

## **Stress Management in Academics: a study for analyzing the indicators of stress, their coping techniques and whether these methods prove helpful.**

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**ABSTRACT:** Stress is a physical response that our body gives to any particular event or a problematic situation. When the body experiences stress, it undergoes a fight or flight situation (Lazarus,1984). The challenge is when our body undergoes any stressful situation it creates an imbalance in the body which needs to be brought back to a balance stage.

The research paper focuses on stress management in academic sphere. As we all know college requires more efforts than high school. As observed that students are motivated to do the work and the instructors also demands higher level of performance. Because of these demands it is common for students to experience stress. There are a lot of students who are intelligent, but they cannot perform well because of stressful factors like pressure from family or professors, conflicting situation with peer group, etc. Stress can harm our emotional and physical health which in turn affects in our life. However, sometimes people perform the best when in a stressful situation. For example- a deadline for an assignment may motivate a student to work which brings out best results if performed well. The tool to be used in the study is Perception Stress Scale (PSS). The age of the subjects ranges from 18-24 years. The rationale of this study is to analyse the factors which causes stress and knowing about the coping methods that students use in their daily life. The hypothesis will focus upon determining how much productivity students portray.

**Key words** –Stress, Perceived Stress scale, Intelligent, Conflict, Emotions and physical health.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Stress is a primarily physical response. When a person undergoes stress, he/she experiences a fight or flight situation. The body releases a complex mix of hormones and chemicals such as adrenaline, cortisol or norepinephrine to prepare the body for a physical action. When a person encounters a difficult situation the first and foremost thing that comes into picture is mind. Hence, a person decides whether to fight or withdraw (flight) from the situation. That heart pounding, fast breathing sensation is the adrenaline; as well as a boost of energy, it enables us to focus our attention so we can quickly respond to the situation. Stress can be of various types such as every-day stress, environmental stress, social stress, etc. When your body goes into stress, it creates an aggressive or agitated reaction towards others, this can be due to our bodies' natural reaction being 'fight'. This may prove helpful in solving the problem but in the latter, it may cause negative affect on relationship with others. When a person decides to withdraw from the situation, it may cause a relieve from a temporary period of time. But in long term, he/she realises that withdrawal was not a clever decision because the problem has not yet been completely eradicated, they have to face it (a win or lose situation).

