



Perceived stress and psychosocial factors of stress among youth

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Abstract

Youth is a developmental phase of transition to adulthood, primarily involving education, career and social and personal relationships. It is the time when they get all kinds of exposures of life as an adult. Individuals at this stage are dynamic and full of vigor and are generally assumed to be physically strong and healthy. However, youth being a transitional phase, challenges are inevitable. The purpose of this paper was to assess the level of stress and to identify the major factors contributing to stress among student youth. The study utilized the Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) to assess the stress level. The result indicated that students experience a moderate level of stress which was primarily contributed by academic factor.

Keywords: youth, student, stress, psychosocial

1. Introduction

Youth is a phase when an individual gain independence to explore societal activities outside family activities. Individuals at this stage are dynamic and generally assumed to be physically strong and healthy. The pressure in their lives increases as a result of their developing stage, the so called life course transition to adulthood and the demands from the constantly changing society and environment. Jekielek and Brown (2005) stated that the 'transition can be a period of growth and accomplishment, especially when youth have the resources they need to navigate this process'. One of the primary goals for young adults is to be independent of their parents and support themselves which can be attained by building up such capacities by engaging in education and work. 'Young adults who are engaged in neither of these activities are often referred to as being idle or disconnected from any path leading to such independence'^[1].

In the fast changing society and technological development, there is higher exposure for the young people to explore. Youth experiencing social exposure suffers 'problems arising from inadequate adaptation which further leads to psychological health problems or deviant behaviors' (Kai-Wen, 2009) ^[2]. Radeef, *et al.*, (2014) indicated that disorders such as stress, depression and anxiety among students were found to be under diagnosed which may lead to increase probability of mental disorders having serious effects on their careers and social lives as well ^[3]. Hawton, *et al.*, (2002) stated that young people in 16-24 years are more likely to attempt suicide than those in older age groups ^[4].

Heins (as cited in Ji and Zhang, 2011) indicated that there are two types of stress sources among college students. One is about academic expectation and achievements, and the other is about social factors, such as maintaining and developing social connections, etc ^[5]. MacKean (as cited in Aldiabat, *et al.*, 2014) stated that university students are more at risk for negative mental health outcomes because they are exposed to

two sources of transitional stressors: stress related to the transition from high school to university, and stress related to the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Transition of students from school environment to university environment is stated to cause a psychological, academic and social shock to them, since this educational system has huge differences: new methods of teaching, new academic requirements, new type of relations between students and faculties ^[6]. Hussien and Hussien (as cited in Thawabieh and Qaisy, 2012) indicated that the same person suffers from different types of stress at the same time ^[7]; while Fogle and Pettijohn (2013) discussed that students with low perceived stress had better health habits, fewer hassles and more uplifts ^[8].

The study of Akande, *et al.*, (2014) revealed that the students have low to moderate stress. Academic factor was found most significantly source of stress, while female students were found to experience more stress than male students ^[9]. Similarly, Thawabieh and Qaisy (2012) indicated that students experience moderate level of stress and social factor relating to nervous and poor interaction with others were most associated with stress. The other main finding was that female students were found to have more stress than male students ^[7]. The finding of Elias, Ping and Abdullah (2011) also disclosed that overall, the undergraduate students experienced moderate levels of stress. They also found that the first-year students had low stress level and most sources of stress were related to academic matters ^[10]. Devi and Mohan (2015) also examined that academic factor was the reason for the cause of stress among college students. The authors suggested that since stress in the college setting cannot be eliminated, college administrators should consider incorporating stress management training specifically geared to the stressors encountered by college students ^[11].

Radeef, *et al.* (2014), in their study, established that the younger students aged 21years and below experienced significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety and stress.

While academic and personal factors were considered the main source of stressors; lack of self-efficacy, lack of motivation to learn and difficulty of class work were considered as determinants for emotional disturbances as these three stressor factors had statistically significant association with depression, anxiety and stress [3].

Kai-Wen (2009) [2] mentioned in his study that stress is considered the primary cause of suicide or self-injury among college or university students (Campus Security Report Center, Ministry of Education, 2009). His findings revealed that third-year students felt much more stress in physical/mental factor, school factor and relationship aspect, as compared to first and second-year students [2]. In a study conducted by Phang, *et al.* (2015) [12], psychological stress among undergraduate students is stated to be associated with poor academic results, physical ill-health and psychiatric disorders [12].

Mental health of youth is a concern and factors that cause distresses among young people need to be identified to understand what puts them into risk of mental illnesses and developing risk behaviors. The purpose of the present study was to assess the perceived stress level of student youth and to identify the major psychosocial factors of stress.

2. Methodology

The design of the study was descriptive and cross sectional in nature. Students from the 5th semester of undergraduate course belonging to Arts, Science and Commerce stream formed the population of the study. Two colleges were selected based on the location, i.e. core area of Dimapur, Nagaland and courses offered, i.e. Arts, Science and Commerce. Disproportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select sample. A total of 170 questionnaires were distributed among the sample and 146 questionnaires were returned, out of which 122 valid questionnaires were obtained. A structured questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the respondents. The first part of the questionnaire included the personal and familial characteristics. The second part dealt with the stress level, for which Cohen’s Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) was used, comprising of 10 questions on the feelings and thoughts during the last one month. The third part of the questionnaire included the psychosocial factors of stress, for which a self-structured questionnaire comprising of five (physical/mental, family, academic, peer and social) factors with a total of 30 statements was used.

Table 1: Reliability Index

	Cronbach's α
PSS-10	0.65
Psychosocial factors of stress	0.72

Data was processed and analysed with Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Percentages, mean, standard deviation, Pearson’s correlation and t test were conducted to analyse and test statistical relationship among the variables.

3. Results

Out of the total respondents, 45 (36.9%) respondents were male and 77 (63.1%) were female. Age of the respondent

ranges from 19-24 years and the mean age was 20.5 and Standard Deviation 1.06. A total of 104 (85.2%) respondents belonged to 19-21 years of age; while 18 (14.8%) of the respondents belonged to 22-24 years of age. A total of 51 (41.8%) of the respondents belonged to Arts stream, 40 (32.8%) from the Science stream and 31 (25.4%) from the Commerce stream.

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents

S. No.	Characteristics	Total	
1	Gender	Male	45 (36.9)
		Female	77 (63.1)
2	Age Group	19-21 years	104 (85.2)
		22-24 years	18 (14.8)
		Mean \pm SD	20.5 \pm 1.06
3	Stream	Arts	51 (41.8)
		Science	40 (32.8)
		Commerce	31 (25.4)

Source: Computed Figures in the parentheses are percentages

3.1 Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) score

The result of the present study indicates that majority (84.4%) of the student perceived moderate level of stress as seen in the table 3 below. In the high stress category, considerable percentage difference can be observed in the female respondent, however the t test conducted between gender and perceived stress did not show any significant difference (t=-.898; df=120; p=.438). