

Understanding the Sources of Stress and Coping Ways of Girls Residing in Hostel

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at understanding the sources of stress and coping ways of girls dwelling in hostel. Sources of stress may vary in different environmental setting. Hostel's environment poses different kind of challenges for students. In India only a few girls are sent to hostel for study purpose as their marriage is given more priority than education. Therefore, 12 hostel girls studying in University of Allahabad were approached in order to collect data. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with girls. The FGD was audio recorded with the permission of girls and the audio recording of discussion was transcribed line by line. The Hindi transcription of the discussion was translated into English. Thematic analysis was used for interpreting the data. Patterns regarding different sources of stress were identified. Family related stress, career related stress, marriage related stress, gender discrimination, societal pressure, unhygienic environment of the hostel and adjustment problem with the roommate were the major themes derived from the patterns found in discussion. The themes that were derived for coping ways were: avoidance, back biting, Faith in God, technology involvement, reliving positive moments of life, diary writing, painting, studying, sharing and meditation.

Keywords: *Stress, Coping, Focus Group Discussion and Thematic Analysis.*

Stress refers to an individual's way of responding to a threat in the environment. Pinel (2003) defines stress as a physiological response to perceived threat. Today's fast-paced life and the inconvenience caused by it play a great role in generating stress among people. Nature and sources of stress may vary in different environmental setting and could be different for males and females because of their roles in a society. The challenges that are posed by different kind of environmental settings may vary and can cause various stressful situations.

The present study explores the sources of stress in hostel girls. The study also tries to find out the coping ways used by hostel dwelling girls to handle stressful situations. In a family,

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responsibilities get distributed among all the members in accordance with their role. But in hostel, one has to do everything by their own and new responsibilities bring many challenges that may cause stress. A good understanding of some of the situational variation as it interacts with individual vulnerability to stressors may provide deep insight into the stress and coping process (Forsman, 1983; Manusson, 1982). A study found that stress level among college students was higher than those of people at any other stage of life and it was also reported that college students have a higher predisposition toward experiencing depression due to stress (David, 2009). Prolonged stress was found to be strongly correlated with depression (Sarafino, 2002). College women showed higher levels of stress than college men for some stressors such as frustration, self-imposed stress, and pressure in relation to academics (Misra et al. 2000). Students living in hostel are given a fixed amount of money by their parents and they have to manage all the expanses. Financial stress has been found to be one of the greatest causes for poor academic performance (Pinto et al. 2001; Ross et al. 1999). Poor family conditions and huge monthly expenses have been found to bring about more stress. (Yanxia Mao, 2005). Heins (2003) has mentioned two types of sources of stress among college students. One is academic expectation and achievements, and the other is social factors, such as maintaining and developing social connections, etc. Emerging adulthood, the transition from adolescence into adulthood was found to be a major cause that increased college students' vulnerability to stress (Towbes and Cohen 1996). Over pressure of academics, cut throat competition, and lack of employment have made students' life deplorable. Academic stress and social stress were reported as the prominent factors responsible for the outcomes such as emotional stress and internalized problems (Verma et al. 2002, Krishnakumar et al. 2005, Lai & Wong 1992). A survey showed that 78.7% of college students agree that the problem of employment is the greatest factor causing stress (Qishan Chen & Zhonglin Wen, 2005). In a study stress in college students was found to be positively correlated with employment situation, study conditions, economic conditions and personal factors (Hong et al. 2011). The learning abilities and academic outcomes of students get affected when they encounter challenges such as social, emotional, physical and family problems (Fish & Nies, 1996, Chew et al., 2003). Stress level among girls was found to be significantly higher as compared to boys (Kumar and Bhukar, 2013). Students were found to get pressurized frequently by a variety of factors which lead them to have stress in one or more ways (Strong et al., 2008).