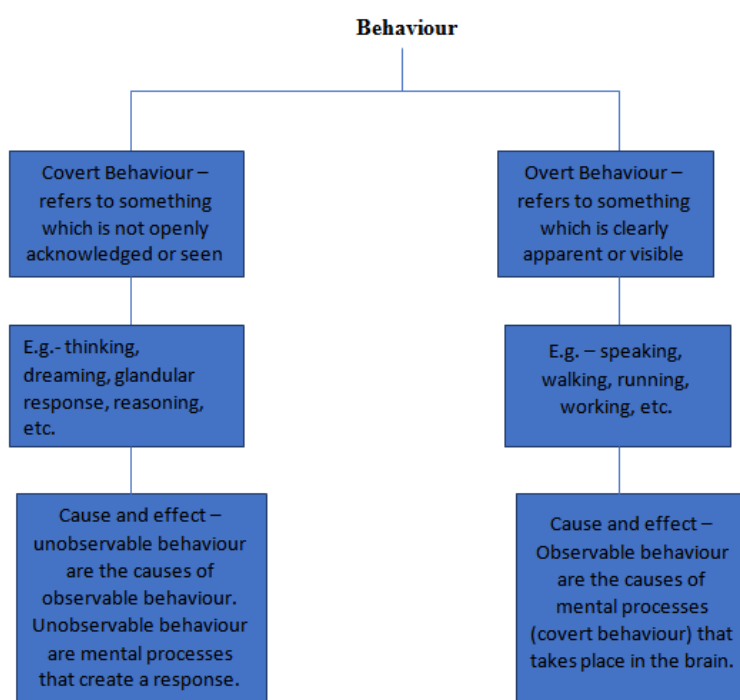
#### **Stress in academics**

The study focuses upon stress in academics. Dr. Sian Beilock, psychologist, points out that her research indicates that stressful academic situations impact the performance of students. If stress is not managed properly, it can prevent students from successfully achieving their academic goals. It is observed that students are willing to do academic work and instructors also demand higher level of performance. Therefore, students experience various kinds of stress in order to meet with the demands. It can be said that higher the level of expectations (from instructors), higher the level of stress. The fact that a college student is more exposed to diverse fields than a high school student can also be a reason for stress. Few examples can be denoted from this: As we have observed that a college student interacts with more number of people than a high school student, this interaction may increase a chance of conflict, hence increasing stress. As observed, the interaction is more, various kinds of opinions develop and hence creates a conflicting situation. Another example can be stated of every day stress: a student getting late for 8 A.M. class, missing bus or having a problem to commute long

distance, not getting enough time to sleep because of workload, assignment deadlines, etc. The American Institute of Stress points out that "stress can have wide ranging effects on emotion, mood, and behaviour." Stress can have a long term affect on both physical and emotional functioning. High levels of stress can lead you to some physical symptoms such as headache, excessive urination, high blood pressure, increased pulse rate, perspiration, etc. When a student experiences these kinds of symptoms, he/she might not feel motivated to complete the work.

A student can also feel emotional symptoms when stressed. Emotional symptoms can be stated as self-defeating thoughts, lack of social interaction, loss of memory, concentration difficulty, constant worry, etc. Such types of problem if not paid attention can lead a person to depression. Depression or anxiety disorders are most commonly seen in undergraduate students. Academic stress is one of the main types of distress. Academic stress can be of various qualities and it can have inter-relation with other factors also. For example, a student can encounter assignment deadline stress because of something that happened in the external situation. Let's say a fight with peer group can also lead to affects on his/her academic performance.

Behaviour is any action or response that an organism makes in a given situation. Behaviour can be categorised in two parts Overt behaviour and Covert behaviour.



From the above flowchart, we can derive the relationship of overt and covert behaviour in academic discipline. Human actions are not limited to observable behaviour. There are wide ranges of emotions, dream interpretations and feelings that comes into picture. Behaviour is psycho-physical in origin and includes everything that an individual does or experience. In a classroom environment, if a student is asked a question and he is unable to answer than several factors related to covert behaviour are justifiable. He/she might be thinking of something that happened recently and hence the student did not play full attention in the class.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. George Essel and Patrick Owusu Causes of students' stress, its effects on their academic success, and stress management by students Case study at Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland.

This research paper focuses on stress in academic sphere of students studying in Seinäjoki University. The main objective was to identify the extent to which stress affects their academic performance, general lifestyle and health. The findings portray different kinds of factors which affects academics. The factors are categorised in 4 parts, 1. Relationship factor, 2. Environment factor, 3. Personal factor and 4. Academic factors.

### 2. Stress Management and Resilience in junior and senior nursing students in Ghana.

This research paper is aimed to investigate the sources of stress, stress management strategies and resilience in junior and senior year students in Ghana. The findings show that nursing students are exposed to sources of stress but the fear of their performance is seen in the clinical settings.

### **3. Impact of Stress on Students Academic Performance at Secondary School Level at District Vehari.**

The title of the existing topic is “Impact of stress on student’s academic performance at secondary school level”. This research paper focuses upon the negative impacts of stress on a student’s performance. The purpose of this study was, firstly, to examine the kind of stress that students face; secondly, to evaluate the impact of stress on student’s performance and thirdly, gender differences on the basis of impact of stress.

### **4. Effectiveness of academic stress management programme on academic stress and academic performance among higher secondary students in selected schools of Udupi District.**

This research paper focuses on assessing the effectiveness of stress management programme on academic stress and academic performance among higher secondary students in selected schools of Udupi district, Karnataka, India. Study was conducted among 96 subjects. Data were collected using Demographic Proforma and Academic stress rating scale. The findings shows that stress management programmes were effective in reducing stress but not effective in improving academic performance.

