

Sources of Stress and Coping Strategies Among College Students in Ladakh

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to assess the sources of stress and coping strategies among college students in Ladakh. Further, to explore the gender difference among college students on the study variables. For this purpose, a sample of 160 (80 Males and 80 Females) college students in the age range of 18 to 22 year were selected through a random sampling technique. Students Stress Inventory by (Arip et al., 2016) and BRIEF COPE by (Carver, 1997) were used to collect data from the participants. An Independent t-test was computed to determine whether there is a significant mean difference between males and females among all the variables. The findings of the study revealed that majority of college students were experiencing a moderate level of stress and there is a significant difference in Stress with respect to Gender, indicating that female college students have more stress than male college students. The findings also revealed that there was no significant gender difference exist in the majority of the coping strategies. However, Gender differences have been observed in the subscale of Active coping, Self-distraction, and Humor. Males were found to utilize more Self-distraction, Humor, and Active Coping than females. By identifying the main sources of stress and highlighting its impact on students' well-being and achievement, educators, parents, counselors, and policy makers can develop effective intervention techniques for reducing the stressors faced by college students.

Keywords: *Stress, Coping Strategies, College Students*

Stress, being an unavoidable aspect of life, affects a diverse spectrum of people regardless of their age, gender, educational level, or financial background. As a human, we often find ourselves in a situation in which we have no idea how to handle it. According to the Yerkes-Dodson law, a moderate degree of emotional or physical strain boosts performance, but only to a certain extent. A higher stress level can lead to several health issues, both mental and physical. Students attending college are more stressed because they are undergoing a developmental shift from teenager to early adulthood, which can be challenging and vulnerable to numerous forms of stressors, such as academic stress, the obligation of success, an uncertain future, psychological and social problems, homesickness, friend sickness, a sense of loneliness, and elevated interpersonal conflict (Shaikh et al., 2004; Buote et al., 2007). Stress has cognitive, physical, and emotional effects. Although everybody can adapt to stress, not everyone responds to similar stressors

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Received: January 19, 2024; Revision Received: February 24, 2024; Accepted: February 28, 2024

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the same way. According to Larsen et al., (2021) continual stress alters the body's hormonal balance, which may cause us to feel irritated, furious, tense, or concerned about a situation or a notion. They can only effectively overcome the difficulties of this stage by maintaining their resilience and using effective methods of coping.

Numerous behavioral scientists have undertaken considerable investigation on stress and its repercussions, suggesting that more attention is needed to the topic. Mohan (2008) defined stress as a psycho-socio-physiological state which crosses the threshold of tolerance. Individuals' resilience is weakened if they have encountered repeated, acute, or prolonged episodes of stress. If stress is allowed to grow beyond control, it causes illness and poor performance. It serves as a crucial early warning system that alerts us to situations that pose a threat to our well-being, safety, self-worth, and emotional stability (Mohan, 2000 a, b). One of the issues that students encounter the most frequently is academic stress. This stress stems primarily from peer and family expectations, as well as fear of failure and humiliation, financial issues, concerns about the future of one's career (Mazumdar et al., 2012) high expectations from parents, teachers, and self (Amanya et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2010). Some academic stress is healthy since it pushes students to do their best, but when stress is seen negatively or becomes excessive, it has a negative influence on their health and ability to succeed (Kaur, 2014; Subramani & Kadhiravan, 2017).

For most students, it may be quite challenging to manage stress while in college. Contrarily, developing coping strategies for stress may aid students in managing their day-to-day social and academic obstacles and, as a result, improve their college experience. Coping is defined by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) as "the cognitive and behavioral attempts to master, tolerate, or reduce internal and external demands and conflicts among them." Such attempts indicate a person's battle for survival in the face of adversity. In other words, because prolonged stress has the potential to harm one's bodily and mental health, coping strategies are focused on preventing such harm. Coping is "a continuous, cognitive and behavioral process of overcoming stress and stressful consequences of external forces" and is essential for individuals to maintain their mental and physical well-being to mitigate or eliminate the harmful consequences of stress (Mohan, 2003). When a stressful situation is assessed, one must select how to deal with the stressor, whether to master, decrease, or tolerate it. One's way of coping is ultimately determined by their belief that they think they have enough resources for dealing with the stressful event (Lazarus, 1966).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Paudel et al. (2022) wants to assess the intensity of stress, and coping mechanisms among undergraduate students. The results of this study show that academic-related stresses (Exams, insufficient study time, poor results, a large quantity of syllabus, and the urge to perform well in the examinations) produced the most stress, whereas other factors induced mild stress. The five coping techniques that were most frequently used were instrumental support, self-distraction, planning, acceptance, and active coping. The coping strategy with the lowest prevalence was substance addiction. As important coping mechanisms, students who scored higher on stress were more likely to use behavioral disengagement, venting, and self-blame. To deal with a stressful situation, male students used alcohol and drugs at a greater rate than female students. In another study by Graves et al. (2021), the data show that there are gender disparities in both the coping strategies and the particular coping approaches used. It was discovered that women advocated the use of the four coping mechanisms more frequently than men and more commonly employed the emotion-focused coping component. These comprised Venting, Instrumental Support, Self-Distraction, and

