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“A study to assess the level of stress among college students in a selected Govt. College of Nursing, Srinagar, J&K, India”.

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ABSTRACT

Stress is a condition of mental pressure for particular individual facing problems from environmental and social well-being which leads to so many diseases. Young age is the critical period because at this time student faces lots of changes in his/her life. Students of the modern era are living in a highly competitive world which exerts lots of stress on students to survive in this era. Stress is an unavoidable phenomenon in all aspects of human life. Stress is an emotional imbalance which may occur due to various reasons such as tests, papers and projects, competitive nature within one's chosen field, financial worries about school and future employment prospects (Ross et al., 1999). Stress can be negative or positive to an individual, depending on the strength and persistence of the stress, the individual's personality, cognitive appraisal of the stress, and social support. Stress affects students academically, socially, physically and emotionally. The transition of students from high school level to the college level is inherently stressful for students. It could cause psychological, academic and social shock to them. From this perspective, this research was aimed to investigate the level of stress among the College students. Descriptive research was undertaken to assess the

students' level of stress. A randomly drawn participants (N = 30) completed Perceived Stress Scale assessing their levels of stress). The results revealed that there was a moderate level of stress among the students. Besides, the students' levels of stress were found to have no statistically significant associations with their gender. The study may theoretically contribute to the body of scientific knowledge on mental health studies. Practically, the study may also guide college communities to take concrete steps towards the improvement of the learning environment and subsequently mitigating the adverse impact of stress on students' wellbeing and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Stress, College Students, Gender.

Introduction:

Stress as an inescapable part of life generally touches a wide range of groups of population with no regard to their age, gender, educational status or socioeconomic status. Despite this fact, stress, depression and anxiety are prevailing mental health problems among college students (Kitzrow, 2003; Marthoenis, Meutia, Fathiariani, & Sofyan, 2018)¹. College students undergo numerous educational, social, environmental and psychological adjustment difficulties in the new campus atmosphere which may affect their psychosocial well-being and learning outcomes. These happen because the new tertiary educational system has a big difference in its methods of teaching, academic requirements, type of relations between faculties and even relations among students themselves (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012)². In short, stress seems to be very common in college students' life because college students need to ensure their academic survival and prepare themselves for the further career. It is not a surprise that much of the academic stress at the college level is associated with what students learn and how they learn it.

Stress can be a healthy and adaptive people's response to the threat by mobilizing their energy towards the stressors (Khan, Lanin, & Ahmad, 2015)³. Thus, it is important to note that a certain level of stress is essential for the students in a way that it motivates students to progress in their academic journey actively, would otherwise be inactive and uninterested creatures (Nandamuri & Ch, 2007)⁴. Many researchers have also noted that stress is not always negative. It also partakes positive motivational contribution in people's life. Take, for instance, exam stress or academic workload may motivate and strengthen a college student to successfully deal with his or her academic tasks and also enhances academic achievement and creativity (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998)⁵. However, if individuals fail to employ effective stress coping mechanisms to handle the stressful situation, their feeling of stress can persist over time and, in turn, become at a higher risk of developing severe physical and mental problems (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998)⁵.

Literature review:

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984)⁶, stress is defined as an individual's physical and psychological reaction to an event or object or which is appraised as a threat. Similarly, according to Campbell (2006) as cited in Bataineh (2013)⁷, stress is an adverse reaction that individuals manifest when they encounter excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them. Stress especially arises when individuals are under overwhelming situation and believe that they are incompetent to handle. The definitions reflect that stress is psychophysical phenomena which come into existence as a result of a continuous interaction between the individual and the environment. Said it differently, when college students, for instance, often deal with pressures associated with finding a job or a potential life partner, such stressors do not cause anxiety or tension by themselves. Instead, the feeling of stress results from the interaction between stressors and the students' perception and reaction to those stressors (Romano, Feng, G.F. 1992)⁸.

With respect to the levels of stress and stressors, previous literature has invariably documented that college students are exposed to different kinds of stressors and stress level. For instance, in a study conducted with the sample of 249 student participants, undergraduate university students were found to experience higher levels of stress as a result of academic commitments, financial pressures, and lack of time management skills. The students' health, emotional state, and academic performance can be devastated when they negatively interpret the stressful context or when the stress level intensifies (Ranjita Misra & Mckean, 2000)⁹.

