

INVESTIGATING THE SOURCES, COPING STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES OF STRESS AMONG THE GRADUATE AND POST GRADUATE STUDENTS AT MURSHIDABAD

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ABSTRACT

Anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being is a stress. Some stresses get us going and our good for us. Without any stress our lives would be boring and pointless. However it has negative impact also to both our mental and physical health. This paper seeks to investigate the sources, coping strategies and outcomes of stress among the graduate and post graduate students at Aligarh Muslim University, Murshidabad campus. The research work is based on the extensive literature review on stress management and the results are based on the survey conducted through questionnaires from 130 respondents (Graduate and Post graduate students pursuing Management, BA.LLB and Education courses). The results of the study are based on the hypothesis testing using one way ANOVA. The findings of the study suggest that stress management involves controlling and reducing the tension that occurs in stressful situations by making emotional and physical changes. Also in this study some of the common sources of stress have been identified among the students like families, friends and the work environment. The value of the paper lies in the fact that this study is an attempt to highlight that students should learn and acquire the necessary skills and knowledge regarding coping with stress that will in turn make them contribute positively towards the development of society and the nation as a whole.

Keywords: *Stress, coping strategies, stressors, outcomes, stress management.*

Introduction:

Stress is a fact of life. We experience stress almost every day however it is just the degree of it which varies from person to person. The word stress has been derived from Latin word "Stringere" which means to draw tight. The term is used to refer hardship, strain, adversity or affliction. The concept of stress has its origin in 1936 where it was defined by Selye as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". Further stress can be defined as an organism's response to circumstances or events (stressors) that threatens the capabilities to adjust to those conditions (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2010).

Stress refers to an internal state, which results from frustrating or unsatisfying conditions. A certain level of stress is unavoidable. Due to its complex nature it

has been studied for many years by researchers in psychology, sociology and medicine. It is a complex phenomenon and very subjective experience. It depends largely on background experiences, temperament and environmental conditions. Nothing can isolate stress from human beings.

According to David (1980) "Stress is a negative emotional experience, accompanied by predictable physiological, cognitive and behavioral changes that are directed either toward altering stressful circumstances or accommodating to its effects".

Stress can be caused by both good and bad experiences. When people feel stressed by something going on around them, their bodies react by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give people more energy and strength, which can be good if the stress caused by physical danger. However, it can also

have a bad effect if the stress is in response to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength. Talking of stress, most of the people tend to think of it as being a negative thing but in reality there are two different forms and different amount of stress. The two forms of stress are called distress and eustress, whereas the latter, eustress, is a positive form and people are likely to experience it if an external event causes high arousal. On the contrary, distress is indeed that form of stress which has negative effects on well-being and health.

A stressor is any event or situation that is perceived by an individual as a threat causing the individual to either adapt or initiate the stress response. Therefore, a stressor is a stimulus and stress is a response. Stressor is the cause and stress is the effect. The effects of stress upon a person are cumulative and can cause serious harm if experienced over a long time. Dr. Selye Hans (1979 b) was the first to study the effects of stress.

He suggested that stress had four basic variations:

1. Good Stress-Eustress
2. Bad Stress-Distress
3. Overstress-Hyper stress
4. Under stress-Hypo stress

Good Stress - Eustress is the positive, desirable stress that keeps life interesting, helps to motivate and inspire people. Eustress involves successfully managing stress even if the individual is dealing with a negative stressor.

Bad Stress- Distress refers to the negative effects of stress that drains an individual out of his energy and goes beyond his capacities to cope.

Over Stress- Hyper stress means too much stress. It can be lead to physical and emotional breakdown. Work overload can be a common source of over stress.

Under stress- Hypo stress refers to too little stress leading to boredom, lethargy and frustration. Work under load and no work at all may lead to hypo stress in some situations. The stressors of life may be divided into two categories; isolated catastrophic events, work stress.

Thus this study focuses on the indirect or the reportable impacts of stress on graduate and post graduate students at Aligarh Muslim University Campus Murshidabad.

Literature Review:

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. Feeling stressed is a normal reaction to a situation which feels out of control or overwhelming. Any problem can cause stress but students do face particular worries which are based on pressure. Some of the main reasons blamed for student stress are burden of course work, debt, exam pressure, financial worries and relationship problems. Emotional stress usually occurs in situations people consider difficult or challenging. People may feel stressed in different situations.

Physical stress is a physical reaction of the body to various triggers. The pain experienced after surgery is an example of physical stress. Physical stress often leads to emotional stress, and emotional stress often occurs in the form of physical stress (e.g. stomach cramps).

Stress management involves controlling and reducing the tension that occurs in stressful situations by making emotional and physical changes. The degree of stress and the desire to make the changes will determine how much improvement takes place.

Students entering the professional education need to face many challenges to which they have never been exposed earlier. The pressure to earn good grades and to earn a degree is very high (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996). Other potential sources of stress include excessive homework unclear assignments and uncomfortable classrooms. In addition to academic requirements, relations with faculty members and time pressures may also be sources of stress. It is important that students should learn and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that will in turn make them contribute positively to the development of the general economy.

Stress seems to be very common in college students' life. They have to survive academically and to prepare themselves for further carrier. Not surprisingly much of the academic stress at graduate level is related to what students learn and how they learn it. There's a lot of pressure of present generation students to learn more and more than the past generations.

University students, especially freshmen, are a group particularly prone to stress (D' Zurilla and Sheedy, 1991) due to the transitional nature of university life. They must adjust to being away from home probably for the first time, maintain a high level of academic achievement, and adjust to a new social setting. University students, regardless of year in school, often face pressures related to doing well in studies, another finding a job. These stressors do not cause anxiety or tension by themselves. Instead, stress results from the interaction between stressors and the individual's perception and reaction to those stressors.

According to Bataineh (2013), students suffer from different kind of academic stressors during their education experiences. In addition students experience stress related to academic requirements and support systems and ineffective coping skills. Another reason students stress could be due to the fact that students presence in the institution have no direct relationship to the quality of education they get. The major sources of student's stressors are fear of failure and academic punishments.

Academic stress occurs due to too many assignments, competition with other students, failures, lack of pocket money, poor relationships with other students or lecturers, family or problems at home.

Students experience stress at each semester studying exams, grade competition and to master in a small amount of time. Institutional level stressors are

overcrowded lecture halls, semester system and inadequate resources to perform academic work. (Awino & Agolla, 2008)

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There are many known negative implications of stressful life circumstances on personal health. Temporary stress can cause elevated blood pressure, headaches, stomachaches, sleeping problems and chest pains. Stress also has been shown to inhibit the immune system leading to more colds and sickness in times of stress. Further, chronic stress can severely impact both mental and physical health. It can decrease the likelihood of individuals to practice healthy habits (including eating a nutritious diet, obtaining adequate sleep, avoiding smoking and drinking in excess and fostering positive relationships). Distress, a form of stress that negatively impacts the body is associated with many serious and deadly health risks including various cancers, cirrhosis of the liver, heart disease, lung problems and in some instances suicide (Chakraborty, 2005)

This stress is felt dramatically among university students and academic pressures can lead to the development of unhealthy habits.

Backovicl et al., (2012) assessed the academic stress influences mental health status and burnout syndrome with the intent to find different patterns in female and male medical students. The educational process brings a considerable amount of stress to medical students that can influence mental status and contribute to further professional burnout. Personality is the main intrinsic factor that predicts a considerable range of variance of burnout among medical students (Luc et al., 2010)

According to Mazumdar et al., (2013), post graduate students were easily target of stress than the graduate students. Factors such as physical and mental, family, job, relationship and social were the main source of stress among the students. On the other hand there were different psychosomatic factors such as headache, sleep problems, tachycardia, ulcers and high blood pressure was involved. These factors contribute to the stress among the graduate and post graduate students. Headache, blood pressure, anxiety, back pain, neck pain, appetite and skin rashes were more predominately observed among females. On other hand poor sleeping patterns, hair falls, erratic moods, heart diseases and depressions was found to be more often in males.

