

Academic Stress among Professional and Non Professional Students

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ABSTRACT

There is growing body of evidence suggesting that attending university for the first time entails a transition in young people's lives that incorporates a great deal of stress. Although for most students this period is a chance for personal growth but for some this is a critical time involving drastic changes which could be overwhelming and at times leading to negative consequences like anxiety and depression. Students, after finishing schooling may either get selected to professional courses or may enter non-professional courses. Usually entry into the latter may either be by choice or due to not being to be selected in professional courses despite making an effort and the resulting frustrations may lead to stress. On the other hand, demands for high quality performance may be imposed on students in professional courses leading to different types of stresses among them. The primary purpose of this study, hence, was to identify different sources of stress in professional and non-professional courses. A sample of 400 students including 200 boys from I.I.T., B.H.U. and 200 boys from Faculty of Science, B.H.U.) Student Stress Scale which assesses stress in five areas, viz., academic, environmental, family, financial and hostel was administered on these students and result showed there was significant difference on academic, family, financial, hostel and overall stress areas as the mean scores of non professional students was significantly higher among non professional students than professional students.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Professionalism vs. Non- Professionalism*

Stress can exist at any stage of life; however, the time of entry to college is fraught with a number of changes that the likelihood of stress at this stage increases. The new surroundings, non-availability of older support system, the demand for acting and thinking independently, a different style of teaching, moving away from home and need to take one's own responsibility rather than depending on others for directions, are some of the factors that might make more difficult for a college entrant.

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Greenberg (1990) conducted a study on 308 male and female students and result indicated that entering college, working and attending school and experiencing changes in sleeping and eating habits, living conditions and in the amount of independence and responsibility, were the life events which were experienced as stressful by more than 50% of the sample. Campbell, Jarvis and Svenson (1992) conducted a study on a sample of 457 undergraduate students and found that younger student subjects (under 22 yrs) reported having more stressful lives as compared to older students (above 22 yrs). Students most often move away from their homes and established support system and face the prospect of developing new peer-based support system (Sher, et.al., 1996). Dyson and Renk (2006) in a study on 74 first year students (23 men and 51 women) found that depressive symptomatology, levels of stress and type of coping strategies were uniquely related for first year students. Abdulghani (2008) conducted a study on 494 students and found that the prevalence of stress of all types was found among 57% and severe stress among 19.6% subjects. There was highly statistically significant association between year of study and stress levels. The odds of students having stress, was higher among first year students.

Stress among Students of Professional and Non-Professional Courses

In India, the courses of study generally fall within two categories, viz., professional and non-professional courses. Entry to professional courses like medical or engineering is very tough and the admission process requires high level of academic excellence and persistence but these courses ensure job security. On the other hand, entry to non-professional course is comparatively easier but these courses do not ensure procurement of a good job immediately on completion of the course. Most of the students want to study in professional courses and they may or may not succeed in procuring admission. Hence, students enter in non-professional courses either by choice or due to failing in getting admission in professional courses. Thus, entry to non-professional courses may lead different kinds of stress.

Supe (1998) conducted a study on 238 medical students belonging to First, Second and Third year and reported that majority of medical students perceived stress. Stress was found to be significantly more in Second and Third MBBS students rather than First MBBS levels. Stress was not found to differ significantly on the basis of sex, stay at hostel, model of travel, time spent in travel every day, medium of study in school, place of school education. Stress was found to be significantly more in students having more than 95% of marks at 12th Standard as compared to others. Academic factors were greater perceived cause of stress in medical students. Emotional factors were found to be significantly more in First MBBS students as compared to Second and Third MBBS students.

Agrawal and Chahar (2007) also revealed that students of engineering and management in India, experience role overload, role stagnation and self-role distance. The reports conclude that professional students have more adjustment problems in comparison to non-professional group. Shapiro and Shaping (2007) documented the high ratio of substance abuse interpersonal relationship problems, depression, anxiety and suicide among medical students. Singh and Singh (2008) conducted a study on 400 students and found that professional

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students had more stress. The result also indicated that professional students were poorly emotionally adjusted in comparison to non professional group.

Elzubeir, Elzubeir and Magzoub (2010) reviewed studies related to the stress and coping strategies among undergraduate Arab medical students published in peer-reviewed English-language journals indexed in Pubmed between January 1998 and October 2009. Studies suggest these students have a high prevalence of perceived stress, depression and anxiety, with levels of perceived psychological stress as high as those reported in the international literature for medical students of other regions of the world. Mane, Krishnakumar, Niranjana, and Hiremath (2011) explored the differences and the correlates of perceived stress among 282 students in professional courses. The prevalence of perceived stress by using the PSS scale was found to be 50 % in the study subjects. The mean PSS score was the highest for dental (29.5) and the lowest for pharmacy (23.2) students. The difference in the mean PSS scores among the students of different courses was statistically significant. Shirazi, Khan, and Ansari (2012) conducted a study on 300 students of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India by assessing their mental health and personality characteristics by using mental health inventory and neo-five factor inventory respectively. They reported that significant difference did not exist between professional and non-professional students on mental health and personality characteristics scores. There appears to be lack of consensus regarding the contention that whether the students in professional courses have higher stress levels or it is those in the non-professional courses who feel more stressed.