In agreement with this finding, Waghachavare, Dhumale, Kadam, and Gore (2013)¹⁰ surveyed a large sample (N = 1200) and demonstrated that college students experienced a certain level of stress associated with healthy lifestyles and academic factors.

Recently, Bhat U et al. (2018)¹¹ concluded that psychological stress is highly prevalent among college students especially among engineering and art students and those who are residing with their families.

Besides, Azila-Gbettor, Atatsi, Danku, and Soglo (2015)¹³ have carried out a cross-sectional study in 275 business students in Ghana and found that academic factors (e.g., getting good grade, exam stress, inadequate educational materials and achieving academic goal), interpersonal and self-stressors (e.g., fear of failure, dealing with personal issue, and study skills), relationship interpersonal and social stressors (e.g., academic competition, and social support), teaching quality, relations with and support from teachers stressors (e.g., delaying in marking and feedback, accessing learning materials, understanding the expectation of teaching staff) and environmental, campus, administration and transition stressors (e.g., college transition and campus adjustment) are among the commonly stress producing factors in the students. Moreover, the study disclosed that environmental, campus, administration and transition stressors were the most stressful category.

Another study was conducted on academic stress among college students in the faculty of education at King Saud University. The result of the study showed that academic overloads, course awkward, inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams awkward, low motivation, and high family expectations produced

moderate level of stress among students. It was also found that fear of failure was the primary source of stress among students (Bataineh, 2013)¹⁴.

Several previous literature seemed to have an agreement on the general prevalence of stress among the college students, but the sources of stress and magnitude of stress among students are not consistent across the studies. Although many studies reported high level of stress among the students, some studies also found university students to experience a moderate level of stress, anxiety, and depression (e.g., Bataineh, 2013; Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012)¹⁴. We guess that such differences in the documented findings might be associated with the nature of the stressors, the individual's cognitive appraisal, and coping resources, or methodological issues, and sample variations.

Empirical studies on the influence of gender on stress were found to be contradictory and mixed up (Azila-Gbette et al., 2015)¹³. For example, Sulaiman, Hassan, Sopian, and Abdullah (2009)¹⁵ found that female students have experienced a higher level of stress compared to male students because they tend to be extra emotional and sensitive toward what is happening in their surroundings.

Jogaratham and Buchanan (2004)¹⁶ found the same finding that female students reported a higher level of stress than their male counterparts concerning the time pressure dimension of stress. More to these findings, stress and anxiety levels among female college students were found to be elevated compared to counterparts (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008)¹⁷. Possible elucidations for female students experiencing higher stress levels could include women taking on the role of being the caretaker of the family while also working and being a successful student. Females usually report a higher level of self-imposed stress and report more physiological reactions to stressors than males while males report lower stress levels because they are taught to be masculine and not show emotional weakness.

Unlike these findings, Khan et al. (2015)³ found that school boys are more stressed than school girls. This might be due the higher expectations and responsibilities that parents put on boys as well as the high standard goals that boys want to attain in their plans (Khan et al., 2015)³. Likewise, in a study conducted in Ghana, male students were found to experience a higher level of stress than female students (Azila-Gbette et al., 2015)¹³.

On the other hand, other studies reported that there is no significant difference between male and female on academic stress (e.g., Bhosale, 2014; Omoniyi & Ogunsanmi, 2012)¹⁸.

Several studies have ascertained that there is an inverse relationship between students' level of stress and their academic performance with the assumptions that higher level of stress hampers students' effective functioning in the field of learning (Bennett, 2003; Elias, Ping, & Abdullah, 2011)¹⁹.

In a study conducted among 656 undergraduate students in India, low performing and high performing students were found to have significantly different scores on different sources of stress (Veena & Shastri, 2016)²⁰.

Similarly, Taylor and Owusu-Banahene (2010)²¹ concluded that stress has a crippling effect on students' academic performance.

