

A Study on College Students: Stress Management for Enhanced Academic Performance

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Abstract— *The prevailing study adds to the body of knowledge concerning college student stressors and their impact on students overall performance. Study identified major categories of stressors like physical, psychological, familial, institutional, individual relationship and societal. Major stressors from these categories are academic workload, inadequate resources, and continuous performance in academic work, familial and societal expectations and uncertainties of getting jobs after graduation. These findings are consistent with the previous studies. The current study also reveals symptoms and impact of stress on college students. Stress is a ubiquitous phenomenon and cannot be avoided but stress in student's life can ruin career, family and social life of an individual. Therefore, there is an urgent need to deal student stress, as they are future of nation. Stress dealing techniques are specified in the paper along with the role of institutions and parents in handling students stress. The current study is descriptive in nature and further studies must be conducted for generalizing the impact of stressors identified in the paper on student's overall performance. Study surfaced certain suggestions for institutions, parents and students in handling stress in student's life.*

Index Terms— *Academic Performance, Institutional Role, Parental Role, Stress, Stressors, Stress Indicators.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Phenomenon in today's life and it is an obvious fact that the most stressful situation in one's life is when he or she is on the verge of constructing career prospects. The important thing about stress is that certain amount of stress is essential for self-motivation and development of an individual but an excess of stress may cause hindrance in progress. It is very important to recognize stress indicators. To continue to successfully compete in global economy, we need an even more highly educated and skilled workforce to confront various challenges that can adapt, to the needs of a rapidly changing and more technically demanding work environment. A 2012 study by the American College Counseling Association found that 37.4 percent of college students seeking help have severe psychological problems, up from 16 percent in 2000. Of the 228 counselors surveyed, more than three out of four reported an increase in crises in the past five years requiring immediate response, 42 percent noted an

increase in self-injury, and 24 percent have seen an increase in eating disorders.

In 2005, the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) surveyed 17,000 college students. Twenty-five percent of the students reported they have "felt so depressed it was difficult to function" three to eight times in the past 12 months. Twenty one percent of the students reported that they "seriously considered suicide." According to the 2005 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors, 154 students committed suicide. The second leading cause of death among college students is suicide

The Associated Press and MTV conducted a survey of college students in spring 2009, to consider college student stress. They surveyed over 2,200 students at 40 randomly chosen colleges throughout the United States. The following are some of the findings of this College Stress and Mental Health poll. 85% of students feel stressed on a daily basis, 77% of students feel stress over academic concerns, 74% of students feel stress about grades, 67% of students feel stress about financial worries, 54% of students feel stress about their families, 53% of students feel stress about relationships, 60% of students at some time have felt stress to the point of not being able to get work done, 70% of students have never considered talking to a counselor about their stress, 84% of students reach out to friends to help them with their stress, 67% of students reach out to parents for help with stress

Stress is an important factor that causes depression. College students are expected to be the elites in the society and this phase becomes a critical period in the pathway. Thus, they should enhance stress management abilities to ensure healthy and prosperous life in the society. Stress mainly comes from academic tests, career exploration, faculty and peer relations, interpersonal relations, competitions, family pressure, benchmarks etc. Academic achievement is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important — procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lotkowski, Robbins, Noeth, the study explored that non-academic factors and academic related skills have a positive relationship in college retention. Institutional commitment, social support, academic goals, academic self-confidence and social involvement when combined with

high school grade point average (HSGPA), socio-economic status (SES) and ACT assessment scores leads to the overall positive relationship in retention of college students.

Chen Kai-Wen (2009), the paper investigated causes of stress among Taiwan college students. It has been founded that male students in college perceives more stress than females and the main cause was family factors. The stress perceived is due to financial, emotional, mental and physical pressure.

Trombitas (2012), the study focuses undergraduate and recently graduated students are facing high levels of stress. Among the contributors of stress the most important one is financial factors like tuition cost, loan repayment and day to day expenditures etc. The financial stress may vary demographically but in severity may affect the student's classroom performance.

Misra & Castillo (2004), the study focuses between the academic stressors and reaction to stressors of American and International students. It has been found that international students reported low academic stress and fewer reactions to academic stressors as compared to American counterparts. Gender and behavior was found one of the major causes of stress. American participants found to have higher level of self-imposed stress and status influences their reaction to stressors.

Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi (2012), the study explores the factors of academic stress among undergraduate students. Some of the factors expressed were poor study habits, change in medium of instructions, high aspiration, more study problems and low socio-economic conditions.

Mazumdar, Gogoi, Buragohain & Haloi (2012), students stress cannot be avoided and its main causes physical, mental, social, job, family and relationship. Their main criteria are concerned towards performance in the exam and good job security. Other than these psychological, psychosomatic and behavioral factors also contributes to stress development amongst college students. Some of the psychological factors jotted in the paper are anger, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and low satisfactions followed by psychosomatic factors as sleep disorders, ulcers, high blood pressure, headache and tachycardia. Symptoms of stress vary in males and females.

Agolla & Ongoriz (2009), the paper investigated the stressors related to academic pressure, academic environment and time. The results of the study states that, academic workload, low motivation, continuous poor performance, inadequate resources, over-crowded lecture halls, and uncertainty of getting job after completion of education lead to stress among students.

L J Frick, J L Frickhe, Coffman and Dey (2010), findings of the study suggest that final year students perceive more stress in comparison to pre-final year students. It is an obvious fact that the final students have to prove themselves in familial and societal context. Final year students have to complete the degree and parallel they have to seek job as per their aspirations.

Ross, Niebling & Hackert (1999), results of the study suggests specific stress management programs should be devised as per the needs of the students in colleges. Authors suggest that college administrators should incorporate stress management training in orientation activities and as well, as

customize the stress management programs or workshops as per the needs of the college students. Students must be fully aware of and should be properly informed about the amenities rendered by the institution for them.

Manukyan & Olmo(2011), the authors identified the types of stressors students may encounter and also suggests the methods to address them. The major stressors identified in the paper are internship, thesis/project, course work, work responsibilities and personal problems, financial problems, lack of social support and health problems. Study suggested measures to cope with stressors related to MSW programs and rolled out with balance of work and play, self-care, maintain social life, vent to supportive people, maintaining perspective, maintain peer and family relationship and stay organized.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the factors causing stress on students.
2. To facilitate students in dealing stress and achieving academic excellence as well as placements.
3. To suggest remedial measures to the Institutes in relieving students stress.
4. To open vistas for further researches.

Stress Indicators among College Students

Stress indicators among college students can be categorized as physical and mental stress indicators.

Physical Stress Indicators

1. Elevated Heart beat
2. Indigestion
3. Insomnia& Oversleeping
4. Headaches
5. Tiredness
6. Pain in neck/lower back
7. Muscular pain
8. Ulcers
9. Excessive crying
10. Increased blood pressure
11. Increased accident proneness
12. Change in appetite
13. Overeating & indigestion
14. Change in sleep pattern

Mental Stress Indicators

1. retfulness (fear or anxiety),
2. Depression (hopelessness) or worthlessness,
3. Annoyance (anger),
4. Wavy temperament,
5. Repetitive thoughts,
6. Lack of concentration (focus),
7. Thought of death or suicide,
8. Forgetfulness
9. Nervousness
10. Pessimistic approach
11. Floating anxiety-anxious

FACTORS CAUSING STRESS

Most common stressors (stress factors) found in college life are as follows:

1. **Physical factor**– College students are much bothered about their physical appearances, ignoring many aspects. It may be commonly seen that students are worried about their

physical appearances and spends lot of time and money for looking getting perfects. Most students migrate for studies and get fascinated in the outer world. They try to get adapt themselves in new environment and cultures and in doing so they may self-degraded themselves, which may cause stress and result in depression.

2. Psychological factor—High Aspirations, Increased financial responsibilities and liabilities, Accountability for decision and preparing for career after graduation are the psychological factor that imposes stress on college students.

3. Familial factor - As soon as students take admission in college, family expectations suddenly increases. This imposes psychological stress on students. There are few parents who understand their child's abilities and potentials and have in-depth understanding of each other's expectations. High expectations from parents disturbs student's academic performance and make them feel more nervous at the time of results and interviews. Another important factor that cause stress in initial college life is homesickness. Many a time parents compare performance of their ward with other siblings.

4. Institutional factor -Institution is one of the main sources of stress among college going students. Such stress comes from new academic environment, new academic responsibilities, raised academic demands, preparation for exams and unsatisfactory academic performance. The prevalent culture in the society diverts students towards the curriculum that fetches job. In such a scenario, they are choosing wrong curriculum, which in turn increases stress.

5. Individual Relationship factor -College life is a phase where students are interacted with new companions and get fascinated by each other's life styles. It totally depends on the circumstances in which they groom their friendship. Therefore, developing new relationship for students is a challenge and a stressor.

Societal factor -In the final and pre final years of studies, apart from familial stress students face a lot of societal stress as society is watching the progress of the individual. Even after completion of education, if student did not get any placement then a societal orbit of pressure is created around them and in such cases individual isolates themselves from social gatherings.

