ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at http://www.journalcra.com

International Journal of Current Research
Vol. 8, Issue, 10, pp.40744-40748, October, 2016

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CURRENT RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEPTION ON STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

***Veena, N.**

Assistant Professor, Jain University, Bangalore

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 08th July, 2016
Received in revised form
22nd August, 2016
Accepted 25th September, 2016
Published online 30th October, 2016

Key words:

Stressful Life Events, Good Academic Performers, Poor Academic Performers, Pure Science, Engineering students.

ABSTRACT

Stress is inevitable in everyday situations. In the current day scenario the concern about stress among college students is imperative. The objectives of the present study was to find the association between stress and academic performance among undergraduate students, also to see the differences in stress experienced between pure science and engineering students. Sample consisted of 656 students from Bangalore city of which 339 were from pure science stream and 317 were from engineering stream. The stressful life events questionnaire- Student form (1990) was administered. The results indicated that Good academic performers 37% experienced high stress levels and 42% experienced low stress levels. Poor academic performers experienced 14% High stress levels and 8% had low stress levels, indicating that there was an association between stress and academic performance (X^2= 15.07, P=.000). It was also evident that there was a significant difference in stress experienced between pure science and engineering students.

Citation: Veena, N. 2016. "Perception on stressful life events among college students", *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, (10), 40744-40748.

INTRODUCTION

Forces from the outside world impinging on the individual could be counted as 'Stress'. Stress can be defined as ''a state of mental or emotional strain or suspense'' and also as ''a number of normal reactions of the body (mental, emotional, and physiological) designed for self preservation'' (Princeton University, 2001) (Cited in Shaikh *et al*., 2004). Stress is inevitable in everyday situations. Stressful life events can have a substantial impact who experiences them. For some, stressful life events can leave them in confused state, withdrawn, depressed and increasingly vulnerable to the next stressful situation that arises. Research has found that various stressful life events to be risk factors for the development of depression, anxiety, and in some cases post traumatic stress disorder. For some, it can serve as a catalyst for positive change, a chance to re-examine life priorities or to develop strong ties with friends and family. However these two divergent patterns depend on the events themselves or people who experience them (Harvey and Miller, 2000). Stressors accumulate an individual's ability to cope or readjust can be overtaxed, depleting their physical or psychological resources. In turn, there is an increased probability that physical illness or psychological distress will follow (as cited in Misra and Castillo, 2004). Stress often leads to the development of depression and anxiety. Studies on Stress, anxiety and depression are seen quite common among students, it is found that these issues are under diagnosed and under treated. Failure to detect these disorders unfortunately leads to increase in psychological morbidity (Sherina *et al*., 2004). Stressful life events have been characterised as those situations that are tension producing and cold adversely affect an individual's mental health (Rabkin and Struening 1976). Lazarus (1984) suggests that stress is a term used to describe an event made up of antecedent, mediating and response components. Antecedent factors are called stressors, as they are events that elicit a response to stress. The impact of stress is mediated by variables such as self esteem, appraisal, self efficacy (Anderson, 1991). The response component may involve expressions to distress (Cited in Thompson, 1996). During a typical college semester, high levels of stress have been reported for 52% of college students (Hudd *et al*., 2000). Clearly, stress among college students has been prevalent and in some cases severe. Previous research has found that college stress levels were often associated with cognitive deficits (Eg: attention and concentration difficulties) illness, increased rates of depression, anxiety and decreased life satisfaction (Chang 2001, Dyson and Renk, 2006, Lumley & Provenzano 2003, Pritchard *et al* 2007). Poor health behaviour was also linked with high levels of collegiate stress (Cited in Brougham *et al*., 2009). Hudd *et al*. (2000) found that college students who reported higher levels of stress also consumed a greater amount of 'junk food' were less likely to exercise and less likely to obtain adequate amounts of sleep. Academic performance was also found to be impaired for students who reported high levels of stress (Lumley and Provenzano 2003, Struthers *et al*., 2000). Thus physical, psychological

****Corresponding author: Veena, N.***
Assistant Professor, Jain University, Bangalore.

behavioural and academic difficulties were the cost of stress for college students. Pierceall and Keim (2007) found that 75% of the college students perceive stress at a moderate level and 12% had a high level of stress. Ross, Niebling and Heckert (1999) reports the sources of stress as follows: 38% from intrapersonal stressors (e.g., new responsibilities), 28% from environmental stressors (e.g., change in living environment), 19% from interpersonal stressors (e.g., fight with boyfriends/girlfriends), and 15% from academic stressors (e.g., low grade). As shown by some studies (Darling, McWey, Howard and Olmstead, 2007; Ross *et al*., 1999), the following issues can be a source of stress for college students: academic grade anxiety, ambiguity about their future plans, financial problems, family matters and interpersonal relationships. Specifically, university students can experience stress in roommate conflict, changes in sleeping and eating habits, public speech, and increased course workload (Darling *et al*., 2007; Ross *et al*., 1999). The previous researches presented that the stress in college students is related to many negative (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation) (Pengilly and Dowd, 2000; Wilbum and Smith, 2005) and positive indicators (e.g., self-esteem, optimism, hardiness) (Extremera, Durán & Rey, 2009; Pengilly and Dowd, 2000; Wilbum and Smith, 2005) of mental health. Therefore, college students frequently experience stress due to the challenging experiences of young adults, and this situation becomes a factor which hampers with their psychological adjustment (Civitci, 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aim: To study the perception of stressful life events among college students.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the present study were multi fold. The primary objective was to assess the prevalence and perception on stressful life events among undergraduate students. Secondary objective was to find the association between stress experienced and academic performance among undergraduate students. The study also aimed to see the differences in the stress experienced between pure science and engineering students.

Procedure & Sample

The quantitative data were collected from the students enrolled in undergraduate programme. Three science undergraduate colleges and five engineering colleges in Bangalore city, India was considered for the present study. Participants comprised of 656 college students age ranged between 19-23 years. The students were drawn from two disciplines (pure science course and engineering course). Pure science students were from undergraduate colleges studying B.Sc course who opted Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics (PCM) combination, affiliated to Bangalore University. Engineering students were from undergraduate colleges pursuing B.E and who opted computer science and information technology, affiliated to Visweshwaraya Technological University. Among these participants, 48% were from pure science course and 52% were from engineering course. The performance of the students in the end term examination was considered as academic performance/achievement. The students' marks/percentage on final end term examination (based on theory, practicals and internal assessment) were obtained from the educational institution/students marks sheet. The educational institutions/universities (Bangalore University and Visweshwaraya Technological University) considers student's marks based on the percentage they have scored in the end term examination, where a score of 70% and above are considered distinction/high academic performance/ achievement, 50% and below are considered as pass class/poor academic performance/achievement. For the current study the students' academic performance/achievement had been categorised as good academic performance/ achievement and poor academic performance/achievement, where for 'good academic performance/achievement' ranges from 60% and above and 'poor academic performance/achievement' ranges from 59% and below. 38% of Students constituted as good academic performance/achievement grades and 40% constituted poor academic performance/achievement. The researcher obtained the permission from the educational institution to collect the data from the students. Participants were recruited by class as a unit and groups of 25-30 students filled out the questionnaires. Prior to responding to the questionnaires, the consent form was filled and an interactive orientation briefing was organized with students regarding the purpose of the study and the need to answer all the questions frankly.

Tools

The data sheet was prepared to elicit information relevant to the study – age, education, gender, class and university from the respondent.

Stressful Life Events Inventory (Albuquerque *et al*., 1990)

The student form, which was developed for Indian context was employed for the present study. It was open ended which consisted of 56 discrete events covering seven different areas of stress (Educational, heterosexual, family, financial, health, bereavement, and miscellaneous stress). A one year time span was used and events were dated to nearest month. Dimensions of desirability (positive, neutral and negative) and controllability (within and beyond control) were measured. The distress for each item experienced was rated on a 5 point scale from no distress (0) to severe distress (5). The reliability of the test using Cronbach's alpha was 0.75.

