

Examining Life Stress among Male and Female College Students

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ABSTRACT

The current research aims to study life stress among male and female college students. The current research participants included a total of 80 students (40 male and 40 Female). Age range of both the student groups ranged from 20 – 22 years. Mean age of male and female students was 21.05 and 20.08 respectively. All of these students had urban and semi – urban middle class socioeconomic background and were unmarried. All the students were studying in the third year of B. Sc (Bachelor of Science) course in Degree College Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, India. The data was collected through the “Personal Information Form”, “The Life Experience Survey”. The t – test was used to compare the means of the two groups. The results showed that there was no significant difference between these two groups (Male and Female) with regards to negative life change, Male students reported significantly higher positive life change than female students.

Keywords: *College Male and Female students, Life Stress*

A life event is defined as stressful if it causes changes in & demands readjustments of an average person’s normal routine. The life events are distinguished as negative life changes & positive life changes.

Positive Life Change – Total impact of events perceived as positive.

Negative life Change – Total impact of events perceived as negative.

College life is composed of different stressful situations. Several investigators have attempted to study young adults particularly college students in terms of their stresses. The findings of these studies in general revealed students are likely to encounter the problems related to academics, relationships or work while some college students appear to adapt well to stressful situations. Some others may become vulnerable to similar situations (Baldwin, D. R., Chambliss, L. N., & Towler, K., 2003).

Stress is a word which is difficult to avoid. The term is discussed not only in our everyday conversation but has become enough of a public issue to attract widespread media. Different people have different views about it as stress can be experienced from a variety of sources (Cooper, 1987)

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The concept of stress was first introduced in the life science by “Hans Selye” in 1976. It is a concept borrowed from natural science derived from the Latin word “stringene.” Aggarwal et al. (1979) believed that confusion in definition is primarily due to the fact that the same term is used variously by scholars of different disciplines.

Selye 1976 defined any external event or any internal drive which threatens to upset the organism equilibrium is stress. Selye also defined stress as the non-specific responses of the body to any demands. In some respects, every demand made on the body is unique that is specific, heat, cold, joy, sorrow, muscular exertion, drugs & hormones elicit highly specific responses (Cox, 1985).

Stress is a condition or circumstance (not all adverse) which can disturb the normal physical and mental health of an individual in medical parlance (Sheps, D. S., Sheffield, D., & Carney, R. M, 1999). If a person frequently encounters stressful situations, his or her body remains in a state of high physiological arousal & alertness for long periods of time, which in turn, may lead to physical damage & illness (Schultz, D.P., & Schultz, S.E. (2010).

Life stress generally means hardship, adversity or affection. It also denotes force, pressure, strain or strong endeavor with reference to objects & persons, organs or mental power. Out of a variety of ecological stressors, researchers have been mainly concerned with life stress or stressful life events (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974).

Most of the life stress studies have been based on the assumption that, (a) life change required adaptation on the part of the individual & are stressful, and (b) persons experiencing marked degree of life change during the recent past are susceptible to physical and psychiatric problems (Sarason et al., 1978)

“Life stress may be most accurately conceptualized intern of events that exert negative impacts on the individuals.” A life event is defined as stressful if it causes changes in & demands readjustment in average person’s normal routine (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1978).

There are many studies which have reported strong relationship between stress & college students. Some individuals are more sensitive to some stressors than others (Schafer, 1996; Fisher, 1994; Altmaier, 1983; Greenberg and Valletutli, 1980).

According to Trockel, Barnes & Egget (2000), stresses related to financial issues among students have also been investigated by researchers. The findings indicated that students have to work during their college life to raise their finances. Such a condition can reflect in their academic work and on their grades, which in turn became a cause of stress.

Baldwin, Chambliss & Towler (2003) examined that college students often live stressful lives, yet some college students appear to adapt better than the persons in similar situation. While some college students appear to adapt to situations some others may become vulnerable to similar situations.

Aggarwal, S., Prabhu, C. H., Anand, L. C., & Kotwal, L. C. (2007) conducted a study on adolescents on the life event & behavioral problems. 186 adolescents were taken for the study & they said that adolescence can be stressful time for children, parents and work with

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them. Stressful life events negatively affect college going students. They explained a causal relationship between negative life event & behavioral problems.