Sources of stress:

Sources of stress come from a variety of areas such as families, friends and the work environment inclusive of the person himself or herself. There are various sources of stress both at home and at work. The common ones can be classified into internal and external stress.

(A) Internal Stress

- Human beings have a tendency to worry about actions that may or may not take place. Internal stress generally happens when individuals worry about things outside their control. Internal stress is categorized into two types-
- **Type A:** Type A personality are obsessive about winning and do not have the ability to spend leisure time productivity. Type A: personality has an excessive, competitive drive. They are in a hurry and impatient. These people are likely to be under stress even in minor situations
- **Type B:** Type B personality does not sense the urgency of time. They work at their own pace with no need to prove their achievement. These people are less likely to be under stress.

(B) External Stress

This type of stress is the result of environmental influence on an individual. External stress is result of stress from the environment. External stress occurs due to-

- Stress from family, work and friends.
- Physical conditions such as poor lightening, loud noise and poor seating arrangements.
- Living in extreme climate.
- Academic work load.
- Intense competition
- Recalling the past choices and decision
- Concerns about the employment in future.

Common stressors in college life include

- (a) Greater academic demands
- (b) Being on one's own in a new environment-with new responsibilities
- (c) Changes in family relations and one's social life
- (d) Financial responsibilities
- (e) Exposure to new people, ideas and temptations
- (f) Being away from home, often for the first time
- (g) Making decisions on a higher level than one is used to substance abuse
- (h) Awareness of one's sexual identity and orientation
- (i) Preparing for life after graduation

Outcomes of Stress:

We can sometimes recognize the short term effects of stress but may not be aware of how harmful the long term effect can be. Apart from the physical symptoms like pain in the shoulder or tummy trouble, there are also emotional signs like frustrations, anxiety and lack

of interest or being overly sensitive. Our behavior may change and we can eat too much, drink too much, be irritable with other people or become withdrawn from society. For example when a person is nervous there is an increase in his or her pulse rate. This is a 'fight or flight' response. Too much of stress can tell upon a person's held. If neglected it can lead to serious health disorders at a later stage.

Short term effects:

- Minds becomes alert-ready to act or react
- Faster breathing
- Feeling sick or having a butterfly stomach
- Dry mouth
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Faster heart rate
- Sweaty palms
- Tension in neck and shoulders
- Dilated pupils

Long term effects:

- Frequency sleeping disorders
- Severe headache
- Affects the memory
- Excessive stress acts as a driving force for other health issues like gastro intestinal difficulties, migraine etc.
- Sometimes stress leads to adopt unfair means
- Excessive stress results into fatigue and boredom
- Stress badly affects appetite

Coping Strategies:

Nothing is impossible in this world. We must analyze our stress points or triggers and try to stay away from them. All human beings are blessed with Emotional Intelligence, making use of which students can smartly handle stress and shall not allow stress rule over his body system or even get carried away by stress.

People who cope best with stress seem to have these things in common

- A sense of being in control of their lives
- A network of friends or family to provide social support
- Personality traits like flexibility and hopefulness

However, some stress management techniques are been suggested here.

Individual Coping Strategies

- Physical Exercise such as Yoga, swimming, jogging, playing, walking etc
- Relaxation-Transactional Meditation
- Work-home transition
- Cognitive Therapy
- Networking
- Time Management
- Use of realistic goal setting
- Organizational level coping strategies

- Supportive organizational culture
- Job Enrichment
- Organizational Role clarity
- Career planning and counseling
- Stress control workshops and Employee Assistance Program
- Improved personal selection and job placement
- Training
- Redesigning of jobs
- Increased employee involvement

Methodology Adopted:

It refers to the procedural framework or the research process, within which the research is conducted. This study is mainly based on quantitative research methods, which focuses on numbers and frequencies rather than on meaning and experience.

Research Objectives:

The following are the objectives of the study:

- a. To find out the sources of stress among the graduate and post graduate students at Murshidabad.
- b. To come up with the coping strategies for managing stress.
- c. To know the outcomes of stress among students.

