

Research Paper

The Influence of Stress on Happiness and Mental Health Among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Stress is a pervasive factor that significantly influences the psychological well-being of college students, affecting both their happiness and mental health. This study aimed to examine the impact of stress on these variables by comparing individuals experiencing high and low levels of stress. A randomized sampling technique was used to select 120 college students (60 males and 60 females) from Gondia, Maharashtra. Participants were assessed using standardized tools, including the Mental Health Battery (MHB-SS), Happiness Scale (HS-RHMJ), and Stress Scale by Vijaya Lakshmi and Shruti Narain (2014). The study employed t-test statistical analysis to determine the significance of differences between high-stress and low-stress groups. Results revealed that students with high stress had significantly lower mental health scores ($M = 80.61$, $SD = 5.31$) and happiness levels ($M = 208.63$, $SD = 6.58$) compared to their low-stress counterparts ($M = 92.48$, $SD = 6.07$ and $M = 227.48$, $SD = 7.10$, respectively). The findings confirm that stress has a statistically significant negative impact on students' well-being, highlighting the necessity for effective coping strategies and psychological interventions. The study underscores the importance of mental health support programs to enhance resilience, emotional stability, and overall happiness among college students.

Keywords: *Stress, Mental Health, Happiness, College Students, Psychological Well-being, Coping Strategies, Emotional Stability*

Stress is an inevitable part of life, particularly for college students who navigate academic pressure, social expectations, financial challenges, and personal responsibilities. The transition from adolescence to adulthood brings about numerous psychological, emotional, and cognitive changes that can significantly impact students' well-being. Stress, when managed effectively, can be a motivator that enhances performance; however, excessive or chronic stress can lead to negative consequences such as anxiety, depression, and diminished life satisfaction. Among college students, stress is often linked to decreased happiness and poor mental health, leading to adverse outcomes such as academic burnout, emotional exhaustion, and an increased risk of psychological disorders.

Happiness, in psychological terms, refers to an individual's overall sense of well-being and life satisfaction. It is influenced by various factors, including personal achievements, social

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Received: December 12, 2023; Revision Received: December 23, 2023; Accepted: December 30, 2023

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relationships, and mental resilience. When students experience persistent stress, their ability to maintain happiness declines, as stress triggers negative emotional states such as frustration, fear, and helplessness. Chronic stress can also impair cognitive functions, leading to difficulties in concentration, memory retention, and problem-solving, which further contribute to academic struggles and reduced self-efficacy.

Mental health is another crucial aspect of students' well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social stability. High levels of stress can negatively impact mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. The inability to manage stress effectively often results in maladaptive coping mechanisms, including substance abuse, social withdrawal, and suicidal ideation. Given the increasing prevalence of mental health concerns among college students, understanding the intricate relationship between stress, happiness, and mental health is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems.

Several studies have explored the impact of stress on college students, highlighting the detrimental effects on their emotional well-being, academic performance, and social life. Various stressors, such as academic pressure, financial difficulties, relationship issues, and future uncertainties, contribute to deteriorating mental health and reduced happiness. Addressing these issues through mindfulness practices, psychological counseling, and stress management programs can significantly improve students' ability to cope with stress.

This research aims to examine the influence of stress on happiness and mental health among college students by analyzing existing literature and exploring the psychological mechanisms through which stress affects overall well-being. By understanding the implications of stress, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals can work towards creating supportive environments that foster resilience, emotional stability, and happiness among students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) introduced the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal in determining an individual's stress response. According to this model, stress is perceived when an individual appraises a situation as threatening and beyond their coping abilities. College students often encounter stressors such as academic deadlines, peer pressure, and financial constraints, which can lead to negative emotional and psychological effects. Their study suggests that effective coping strategies, such as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, can mitigate stress and enhance well-being. This foundational theory highlights how individual perceptions of stress influence their overall happiness and mental health, making it a critical framework for understanding stress management among students.

