

# Stress Among College Students and Its Management

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Stress may be defined as a state of psychological and / or physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and / or motivation to meet those demands. Stress can disrupt both our professional as well as our personal lives. It is the major cause of health problems as 80 percent of all modern diseases have their origins in stress and 75 percent to 90 percent of all visits to primary care practitioners are now known to be stress-related. The World Health Organization (WHO) calls stress "the health epidemic of the 21st century".

Level of stress varies with age and occupation. College years have been deemed as one of the most stressful periods of a person's life. Rajasekar (2013) found that the main cause of stress among management students were faculty pressure (53%) followed by society (50%), parents' expectations (45%) and peer group (2%). Gender also plays a major role in causing stress as a greater number of females (38.1%) are stressed than males (23.3%) (Waghachavare et.al., 2013). Furthermore, employed females are more stressed than unemployed ones due to Overburden of work (mean score 1.04), pleasing others (mean score 0.92), extreme hot weather (mean score 0.86) and decision making (mean score 0.28) (Harshpinder, 2000). To cope up with stress people use different strategies. Some of these strategies are good but some affect negatively to their body. For example, 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 (Patel & Greydanus 1999).

## Stages of stress

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 a good thing if their stress is caused by physical danger. But this can

also be a bad thing, if their stress is in response to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength. Stress consists of physiological reactions that occur in three stages:

1. Alarm phase: Upon encountering a stressor, body reacts with "fight-or-flight" response and sympathetic nervous system is activated. Hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin released into the blood stream to meet the threat or danger. In this stage the body's resources are mobilized.
2. Resistance phase: Parasympathetic nervous system returns many physiological functions to normal levels while body focuses resources against the stressor. Blood glucose levels remain high, cortisol and adrenalin continue to circulate at elevated levels, but outward appearance of organism seems normal. Heart rate, Blood pressure, breathing increases and body remains on red alert.
3. Exhaustion phase: If stressor continues beyond body's capacity, organism exhausts resource and becomes susceptible to disease and death.

## Type of stress

Stress can be both positive and negative. It is our response to stress, how we manage it makes a difference in terms of how it affects us.

- i. Eustress: Stress resulting from pleasant events or conditions is called eustress. Eustress can be defined as a pleasant or curative stress. We can't always avoid stress, in fact, sometimes we don't want to. Often, it is controlled stress that gives us our competitive edge in performance related activities like athletics, giving a speech, or acting.
- ii. Distress: Stress resulting from unpleasant events or conditions is called distress. It is again subdivided into three parts
  - a) Bad stress: If a stimulus we react to is negative, we are actually feeling "distress"

though we label it as stress. e. g. death of a close friend.

- b) Acute stress: Acute stress is usually for short time and may be due to work pressure, meeting deadlines pressure or minor accident, over exertion, increased physical activity, searching something but you misplaced it, or similar things.
- c) Chronic stress: Chronic stress is a prolonged stress that exists for weeks, months, or even years. This stress is due to poverty, broken or stressed families and marriages, chronic illness and successive failures in life. People suffering from this type of stress get used to it and may even not realize that they are under chronic stress. It is very harmful to their health.

## Stressors and their type

Factors that cause stress are called Stressors. In recent times, youngsters encounter different kind of stressors, such as expectation of excelling in academics, vague future, problems associated with adapting into the college environment, stressful surroundings, job expectation, social, emotional, physical and family problems (Lai & Wong 1992, Fish & Nies, 1996, Verma et al. 2002, Chew et al., 2003, Krishnakumar et al. 2005). The most important stressors encountered by youngsters 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 (Maheshwari & Deepa 2013). Stressors can be broadly classified into two groups as follows:

- a) External stressors: External stressors are events and situations that happen to cause stress to a person. Some examples of external stressors include major life changes. These changes can be positive, such as a new marriage, a planned pregnancy, a promotion or a new house. Or they can be negative, such as the death of a loved one or a divorce.

- b) Internal stressors: Internal Stressors are sources of stress that are coming from within individual's body or mind. They include things like whether they are tired, ill, hungry, hot, cold, nutritional status, emotional state, what thoughts they are preoccupied with, mood, and attitudes.