Coping ways are the mechanisms that are used to handle stressful situations. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) defined coping as "the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them". Lazarus and Folkman (1984) classified coping in two types. One is problem-focused where attempt is made to change the person-environment realities behind negative emotions or stress and the other is emotion-focused coping where an individual can relate to internal elements and try to reduce a negative emotional state or change the appraisal of the demanding situation. Studies have reported that problem solving is an important coping strategy that can reduce, minimize, or prevent stress by enabling a person to better manage daily problematic situations and their emotional effects (D'Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991). It has been found that women use more

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emotion focused coping as compared to men (Ruby et al. 2009). Coping strategies such as finding help, solving problem, leisure, exercise, cognitive restructuring, and a sense of security were found to be beneficial for management of stress (Donaldson et al., 2000). College students' use of emotion-focused strategies of coping, such as use of avoidance have been found to result in negative outcomes such as poorer health and increased negative affect (Pritchard et al. 2007). On the other hand, students who used emotion-focused strategies such as acceptance and positive reframing have showed increased well-being (Scheier et al. 1994). Methods that have been used to reduce stress by students include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits (Mattlin et al.1990). Effective time management strategies increase academic performance (Campbell and Svenson, 1992). Albert and Monika (2001) reported that even five minutes of aerobic exercise can generate anti-anxiety effects. A study found that sports, music and hanging out with friends were common coping strategies in college students (Shaikh et al., 2004).

METHODOLOGY

Participants:

A group of university hostel girls with the age range of 21 to 25 were taken for conducting Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The group consisted of 12 girls. All the girls were from different stream of education.

Procedure:

Girls residing in hostels were approached and made understand the purpose of the study. They were briefed about FGD. A consent form was given to each participant where it was clearly mentioned that all the information given by them would be kept confidential. After taking the consent, date, time, day and place were decided according to convenience of participants. FGD took place in a room of the hostel. The FGD was done in two sessions. Total time taken in first session of FGD with the girls was 1 hour and 35 minutes and the second session lasted for 37 minutes. Before conducting FGD, instruction was given and rapport was established with the girls. After giving instruction, the discussion was initiated with the following question:

“What are the things that are causing stress to you for last few months?”

Each FGD was audio recorded with the permission of participants. Both the groups of girls were thanked for their participation in the discussion.

Analysis:

The recording of the discussion was transcribed line by line and translated into English. Thematic analysis was used for the interpretation of data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) with in data. Before analysis, the data were read thoroughly many times. After reading the data, patterns of different sources of stress were identified. With the help of patterns found in the transcription of FGD, sub themes and major themes were derived. Finally the themes were defined on the basis of

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patterns found in FGD. The themes of sources of stress with their sub themes and definition have been shown in result section.

RESULT

Table.1. Table no.1 shows different sources of stress found in hostel girls. Major themes, sub themes and the definition of different sources of stress are given below in table.

Major themes	Subthemes	Definition
Family related stress	Unsupportive behavior of parents and taunt by family members	Family stress refers to tension regarding unsupportive behavior of one's parents and other family members.
Career related stress	Job insecurity, peer pressure, and devaluation of one's field of study	Career related stress refers to frustration resulting from over thinking about future, uncertainty of job and excessive comparison with peer group.
Marriage related stress	Increasing age, taunt by others, fear of consequences of marriage	Marriage related stress refers to frustration resulting from one's increasing age and taunt by neighbour and relatives for not getting married.
Gender Discrimination	Eve-teasing, feeling of insecurity, not getting equality in property issues, and no right on one's own body	Gender related stress refers to frustration which results from helplessness caused by discriminatory behavior towards girls (by both male and female).
Societal Pressure	Conflict with social norms and values and fear of being different	Societal stress refers to pressure resulting from conflict between one's own and others' values and believes.
Unhygienic Environment of the hostel	Uncleanliness of washrooms and unavailability of healthy food	Unhygienic environment of the hostel refers to unhealthy food, unclean toilets and washrooms.
Adjustment problem with roommate	Roommate's misbehavior and inability to say no.	Adjustment problem refers to compromising with roommate's bad habits in the hostel and being unable to say no to such things.

Table.2. Table no.2 shows different ways of coping with stress found in hostel girls. Major themes, sub themes and the definition of different coping ways are given below in table.

Themes	Sub themes	Definition
Avoidance	Ignoring the situation and not paying attention to the person	Avoidance refers to not paying attention to the person or thing that is causing stress.
Back biting	Using bad words and humiliating someone behind her back,	Back biting refers to talking ill about the person causing stress to a third person.
Faith in God	Worshipping God and going temple	Faith in God refers to having deep belief that God will resolve the problems.