### **5. Impact of stress management on learning in a classroom setting.**

The effectiveness of an in-class setting for improving course content was tested with a cross-over design in two introductory graduate biostatistics classes. Each class met for one day per week during the whole semester and was taught by the same professor, following the same syllabus. During the first half of the semester, each class session in one section was preceded by a ten-minute-deep breathing stress management procedure (n = 30). During the second half of the semester this procedure was discontinued in the first section and implemented in the other section (n = 10). No significant differences in terms of age, gender, or citizenship was noted. Based on the statistical analyses between the two groups the study did not give a clear answer if stress management was effective in improving learning.

### **James-Lange: Theory of Emotion**

Theorists William James and Carl Lange developed their individual theories based on co-relation of stress and emotion but they had a similar idea on this relationship i.e. emotions do not immediately succeed the perception of the stressor or of a stressful event. According to this theory the feeling of fear or any other emotion begins only after bodily changes. For example- when you see a growling dog, your heart starts pounding, you breathe faster and then your eyes become wide open. Hence, such transitions are very minute for a layman to observe but this theory states that bodily changes are followed by emotional changes.

### **Canon-Bard: The Emergency Theory**

The emergency theory is quite opposite to what James and Lange proposed. According to theorist Walter Canon, emotions in response to stress occurs only when bodily responses are not present. He attempted to prove this theory by the method of “decorticated cats” in which the neural connections of the body are separated from the cortex in the brain of cats. When challenged with a stressful stimulus, the cat responded with the emotional behaviour i.e. anger and rage. This emotion was then displayed by overt behaviour such as baring of teeth, growling and erect hair.

To further demonstrate the theory of Walter Canon, Philip Bard extended the ideas by arguing that thalamus (lower brain stem structure) is important in production of emotional response. According to Bard, the emotional response is sent as a signal by thalamus to the brain cortex for the understanding simultaneously with the sending of the signals to Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS). Hence, this theory suggest that physical response and emotional response occurs simultaneously and not in relation to each other.

## **III. OBJECTIVES**

- I. The main aim of this study is to focus on stress level among undergraduate students.
- II. To identify how they encounter stress in their daily academic lifestyle and what are the main causes of stress.
- III. To identify what coping methods that students use to overcome stress.
- IV. To study gender difference with respect to stress level.

## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

### **Tool**

The scale used for this study was Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Sheldon Cohen. PSS is one of the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. Items were designed to depict how unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloaded respondents find their lives. The number of items on the questionnaire were 10. The subjects get to rate the questions from 0-4, 0 being never and 4 being very often. The

questions are easy to understand and response alternatives are simple to grasp. Moreover, questions are of general nature and hence free of content which is related to any specific subgroup.

**Sample**

In this study, 100 students (45 male and 55 female), college going students were taken as a sample. The students were from some prominent colleges of Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad. The subjects were asked to fill the questionnaire keeping in mind their academics and the stress that they came across in the previous month.

**Sampling method**

The stratified random sampling technique has been used in the selection of sample. To analyse the data, the researchers used an appropriate technique like quantitative analysis.

**V. RESULTS**

A summary of the sample population for the following study is given in the table below.

*Table 1: Gender distribution total population = 100*

**Gender distribution of sample population**

	Female	Male
N	55	45
%	55%	45%

*Table 2: Overall stress level among the sample population*

Stress level	
High	18%
Moderate	79%
Low	3%

As mentioned in the Table no. 2, majority of the people have moderate stress level. According to PSS scale, the score for high stress level is 0-13, for moderate is 14-26 and for high is 27-40.