Seligman (2002) in his book "Authentic Happiness" explored the role of positive psychology in enhancing happiness and well-being. He argued that happiness is not merely the absence of stress but a cultivated state of mind that emerges from optimism, resilience, and emotional intelligence. His research suggests that stress, when perceived negatively, can lead to lower life satisfaction and increased anxiety among students. However, adopting positive psychological interventions, such as gratitude exercises and mindfulness training, can help mitigate stress's adverse effects. Seligman's work is particularly relevant to college students, as it provides evidence that mental resilience and positive thinking can buffer against the harmful effects of stress and enhance overall happiness.

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Pascoe et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis examining the impact of stress on mental health among university students. Their findings indicate that chronic academic stress is strongly correlated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout. The study highlights that students experiencing high academic stress often report lower levels of happiness and diminished psychological well-being. Moreover, the authors found that stress management interventions, such as mindfulness meditation, physical activity, and social support, significantly improve students' mental health. Their research underscores the need for universities to incorporate structured stress-relief programs to enhance student well-being and academic performance.

Folkman (2011) explored the relationship between stress and coping mechanisms in students, emphasizing the significance of emotional regulation. Her study found that students who engage in adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking social support, practicing mindfulness, and engaging in leisure activities, report higher levels of happiness and lower stress-related mental health issues. Conversely, students who resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as avoidance and substance use, exhibit increased psychological distress. Folkman's research suggests that universities should focus on promoting adaptive stress-management techniques to help students maintain emotional stability and overall well-being. Hussain et al. (2018) examined the relationship between stress and happiness in university students and found that high stress levels significantly reduce subjective well-being. Their study concluded that stress negatively affects students' ability to experience positive emotions, leading to lower life satisfaction and increased mental health concerns. The authors emphasized that interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and resilience-building workshops can help students manage stress effectively. The findings reinforce the idea that happiness and mental health are deeply intertwined with stress management, making it essential for academic institutions to provide adequate psychological support.

Objectives of the study:

To find out the impact of stress on happiness and mental health of college students.

Hypothesis:

Stress will be no significant impact on college students' happiness and mental health.

Sample:

A total of 120 college students were selected for the study using a randomized sampling technique, which ensured that each student had an equal chance of being included. The participants comprised 60 male and 60 female students from Gondia, Maharashtra. Additionally, non-probability purposive sampling was employed, meaning that participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research question. In this case, the researchers targeted college students in Aurangabad to gain insights into a particular aspect of their experiences or behaviors. This sampling method allows researchers to focus on a subgroup of the population that is most pertinent to their study.

Variables

A. Independent Variables

1. Stress

- a) High
- b) Low

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B. Dependent Variables

1. Happiness
2. Mental Health

Research Tools

1. **Mental Health Battery (MHB-SS):** The Mental Health Battery (MHB) was constructed and standardized by Arun Kumar Singh and Alpana Sen Gupta. In 2000, they developed and validated the English version of the MHB, which was utilized in the investigator's study. The battery aims to evaluate the mental health of individuals aged 13 to 22. It consists of six tests and includes a total of 130 items, classified into six categories: emotional stability (ES), overall adjustment (OA), autonomy (AY), security-insecurity (SI), self-concept (SC), and intelligence (IG). The reliability of the various dimensions of the battery ranges from 0.72 to 0.87. Additionally, it demonstrates strong concurrent and construct validity. Each item awards one point for a correct answer and zero points for an incorrect response. The scores for each dimension are tallied separately to obtain the dimensional scores.
2. **The Happiness Scale (HS–RHMJ):** The Happiness Scale, developed by Himanshi Rastogi and Janki Moorjani in 2017, consists of 62 items categorized into five areas: I. Subjective Well-being, II. Social Well-being, III. Career Well-being, IV. Emotional Well-being, and V. Spiritual Well-being. The reliability of the scale was determined using the Split Half method (odd-even method), yielding a reliability coefficient of $r = 0.88$. The validity correlation was calculated to be $r = 0.91$.
3. **Stress Scale by Dr. Vijaya Lakshmi and Dr. Shruti Narain (2014):** This is a 40-item measure designed to assess stress levels among individuals aged 12 to 25 years. It consists of four subscales: (a) Physical Stress, (b) Frustration, (c) Anxiety, and (d) Pressure. Respondents answer each item using a 2-point scale with options of "Yes" or "No." The scores from the four dimensions are summed to calculate a total stress score.

