

THE ROOTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

At some point or another, every college student will experience stress. The key to a healthy and happy life is learning to manage that stress. Finding out more about undergraduates' stressors and coping mechanisms was the driving force for this qualitative study. To gather information for the study variables and to help rank the narratives, researchers used a nominal group approach to interview study participants (n = 174). The symptoms of psychological stress, ways of coping with it, and generational factors that contribute to it were all discussed by the participants. These factors included things like parental expectations, prayer, talking to mom, internet use, and social networking, as well as multitasking, grades, and GPA. A number of factors contributed to the prevalence of anxiety, including pressures related to schoolwork, money, relationships at home, and social situations. The top three stress symptoms indicated by participants were irritability/moody mood, anxiety, and trouble sleeping. The top three methods of dealing with stress were exercising, praying, and talking to mom about concerns. Although today's college students may experience some of the same symptoms, stresses, and coping mechanisms as their parents' generation, the causes of these problems are different.

Keywords: Psychological stress symptoms, coping mechanisms, grades, grades per assignment, multitasking, and parental expectations.

Introduction

For the majority of young adults, adjusting to college life is a challenging and stressful ordeal. Keeping up with coursework, socialising, and basic needs is no easy feat for high school students (Hudd et al., 2000). College life is stressful for everyone, but how students deal with that stress can have a major impact on their physical and mental health.

According to Oliver, Reed, & Smith (1998), Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz (2007), and Economos, Hildebrandt, & Hyatt (2008), students' harmful habits such as excessive drinking, smoking, and binge eating can be attributed to their failure to manage stress. Possible side effects include lowered immune system function, heightened infection susceptibility, chronic herpes virus infections, hypertension, cancer, autoimmune illness, and stroke (Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Largo-Wright, Peterson, & Chen, 2005). Furthermore, a number of studies have shown that stress has a negative impact on college students' mental health, which may lead to an increase in depression rates (Yorgason, Linville, & Zitzman, 2008; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Benton et al., 2002). Given the detrimental effects on health, experts have taken an interest in understanding the sources of stress for children and possible strategies for managing it.

Many studies have looked at different types of college students to determine what causes stress, how it manifests, and what they may do to lessen its impact. Research conducted by Marshal, Allison, Nykamp, and Lanke (2008) indicates that medical students face numerous sources of stress, such as family, relationships, exams, time management, extracurricular obligations, and finances. To alleviate this stress, they engage in activities such as going to the gym, spending time with friends, sleeping, watching television, and drinking. Establishing friendships and collaborating with strangers are two of the most stressful aspects of nursing school (Seyedfatemi, Tafreshi, & Hagani, 2007). Anshel, Sutarso, and Jubenville (2009) found that collegiate athletes of white ethnicity were more likely to report high levels of stress compared to African American players, and that women reported higher levels of stress than men. Skirka (2000) and Hudd et al. (2000) discovered that stress is influenced by various variables, including different populations and traits like self-sufficiency, sports participation, and resilience.

Scientists find stress measuring challenging. Numerous methods and surveys for assessing stress and its symptoms have been developed over the years (e.g., Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Johnson, 1980; Gadzella, 1994; Bijttebier, Vertommen, & Steene, 2001; Gadzella, Pierce, & Young, 2008). Life Events Checklist (LEC) (Grey, Litz, Hsu, & Lombardo, 2004) (originally developed for PTSD; adapted for broader use; measures stress-related events that have

occurred during the past year) and the Daily Hassles Questionnaire (DHQ) (Rowlison & Feiner, 1988) have been used to assess the stress problem. The original stress inventory was developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967). They used stress event points or units to quantify stress statistically. Other studies have revised and/or updated this questionnaire due to measurement issues or changes in targeted participants. The LEC was used by Johnson (1980) to quantify adolescent stress, but a simpler frequency count was used by Ryan-Wenger, Sharrer, and Campbell (2005). Another scale that was developed to measure the mental health of first-year college students was that of Blackmore, Tucker, and Jones (2005). The Student-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI), which was developed to measure stress among college students, was validated and shown to be reliable by Gardzella (1994).

What makes college students anxious:

- High expectations and academic pressure to succeed
- Money worries, including covering costs like education, housing, and food
- Difficulty managing time effectively while juggling academics, extra curriculars, and social life
- Difficulty adjusting to a new place and making friends
- Illness or injury that affects one's health
- Matters pertaining to one's own life, including familial obligations or marital strife.

Stress and its impact on college students:

- Symptoms that manifest physically, like headaches, exhaustion, and muscular tension
 - Symptoms that manifest emotionally, including anxiety, sadness, and anger
- A decline in academic performance and an increase in the probability of absenteeism and dropping out of school are some of the behavioural signs that may accompany this mental health disorder. Other symptoms include substance addiction, excessive eating, and withdrawal from social activities.