Keeping in mind the above objectives the following hypotheses were considered for the present study:

H₀₁: Stress results into creativity and innovation for all the students irrespective of their courses of study.

H₀₂: Stress results in improving the immune system of the students irrespective of their courses of study.

H₀₃: Stress results into the improvement of the performance of students irrespective of their courses of study.

H₀₄: Stress helps the students improving their level of confidence irrespective of their courses of study.

H₀₅: Stress helps the students in maintaining their punctuality irrespective of their courses of study.

H₀₆: Stress helps the students improving their mental alertness irrespective of their courses of study.

Scope of the Study:

This study is limited to the students studying at AMU Centre Murshidabad only. Sources of stress come from a variety of areas such as families, friends and the work environment inclusive of the person himself or herself. Outcomes of stress deal with short term and long term effects. Short term effects lead to situations in which mind becomes alert, faster breathing, feeling sick and faster heart rate. Long term effects lead to frequent sleeping disorders, affects the memory, leads to adopt unfair means and excessive stress results into fatigue and boredom.

Questionnaire Development:

In this research the data has been collected through questionnaire survey. The instrument (questionnaire) was developed in several stages. Firstly a paper based version of the questionnaire was pre tested with five subject experts. It was done to improve its contents, structure and design as well as the nature of the questions asked in the questionnaire and hence its validity was established. Then it was pilot tested where it was given to thirty respondents for their feedback. Based on their valuable comments, the questionnaire was further refined and after some minor design changes a paper based version of the questionnaire was used to collect the data reported in this paper. Due to the nature of the questions the graduate and post graduate students were identified as the most suitable persons to provide the required information.

Scale Refinement and Validation:

It is necessary to develop valid and reliable measures, as it enables proper framework for establishing dimensions under study. In this study, the contents of the questionnaire were validated through face validity, which simply means that appearance of the scale seems to measure what it intends to measure. In this research most of the variable terms were standard and seem to measure what they intended for.

Data Collection:

The data for this study was obtained from 130 graduate and post graduate students belonging to law, management and education at AMU campus Murshidabad. The overall sample comprised of 235 students of which 148 responded. While after discarding the questionnaires with incomplete information 130 responses were found suitable for further analysis giving a satisfactory response rate of 55%. The researcher has adopted the convenience sampling method for data collection. The sufficiency of the sample size has been derived from the previous similar studies where the sample size ranges from 110 to 500.

Analysis and Discussion:

This section presents an analysis and interprets the findings peculiar to the study. The first part deals with the description of the sample and the other part deals with the hypothesis testing by using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Respondents' Profile:

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	86	66.2
Female	44	33.8
Total	130	100

From the above table it is evident that out of 130 respondents, 66.2% were male and the remaining 33.8% of the respondents were female.

Table 2: Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	%
Below 20	14	10.8
20-23	86	66.2
23-26	30	23.1
Total	130	100

From the above table it is clear that majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-23 i.e.66.2% while 23.1% belong to the age group of 23-26 and 10.8% belong to the age group of below 20.

Table 3: Courses currently enrolled in

Courses	Frequency	%
Under graduate	59	45.4
Post graduate	71	54.6
Total	130	100

This table shows the division of under graduate and post graduate students who participated in this study 54.6% of the respondents belonged to the post graduate category while 45.4% belong to under graduate category

Hypothesis testing using One way ANOVA:

Analysis of variance or ANOVA is a method of testing the null hypothesis that several group means are equal in proportion by comparing the sample variance estimated from the group means to that estimated within the groups

Hypothesis		df	f	Sig
At times stress results into creativity and innovation	Between Groups	2	3.292	0.040
	Within Groups	127		
	Total	129		
At limited amount of stress is good for immune system	Between Groups	2	2.713	.070
	Within Groups	127		
	Total	129		
At times stress is helpful in improving your performance	Between Groups	2	7.509	.001
	Within Groups	127		
	Total	129		
At times stress is helpful in improving your level of confidence	Between Groups	2	3.343	.038
	Within Groups	127		
	Total	129		