Statistical Analysis:

“t” value Statistics is used for the present study.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

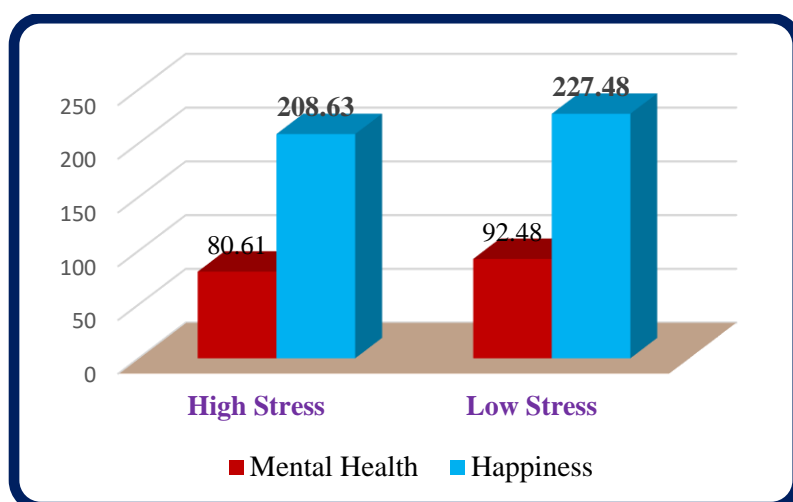
The mean, standard deviation, and t-value of the impact of stress on happiness and mental health among college students were calculated to assess the statistical significance.

Table No-1

Dimensions	Stress					
	High		Low			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	df	t
Mental Health	80.61	5.31	92.48	6.07	118	11.40**
Happiness	208.63	6.58	227.48	7.10	118	15.08**

*Significant at 0.01** = 2.62, 0.05* = 1.98*

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The study examined the impact of stress on happiness and mental health among college students using a comparative analysis of individuals experiencing high and low levels of stress. The mean, standard deviation (SD), and t-value were calculated to determine the statistical significance of the differences between these two groups. The results, presented in Table No-1, indicate that stress has a substantial impact on both mental health and happiness, with statistically significant differences at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$).

The findings suggest that mental health scores were significantly lower for students experiencing high stress ($M = 80.61$, $SD = 5.31$) compared to those with low stress ($M = 92.48$, $SD = 6.07$). The obtained t-value of 11.40 exceeded the critical value at the 0.01 significance level (2.62), indicating a highly significant difference. This aligns with previous research by Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020), which found that chronic academic stress is closely associated with increased anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion among university students. Moreover, high stress can impair cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being, making students more vulnerable to mental health disorders (Beiter et al., 2015).

Similarly, the analysis revealed a significant difference in happiness levels between high-stress and low-stress groups. Students experiencing high stress reported significantly lower happiness scores ($M = 208.63$, $SD = 6.58$) compared to those with low stress ($M = 227.48$, $SD = 7.10$). The t-value of 15.08 is well above the 0.01 significance threshold, suggesting that increased stress negatively affects subjective well-being and life satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the research of Seligman (2002), who proposed that happiness is strongly influenced by an individual's ability to cope with stress and maintain a positive outlook on life. Additionally, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) argued that stress reduces the capacity to experience positive emotions, reinforcing the link between psychological distress and diminished happiness.

The results clearly indicate that stress serves as a major predictor of both mental health and happiness among college students. The significant differences in mean scores between high and low-stress groups underscore the urgent need for effective stress management interventions. These findings corroborate the work of Folkman (2011), who emphasized the importance of adaptive coping mechanisms in reducing stress-related emotional distress. Given that chronic stress can lead to burnout, emotional instability, and long-term

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psychological issues, universities should implement counseling services, mindfulness programs, and academic support systems to mitigate its impact (Hussain et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

- The study confirms that high stress significantly reduces both mental health and happiness among college students, emphasizing the need for effective stress management strategies.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sonali, N.B. (2023). The Influence of Stress on Happiness and Mental Health Among College Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology, 11*(4), 3357-3362. DIP:18.01.321.20231104, DOI:10.25215/1104.321