



## A STUDY OF STRESS & ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*Factors such as physical and mental, family, job, relationship and social are the main source of stress among the students. For many young adults, college is the best time of life. These critical years can also be undermined by depression, anxiety and stress. Students are very likely to experience some or many stressors which may test their ability to cope: adapting to a new environment, balancing a heavy work load, making new friends, becoming more independent, and dealing with myriad of other issues. Looking from a closer perspective, the college students' encounters a number of challenges in his day to day life, therefore the whole idea of an existing and vibrant college life is unveiled by these challenges which in turn contribute to stress and if not dealt with can only escalate and hamper their academic performance, emotional and social well-being.*

*The present paper examines the sources and effects of stress on the college students. It is hoped that the findings of the present study will assist college students to deal with stress and help advance knowledge on coping strategies to face life stress.*

**Key words :** College students, psychological, Stress, Stressors

## **Introduction**

College life is one of the most scintillating and memorable experiences in an adolescent's life. It is in college that an adolescent enjoys the vibrant environment, the company of friends and the various academic and co-curricular activities, which enriches nurtures and henceforth prepares the adolescent for adulthood.

Looking from a closer perspective, the college student's encounters a number of challenges in his day to day life, therefore the whole idea of an exciting and vibrant college life is unveiled by these challenges which in turn contribute to stress and if not dealt with can only escalate and hamper their academic performance, emotional and social well-being.

College students are exposed to a considerable amount of stress, which necessitate successful and constantly changing coping strategy. These stressors include internal and external pressures exerted by the environment to thrive and succeed, overcome economic hardships, worries about vague futures, societal problems and opportunities. College students often meet their future partners in college, hand in hand they also require preparation and focus to perform well in home works and tests in various subjects and disciplines, consequently they very often face inconsistent outcomes. Therefore ineffective coping can lead to anxiety, drinking problems, depression and a multitude of other mental health problems amongst college students. The issue of stress among college and university students has been in focus for several years. Elevated stress levels amongst students can result in a decline in the academic accomplishments, and can affect both the physical and mental health of students. Therefore, studies on coping with stress will have a significant impact in higher education. (Scott, 2009)

## **Literature Review**

In recent times, students encounter all kinds of stressors, such as that of excelling in academics, vague future and problems associated with adapting into the college

environment. The learning abilities and academic outcomes of these students are affected when they encounter challenges such as social, emotional, physical and family problems. (Fish & Nies, 1996, Chew et al., 2003) According to Feld 2011, the most important stressors encountered by students include high individual and external expectations, and stressful surroundings as well as academic motivators such as academic tasks, ranks and college recognition. Students believe that they would practice an improved way of life if these challenges were removed.

Babar et al 2004 found out that the most dominant stressors were that of academics and examinations. The subject of academic stress and college students has been in the limelight for several years. During every semester, at specific periods college students experience pressure due to academic engagements and responsibilities, economic hardships and improper time management skills. Health and academic accomplishments can both be hampered if stress levels are very high and if stress is negatively perceived. (Campbell & Svenson, 1992).Womble, 2003 studied various factors that can weaken a student's academic achievements. These factors included societal activities, job demands or romantic relationships which can take away valuable time.

In India, the factors responsible for the outcomes such as emotional stress and internalized problems are due to elevated levels of academic and social stress. (Verma et al. 2002, Krishnakumar et al. 2005, Lai & Wong 1992). While students stress has often been linked in the literature to family problems, similar results were found in studies by other researchers that students learning ability and academic accomplishments were affected by family problems(Fish et al 1996;Chew et al, 2003)

Social support from the university, family, friends and mentors create an enormous impact on student's achievement and performance. Likewise, emotional, academic and financial aids are incredible factors which ascertain the success of college students. College life can be stressful and alter the life experience of a student, it is therefore vital to be in the company of family and friends while being in college. (Trockel et al. 2000) Shaikh et al 2004 also reports that relationship problems both at home and in college often

contributes to stress. As stated by Greenberg (1996) making new friends is one of the causative factors of stress amongst college students. Besides making new friends, it is often seen that transforming and building new friendship is a stressful situation highly related with college life. An individual's self-esteem is enhanced through academic excellence and accomplishment. Ills, (1991) states that academic achievement is influenced by self-esteem. Studies conducted by Dennis et al., (2005) and Nicpon et al., (2006) clearly determine that students who are socially inactive tend to be more isolated, attain low grades and are more at risk of withdrawing from college. A decline in the academic performance and adjustment is seen among students who are lonely and socially inactive in college thus making them unable to utilize the social resources available on the campus.