Hypothesis		df	f	Sig
At times stress is helpful in maintaining your punctuality	Between Groups	2	1.834	.164
	Within Groups	127		
	Total	129		
At times stress is helpful in improving your mental alertness	Between Groups	2	2.168	.119
	Within Groups	127		
	Total	129		

The p-value for H₀₁ (0.040) of creativity and innovation which is lesser than 0.05 therefore we reject the null hypothesis; the sample means are not equal. So it is concluded that there is a difference of opinion among people on the basis of stress resulting into creativity and innovation.

The p-value for H₀₂ (0.070) of amount of stress is good for immune system which is higher than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is not rejected. The sample means are equal. So it is concluded that there is a similarity in the opinion among people about the amount of stress that it is good for immune system.

The p-value for H₀₃ (0.001) about the amount of stress being helpful in improving the performance is less than 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis; the sample means are not equal. So it is concluded that there is a difference of opinion about whether stress is helpful in improving the performance.

The p-value for H₀₄ (0.038) regarding the amount of stress as being helpful in improving the level of confidence which is less than 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis. The sample means are not equal. So it is concluded that there is a difference of opinion about whether stress is helpful in improving the level of confidence.

The p-value for H₀₅ (0.164) regarding the amount of stress being helpful in maintaining the punctuality is higher than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is not rejected. The sample means are equal. So it is concluded that there is a similarity in the opinion among students on stress is helpful in maintaining the punctuality.

The p-value for H₀₆ (0.119) regarding the amount of stress as helpful in improving the mental alertness is higher than 0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is not rejected. The sample means are equal. So it is concluded that there is a similarity in the opinion among students on the amount of stress is helpful in improving the mental alertness.

Conclusion:

Stress management involves controlling and reducing the tension that occurs in stressful situations by making emotional and physical changes. The degree of stress and the desire to make the changes determine how much improvement takes place. Sources of stress

come from a variety of areas such as families, friends and the work environment inclusive of the person himself or herself. There are various sources of stress both at home and at work. In addition to academic requirements, relations with faculty members and time pressures may also be sources of stress.

Students entering the professional education need to face many challenges to which they have never been exposed earlier. The pressure to earn good grades and to earn a degree is very high. Other potential sources of stress include excessive homework unclear assignments and uncomfortable classrooms.

We can sometimes recognize the short term effects of stress but may not be aware of how harmful the long term effect can be. Apart from the physical symptoms like pain in the shoulder or tummy trouble, there are also emotional signs like frustrations, anxiety and lack of interest or being overly sensitive. Our behavior may change and we can eat too much, drink too much be irritable with other people or become withdrawn from society.

Nothing is impossible in this world. We must analyze our stress points or triggers and try to stay away from them. All human beings are blessed with Emotional Intelligence, making use of which students can smartly handle stress and shall not allow stress to rule over his body system or even get carried away by stress.

Managerial Insight:

This study is fruitful for the academicians as well as professionals working in the industry. The following key findings should be kept in mind while dealing with the stress among graduate and post graduate students studying at college and universities.

- Efforts should be made to enhance the confidence of the students and motivate them towards their work
- Many of them feel financial factor as the cause of their stress which should be highly focused
- Proper training should be given to the students
- There should not be excess work load and work schedule should be prepared properly and carefully
- There should be cordial relationship among the teachers and students
- Proper ways and means should be taken to manage the stress with the help of consultant
- Efforts should be made to make students feel socially and emotionally responsible for improving their performance
- Health of the students should also be noticed and cared.

Limitations:

Some of the major limitations of this work are mentioned below:

- This work restricts itself to the study of stress among graduate and post graduate students, and

excludes non students. In future study can be undertaken to make a comparison between student and non-student category. Also study can be undertaken exclusively to study the factors and outcomes of stress among non-students category.

- Considering the nature of study the sample size is considered to be small therefore the results of the study cannot be generalized. Had the sample size been large, the results of the study could have been something different.

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