*Table 3: Comparison of stress level among male and female with age division*

AGE	HIGH	LOW	MODERATE	GRAND TOTAL
<b>FEMALE</b>				
17	0	1.81%	14.54%	<b>16.53%</b>
18	0	0	14.54%	<b>14.54%</b>
19	9.09%	0	34.54%	<b>43.63%</b>
20	5.45%	0	9.09%	<b>14.54%</b>
21	0	1.81%	7.27%	<b>9.08%</b>
23	0	0	1.81%	<b>1.81%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14.54%</b>	<b>3.62%</b>	<b>81.79%</b>	<b>85.59%</b>
<b>MALE</b>				
17	2.22%	0	0	<b>2.22%</b>
18	2.22%	0	11.11%	<b>13.33%</b>
19	11.11%	2.22%	31.11%	<b>44.44%</b>
20	0	0	24.44%	<b>24.44%</b>
21	4.44%	0	2.22%	<b>6.66%</b>
23	0	0	4.44%	<b>4.44%</b>
25	0	0	2.22%	<b>2.22%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19.99</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>75.54</b>	<b>97.75</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 shows the percentage of stress level according to age and gender. There are 2 broad section which classifies Male and Female stress level. As shown in the table 3,

**17- and 18-years** female faces moderate stress which is **14.54%.19 and 20 years** of female faces moderate stress which is **34.54%** and **9.09%** respectively, as compared to low stress of 9.09%and 5.45% respectively. **21-23 years** of female faces moderate stress of **18.17%**. Hence, stress level among the age group of 20-23 as compared to that of 17-20 is more i.e. 18.17%. The overall stress level among female is **81.79%**.

The second section describes the stress level among male, according to their age. **17-18 years** of male faces moderate stress of **11.11%.** **19 and 20 years** of male faces moderate stress of **31.11%** and **24.44%** respectively. **21-23** age group of men faces moderate stress of **8.88%**. Hence, stress level among the age group of 19-20 years is more as compared to that of 21-25 i.e. 31.11%.

The overall stress level among **female** is **99.95%** and among **male** is **97.75%**. Hence greater amount of moderate stress is seen among female as compared to male.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Adding up to the popular beliefs, it is seen that females tend to have more Stress as compared to male. In this study, both male and female student are from varied colleges. Hence, they are not exposed to similar environment. Their experience in academics or extra-curricular activities serve as a foundation for and help facilitate their stress level. As shown in table 3, 17-18 years of female faces low level of stress as compared to that of 19 and 20 years of females. Therefore, we can interpret that academic stress is low as they are freshers in the field. 19 and 20 years of female faces moderate stress level.

(Refer to section 2 of results) It is visible that 17-18 years of male faces low level of stress as compared to 19-10 years of male. The study shows that 21-23 years of male faces low level of stress as compared to 19 and 20 years of male. The study shows contrary results which says that 21-23 years of female faces high level of stress and 21-23 years of male faces low level of stress. Hence, we can interpret that females tend to think more when it comes to academics.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Majority of the students undertaken for the study have an average score on the stress level i.e. 79%. It was found that there was a slight different of stress level of both the genders. When further classified with age, it was seen that adult females have more stress than adult males. The first-year students have low stress level as compare to last year students. It was inferred that as a result of females falling under the high categorization of stress level, females tend to think more about their surrounding environment and activities than male.

Thus, it is important to understand the role of stress in academics for an effective experience in college and organizations irrespective of gender.

## VIII. SUGGESTIONS

Further research in this area is needed with a larger number of sample sizes in order to generalise the conclusion.

Stress management is mandatory in academics in order to balance the changing environment to the institution. Awareness should be spread amongst individual who face high level of stress. Counselling sessions and support group should be initiated in institutions in order to reduce stress levels among the students. The faculties should engage the students in a much more diverse field which breaks the student-teacher relation and enhances a parent-child like relation.

## LIMITATIONS

The present research has some limitations. There are chances of measurement error, i.e., human error. Attention deviation due to the surrounding environment while filling the questionnaire can be possible. The present findings may not be generalized to a larger population as the study has a limited sample size.

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