Assessing college students' stress in a formative way entails:

- Collecting information from students via questionnaires, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.
- Finding typical causes of stress and how they affect pupils using data analysis.
- Creating and executing plans to deal with the problems caused by the issues that have been recognised.

An Analysis of Relevant Works

Academic pressure, financial worries, relationship problems, and health issues are among the most prevalent causes of stress among college students. To identify these sources, it is necessary to analyse research that has examined these topics. For instance, among college students, the three most common sources of stress were social interactions, financial worries, and academic pressure (Wang et al., 2019).

The impact of stress on college students' bodies, minds, and behaviours, particularly how it affects their mood, sleep, and overall health, would be the focus of the literature review. Stressed college students exhibited worse sleep quality, more anxiety, and depressive symptoms, according to research by Kim and colleagues (2018).

Mindfulness, exercise, and time management are just a few examples of the current stress management strategies that would be reviewed in this review. University students' stress levels were significantly reduced by mindfulness-based therapies, according to a study conducted by Li and colleagues (2017).

Using technology-based solutions, including online support groups and smartphone apps, to reduce stress is another new method that will be included in the assessment. Chen and colleagues (2021) discovered that college students' stress levels and mental health might be improved with the help of stress management applications. In order to offer a thorough grasp of the factors that contribute to, impact, and control over stress among college students, the literature review would compile and analyse the results of these and other studies.

Problem Statement

In addition to adjusting to life as a young adult, college students face enormous pressure to excel academically, take care of their finances, and keep up positive relationships. Students'

physical and mental well-being, as well as their academic achievement and general quality of life, might take a hit from the stress that comes with these demands. Stress is a big problem among college students, but little is known about what causes it, how it manifests, or how to deal with it. The present research intends to address this knowledge vacuum by performing a formative assessment of the causes and consequences of stress among college students, reviewing current methods for dealing with stress, and coming up with novel ways to help students cope better. The results will help us better understand college students' stress and provide us clues about how to help them in the future.

Need for the Study

Stress has a severe impact on the mental and physical health, academic performance, and overall quality of life of university students. Therefore, it is vital to study what causes stress and how to reduce it. If we can learn more about the sources of stress and how to avoid them, everyone from students to doctors can benefit from a greater grasp of the topic. Conducting a formative evaluation of stress management strategies can assist increase the amount of support given to students by identifying what works and what needs improvement.

Significance

There are a number of reasons why it is important to research stress among college students and how to deal with it:

- ✚ Negative effects on mental and physical health, such as anxiety, sadness, insomnia, migraines, and gastrointestinal issues, are all possible results of stress. It is important for students to be aware of the causes and effects of stress so they may take steps to protect their health and reach out for help when they need it.
- ✚ Academic achievement: It is worth noting that stress can also hinder academic achievement. Overwhelmed or stressed-out students may struggle to focus, remember what they've learned, and finish their work. Students can take action to reduce the negative impacts of stress on their studies by learning about its origins and consequences.
- ✚ Quality of Life: Stress can have a negative impact on students' relationships, social lives, and overall happiness with university life, all of which contribute to their overall quality of life. Students can benefit from developing coping mechanisms and maintaining a healthy work-life balance by learning about the origins and effects of stress.
- ✚ Formulation of Efficient Plans: Finding out what is and isn't working with stress management tactics can be aided by conducting a formative review. Students can be better supported and given the tools they need to cope with stress if this data is used to improve existing programmes.
- ✚ The overall health, academic achievement, and quality of life of college students can be enhanced via research into the origins, consequences, and treatment of stress. Also, future student support can be greatly enhanced with the data gleaned from formative evaluations of stress management practices.

What this Study Performed

- ✚ College students' stress: what it is, how it manifests, and how to cope Among the many possible domains for a formative evaluation are:
- ✚ Finding the Roots of Stress: One approach is to conduct surveys among students to determine the most prevalent causes of stress, including but not limited to: academic pressure, financial worries, relationship problems, and health problems.
- ✚ The study can assess the consequences of stress on college students by looking at how it affects their mood, sleep, food, and academic performance, among other things.
- ✚ Existing stress management solutions, such as support groups, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, and counselling services, can be evaluated to find out how helpful they are in lowering stress.

- ✚ Creation of Novel Approaches: The findings of the formative assessment can inform the creation of novel approaches to stress management that will better serve the requirements of the pupils.
- ✚ To make sure stress management measures are effective and available to students, the study can also centre on how to implement and monitor them.
- ✚ In sum, the research on stress in college students included the following areas: The effects of stress on college students can be explored in several ways through formative evaluations. It is our hope that by learning more about stress and its causes and consequences, we can better assess current methods of stress management and come up with innovative ways to help students cope.