For the longest time, people assumed that the student population was the least affected by any sort of stress or problems. Stress is now understood as a lifestyle crisis (Masih & Gulrez, 2006) affecting any individual regardless of their developmental stage (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2016). The only task students were expected to undertake was to study and studying was never perceived as stressful. What proved to be stressful was the expectations parents had for their children, which in turn grew into larger burdens that these children could not carry anymore. According to the statistics published by National Crime Records Bureau, there is one student every hour that commits suicide (Saha, 2017). The bureau registered 1.8% students who committed suicide due to failing in examinations and an 80% rise in suicide rates during a one-year time frame. A 2012 Lancet report also quoted that the 15-29 age group bracket in India has the highest rate of suicide in the world (as cited in “India has the Highest Suicide Rate”, n.d.) and these numbers show no sign of dropping. (Reddy K. J, Menon K. R, Thattil A. 2018)

Confronting the COVID-19 outbreak and variously rigorous measures to prevent the spreading of the infection, college students may feel stress and have more or fewer health problems. Academic workload, psychological separation from school, and fear of contagion were positively associated with the perceived stress and negatively associated with physical and psychological health. In addition, perceived stress is a key mechanism in the relationships between three stressors and two forms of health. This study makes not only unique theoretical contributions to the stress and health literature during the COVID-19 outbreak but also offers novel practical implications for joint efforts from all circles of society to ensure students' health. (Yang C, Chen A, Chen Y, 2021)

Research Tools

Life Experience Survey – Life Experience Survey (LES) originally developed by Sarason, Johnson & Siegel, J.M. (1978) was administered as a measure of life changes among the students. The questionnaire was chosen on the basis of its provision for individualized ratings on a scale from -3 to +3 thus indicating not only the intensity of the stressor but also its desirability. The rating of -3 indicated that an event was extremely unfavorable to the respondent while +3 rating corresponded to an extremely favorable impact. The original LES contained 57 items divided between two sections. Section 1 designed for all respondents comprised a list of 47 specific events plus 3 blank spaces in which participants could indicate other events that they may have experienced. Section 2 contained remaining 10 items specifically designed to capture life events in student populations.

The instrument was modified in the present study to further adapt it to the student population. Student section was expanded to include several items from Section 1 & those items which commonly occur among students. This way, 18 item scale was developed to represent life changes frequently experienced by students.

Data Collection

- Life Experience Survey (LES) was administered to the subjects individually. The scale was administered according to standard instructions.
- A cover sheet was used to collect information regarding demographic characteristics of the subjects. This included gender, age, income, religion, type of family, marital

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status and residential background. Subjects were assured that their results would be kept confidential and would be used only for research purposes.

Scoring of Life Experience Survey

It is a seven point scale ranging from -3 to +3. Ratings of -3 indicate a negative event judged to have had an extreme negative impact on the respondent. Rating of +3 indicates positive event having an extremely positive impact and zero rating indicates no impact of a particular event. Summing the impact ratings of events deemed as positive by the subject provides positive change scores. A negative change score is derived by summing the impact rating of those events experienced as negative by the subject. Scores of all positive and negative items are summed up separately to obtain a positive as well as negative total scores.

Statistical Analysis

Scores were subjected to “T” test to compare the males and females with regard to negative life change, positive life change. Mean score, Standard Deviation and T-value for male and female college students is shown in the table below

Trait Anger among College Male & Female Students

Variable	Female College Students	Male College Students	T-Value
Negative Life Change	M=7.8000 SD=4.4618	M=-9.80 SD=5.24	1.83
Positive Life Change	M=5.9000 SD=3.07	M=9.68 SD=7.42	2.972**

**P<0.05

CONCLUSION

The t-statistic measures how many standard errors the coefficient is away from zero. Generally, any t-value greater than +2 or less than -2 is acceptable. “The higher the t-value, the greater the confidence we have in the coefficient as a predictor. Low t-values are indications of low reliability of the predictive power of that coefficient.”
<https://bit.ly/3GsoCdH>

Since the t-value in the present study is within -2 and +2 we can conclude that there was no significant difference between the two groups (Male and Female College students) with regards to negative life change.

However, the t-value in the present study is not within -2 and +2 we can conclude that there was significant difference between the two groups (Male and Female College students) with regards to positive life change.

Hence, we can conclude that male students reported significantly higher positive life change than female students.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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