## Symptoms of stress

- Physical symptoms: People in stress may experience changes in sleep pattern, fatigue, digestion problems, loss of sexual drive, headaches, aches and pains, infections, dizziness, fainting, sweating & trembling, tingling hands & feet, breathlessness, palpitations and missed heartbeats.
- Mental symptoms: Stress leads to lack of concentration, memory lapses, difficulty in making decisions, confusion, disorientation, panic attacks.
- Behavioural symptoms: People may experience changes in appetite, eating disorders - anorexia, bulimia, increased intake of alcohol & other drugs, increased smoking, restlessness, fidgeting and nail biting.
- Emotional symptoms: Depression, impatience, extreme anger, tearfulness, deterioration of personal hygiene and appearance are some of the symptoms depicting emotional disturbance that people in stress may experience.

## Stress management strategies

- i. **A B C technique:** The ABC Technique is an approach developed by Albert Ellis and adapted by Martin Seligman to help us think more optimistically. The technique is based on our explanatory style. That is, how we explain difficult or stressful situations to ourselves, across dimensions of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. This strategy has 3 steps, thus the name A-B-C that anyone can follow. The A here is the potentially stressful situation, while B is the beliefs, thoughts, or perceptions about that stressful situation, and C is the consequences,

which results to stress. After knowing the ABC of stress, one can start changing it to avoid stress. Changing A modifies the environment whether it is work place or home. If somebody don't like waiting and sitting in traffic then he/she can leave earlier to avoid rush. If one can't modify the environment, he/she can change B by altering his/her perception. To properly manage stress, one must always focus on how he/she could change the way he/she view things. If modifying the situation or thoughts about the situation can't be done, change C. Learn how to relax and quiet down your mind and body.

ii. **Biofeedback:** Biofeedback is the process of gaining greater awareness of many physiological functions primarily using instruments that provide information on the activity of those same systems, with a goal of being able to manipulate them at will. Some of the processes that can be controlled include brainwaves, muscle tone, skin conductance, heart rate and pain perception. Biofeedback may be used to improve health, performance, and the physiological changes which often occur in conjunction with changes to thoughts, emotions and behaviour. Eventually, these changes may be maintained without the use of extra equipment, even though no equipment is necessarily required to practice biofeedback actually. Biofeedback has been found to be effective for the treatment of headaches and migraines

iii. **Time management:** Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity. Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals complying with a due date. This set encompasses a wide scope of activities, and these include planning, allocating, setting goals, delegation, analysis of

time spent, monitoring, organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing. Initially, time management referred to just business or work activities, but eventually the term broadened to include personal activities as well. A time management system is a designed combination of processes, tools, techniques, and methods. Usually time management is a necessity in any project development as it determines the project completion time and scope.

iv. **Meditation:** Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind and/or induces a mode of consciousness to realize some benefit, although it can be argued meditation is a goal in and of itself. The term meditation refers to a broad variety of practices (much like the term sports), which range from techniques designed to promote relaxation, contacting spiritual guides, building internal energy, receiving psychic visions, getting closer to a god, seeing past lives, taking astral journeys, and so forth, to more technical exercises targeted at developing compassion, love, patience, generosity, forgiveness and more far-reaching goals such as effortless sustained single-pointed concentration, single-pointed analysis, and an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any and all of lifes activities. Thus, it is essential to be specific about the type of meditation practice under investigation.

v. **Cognitive therapy:** Based on the theory that depression is due to distortions in the patients perspectives, such as all-or-none thinking, over-generalization, and selective perception. The therapist initially tries to highlight these distortions, and then encourages the patient to change his or her attitudes.

vi. **Relaxation technique:** A relaxation technique (also known as relaxation training) is any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness; or otherwise reduce levels of anxiety, stress or anger. Relaxation

techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathe rates, among other health benefits.

### Conclusion

Stress is the major problem among college students. There are several reasons of stress, major being the academic pressure and competition for job. Some amount of stress is necessary to work efficiently but it becomes dangerous if it crosses the resistance level. The person suffering from stress may seem normal but it is very important to identify the symptoms of stress so that the problem could be identified and proper management strategies could be adopted. Some of the symptoms of stress are changes in sleep pattern, changes in appetite, fatigue, digestion problems, dizziness, increased intake of alcohol & other drugs, increased smoking, restlessness, fidgeting and nail biting, tearfulness, deterioration of personal hygiene and appearance. If the person in stress is left unattended, they may adopt some harmful means to overcome their stress. It is the responsibility of peer group, family members and teachers to identify the person in stress and suggest proper stress management strategies like changing their thinking pattern, meditation, time management and using relaxation techniques to overcome their stress.

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