Steps in Conducting Research

Using a qualitative, nominal group process research methodology (McDermott & Sarvela, 1999; CDC, 2008), this study aimed to discover new things and organise current data. The authors of the study conducted the interviews; to ensure consistency in methodology, they were all trained in nominal group process and were asked to follow a predetermined script. Also, each group was only allowed to discuss one issue at a time, and the interviewers were assigned specific topics to cover during all of their interviews (Delberg, Van De Ven & Gustafson, 1986).

Eight classes, or two per grade level, were selected because they were deemed relatively unbroken, with twenty-five to forty students in each. The students were split into three groups of eight to fourteen as soon as the interviewers showed up. Each group was given a different topic to discuss, such as stresses, physical indicators of stress, or coping mechanisms. Without talking to their classmates or group, students worked alone, taking notes on index cards. Following that, the facilitator used a round robin method to record items on flipcharts until everyone had had a chance to speak. Additional information was given if necessary. In order to reach a consensus, the group had to evaluate each member's ideas and then rank the five most important ones on the note card. It took the researchers no more than twenty or thirty minutes total, and they preserved all of the paper they used (notecards, flipcharts, etc.). When and how many people participated

This study enlisted the help of approximately 200 first-year students from a medium-sized institution located in the Southeast. The participants had to fulfil certain criteria, such as having an equal distribution of grade levels (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior), hence a non-probability, purposeful sampling method was used (McDermott & Sarvela, 1999). We emailed the professors who might have been able to grant us access. With a maximum of 25 kids per class, we aimed to keep class sizes to two per grade level. Classes were selected from a broad range of departments within the institution, including health, education, and general studies. No minors were included, participants' confidentiality was safeguarded, and no pay was given. During the first half of class, students took part in a research project that made use of the Nominal Group Technique. The Institutional Review Board at the university gave their stamp of approval to the study.

Individual Accomplishment: Six educators volunteered to have their classes participate in the study. A total of 192 students were present in these classes; however, 19 of those students were absent during the course of their observation. Among the 173 students present, every single one of them opted to participate in the survey. Table 1 provides information about the participants' backgrounds in the study. The study's female participants constituted about 60.9% of the total. There was a diverse range of racial and ethnic backgrounds represented among the participants, while white people made up the majority (65.3%). While the remaining portion of the sample was representative of the undergraduate student body overall, more than half of it (51.4%) fell within the anticipated 18–19 age range. Among the people surveyed, first-year students made up the biggest demographic (41.6%). Last but not least, 91.3% of students said they were full-time.

ANALYSIS AND OUTCOME

This study only used descriptive statistics in its statistical analysis. The data, along with the inductive reasoning processes inherent to nominal group procedure (i.e., participants' input was

ranked hierarchically), allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The data collected from free-form questions was sorted into clear topical groups using a theme content analysis. We employed the nominal group process scoring and ranking procedures in accordance with Elwyn et al. (2005). By giving each group inverse scores on the stress descriptions they assessed and then summing the totals, we were able to compare their rankings. The population's statistics were also recorded.

We documented information regarding stressors, stress symptoms, and stress management techniques at each nominal group process session. One function of the nominal group approach was to identify and rank informational components that had gone unnoticed before. Prior to picking their top five options, participants provided more information and a list of possible stress indicators. Tables 2–3 display the group ranks in a hierarchical format. Since qualitative investigations uncover depth and breadth of data, all things that made the top eight group ranking "cut" are included in the data tables. The sole method that combines the strengths of quantitative and qualitative data reporting—nominal group process—is used to rank and evaluate qualitative data. As is typical for this particular analytical technique, comprehensive tables are provided.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study participants (n = 173).

Demographic Characteristic	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	121	69.9
Male	40	23.1
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
Non-Hispanic White	133	65.3
Non-Hispanic Black	39	22.5
Hispanic	2	1.2
Asian	2	1.2
Other	6	3.5
<i>Grade Classification</i>		
Freshman	72	41.6
Sophomore	35	20.2
Junior	18	10.4
Senior	37	21.4
<i>Age</i>		
18 years-old	40	23.1
19 years-old	49	28.3
20 years-old	22	12.7
21 years-old	15	8.7
22 years-old and older	34	21.0
<i>Student Status</i>		
Full-time	158	91.3
Part-time	2	1.2

Table 2: Stressors proposed and ranked by students via Nominal Group Process (NGP)

Stressors	Group1 Rank (Score)	Group2 Rank (Score)	Group3 Rank (Score)	Group4 Rank (Score)	Group5 Rank (Score)	Group6 Rank (Score)	Total Score
Schoolwork	2 (7)	5 (4)	2 (7)			1 (8)	26
Money		2 (7)	1 (8)	7 (2)		3 (6)	23
Time Management		1 (8)	2 (7)		3 (6)	8 (1)	22
Parents/Family	5 (4)			1 (8)		4 (5)	17
Tests (Content/Time)		6 (3)	4 (5)		2 (7)		15
Relationships				6 (3)	5 (4)	4 (5)	11