Impact of stress on students

Stress in college life degrades the academic performance that in turn affects their job prospects, which again leads to more stress. Over stressed students may indulge themselves in drug and alcoholic addiction. For fulfilling their raised financial expenditures, they may start borrowing money, rob or get involved in some criminal as well as anti-social activities. Stress may also lead to depression and sometimes compels students to commit suicide.

They start keeping themselves in isolation and not even communicate with parents, friends and relatives. Students become pessimistic in behavior and are easily discouraged.

Dealing Students Stress

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. It may be defined as "a state of mind where psychological or

physiological imbalance results the disparity between situational demand and one's ability and motivation to meet up with those demands." (<http://kalyan-city.blogspot.com/2011/03/what-is-stress-meaning-definition-and.html>)

1. Time management – Time is an important constituent in college life and it is important that students manage it properly. Each semester poses challenge, with new subjects, assignments and projects that are to be duly submitted in time. Students wait for last minute and last minute pressure is severe to handle. Institutes accept that time management is the greatest hurdle in students life. Students should be trained to maintain balance between coursework as well as academic assignments and projects.

Goal Setting and Prioritization – Students should set realistic goals that they want to achieve in their academic tenure. Goal setting practice must be inculcated in routine life so as to know what is to be done and when is to be done. This helps in concentrating on something concrete to work forward. Prioritization of goals will keep students on schedule and thus helps in reducing stress.

2. Talking to friends, colleagues, teachers and parents –Talking about stress definitely make one feel better. The additional benefit is that, opening to a friend, colleague, teachers or parents may help them out also. Students usually help each other in de-stressing by involving in some fun making or recreational activities.

3. Reject quick solutions – Students find drugs or alcohol as a quick way to be stressed out. However, they must be taught, that these are not the permanent solutions to a problem.

Daily diary – Writing one's own feelings and perception helps in distressing. It is another way to cope stress in college life, though it may not appeal to everyone but getting down feelings and thought on paper or computer

1. Helps in examining them and one can work on strategy to manage stress.

2. Proper sleep and nutrition – Good sleep and proper nutrition keeps the body and mind in right pace and helps in coping stress. Students must maintain balance diet within frequent intervals as well as avoid junk food and late night parties.

3. Exercises and Relaxation – College student schedule is full and they do not have time for relaxation and physical exercises. Relaxation and exercises increases body efficiency and mental activeness and thus helps in reducing stress.

4. Meditation/Yoga - Meditation/Yoga is an unusual approach to unshackle stress. Students are benefitted by escalating strong will power and self-confidence. Even they are accumulated by concentration and focus has been set sharp.

5. College counseling – Most of the institutes today are having their own counselors and health services. Apart from that, college should conduct workshops on coping skills, guest lectures and few other activities designed to deal stress on time management, money management, study habits and relationships.

6. Positive Affirmations – It is distressing through getting control over the environment through positive self-talk. With

positive self-talk mind will believe in positive outcomes and that will help in facing challenges and coping stress.

Institutional Role in Relieving Stress

1. Proper Career Counseling

Most of the colleges opt to career guidance and counseling cell for students to provide better options of studies as well as placements in near future. They have extensive tools for college students not only to aid with stress management but also to offer enhanced performance, results and placements. Many colleges in anticipation provide workshops on coping skills by the speakers that help them to relax their stress. The Guest Speakers are requested to speak on topics as identifying stress, reducing its effects, time management, finance management, building Relationship, plan study habits, prioritization etc. They even guide and advice on health related issues. Many colleges appoint counselors at the time of admission itself, so that the student may feel comfortable to choose their subjects and satisfactory zone for job. Although most of the college students related stress is self-manageable, but still there are situations that may be severe enough to require counseling or the advice of faculties and professionals. If the stress in your life is devastating and/or you feel feeble, get help from those you feel comfortable. Thus proper career counseling might be of great assistance to college students for their enhanced educational growth and exigent (challenging) employment.

2. Institute should be equipped with stress management resources

There is an urgent need that college students should receive proper information about stress reduction. Institutions should provide opportunity for students to reduce or manage stress within the institute premises or outside. Students should have proper knowledge about such resources and should be motivated to attend.

3. Recognizing stress as a source of academic and social impairment.

Institutions impose pressure on students through their practices, policies that are intended for the overall development of the students. Students may become stresses or depresses which in turn can hinder their academic progress and affect their mental and physical health. University should develop culture of academia that can foster an environment in which faculty and staff can easily recognize and mitigates the negative effects of stress among students.

4. Development of Infrastructure and availability of physical spaces to support and promote stress reduction.

Institute should setup infrastructure where students can relax and engage in stress relieving activities such as meditation or other such practices. Arena or the physical environment of space should be such that contributes effectively in stress reduction.

