale consists of 12 items. The GHQ12 was developed by Goldberg & Williams (1988). It consists of 12 items. It is used for screening psychological distress. It is also used as a screening tool to determine whether an individual is at risk of developing a psychiatric disorder. The tool is found by researchers to be reliable and well validated. Each item is rated on a four point scale- less than usual, no more than usual, rather more than usual, or much more than usual. The positive items were correlated from (0-3) and the negative items from (3-0). The score was used to generate a score ranging from 0 to 36. High scores indicate worse health.

Demographic details

The demographic detail was given along with the other questionnaire. It consisted of the person's name which is optional, age, gender, course of study, year of studies and name of college.

Results

The descriptive statistics including mean \pm SD of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) in male female among college students were reported in table1 and table 2.

Table 1: Gender and Perceived Stress Level

		Perceived Stress Scale			
Gender	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Male	40	18.85	4.57	6	24
Female	40	19.8	3.82	12	29
Total	80	19.32	4.20	6	29

Note. N=number of participants, SD= Standard Deviation, min=minimum, max=maximum.

Hypothesis 1 states that there would be significant difference between male and female on the level of stress.

Table 1 shows the mean scores of male and female. The mean and SD of the male participants (M=18.85, SD=4.57), whereas in female participants it was (M=19.8, SD=3.82). The scores were compared using a t-test for independent samples. The result of the analysis showed that there were no significant difference between the Perceived Stress means scores of male and female. (df=76, t=0.315, p>0.05)

The table further highlights the minimum and maximum scores.

Table 2: Gender and general health

		General Health questionnaire			
Gender	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Male	40	12.8	4.83	4	24
Female	40	14.13	4.92	1	23
Total	80	13.42	4.88	1	24

Note. N=number of participants, SD= Standard Deviation, min=minimum, max=maximum.

Hypothesis 2 states that there would be significant difference between male and female on the level of psychological distress.

Table 2 shows the mean scores of male and female. The mean and SD of the male participants was (M=12.8, SD=4.83), whereas in female participants it was (M=14.13, SD=4.92). The comparison scores between male and female were computed using the t-test for independent samples. The result of the analysis showed that there was no significant difference between the psychological distress scores of male and female participants. (df=78, t-test=0.254, p>0.05). The table further highlights the minimum and maximum scores.

Table 3: Correlation between perceived level of stress and general health

Variable	N	r	p value	df
Perceived Stress Scale	80	.26	0.02*	79
General Health Questionnaire12				

Note: N=no. of participants. df=degrees of freedom, *p<.05

Hypothesis 3 states that there would be significant relationship between the perceived level of stress and general health among college students.

Table 3 shows the correlation between perceived level of stress and general health among college students. The computed score shows the correlation value (r=.26, p value=0.02, df=79). The scores show that it is significant at .05 level. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the scores of perceived stress scale and general health questionnaire.

Discussion

The current study proposed to study the gender difference on the level of stress and general health. The relationship between perceived level of stress and general health was examined too. In the Perceived Stress Scale, when the mean scores were compared between male and female participants it was seen that female group ($M=19.8$) had a higher score when compared to the male group ($M=18.85$). However, in computing statistically to find the difference between the two groups it was found that there was no significant difference between male and female participants. This study contradicts to studies which reveals that female have higher level of stress when compared to male. (Shwa, 2017). Many researchers have contributed to studies that support that female students in general have a higher level of stress, and are more prone to have chronic stress (Mc.Dougough & Walters, 2001; Matud, 2004). But in this present study, there was no difference on the level of perceived stress among the female and male groups which is consistent with previous study that revealed that there were no difference between male and female in the level of stress among college students. (Amr et al, 2009). The result found may simply indicate that there is no difference between the genders on this variable.

In other words, men and women may share more similarities in the way stress is perceived. While there are clearly differences between men and women, this study did not find them in this variable. The General Health Questionnaire is a commonly employed measure of mental health status which is used for evaluating psychological disorders and strains. In the present study it was found that there was no significant difference in gender in the general health questionnaire. The present result contradicts with previous study which reveals that female students have a higher level of psychological distress (Droogenbroeck, 2018). Although this study did not reveal significant difference between gender and perceived stress; gender and general health, it revealed that there was a significant relationship between the level of perceived stress and the general health. This is an obvious result as many researcher and studies have revealed the link between stress, mental health and psychological distress. The high rate of stress among college students has been greatly linked to a greater risk for suicide attempts and mental health diagnosis. (Liu Ch, 2018).

Individuals with high level of stress and high psychological distress needs to be identified in colleges so that further assessments, positive interventions can be implemented. Awareness about stress and coping skills is a vital step in helping face challenges faced daily. Colleges can adopt courses on personality development, self-awareness programs. Stress management programs for students can be implemented as well. The need for school and college counsellor is the need of the hour in the state and implementation of this will be beneficial for the college students to cope with the challenges and struggles faced by them.

Conclusion

From this study it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between gender and level of stress. There was also no significant difference between gender and general health. However, there existed a positive relationship between level of stress and general health among college students.

Limitations

The sample was limited only to 80 participants; a similar study can be conducted in a larger sample. The study was limited to only art students. Further research could focus on the inclusion of arts, science and professional course in the study. The study was also limited to only few colleges in Imphal.

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