

Assessing the Stress Levels and Coping Strategies Employed by College Students

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Abstract: *Stress is a complicated psychological and physiological reaction that happens when someone experiences something as difficult, overpowering, or dangerous to their well-being. It is a normal, adaptive reaction made to mobilize the body's capabilities to meet perceived demands or stresses. Coping mechanisms are essential for college students who want to efficiently manage their stress and keep their lives in balance. This study aims at the stress levels and coping techniques of college students. Data from Web-based survey data were gathered over the course of a six month cross-sectional observational study. 161 of the 338 individuals reported experiencing stress, whereas 177 reported not experiencing stress. Stress has been linked to rising academic pressure, as well as financial, social, and personal expectations. Students can reduce their stress by using a variety of coping mechanisms, including as time management techniques, mindfulness meditation, physical exercise, and social support.*

Keywords: Academic Demands, Social Support, Stress Management Strategies, Time Management

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Introduction

It's crucial to remember that, despite the fact that college can present a number of difficulties and stressors that may have a bad effect on students' mental health; it can also be an exciting and transformative stage that provides opportunities for both personal development and new experiences. One of the many things that might generate stress, which is described as a physiological and psychological reaction to being a perceived threat or challenge, are academic pressures, financial troubles, social pressure, and personal issues, to name just a few. The Higher Education Research Institute conducted a study that found that college students' levels of stress have been gradually increasing since 1980s^[1]. A Study Published in the Journal of Adolescent Health examined the relationship between Academic stress and mental Health problems among college students. The study concluded that Academic stress is significant predictors of mental health issues in this population^[2]. College students commonly experience substantial academic pressure due to demanding course work, exams, and deadlines Stress can have severe detrimental effects on college students. Numerous health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disease, have been related to stress^[3]. Anxiety: College students may experience feelings of nervousness or worry, which can manifest as physical symptoms like sweating, trembling, or a racing heartbeat^[4]. Depression: Chronic stress can also lead to feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest in activities that were previously enjoyable^[5]. Chronic stress can also cause tension headaches, which are often characterized by a dull, aching pain that feels like a band tightening around the head^[6]. College students may feel more irritable or short-tempered than usual when they are experiencing chronic stress^[7]. Stress can impair college students' academic performance by affecting their concentration, memory, and motivation^[8]. Therefore, it's crucial for college students to create stress-reduction plans that work. Regular exercise has been shown to lower stress and elevate mood by boosting the brain's levels of dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins. Exercise can enhance academic achievement and cognitive function, which can lower stress from academic expectations^[9]. Effective time management can reduce stress related to academic and personal responsibilities, as well as increase productivity and academic performance^[10]. Setting goals, breaking things down into smaller pieces, and arranging time for particular activities are all examples of time management approaches. CBT has been found to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety among college students^[11].

Aim and Objectives

To assess the stress levels of college students and look into stress management techniques that can be applied to lower stress and improve well-being. College students who are stressed out may experience a variety of

negative outcomes, such as decreased academic performance, issues with physical and mental health, and a high risk of substance misuse. Therefore, in order to maintain their physical and emotional well-being and achieve academic success, college students must learn efficient stress management techniques.

Materials and Methods

A web-based survey will be done following a cross-sectional observational study that was conducted for six months. College students of both genders between the ages of 18 and 24 were eligible to participate in our study. Participants who were not enrolled in a college or university as well as those with severe or persistent mental health conditions were not included. Self administered structured questionnaires were utilized to collect the data. Demographics and socioeconomic, causes of stress, predictors of stress, risk factors of stress, outcomes of stress, symptoms of stress and management strategies were the seven domains covered by the questionnaire.

Results

In our study, out of 338 individuals, 161(52.4%) reported experiencing stress, whereas 177(47.6%) reported not experiencing it.

Table 1: Gender wise distribution of study population

Gender	Total no of participants n= 338
Male	237(70.1%)
Female	101(29.9%)

There were 338 participants, of which 237(70.1%) were male and 101(29.9%) were female. [Table 1]

Table 2: Economic status of parents per month

Economic status	Total no of participants n=338
Less than Rs. 20000	159(47%)
Between Rs. 20000 to 30000	110(32.5%)
Between Rs. 30000 to 50000	52(15.4%)
More than Rs. 50000	17(5%)

From the total number of study participants, 159 (47%) have parents with monthly incomes of less than Rs.20000, 110(32.5%) have parents with monthly incomes of between Rs.20000 to 30000, 52(15.4%) have parents with monthly incomes of between Rs. 30000 to 50000 and 17(5%) have parents with monthly incomes of more than Rs. 50000. [Table 2]

Table 3: Residence wise distribution of study population

Residence	Total no of participants n=338
Urban	147(43.5%)
Rural	191(56.5%)