5. Curative intervention for prevention and management of stress-related consequences.

Different stress management methods as per the needs and demand of the student should be identified. Accordingly offering multiple types of interventions for stress is necessary to maximize student engagement such as meditation, yoga,

writing exercises, maintaining diary, showing motivational movie etc. to ensure that each student stress management approach that appeals him or her.

6. Prospects of academic, social, and financial support.

Students are more concerned about the classes, relationship and money. Institutes could provide special tutorial classes and social support to reduce students stress. Apart from that, institutes can also offer resources that help students in budgeting, managing debt and handling financial resources effectively.

7. Routing of Institutional systems.

Institutions should improve their service quality to lessen the complexity of the system. Student find difficulty in receiving necessary support provided by the institution, they have to do lot of formalities and paperwork in receiving small-small facilities, which again imposes stress on students. Taskforce could be established to address such issues and reducing students stress by helping them out.

Parental Role in Relieving Stress

1. Encouragement and Motivation –Parents must encourage their ward by rewarding efforts and must not emphasize on grades. Rather they must emphasize learning process and love for learning. Parents must find best-fit institution for higher studies of their ward. They should understand their ward's potential and abilities and then after should promote the students to think about the goals, planning of curriculum and institutional alternatives.

Connectivity and communication– Listen carefully to your ward. Parents should be in contact with the faculties, friends, colleagues and other parents. They should discuss

1. about the academic and other issues to the above mentioned along with their child. Parents should be careful, helpful, concerned, calm and available to student and should perceive any signs of stress visible.
2. **Creating friendly atmosphere at home**– Home atmosphere should be cheer, peaceful and loving. Parents should eat family meals on a regular basis, foster family conversations and should involve their ward in family chores.
3. **Avoiding over involvement**– Sometime parents become over possessive about their child's progress and activities. Students should be allowed to choose courses, extra-curricular interests, while cautioning against over-commitment. Parents should avoid repeated questioning about homework, grades. This causes stress among students.

Promoting work-life balance– Parents should promote good sleep habits, healthy eating and exercise and limit or restraint in the number of

1. Extra-curricular activities, commitments, computer/cell phone use. Parents should be cautious when suggesting course load, it should not be too difficult a course load. Parents should teach their ward to set own limits
2. The parents should always handle handling child's immature behavior in positive and constructive way - Child's inactions and/or irresponsible behaviors in an

optimistic and constructive manner. If parents visualize stress symptoms or if the child admits to being stressed; parents should remain calm, sympathize and encourage their ward to decide on suitable plan of action to distress.

3. Enquiring child's need- Parents should consistently enquire regarding any support or expertise needed by their ward and whether their ward is all right, in control or feels stressed or bored. Parents should enquire about his/her friends in a non-interrogative friendly way during family meals, outings or study breaks.

Plan events and activities- Family activities and vacations are an important distressing activity for the

1. whole family. Events and activities such as entertaining guests, having house guests, repairs and re-furnishing should be taken care of and managed carefully so that living and study arrangements of your ward are least disrupted.

Suggestions for Institutions and Parents

- ✓ Identifying of student's stress,
- ✓ Integrate career development issues in formal curricula,
- ✓ Devising curriculum on stress and stress coping strategies,
- ✓ Pay attention to learning induced stress,
- ✓ To advise specific stress relaxation techniques,
- ✓ To clarify ethics and values to develop a sense of spirituality,
- ✓ Encourage students to set realistic expectations,
- ✓ Enhancing problem solving and handling skills,
- ✓ Seek professional advice when signs of stress constantly persist for long time.

Suggestions for students

- ✓ To understand one's own role in stress reactions,
- ✓ To discuss problems with someone,
- ✓ To develop a balanced life-style and mental status,
- ✓ Try to change or manage yourself,
- ✓ Relax or take rest,
- ✓ Physical exercises may help a lot,
- ✓ Meditation/ Yoga is advisable,
- ✓ Take proper healthy and balanced diet,
- ✓ Be aware of self competencies as well as weakness,
- ✓ Self appraisal is must.

IV. CONCLUSION

Physical, Psychological, Familial, Institutional, Individual relationship and Societal factors are the major categories of stressors that affects students academic performance and career prospects. The above mentioned factors should be taken care of by the institutions, parents and students. Parents should understand the abilities and interest of their wards and then after encourage them to set realistic goals, to select proper course and institute and targeting career prospect of their interest. When

Student reach the institute, now its institutional duty to proper counsel the students while selecting the course and provide pleasurable learning process so as to avoid making it a stressful event for fresher. Institution should provide congenial, supportive and stimulating atmosphere to reduce students stress and to make them achieve excellence in academics as well as their goals and aims in life.

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