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Themes	Sub themes	Definition
Technology involvement	Using facebook and what's app, watching movies on laptop and listening songs on mobile	Getting involved with technology refers to spending time on social networking sites, watching movies on laptop and listening songs on mobile.
Reliving Positive moments	Memorizing good moments and reviving same emotions	Reliving positive moments refers to reminiscing good moments of life that once brought happiness.
Diary writing	Writing down negative events	Diary writing refers to noting down the events that cause stress in life.
Painting	Drawing, sketching and colouring	Painting refers to drawing something and filling it with colours.
Studying	Focusing on study and spending long hours in study	Studying refers to spending a huge amount of time in reading, writing and understanding for a better future.
Sharing	Talking to friend and asking for solution	Sharing refers to talking to a best friend about the problem.
Meditation	Practicing peacefulness, being conscious about one's positive and negative thoughts	Meditation refers to exercising peace of mind.

DISCUSSION

Family related stress, career related stress, marriage related stress, gender discrimination, societal pressure, unhygienic environment of the hostel and adjustment problem with the roommate were the sources of stress found in Hostel girls. Avoidance, back biting, faith in God, technology involvement, reliving positive moments of life, diary writing, painting, studying, sharing and meditation were the coping ways used by hostel girls to deal with stress. A few examples of each source of stress and coping ways reported by girls have been discussed ahead. The examples have been shown in italicized words.

The participants reported family stress but they have also mentioned that due to living away from their family and relatives they can escape some stressful situations. The examples are evident respectively in the following sentences.

“I don't do many things because my father does not like it or my brother. My bua (aunt) keep saying that education has spoiled her. These things perturb me.

“Residing home is more stressful. You have to face many problems there but here in hostel I can escape many issues that bring stress.”

In a study lack of family support was found to be strongest source of stress (Devi & Mohan, 2015).

Another source of stress was career. The frustration due to uncertainty of job and the pressure of getting a government job has been reported to be a great source of stress. The severity of the career stress is obvious in the given examples.

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“Like, I don’t have any surety of job. I don’t know whether I will get a job or not. There is so much pressure of government job. Private jobs are not considered as good as government. This also creates stress.”

“There is also a belief that B.Tech students are good, medical students are good but fine arts is not good. Girls studying fine arts are not good.”

The stress of getting a job and achieving one’s goal is more intense and severe as compared to other sources of stress in hostel dwellers. This can be noticed in following statements:

“If we have been sent to hostel, we can’t leave this place without a job in hand.”

Stress from peer group comparison was also reported by hostel girls.

“A lot of stress comes from peer group. Her painting has got selected but not mine. Her paper got published but not mine. When I look at my friend circle and see that she has got a job, I feel stressed.”

Employment condition was mentioned as chief factor of stress by college students (Hong et al. 2011). 87.71% female students reported academic problem as the major reason of stress (Devi & Mohan, 2015).

Marriage pressure and the fear of repercussions of marriage were also reported which is obvious in following statements:

Another source of stress which was found in girls was their gender. Eve-teasing, inequality in property rights and other discriminatory behaviour in society caused stress in girls. The examples of aforementioned problems are obvious respectively in the following sentences derived from FGD.

“An old man came to me hurriedly and hit me here (putting her hand on the breast). I can’t forget this and that incident keeps coming in my mind.”

“He was a police officer, a man in power. I could not confront him. He put his hand on my hand and pinched it brutally and went away laughing. I feel insecure on the road. Being a girl itself is stressful in India. ”

“I want equality in everything but I don’t get it. Like, when it comes to property, my father takes advice from my brother but not from me because these things are deeply rooted in their mind that girls are not made for this.”

“Don’t eat too much otherwise you will get fat. Nobody will marry you. I don’t have any right on my body.”

“If you and your husband is earning equal amount of money still you will cook food in the kitchen.”

Social norms and values has also been a common source of stress in girls. Frequent evidences of societal stress were found in girls residing in hostel.

“We are bound by social norms and rules and when I can’t do things I like, it feels bad. These things cause stress.”

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“Just because they are respected and elderly people, I have to say yes even when I don’t agree with them. I feel stressed due to such things.