Out of the total number of participants in the study, 147(43.5%) are from urban areas and 191(56.5%) are from rural areas. [Table 3]

Table 4: Causes of stress wise distribution of study population

Causes	Total no of participants n=161
Study	117(72.7%)
Economic	79(49.1%)
Family	63(39.1%)
Relationship	50(31.1%)
Others	16(9.7%)

In terms of the 161 participants, sources of stress, 117 (72.7%) are affected by their studies, 79(49.1%) participants are affected by the economy, 63(39.1%) are affected by their families, 50 (31.1%) are affected by their relationships, and 16 (9.7%) are affected by other sources. [Table 4]

Table 5: Predictors of stress-wise distribution of study population

Predictors of stress	Yes	No
Difficulties in balancing academic and personnel responsibilities	121(75.2%)	40(24.8%)

Inadequate study materials	95(59%)	66(48%)
Absence of good relationship with family	112(69.6%)	49(30.4%)
Trouble in paying college fees	119(73.9%)	42(26.1%)
Feeling lonely	113(72.7%)	48(27.3%)

Regarding among 161 participants, the following factors were found to be significant predictors of stress: 121(75.2%) participants reported having difficulties in balancing academic and personal responsibilities, 95 (59%) participants reported having insufficient study materials, 112 (69.6%) participants reported having a relationship with their family, 119 (73.9%) reported having trouble paying for college and 113 (72.7%) participants reported feeling lonely. [Table 5]

Table 6: Strategies for stress management wise distribution of study population

Strategies	yes	No
Spend time with friends	113(70.2%)	48(29.8%)
Listen music	135(83.9%)	26(16.1%)
sleep	90(55.9%)	71(44.1%)
Yoga or exercises	54(33.5%)	107(66.5%)
Manage time on social media	112(69.6%)	49(30.4%)
Bike ride	97(60.2%)	64(39.8%)

Among the 161 participants, 113 (70.2%) spend time with friends, 135 (83.9%) listen to music, 90 (55.9%) sleep when stressed, 54 (33.5%) do yoga or exercises, 112 (69.6%) regulate their social media usage, and 97 (60.2%) go for a bike ride. [Table 6]

Discussion

Men may avoid getting stress alleviation since they are regularly socialized to be tough and independent. Contrarily, women are typically socialized to be more outgoing and talkative, which may increase their propensity to seek out assistance from others while under stress. Stress is more likely to be reported by people with lower socioeconomic backgrounds than by those with higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This is likely a result of the more challenging financial and personal situations that students from lower-income families experience^[12]. It is important to note that some recent research confirm the notion that students in urban regions suffer lower levels of stress than do students in rural settings. For instance, a 2016 study by Probst and colleagues found that college students in rural locations had higher levels of stress and less social support than their urban counterparts^[13]. To understand these results more fully, we can turn to scientific research on the causes of stress in college students. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the academic constraints placed on college students, such as an enormous workload, tests, and assignments, cause them to feel a great deal of stress^[14]. Financial difficulties, such as expensive living expenses and tuition, have also been identified as significant sources of stress for students^[15]. Last but not least, social isolation has been linked to greater levels of stress, particularly in first-year students^[16]. Academic pressure can occur when college students have a lot of work to do and have deadlines for their assignments^[17]. Financial anxiety: Stress over money, including worries about debt from student loans and living expenditures, can make college students more agitated^[18]. Social stress: Relationship issues, social isolation, and prejudice are some examples of social stresses that college students may encounter. According to research, several of these strategies might help people feel less stressed. For example, it has been proven that listening to music has a calming impact on the body and reduces stress levels^[19]. Social support and time spent with friends are also linked to better mental health and reduced levels of stress^[20]. Due to the fact that it reduces the body's level of the stress hormone cortisol, getting enough sleep is crucial for stress management^[21]. Several studies have suggested that getting physical activity and putting technology away can have positive effects on mental health and stress levels, even though there may be little scientific evidence to support the utility of riding and restricting social media use for stress management^[22, 23].

Limitations

The study sample size might not be sufficient to adequately represent the complete variety of college students' experiences and methods. Students may give socially desirable answers in order to make themselves look good or to avoid negative judgement, which can affect the validity of the results. Since the survey was conducted online, it was impossible to presume the results were accurate.

Conclusion

Our study's findings indicate that stress is a prevalent issue that has a big influence on some college students. Of the total participants, 161 reported feeling stressed out for various reasons. Due to their social and financial obligations, college students endure a great deal of stress throughout their academic careers. Stress management is essential to preventing long-term negative impacts like anxiety, depression, and physical health issues. A number of coping strategies, including physical activity, mindfulness meditation, peer support, and time management approaches, can help college students manage their stress. Institutions of higher learning must also give college students enough assistance in managing their stress levels. This entails providing counseling services, organizing stress management programmes, and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

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