Pinto et al. 2001; Ross et al. 1999 and St. John, 1998, documented a decline in academic performance as a result of financial stress. However, Mehta, et al., (2011) suggested that financial stress is not the only determining factor of poor academic performance.

Investigation carried by Patel & Greydanus (1999) exhibits adolescent stage to be a crucial period where substance use primarily develops. As a consequence of peer pressure, college recognition and accessibility of substances (alcohol, drugs, tobacco such as cigarettes and gutkha), substance abuse by students is mainly due to academic stress. As reported, nearly 5500 children and adolescents in India, begin usage of tobacco products daily, with a majority who initiate substance intake before 18 years and a few as young as 10 years old.

The major purpose of substance usage as affirmed by Lukoye et al., (2011) were mainly peer pressure, experimentation, and de-stressing. The incidence of substance abuse mainly smoking and alcohol is very high among students in economically backward countries. Poor academic performance, low self-esteem, bonding difficulties with parents, lack of moral and spiritual values, sensation seeking and early initiation of substance use

as a result of perceived peer pressure are the dominant risk factors responsible for high substance abuse among the youth. (Otieno & Ofulla, 2009)

Reenberg and Valletutti, 1980, state that a good psychological balance on the part of person is an effective tool to deal with stress. The strategies to tackle stressful crisis are referred to as coping mechanisms; which include the, behavioural, physical, external factors, emotional, spiritual and cognitive strategies. ((Lazarus 1999; Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Everley et al. 2002; Westen 1999; Tix et al. 1998). Positive coping strategies relieves stress and was found to be beneficial in the long run, unlike negative coping which may ease stress for a short period of time (eg. Use of alcohol or drugs, or withdrawal from social interaction), but prove to be harmful and affect both the physical and mental health. (Everley et al. 2002). Good coping skills are likely to lower the stress levels whereas negative coping increases stress (Lazarus 1999).

Coping techniques such as proper utilization of time, involving in leisure related activities, optimistic appraisal and support from friends and family often relieves stress in students (Blake & Vandiver, 1988; Mattlin et al., 1990). Leisure and exercise relieves stress, motivates and provides directions and increases proficiency in college students (Ragheb & McKinney, 1993). Different coping methods such as finding help, solving problem, leisure, exercise, cognitive-restructuring, and a sense of security were found to be beneficial (Donaldson & Prinstein et al., 2000).

According to Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi 2012, stressors like academics; social, emotional and financial has an impact on the academic achievements of a college student. Results of an Indian study revealed that factors associated with curriculum and workloads combined with economic deprivation are accountable for academic stress. Low academic achievement of some students can be a consequence of improper time management, economic hardships, lack of sleep, and societal engagements .This is also seen in students with children. (Maheshwari & Deepa 2013)

Researchers have given a lot of emphasis on the issues of college going students, an important area of study being stress and how students cope with it. The studies above indicate that stressors like social, emotional, financial conditions at large affect the academic performance of students although academics is a stressor all by itself. After a thorough literature review very rare studies were found to be conducted in Shillong, Meghalaya on the topic hence the present study “Stress levels of college students: Interrelationship between stressors and coping strategies” is therefore conducted with the aim of exploring and confirming the stressors and how students deal, behave or cope with these stressors in this part of the region.

### **Objectives**

1. To assess the level of stress among college students.
2. To find out the sources and effects of stress.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A questionnaire survey was adopted in this paper. A questionnaire consisting of three sections was used for data collection. The first section of the questionnaire comprises of demographic information, the second section is a set of questions on academic, social, family, emotional and financial stressors and the last section includes the statements on positive and negative stress coping strategies.