RESULTS

The present study investigated the perception of stressful life events among college students, to find the association between stressful life events and academic performance, also to see the differences in stress experienced between pure science and engineering students. The total of fifty six stressors, divided into educational, heterosexual, family, financial, health, bereavement and miscellaneous were assessed in the current study. The responses of the students were analyzed to meet the objectives of the study stated. Descriptive statistics, Chi square and t tests were used to analyze the results. Characteristics of the present sample are as follows. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the subjects in the sample with respect to pure science and engineering students. Of 656 participants that comprised students from pure science stream were 339 (52%), participants remaining 317 (48%) were from engineering stream. Among the total 656 students, good academic performers were 78% and poor academic performers were 22%, indicating good academic performers were more in numbers in the study.

Table 1. Distribution of the subjects in the sample with respect to stream, academic performance and levels of stress perceived

Sample	Frequency	Percent
Streams	-	-
Pure Science	339	52
Engineering	317	48
Total	656	100
Academic Performance	-	-
Good Academic Performers	470	72
Poor Academic Performers	186	28
Total	656	100
Level of Stress	-	-
High Stress	323	49
Low Stress	333	51
Total	656	100

Table 2. Distribution of the subjects in the sample with respect to perception of stressful life events

Stressful Life Events	Frequency	Percent
Perception of being academically evaluated	607	92
Financial Stress	336	51
Health Issues	280	43
Romantic Relationships	262	40
Family related	230	35
Loss of Loved Ones	193	29
Developing Unhealthy Habits	71	11

Table 3. Frequency, Percentage and chi square results of students level of stress in both Good academic performers and poor academic performers groups

Level of Stress	Good Academic Performance Group (n-470)		Poor Academic Performance Group (n-186)		Chi-square value
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Low Stress (n-331)	219	66	112	34	9.888**
High Stress (n-325)	251	77	74	23	

** p<.01 *p<.05 (Significant)

Table 4. Scores on descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney U test values of pure science and Engineering students on levels of stress

Course	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U Value	P value
Pure Science	339	314.04		
Engineering Students	317	343.97	48828	.020*

** p<.01 *p<.05 (Significant)

Among the total 656 students, 49% students experience high stress levels and 51% experienced low stress levels. Among the total 656 students, 607 students (92%) perceived stress when academically being evaluated, 336 (51%) experience financially stressed, 280 (43%) experienced health as stressful, 262 (40%) are stressed because of romantic relationships, 230 (35%) was related to family issues, 193 (29%) felt stress due to bereavement, 71 (11%) are stressed of developing unhealthy habits. On the Levels of stress, good academic performers experienced high level of stress compared to low academic performers. Hence there is an association between stress experienced and academic performance. The Mann Whitney U test indicated that engineering students experience more stress compared to pure science students. The results indicate a statistically significant difference in experiencing stress between pure science and applied science students.

DISCUSSION

A student's life is subjected to different kinds of stressors, such as the pressure of academics with an obligation of success, uncertain future and difficulties envisaged for integration into the system. Students face social, emotional, physical and family problems which may affect their learning ability and academic performance (Fish and Nies, 1996; Chew Graham, Rogers and Yassin, 2003). Some of them find it hard to cope with the stress and lag behind, while others see the pressure as challenge to work harder. Stress reduction and adopting a healthier life style have been major concerns of the students (Mundt, 1996). Students revert to different coping strategies, harmful as well as constructive (Shaikh *et al*., 2004). Severe stress can reduce students' self-esteem, lower their learning capabilities, and consequently diminish their potential academic achievements (Chew-Graham *et al*., 2003; Fish and Nies, 1996; Niemi and Vainiomaki, 1999; Silver and Glicken, 1990). Given that stress may be related to university students' academic performance, understanding the coping strategies used by students may be important in facilitating a positive transition to a university setting (Guszkowska *et al*., nd). Table 2 shows the frequency and prevalence of perception of stressful life events. It is seen that students perceive high stress when they are academically evaluated. Many studies in

the literature indicate that academics-related stress among students is most apparent when they have to face exams, grade competition and when they have too much information to assimilate in insufficient time (Carveth *et al*., 1996). Stress is commonly noted among university students (Towbes and Cohen, 1996) as they are required to juggle many things at the same time including maintaining good results and adjusting to the new social environment. Towards the end of their study, other issue such as the need to land good jobs adds to the existing sources, creating a higher level of stress (D'Zurilla and Sheedy, 1991). In general, students also reported stress from finance, health, romantic relationships, bereavement and developing unhealthy habits.