Need of the Study

In the present competitive age, both professional and non professional students face many kinds of stressful situations. Factors like parental preference for professional course for their children, inability to fulfill these expectations, financial demands of the professional courses, anxieties regarding future job prospects, lack of support & facilities available at the chosen educational institution, lack of conducive study atmosphere are likely to contribute to the stress among college students. Understanding of level and sources of stress of boys and girls in different type of courses may help to take the necessary measures to counter it at the point of onset itself. The present study, hence, was undertaken with the following objective.

Objective

- The present study aimed to investigate the difference in the perceived stress between students from professional (I.I.T.) and non-professional (Science) courses of study.

Hypothesis

H1: Students in Professional (Engineering) course are expected to score lower on areas of stress than students in non-professional (Science) course.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of 400 students including 200 boys from professional courses (I.I.T.) and 200 boys from non-professional course (Science) from B.H.U., Varanasi.

Tool

College Student Stress Scale (Kumar & Srivastava, 2009) measuring stress in five areas, viz., academic, environmental, family, financial and hostel was used to assess the stress. The data was collected either individually or in small group as per availability of the participants.

RESULTS

t test was calculated to know the differences on different areas of academic stress among professional and non professional students.

The results related to comparison of boys and girls on various areas of stress have been presented in Table 1 and Fig 1.

Table-1 Comparison of Professional and Non Professional students on Measure of Stress

Areas of Stress	I.I.T. (n=200)	B.SC. (n=200)	t Value (df=398)	p
Academic	34.14	37.47	1.92*	.05
	(17.35)	(17.23)		
Environmental	14.67	14.34	.36	NS
	(9.45)	(8.54)		
Family	9.77	12.44	2.69**	.01
	(9.38)	(9.78)		
Financial	5.59	6.91	2.18 *	.05
	(5.78)	(6.33)		
Hostel	23.73	27.38	1.92*	.05
	(17.49)	(20.41)		
Overall Academic Stress	87.99	98.57	2.08*	.05
	(50.02)	(51.84)		

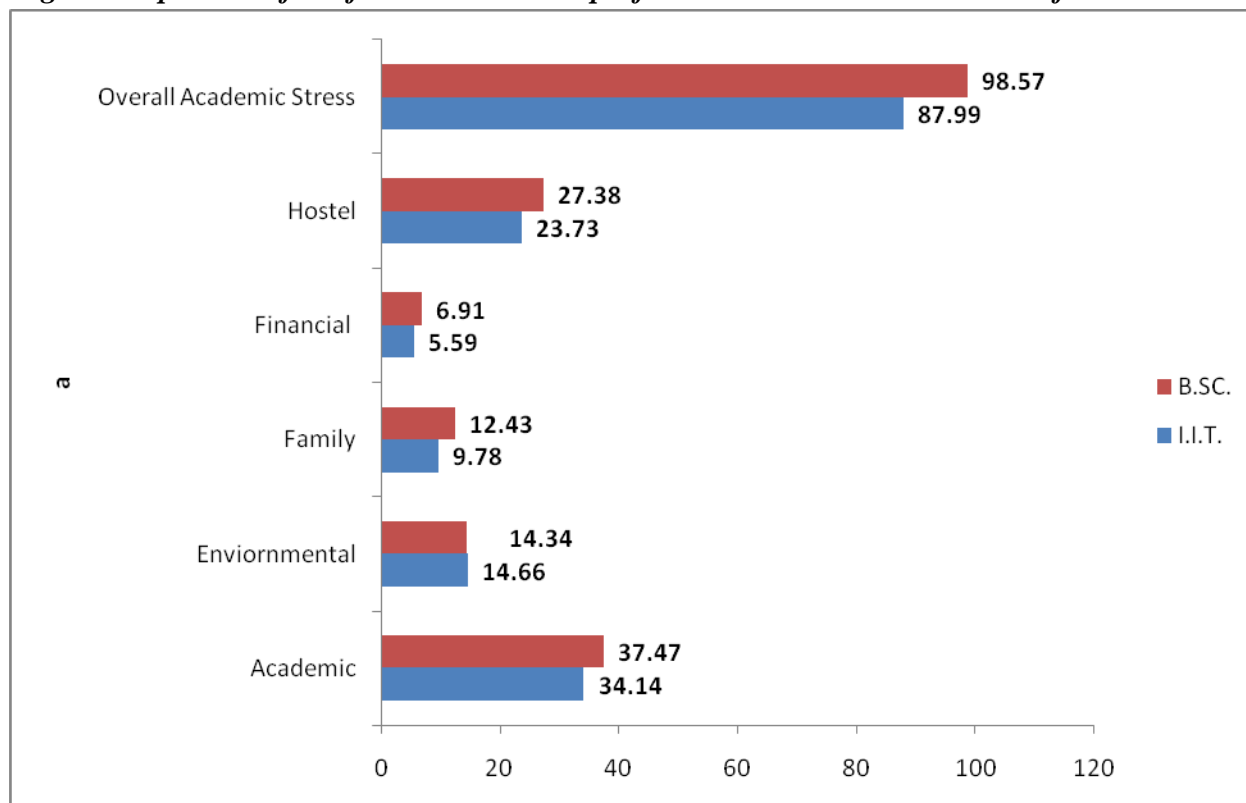
** Significant at 0.01 level, * Significant at .05 level.