In addition, components of stress such as social and financial stress were also claimed to decline students' academic performance (Pariat, Rynjah, & Kharjana, 2014)²².

From the reviewed literature, it seems that many studies are in favor of the adverse effect of stress on students. However, there some studies which challenge the inverse relationship between stress and academic performance and advocate for the positive contribution of stress to students' learning outcome. For instance, Siraj et al. (2014)²³ explored the association between stress levels and the academic performances and demonstrated that respondents with a high and severe stress level were observed to have a higher cumulative grade point average. The medical students were found to be highly capable of managing their stress well and, thus, deny the adverse effect of stress on their academic performance. On the other hand, other studies found no statistically significant relationship between stress and academic performance (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2015; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004)^{13,15}.

Statement of the problem:

“A study to assess the level of stress among college students in a selected Govt. College of Nursing ,Srinagar, Kashmir”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To assess the level of stress among the college students.
2. To find out association between the level of stress and selected demographic variable (gender).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This includes:

1. Research approach,
2. Research design,
3. Variables under study,
4. Setting of the study,
5. Population ,Sample and sampling technique,

6. Diagrammatic presentation of methodology
7. Data collection tools and techniques,
 - Development of the tool
 - Description of the tool
8. Plan for data analysis

RESEARCH APPROACH:- In view of the nature of the problem under study and to accomplish the objectives of the study, quantitative approach was found to be appropriate to determine the level of stress among the college students.

RESEARCH DESIGN:- Descriptive research with post-test only design was used to determine the level of stress among the college students.

VARIABLES UNDER STUDY:

The selected variable of the present study is:

Demographic variable: The demographic variable in the present study is gender.

RESEARCH SETTING: The study was conducted at Govt. College of Nursing, Srinagar. The total accessible population of students was 100.

STUDY POPULATION: In this study the population comprises of Second Year Students studying in Govt. College of Nursing, Srinagar.

SAMPLE:- The present study was conducted on 30 second year students, who were available during the period of data collection.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:- In this study Simple Random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Sample consists of 30 second year students which were selected by lottery method.

Data collection Instrument/Tool: In the present study, data collection instrument used was Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to assess the stress level

Development of the tool (Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)):

The tool was prepared on the basis of Objectives of the study.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) comprised two sections:

Section A: Deals with demographic data related to the students. It includes gender.

Section B: Perceived Stress Scale is a classic stress assessment tool. It comprised of 10 items.

Perceived Stress Scale

A more precise measure of personal stress can be determined by using a variety of instruments that have been designed to help measure individual stress levels. The first of these is called the Perceived Stress Scale.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a classic stress assessment instrument. This tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a popular choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress. The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way; rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS):

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

0 – never 1 - almost never 2 – sometimes 3 - fairly often 4 - very often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? _____
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? _____
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed? _____
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? _____
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? _____
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? _____
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? _____
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? _____
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control? _____

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?_____

Scoring pattern/criteria to assess stress:

Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

1. Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.
2. Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.
3. Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

Data collection procedure: In the process of data collection, The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) were distributed to the selected participants in their classroom. As the level of education was known to understand the English language of item statements, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was used with no translation to the local language. Thus, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was easily administered by the participants. However, to smoothly facilitate the process of data collection, we were present at time.

Data analyses procedure:

First, data were inputted into 21 SPSS version. Then, descriptive statistics such as frequency of distributions, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize and analyze the data.

Finally, to test whether students' level of stress significantly differed across their gender, chi-square test for independence was determined.

Results:

Descriptive statistics of the study variables:

To determine the level of stress, the study employed descriptive statistics (frequency distribution).

Table1. Frequency distribution of the level of stress. (N=30)

Levels of stress	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Lower	10	33.3
Moderate	19	63.4
Higher	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

Table 1 presented that the majority of the students (63.4%) reported a moderate level of stress, 3.3% high level of stress and 33.3% low level of stress.