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Emotional Support. There is disagreement concerning the effect of gender on negative coping techniques. According to (Chen et al., 2009; Paudel et al., 2022) men are prone to engage in unhealthy coping techniques such as alcohol drug usage and alcohol (Misigo, 2015). In contrast, several studies have found that college students frequently engage in harmful coping techniques including drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and using illicit drugs, regardless of gender. (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

Gomathi et al. (2013) attempted to compare stressors and coping mechanisms employed by a sample of college students. Both first-year and second-year respondents reported the frequency of exams, academics, and managing time burden as the top academic stressors. The vast majority of students employed positive coping mechanisms. Both first-year (78%) and second-year (71%) students stated that they utilized religion/prayer as their primary coping strategy. Other major coping methods for 1st and 2nd-year college students were seeking instrumental support (56% and 57%), active coping (71% and 70%), planning (76% and 65%), and positive reframing (68% and 62%). In their study among nursing college students on stress and coping mechanisms Yehia et al. (2016) discovered that planning, religion, and active coping were the most popular coping strategies, whereas drug abuse, behavioral disengagement, and humor were the least popular ones in dealing with stress. Another study by Yasien & Alvi (2018), examines the stress and coping mechanisms among students. The findings of the study showed that 29% of the participants reported having minimal stress, 26% had moderate stress, and 20% had excessive stress. The study also found that the frequently employed coping styles to manage stress are problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles concurrently along with planning, acceptance, religion, self-distraction, and positive reframing. The males seemed to employ an emotion-focused coping strategy, whereas the females were more likely to adopt a denial/blame strategy (Som & Patil, 2019).

Significance of the Study

Identification of stressors, understanding the root causes of depressive behaviour in young adults, and assisting them in coping with such issues are matters of concern at the moment when the prevalence rate of stressful, depressed, and anxious behaviour among young adults is alarmingly rising and steadily deteriorating their mental health and quality of life. The current research examines the sources of stress and coping mechanisms utilized by undergraduate students in facing stressful situations. Students attending college are more stressed because they are undergoing a developmental shift from teenager to early adulthood, which can be challenging and vulnerable to numerous forms of stressors, such as academic stress, the obligation of success, an uncertain future, psychological and social problems, homesickness, friend sickness, a sense of loneliness, and elevated interpersonal conflict (Shaikh et al., 2004; Buote et al., 2007). Understanding the various factors that lead to psychological problems among students can aid in the development of effective intervention programs that promote the overall well-being and academic achievement of students.

Objectives

The purpose of this research is to assess the level of stress and coping techniques among Ladakh college students. The main objectives of the present study are-

1. To explore the gender difference among college students on stress and coping strategies.
2. To determine the level and sources of stress among college students.

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3. To identify the type of coping strategies employed by the male and female students to manage stress.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a gender difference in college students' stress and coping styles.
2. There will be a significant gender difference in the source of stress experienced by students.
3. There will be a significant gender difference in the coping strategies adopted by the students.

METHOD

Sample

The subjects for this study included the college students of Kargil (Ladakh). The total sample of the present study consists of 160 college students, 80 of whom were males and 80 of whom were females. The research only includes students who are majoring in science, arts, or commerce. The age of the participants ranges from 18 to 22 years old. The researcher used a simple random sampling technique for this study.

Measures

1. STRESS

The Student Stress Inventory (SSI), designed by Arip, Kamaruzaman, Roslan, & Ahmad (2016) was used to measure the level of stress among undergraduate students. The scale is made up of forty negative questions that are used to assess four subscales (10 items for each). These four subscales are Physical dimensions, Interpersonal Relationship dimensions, Academic dimensions, and Environmental dimensions. The 40 items are graded on a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with 1 denoting "Never," 2 denoting "Somewhat frequent," 3 denoting "Frequent," and 4 denoting "Always." For purposes of scoring and interpretation, those who received scores of 122-160 indicated that they were under severe stress, those who received scores of 81-121 indicated they were under moderate stress, and those who received scores of 40-80 indicated they were under mild stress. Student Stress Inventory has a strong overall reliability coefficient of .857. The Physical and Interpersonal Relationship subscales of the SSI showed moderate reliability, with values of .680 and .620, respectively. Nonetheless, the subscales of Academic stress and Environmental stress have high reliability of .842 and .806, respectively.

2. COPING

A brief COPE (Carver, 1997) scale was used to examine the coping styles utilized by college students. It was developed by Professor C. S. Carver at the University of Miami. The scale includes 28 items that evaluate 14 individual coping strategies (2 items each) such as Planning, Acceptance, Active Coping, Positive Reframing, Humor, Religion, Using Emotional Support, Using Instrumental Support, Self-Distraction, Denial, Venting, Substance use, Behavioral Disengagement, and Self-Blame. Respondents rate how frequently they have employed each coping technique in reaction to a stressful occurrence on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I have been doing this a lot).

Inclusion Criteria

1. In Ladakh, students from only Kargil district will be selected for the study.
2. The age range of the sample will be from 18-22 years.
3. Subjects who agree to voluntarily participate in the study will be chosen.

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4. Only the students from the science, arts, and commerce stream will be included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Individuals suffering from psychopathology or deteriorated mental and physical health will be excluded from the sample.
2. Those suffering from any other chronic illness will be excluded.

Ethical Considerations

1. Informed consent from the participants was obtained.
2. The confidentiality of information given by subjects will be ensured.
3. The information collected will be used for research purposes only.

Statistical Analysis

In light of the study's aims, descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. An independent t-test was used to evaluate whether there is a significant variation in the means between males and females across all variables.

Procedure

The sample was taken from 2 out of 3-degree colleges in Kargil (Ladakh). Prior permission was taken from the principal for data collection. Participants were approached as a group in the class and they were also informed that the information gathered from them will be kept private and used solely for study. A compiled questionnaire including a socio-demographic datasheet and the scales for assessing the study variables was provided. The participants were instructed to read each item carefully and tick mark the response that best represented their opinion about themselves and their life. The scoring of the collected data was done manually and data was analyzed using SPSS version 23.

RESULTS

Table 1: Stress levels among college students are depicted.

Level of stress	Frequency	Percent (%)
Mild Stress (40-80)	42	26.25%
Moderate Stress (81-120)	106	66%
Severe Stress (121-160)	12	7.5%
Total	160	100%

The analyzed data shows a large percentage of undergraduate students 106 (66%) indicated a moderate degree of stress (81-120), while 42 students (26.2%) have a lower degree of stress (40-80) and only 12 students (7.5%) had a severe degree of stress (121-160). Among the four dimensions of stress, the Academic dimension and Environmental dimension were found to contribute higher to the student's degree of stress.

Table 2: Showing Mean, S.D., and t-ratios in the sources of Stress.

	Male		Female		t (158)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Physical	18.43	2.99	20.50	4.69	3.33	.001**	0.42
Interpersonal	22.59	3.61	22.68	4.06	.14	.886	0.02
Academic	24.15	4.52	25.16	5.99	1.20	.230	0.19
Environmental	23.66	4.06	25.76	4.87	2.95*	.004*	0.46
Total Stress	88.83	8.92	93.94	12.39	2.99*	.003*	0.47

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An independent t-test was employed to evaluate the gender difference in the sources of stress. The t-test's findings indicated a substantial difference in the Physical and Environmental sources of stress among gender $t(158)= 3.33, p< .05$ & $t(158)= 2.95, p<.05$. The mean score of females is higher in Physical stress ($M= 20.50, SD= 4.69$) and Environmental stress ($M= 25.76, SD= 4.87$) as compared to males ($M= 18.43, SD=2.99$) & ($M= 23.66, SD= 4.06$). The value of Cohen's d for Physical and Environmental stress was 0.42 & 0.46 (<0.50), which indicates a small effect size. In addition, the t-test findings likewise revealed a statistically insignificant distinction between males and females in Interpersonal ($t=.144, p> .05$) and Academic ($t=1.20, p>.05$) sources of stress. The value of Cohen's d for Interpersonal and Academic stress was 0.02 & 0.19 (<0.50), which indicates a small effect size.