Academic behaviour is something of great importance to parents, teachers and students themselves. Even the larger society is aware of the long term effects of positive or negative academic behaviour since graduates from educational institutions are expected to shape the destiny of society (Salami, 2001). Unfortunately academic behaviour of undergraduates is becoming worrisome and this has remained a matter of great concern to many educationists (Aremu, 2001). These students have many obstacles to overcome in order to achieve their optimal academic performance (Womble, 2003) (as cited in Kumari and Gartia 2012). Table 3 presents the results of good and poor academic performers group of students with reference to their perception of stressful life events. It shows a statistically significant association between stressful life events experienced and academic performance. It is relevant to note that good academic achievement itself acts as a stressor to the students, in terms of the pressure surrounded by themselves to prove and perform well and also expectations from parents, teachers and peers makes them more stressful and prove significant others. Kumari and Gartia (2012) have also found a positive correlation between stress and academic achievements. Though most of the research findings support the negative relationship between stress and academic achievement, few researchers conclude against them. Bankston and Zhou (2000) reported a significant positive relationship between stress and academic performance of college students. Kaplan and Sadock (2000) reported that an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability. Gelow, Brown, Dowling and Torres (2009) stated that a state of emotional stress was reported to have a significant positive relationship with reported school performance. In another research Womble (2003) did not find any relationship between perceived stress and academic achievement of college students. Albuquerque (1987) reported that various studies both in India and West have identified educational and academic domains as major areas of stressors in college students' population. The current study also tried to understand whether there is a difference in experiencing the level of stress between pure science and engineering students. Table 4 presents the results of two groups that are pure science and engineering science students on levels of stress experienced. The results indicate a statistically significant difference in levels of stress experienced between pure science and engineering students. From the mean difference scores between two groups, it can be inferred that pure science students experienced high stress. This could be attributed to pressures or stressors faced by engineering students from parents, teachers, and friends to perform well, assignments to be completed within short time and perform well in the periodic internal tests to maintain high academic achievement and the consequent falling ill are high compared with pure science students.

Conclusion

It is generally believed view that stress has a negative effect on academic performance. The current study provides different views on this opinion. The results of this study reveal that good academic performers experience more stress levels compared to poor academic performers, which states that there is a significant association between stress and academic performance. Students with high and moderate level of stress have higher academic achievement than students with low levels of stress (Kumari and Gartia 2012). Aldwin & Greenberger (1987) found that perceived academic stress was related to anxiety and depression in college students. This implies that stress leads to tendency for developing neurotic behaviours. The study also reveals that pure science and engineering students differ in experiencing the stressful life events, where engineering students perceive high levels of stress compared to pure science students.

Implications

- Stress among college students manifests itself in academic failure, emotional and psychosocial problems. Trained professionals through Individual counselling can identify sources of stress and help students to understand them as well as advice them about how to mitigate their stress.
- It is important to introduce to the students, perhaps through the educational curriculum, the type and nature of stressors and common problems faced by them. This could be supplemented with field work and training in the college settings.
- The most important source of stress for a college student is from educational/academic domain. Hence teachers play a vital role by imparting study skills, time management, stress management and enhancement of coping skills in the students.
- Enrichment/Training programs should be integrated into the existing courses imparting livelihood or vocational skills for students.
- There should be adequate planning in academic work such that there would be enough intervals between the periods of examinations and continuous assessment tests.

REFERENCES

Albuquerque 1987. "*Coping behavior in relation to life stress and strains in college students*", unpublished, M.Phil thesis, Bangalore University, Bangalore.

Albuqureque ZM, Rao K, Rao S, Subbakrishna DK, Prabhu GG 1990. "Stress and Coping in Psychologically Distressed and Non-Distressed College Students", *Indian journal of Psychological Medicine.,* January 1990, 13, 63-70.

Aldwin, C. and Greenberger, E. 1987. Cultural differences in the predictors of depression. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *15*(6), 789-813.

Bankston, C. L. and Zhou, M. 2002. Being Well vs. Doing Well: Self-Esteem and School Performance among Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Racial and Ethnic Groups. *International Migration Review*, *36*(2), 389-415.

Brougham, R. R., Zail, C. M., Mendoza, C. M. and Miller, J. R. 2009. Stress, sex differences, and coping strategies among college students. *Current Psychology*, *28*(2), 85-97.