Commute	3 (6)	4 (5)					11
GPA					1 (8)		8
Texting	1 (8)						8
Lack of Sleep	7 (2)	8 (1)		5 (4)			7
Finding a Job				2 (7)			7
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	8 (1)	3 (6)					7
Graduation						2 (7)	7
Job				3 (6)			6
Major				4 (5)			5
Balance	4 (5)						5
Deadlines					4 (5)		5
HOPE Scholarship					5 (4)		4
Greek Life		6 (3)					3
Parental Expectations	6 (3)						3
Living Situations						6 (3)	3
Keeping in Shape						7 (2)	2
Pointless Core Classes					7 (2)		2
Not Enough Time					8 (1)		1
Assignments				8 (1)			1

Table 3: Signs and symptoms of stress proposed and ranked by students via NGP.

Signs and Symptoms	Group1	Group2	Group3	Group4	Group5	Group6	Total Score
	Rank (Score)						
Being Moody/Irritable	1 (8)	4 (5)	2 (7)	2 (7)	2 (7)	4 (5)	39
Anxieties	8 (1)	2 (7)	3 (6)	6 (3)		2 (7)	24
Sleep Problems	5 (4)	2 (7)	6 (3)	3 (6)	6 (3)		23
Rushed/Hurried	3 (6)	1 (8)			4 (5)		19
Headache		6 (3)			4 (5)	3 (6)	14
Nervous					3 (6)	1 (8)	14
Shut Down	6 (3)		4 (5)	7 (2)		8 (1)	11
Poor Eating Habits		7 (2)	8 (1)	1 (8)			11
Feel Overwhelmed			1 (8)			7 (2)	10
Frustration	1 (8)						8
Exhaustion		5 (4)				5 (4)	8
Depression					1 (8)		8
Inattentive	7 (2)					5 (4)	6

Restless			4 (5)			5
Emotional	4 (5)					5
Aggression		5 (4)				4
Illness/Sickness			5 (4)			4
Backaches				7 (2)		2
Cry		8 (1)				1
Short Temper				8 (1)		1

Discussion

The researchers in this qualitative study set out to learn more about what stresses students out, how they cope with various forms of stress, and what factors contribute to overall stress levels. Many people appreciated the opportunity to discuss issues stemming from those sources. Despite the unfamiliarity of the data collection method, students quickly learned the procedures and followed the rules. They also appreciated the chance to discuss in groups what each step meant to them.

College students may have dealt with similar stresses and symptoms for longer periods of time, but the foundations upon which they have been formed have changed throughout time. According to Comes and DeBard (2004), the Millennial generation consists of those who were born between 1981 and 1996. How well this group of students does in college, particularly when faced with the challenges of adjusting to a new setting, may depend on how they differ from previous cohorts in important ways.

Limitations

Some caveats to keep in mind when reading up on college students' stress: A formative evaluation may consist of:

1. Limitations of the study's sample size include the possibility that its results might not apply to the full population of college students and that the conclusions cannot be extrapolated to other groups.
2. Students' own accounts may constitute the backbone of the study, but they aren't immune to errors and biases. As an example, students could be hesitant to reveal specific details or understate the level of stress they are experiencing.
3. It is challenging to ascertain the actual efficacy of some stress management tactics when there is no control group to compare them to.
4. The study's scope and quality may be affected by time and financial limitations, which could restrict the research.
5. University students may encounter new causes of stress that were not included in the study due to the fact that stressors are constantly evolving.
6. Despite these caveats, university students' stress: causes, effects, and treatment can guide future efforts to better assist these individuals. When drawing conclusions from the results and proposing avenues for further study, it is essential to have these caveats in mind.

Conclusion

The majority of today's college students are members of the Millennial age, therefore researchers wanted to know how they cope with stress, what symptoms they encounter, and how often it occurs in their lives. Helping to update classic stress inventories to better reflect the difficulties faced by today's children was the purpose of this debate and compilation of proposals. A variety of typical pressures among students were covered in class, including grades, GPA, multitasking, and parental expectations. Students also talked about the psychological rather than physical symptoms of stress and the ways they cope with them, such as praying, talking to mom, going on social media, or browsing the web. Current quantitative college stress inventories can be enhanced by incorporating participant ideas. Future study and validation of these upgraded inventories will allow for more precise measurement of stress.

The authors note and appreciate the significant qualitative data contributions made by the participants even if the study's major aim was accomplished. It seemed like the kids were incredibly appreciative of being able to talk about their stressful experiences in a safe environment. Making friends with other students going through the same things seems to bring them genuine comfort. The study's authors are crossing their fingers that it will encourage students to continue discussing stress management strategies amongst themselves.

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