Further, the t-test results revealed that there was a substantial difference in overall stress score between males and females $t(158)= 2.99, p<.05$. The mean score of the female is higher in stress ($M= 93.94, SD= 12.39$) as compared to males ($M= 88.83, SD= 8.92$) indicating that female college students have more stress than male college students. The value of Cohen's d for total Stress score was 0.47 (<0.50), which indicates a small effect size. Therefore, the hypothesis there will be a gender difference in stress is accepted while the gender differences in the Source of Stress are partially accepted.

Table 3: Mean, S.D., and t-ratios of the coping strategies used by college students.

	Male		Female		t(158)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Self-Distraction	5.56	1.29	4.13	1.55	2.97	.005*
Active Coping	5.98	1.39	5.12	1.24	3.17	.002*
Denial	4.65	1.28	4.53	1.27	0.55	.579
Substance use	2.17	0.65	2.12	0.33	.61	.542
Emotional support	5.26	1.32	5.48	1.19	1.12	.261
Info. Support	5.82	1.28	5.77	1.23	0.25	.802
Beh. Disengagement	4.30	0.97	4.17	1.04	0.78	.431
Venting	4.47	1.36	4.76	1.18	1.42	.157
Positive reframing	5.35	1.18	5.22	0.98	0.72	.462
Planning	5.28	1.32	5.01	1.33	1.30	.193
Humor	4.58	1.22	3.86	1.34	3.55	.000**
Religion	5.82	1.47	6.11	1.22	1.34	.181
Acceptance	5.36	1.45	5.07	1.54	1.21	.228
Self-Blame	4.45	1.41	4.43	1.37	0.05	.955

As illustrated in Table 3, the coping mechanisms used most frequently by male college students were Active coping ($M= 5.98, SD=1.39$), Religion ($M= 5.82, SD= 1.47$), Informational support ($M=5.82, SD= 1.28$), Self-Distraction ($M=5.56, SD= 1.29$), while the least utilized coping strategies are behavioral Disengagement ($M= 4.30, SD= .97$), Substance Use ($M= 2.17, SD= .65$) and Self-blame ($M=4.45, SD= 1.41$). The mostly used coping strategies by female college students are Religion ($M=6.11, SD= 1.22$), Informational Support ($M= 5.77, SD= 1.23$), Emotional support ($M= 5.48, SD= 1.19$), Active Coping ($M= 5.12, SD= 1.24$), whereas the most rarely utilized coping strategies by female students are Substance Use ($M= 2.12, SD= .33$), Humor ($M=3.86, SD= 1.34$) and Self-distraction ($M=4.13, SD= 1.55$).

To determine whether there are gender variations in the strategies for coping used by college students, an independent t-test was carried out. As shown in Table 3, although there was no

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substantial gender difference existed in the majority of the coping strategies ($p > .05$), however, there was a substantial gender difference prevailed in Self-Distraction $t(158) = 2.97$, $p < .05$, Active Coping $t(158) = 3.17$, $p < .05$ and Humor $t(158) = 3.55$, $p < .01$. The mean score of males is higher than female in Self Distraction ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.29$) & ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.55$), Active Coping ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.39$) & ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.24$) and Humor ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.22$) & ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.34$). Therefore, the hypothesis there will be a significant gender difference in the coping strategies adopted by college students is partially accepted.

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to measure the level of stress and the coping strategies employed by undergraduate college students in Ladakh. Further, to explore the gender difference among college students on the study variables. As shown in Table 1, the result showed that the majority (66%) of college students are experiencing a moderate level of stress, while 7.5 % are experiencing a severe degree of stress. Several other researchers also reported the same results of having a moderate level of stress among college students (Kumari & Mishra, 2014; Yikealo et al., 2018; Mustafa & Gulati, 2022).

The primary stressors among college students examined in this study were physical, interpersonal, academic, and environmental stress. Out of the four domains, Academic and Environmental sources of stress were found to contribute most to the student's level of stress, which is in line with the findings of previous studies which also show greater environmental stress among college students (Azila-Gbetor et al., 2015; Yikealo et al., 2018). The results showed a substantial gender difference in the physical and environmental sources of stress, with female college students experiencing greater physical and environmental stress than male students (Gulati et al., 2016; Sawant & Mishra, 2015). The current study's findings also showed that there was no statistically significant gender difference in the stressors of interpersonal relationships and academic stress. Previous research has likewise found no substantial difference in academic stress between male and female college students (Bhosale, 2014; Omoniyi & Ogunsanmi, 2012).

While comparing the total stress score among gender the data demonstrated a substantial variation in Stress with regard to Gender, indicating that female college students have a higher degree of stress than male college students. Previous studies also support this finding. Research done by Kumari & Mishra (2014) on college students of sample 120, reported that 80 % of the respondent had a moderate degree of stress and there was a significant difference among gender in stress. Female respondents were shown to be experiencing greater stress than male respondents (Dhull & Kumari, 2015; Mohan & Mustafa, 2022).