Association of Level of stress and selected demographic variable (gender):

Table 2. Summary of cross-tabulation for Gender and level of stress (N=30)

Gender		Level of overall stress			
		Lower	Moderate	Higher	Total
Male	Number	7	10	0	17
	%age	41.30%	58.70%	0.00%	100.00%
Female	Number	4	7	2	13
	%age	30.7%	54.0%	15.3%	100.00%
Total	Number	11	17	2	30
	%age	36.6%	56.6%	6.2%	100.00%

As presented in Table 2, the result revealed that the majority of the male participants 10 (58.7%) out of 17 were found experiencing a moderate level of stress. The rest of male participants 7 (41.3%) were found having lower stress level. However, there was no any male student who experienced a high level of stress. Regarding the female participants, the majority of them, 7 (54.0%) out of 13 experienced moderate, 4 (30.7%) lower and 2 (6.2%) higher levels of stress. The frequency distributions of male and female indicated that they more or less had a similar level of stress even though female students a bit seemed more prone to stress than their counterparts.

To test whether the association between the level of stress and gender was statistically significant, a Chi-Square test for independence was run. The chi-square test result indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in stress scores between male and female students $X^2(2, N = 123) = 4.01, p = 0.13$.

Discussion:

This research was aimed to examine the levels of stress among college students. Besides, the study attempted to explore the association of students' overall stress level with their gender. The results showed that majority of the students experienced moderate stress. Findings of the present study also discovered that there was no statistically significant association of students' gender with their overall stress scores.

Studying for long hours and inadequate educational facilities were reported to be the most academic stress causing factors.

Additionally, in concord to our finding, Bataineh (2013)⁷ reported that college students are more stressed with financial problems, inadequate resources like computers, books, lecturers, and overload hours every semester as academic stressors.

Following the findings of Bhosale (2014)¹⁸ and Omoniyi and Ogunsanmi (2012)²⁴, the present study showed that students' stress scores did not show statistically significant difference across their gender. However, it is

also important to note that there are several studies which detected a significant difference in stress scores between males and female.

For instance, Thawabieh and Qaisy (2012)² presented that female students are more vulnerable to stress than males. This could be explained by the fact that females are more subjected to community pressure and they are still under the pressure of cultural habits.

On the other hand, Khan et al. (2015)³ found that male students are more stress than female students which might be due to the high standard parental and social expectations. We guess that the self-contradictory results on the relations between gender and stress might be associated with methodological problems and sample variations.

Finally, in the present study, the students' overall level of stress was found to be moderate, and this is parallel to several previous findings (Abouserie, 1994; Bataineh, 2013)⁷. This moderate level of stress seems to occur as the students in the college bother from various administrative problems and the college academic demands.

Limitations and future research directions:

The present research project endeavored to better understand the context of stress among college students from individual perspective using survey method. Hence, future studies might adopt mixed or multiple research approaches to maintain an accurate understanding of college students' stress.

Since the present study surveyed a small sample size, findings and conclusions may not be sufficient to generalize to other college students' population. Therefore, future research may be directed to reproduce the study using large samples to enhance the external validity of the present findings.

The current study was limited to quantitatively describe the existing stress condition of the students without establishing a causal relationship between variables. Thus, researchers might plan to examine the causal relationship between college stressors and stress outcomes.

Conclusion:

This research indicates that the majority of the College students have a moderate level of stress. Explicitly speaking, lack of fair grading system, academic overload, difficulty in dealing with one's academic problems, and poor subject matter and pedagogical competence of instructors were among the academic stressors that inflict high stress.

According to the findings of this study, no statistically significant difference between the level of stress and gender. Both male and female participants were found experiencing a moderate level of stress.

Implications:

This study in its part made an effort to analyze level of stress among college students, which may enhance the comprehensive understanding of scholars on the area. Practically, the findings of the study can benefit people who deal with college students' life. For instance, the college communities are at the forefront of reducing the stress feelings of their students.

With this regard, the college communities can improve the quality of the learning environment. In the academic part, the college should apply measures to improve the subject matter and pedagogical competence of instructors, inadequate educational facilities, and academic overloads. Besides, conducting regular communications and discussions (like seminars, meeting) with their students are remarkable requirements. More importantly, the college should strengthen the provision of guidance and counseling services that deal with the mental health problems of their students and subsequently promote their psychological, social and emotional wellbeing.

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