Participants in this study were college students enrolled in two colleges Akal Degree College and S.U.S. Govt. College Sunam of Sangrur District . Degree students who were pursuing their studies in different streams namely Arts, Commerce and Science were selected. They were in between the age group of 18-21 years of age.

Participants were briefed in their respective classrooms regarding the questionnaire and the scale and confidentiality of the data was assured to the participants. A total number of 200 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 200 completed the questionnaire in

The presence of the investigators. Convenience sampling method was used for data collection. Various tools are used to analyse the data .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Basic data analysis

Items	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	123	61.5
Female	77	38.5
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0
<b>Grade</b>		
First year	86	43.0
Second year	47	23.5
Third year	67	33.5
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0
<b>College</b>		
A	114	57.0
B	86	43.0
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0

the basic data analysis shows that out of the selected samples 61.5% were males and the remaining 38.5% were females.

**Demographic Information:** The demographic information on the age distribution, gender, course and year of study, accommodation, type of family, marital status, literacy rate of parents was collected and it was found that 55.1 % of the participants resided in their own house during the course of study. This is mainly because participants are native to local city. The remaining participants studying in these college were either residing in the hostel or rented house who belonged to other North Eastern States. Majority (57.5%) of the participants surveyed belongs to the nuclear family.

**Academic Stress:** The academic stressors included were family expectation, teachers' expectations, competition with other students and excessive course work or workload. Of all the academic stressors, family expectations (58.7%) and teacher expectations (33.4%) contributed the most (i.e. 56.7% and 30.4% respectively) towards the stress level of the participants. This indicates that these factors were largely responsible for causing academic stress among the respondents.

**Social Stress:** The social stressors included were attending social events, trouble getting along with a family member, mingling with friends from other cultures, having no friends. It is obvious that a very small group (3.5 percent males and 1.5 percent females) always had problem getting along with family members. A very small percentage of male (1.3%) and female (1.7%) participants did not have friends. The findings above suggest that social stress was not a concern for most of the participants.

**Emotional Stress:** The most important emotional stressors included were adjusting and managing romantic relationship, things are not going along the way one wants them to, not feeling confident about oneself, feeling lonely, anxious and having no one to turn to and understand. Factors like things are not going along the way you want them to, not feeling confident about yourself, feeling lonely and anxious, and having no one to turn to and understand, the response was sometimes and there was a marginal difference in the



responses of both males and females. This result gives a good reflection of the emotional well being of the respondents

**Financial Stress:** The most important financial stressors included were not getting financial support from family for pursuing studies, parents control the money spent, trouble managing a budget, insufficient money for paying personal mobile and internet expenses. Majority (26.4 percent males and 35 percent females) of the participants were having a sound financial background as their families were able to support them for pursuing their study.

**Positive Coping:** Of the positive coping strategies, the mean scores reflected that meditation and prayer was the most effective for both gender followed by listening to music or watching television, sleep, pursuing hobby or interest, talking to parents or any family members and exercise or yoga respectively.

**Negative Coping:** Irrespective of the type of negative coping strategy (i.e., spending more time on social networking sites, smoking, taking alcohol and using drugs) it was revealed that males were more inclined to use these coping strategies than females.

## **Conclusion**

The main findings of this study therefore concluded that academic stress was highly correlated with social and financial stress. Likewise, the present study is also supported by studies conducted by Pinto et al. (2001); Dennis et al., (2005) and Nicpon et al., (2006) ; Raychaudhuri et al., (2010), Mehta, et al., (2011). Positive coping strategies like meditation, prayer and sleep was found to be very helpful (significant at 0.05 level) to combat academic stress. Pursuing hobbies and interest help students to cope with academic stress and these values were significant at 0.05 level. The major sources of stress found out in through the study have a direct relation with the stress level of students. The reasons for stress cannot be limited to these. It varies according to students and their psychology.

In conclusion the results of this study are suggestive as to the necessary components of a stress management program specific to the needs of college students. Given the detrimental effects of stress on health and academic performance, college administrators should consider incorporating stress management training in orientation activities. A better approach may be the use of a stress management workshop, specifically geared to the stressors encountered by college students. Certainly, stress in the college setting cannot be eliminated but we can and should do a better job preparing students to manage it.

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