The study also sought to determine the typical coping strategies employed by college students. The Brief Cope questionnaire, which comprises 14 subscales with two items on each subscale, is used to examine this goal. As shown in Table 3, the primary coping mechanisms used by male college students in Ladakh were Active coping, Religion, Informational Support, and Self-Distraction, while self-blame, behavioural disengagement, and substance abuse are the least prevalent coping mechanisms. The most prevalent methods of coping employed by female college students in Ladakh were religion, informational support, emotional support, and active coping, whereas the least common coping mechanisms were substance use, humor, and self-distraction. Various other studies conducted in the past had yielded the same finding. Research done by Graves et al., (2021) found that the common coping strategies employed by males are Active Coping, Self-

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Distraction, Planning, and Religion, while females mostly employed Active Coping, Informational Support, Religion, and Positive Reframing. Several Other Studies were done in India (Acharya et al., 2016; Gupta et al., 2021; Nazeer & Sultana, 2017), in Nepal (Paudel et al., 2022; Sreeramareddy et al., 2007), and Saudi Arabia (Al-Sowygh, 2013) have yielded the same finding and supported the above results. The findings of this research also showed that both male and female college students in Ladakh most frequently utilized religion as a coping strategy, which is in line with studies done by (Al-Dubai et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2013; Yehia et al., 2016). The residents of Kargil place a high value on religious activities. They engage in religious activities including giving religious speeches, readings from the Quran, and imparting religious knowledge. It fosters a sense of community and fraternity even in depressive times, which eventually serves as a source of optimism, hope, and happiness (Shekhar & Hussain, 2018). Research has shown that religious practices and beliefs can help people deal with challenging circumstances including medical conditions, anxiety, stress, and social rejection (Aflakseir & Mahdiyar, 2016; Bryan et al., 2016). It entails turning to a divine source for consolation, support, and direction through religious beliefs and customs (Bryan et al., 2016).

Additionally, the results also found that the least used coping strategies by college students in Ladakh were Substance Use, Behavioral disengagement, and Self-blame which has been confirmed by several previous studies (Paudel et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2021; Graves et al., 2021; Acharya & Pathak, 2016). All these studies found that the use of Substances like Alcohol, Cigarettes, and other hard drugs was the least used by college students as a coping strategy in dealing with Stress.

An independent t-test was performed to evaluate whether a substantial gender difference exists in the coping strategies employed by undergraduate students. The findings revealed that there was no significant gender difference exist in the majority of the coping strategies. However, Gender differences have been observed in the subscale of Active coping, Self-distraction, and Humor. Males were found to utilize more Self-distraction, Humor, and Active Coping than females. These findings are consistent with past studies that showed that male college students employed humor, self-distraction, and active coping strategies more frequently than female students did (Sreeramareddy et al., 2007; Madhyasta & Latha, 2016; Gupta et al., 2021; Graves et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the research revealed that a majority of college students are experiencing a moderate degree of stress. Among the four dimensions of stress, the Academic and Environmental stress were found to contribute higher to the student's degree of stress. Further, the t-test results revealed that there was a significant difference in overall stress scores between males and females, with female college students experiencing more stress than males. The primary coping mechanism utilized by male college students in Ladakh were Active coping, Religion, Informational Support, and Self-Distraction while female students mostly used Religion, Informational Support, Emotional support, and Active Coping. The findings also revealed that there was no significant gender difference exist in the majority of the coping strategies. However, Gender differences have been observed in the subscale of Active coping, Self-distraction, and Humor.

By identifying the main causes of stress and highlighting its consequences on students' well-being and academic achievement, educators, parents, counselors, and policymakers can develop effective intervention techniques for reducing the stressors faced by college

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students. Lastly, this study adds to the growing body of knowledge about stress and coping strategies in college students. We can better assist college student's mental health and academic achievement by developing awareness, comprehending, and implementing appropriate coping strategies, resulting in a more resilient and healthier educational environment.

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Acknowledgment

Mohd Mustafa has been awarded a Doctoral Fellowship by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). This paper is essentially the outcome of his doctoral research, which was funded by the ICSSR. However, the author is solely responsible for the information provided, opinions expressed, and conclusions formed.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Mustafa, M. (2024). Sources of Stress and Coping Strategies Among College Students in Ladakh. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(1), 1339-1349. DIP:18.01.126.20241201, DOI:10.25215/1201.126