Carveth, J. A., Gesse, T. and Moss, N. 1996. Survival Strategies for Nurse-Midwifery Students. *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery*, *41*(1), 50-54.

Civitci, A. 2015. Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction in College Students: Belonging and Extracurricular Participation as Moderators. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *205*, 271-281.

Darling, C. A., McWey, L. M., Howard, S. N. and Olmstead, S. B. 2007. College student stress: The influence of interpersonal relationships on sense of coherence. *Stress and health*, *23*(4), 215-229.

Dyson, R. and Renk, K. 2006. Freshmen adaptation to university life: Depressive symptoms, stress, and coping. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *62*(10), 1231-1244.

D'Zurilla, T. J. and Sheedy, C. F. 1991. Relation between social problem-solving ability and subsequent level of psychological stress in college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *61*(5), 841.

Extremera, N., Durán, A. and Rey, L. 2009. The moderating effect of trait meta-mood and perceived stress on life satisfaction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *47*(2), 116-121.

Gelow, Z. A., Brown III, U. J. and Torres, P. D. 2009. Stress, General Health, and Academic Performance. In *Ninth Annual IBER & TLC Conference Proceedings, Savannah, State University, Las Vegas, NV, USA*.

Guszkowska, M., Zagórska-Pachucka, A., Kuk, A. and Skwarek, K. (nd) Gender as a factor in differentiating strategies of coping with stress used by physical education students.

Harvey, J. H. and Miller, E. D. 2000. *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives*. Psychology Press.

Harvey, J. H. and Miller, E. D. 2000. *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives*. Psychology Press.

Hudd, S. S., Dumlao, J., Erdmann-Sager, D., Murray, D., Phan, E., Soukas, N. and Yokozuka, N. 2000. Stress at college: Effects on health habits, health status and self-esteem. *College Student Journal*, *34*(2), 217-228.

Kumari, R. and Gartia, R. 2012. Relationship between stress and academic achievement of senior secondary school students. *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research*, *1*(3), 152-160.

Lumley, M. A. and Provenzano, K. M. 2003. Stress management through written emotional disclosure improves academic performance among college students with physical symptoms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *95*(3), 641.

Misra, R. and Castillo, L. G. 2004. Academic stress among college students: Comparison of American and international students. *International Journal of Stress Management*, *11*(2), 132.

Pengilly, J. W. and Dowd, E. T. 2000. Hardiness and social support as moderators of stress. *Journal of clinical psychology*, *56*(6), 813-820.

Pierceall, E. A. and Keim, M. C. 2007. Stress and coping strategies among community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *31*(9), 703-712.

Rabkin, J. G. and Struening, E. L. 1976. Life events, stress, and illness. *Science*, *194*(4269), 1013-1020.

Ross, S. E., Niebling, B. C. and Heckert, T. M. 1999. Sources of stress among college students. *Social Psychology*, *61*(5), 841-846.

Sadock, B. J. 2000. *Kaplan & Sadock's comprehensive textbook of psychiatry* (Vol. 2). Philadelphia, PA: lippincott Williams & wilkins.

Shaikh, B. T., Kahloon, A., Kazmi, M., Khalid, H., Nawaz, K., Khan, N. and Khan, S. 2004. Students, stress and coping strategies: a case of Pakistani medical school. *Education for health-abingdon-carfax publishing limited, 17*, 346-353.

Sherina, M. S., Rampal, L. and Kaneson, N. 2004. Psychological stress among undergraduate medical students. *Medical Journal of Malaysia*, *59*(2), 207-211.

Thompson, V. L. S. 1996. Perceived experiences of racism as stressful life events. *Community Mental Health Journal*, *32*(3), 223-233.

Towbes, L. C. and Cohen, L. H. 1996. Chronic stress in the lives of college students: Scale development and prospective prediction of distress. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *25*(2), 199-217.

Wilburn, V. R. and Smith, D. E. 2005. Stress, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation in late adolescents. *Adolescence*, *40*(157), 33.

Womble, L. P. 2003. Impact of stress factors on college students academic performance. *Undergraduate Journal of Psychology*, *16*(1), 16-23.

****