The respective mean scores of professional and non professional students on academic stress were 34.14 and 37.47 and the mean score of non professional course was significantly higher ($t_{398} = 1.92$, $p < .05$) than that of boys. On Environmental Stress, the professional ($M = 14.67$) and non professional students ($M = 14.34$) were found to be similar to each other as the difference was not significant ($t_{398} = .36$, NS). On Family Stress, the respective mean score of professional and non professional students was 9.78 and 12.43 and the mean score of non professional students was significantly higher ($t_{398} = 2.69$, $p < .01$). On Financial Stress, the respective mean score of professional and non professional students was 5.59 and 6.91 and the mean score of non professional students was significantly higher than professional

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students were similar to each other as the difference was not significant ($t_{398}=2.18, p<.05$). On Hostel Stress also, the respective mean score of professional and non professional students ($M= 27.38$) and ($M=23.73$) and the mean score of non professional students was significantly higher ($t_{398}= 1.92, p<.05$). On overall academic stress the respective mean score of professional and non professional students was 87.99 and 98.57 and the mean score of non professional students was significantly higher than professional students ($t_{398}= 2.08, p<.05$). Data have also presented graphically and they are appeared in figure 1.

Fig.1. Comparison of Professional and non professional students on measure of stress



DISCUSSION

The results indicate that within the male students, those in non-professional course like science are under higher levels of stress than students of engineering, i.e. professional course on academic, family, financial, hostel stress areas and overall academic stress.

The obtained results do not appear to be in consonance with the conclusions drawn in a number of earlier studies investigating stress among students in professional courses. Supe (1998) in a study on medical students reported that majority of medical students perceived stress. Agrawal and Chahar (2007) also revealed that students of engineering and management in India, experience role overload role stagnation and self-role distance and have more adjustment problems in comparison to non-professional group. Singh and Singh (2008) had also reported that professional students had more stress. Elzubeir and associates (2010), on the basis of their review of studies on undergraduate Arab medical students, concluded a high prevalence of perceived stress among medical students. Mane et al. (2011)

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also reported prevalence of perceived stress in the study subjects. However, Shirazi et al. (2012) in their study on students of AMU, Aligarh India did not find a significant difference between professional and non-professional students on mental health.

In the present scenario, in general, there is a pressing need for any adolescent to acquire a profession. However, in a traditional city like Varanasi, from where the data was collected, the male child is perceived as the bread earner of the family and the parental and family expectations result in an almost overwhelming pressure on the male child to enter a professional course with engineering and medical being the most coveted courses. Under these circumstances, when a male adolescent after finishing school is able to secure admission in any of these courses, the sense of having fulfilled the parental expectations to a large extent is most likely to reduce the stress. On the other hand, having failed to enter these coveted courses may lead to negative consequences. The child, especially the male child, once selected in a professional course is treated almost like a royalty and is provided all kind of support by the family, leading to relief in stress in areas like family and finance. Furthermore the facilities in a professional institution are comparatively better, hence, this may help in lower levels of academic and hostel stress. The students who fail to get selected in a professional course and ultimately join a non-professional course generally have to face a contrary situation where inability to fulfill parental expectations on one hand and a comparative lack of facilities in the academic institution may deprive them of comfort either at home or at college leading to a higher level of perceived stress in various areas.

In fact, the male Students of non-professional course (science) reported a general dissatisfaction regarding their present course of study as most of them wanted to go either for medical or engineering but could not succeed in qualifying for it despite repeated attempts. Not being able to qualify led to the feeling that they could not fulfill the expectations of their parents and as expected this could be the possible cause of family related stress. Many were under double load, as they were still preparing for entrance tests for admission to professional courses with little hope of getting selected along with expending time and effort in their present course classes.

A large number were from rural background with comparatively lower financial support from family which may be contributing to the financial stress. Hostel facilities were actually of poorer quality than that of the engineering students in terms of mess, number of students per room, size of room etc. which would mean poorer study conditions. They also had lesser time for rest and studies as compared to the engineering students for whom classes end by 1 PM and remain off on Saturday.

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