“yes, an ideal definition has been drafted that we should be like this and that. We get pressurized to be someone we are not”

“Sometimes it feels that these people are experienced and elderly, they must be right. I might be wrong. Such thoughts give stress.”

Hostel’s unhygienic food and unclean washrooms were also mentioned as source of stress by girls.

“Hostel is not clean, the sweeper does not come at right time, washrooms are not clean and hostel mess does not provide good food. You will find many girls in the hostel who are suffering from typhoid. These daily life problems also cause stress when you live in the hostel.”

Daily life hassles were reported more often than major life events with intrapersonal sources being the most frequent by college students (Ross et al. 2008).

Another source of stress mentioned by hostel girls was adjustment problem with roommate. Compromising with roommate’s bad habits and misbehavior in the hostel has also been mentioned as stressful.

“When you live in hostel, you have to adjust with your roommate. My roommate uses my things but I can’t say no to her. I can’t concentrate on my study. I keep thinking that I should have said no to her and I start feeling stressed.”

Conflict with roommate was found as a source of stress in college students (Ross et al. 2008). The themes that were derived for coping ways were: avoidance, back bitching, faith in God, technology involvement, reliving positive moments of life, diary writing, painting, studying, sharing and meditation.

Avoidance was one of the coping ways used by hostel girls to deal with stressful situations.

“I avoid that situation. Somehow I avoid that situation.”

The use of avoidance strategies resulted in negative outcomes such as poorer health and increased negative affect (Pritchard et al. 2007).

Back bitching was a way of dealing with stress caused by roommate’s misbehavior.

“I get involved in back bitching which gives me relief.”

Having deep faith in God was another way to cope with stress. Worshipping God and going to temple has been reported as stress reducing.

“I believe that at the end God will resolve all my problems. Most of the time I go to temple or pray to God to solve my problems.”

Involving with technology was also used as a way of coping with stress by hostel girls.

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"I take the help of social networking sites. I use Facebook or what's aap to escape the situation."

"I listen to my favourite songs on my mobile for hours and hours or watch movies on my laptop."

Reliving positive moments of life brought ease in girls suffering from stress.

"I memorize all the good moments of life and that keep me away from stress for some time."

Diary writing was also mentioned by girls as a way of reducing stress.

"I write down the thing which cause stress to me and by doing this I feel positive."

Painting was another creative way used by few girls to stay away from stress and this is obvious in the following sentences.

"I draw something or make sketches and fill it with colours."

To reduce the stress caused by career, girls engaged in study.

"I spend more time on study when stress comes due to career pressure. Why can't I do it? I will."

Sharing the problem with friends was also stress reducing for girls.

"I talk to my best friend who truly understands me or I talk to some of my friends on phone for longer period of time."

College women also reported greater use of social support than college men (Dwyer and Cummings, 2001).

Meditation was mentioned by two girls as a way to deal with stressful situation.

"I do meditation when I feel stressed."

"After meditating I feel a big relief."

All the coping strategies that have been mentioned by hostel girls in the present study were emotion-focused. Researchers have found similar results. A study found that college women reported greater use of emotion-focused coping strategies consisting of expressing feelings, seeking emotional support, denial, acceptance, and positive reframing than college men (Eaton and Bradley, 2008). Another study on college students also found similar results.

Positive coping strategies such as meditating, praying, sleeping, listening to music, talking to parents, yoga and hobby and negative coping strategies such as spending time on social networking sites, smoking, using drugs and alcohol were used by college students (Pariat et al.2014).Techniques of stress management such as meditation, support groups, and games help in better adoption of coping skills, improved knowledge of stress and enhanced ability to resolve conflicts (Shapiro and. Schwartz, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The present study helps in understanding different sources of stress of hostel girls. The study also focuses on different coping ways that were used by the girls to deal with stressful situations. By understanding the sources of girls' stress in hostel setting, intervention program can be developed in order to help them. Better understanding of the problem will lead to better solution. Here in India most of the university and college hostels don't have counselors to provide students with help in resolving their problems. Sometimes student who suffer from stress for long period of time commit suicide for they find no one whom they can tell their life problems. Hence there is a dire need to appoint counselors in hostels to help students.

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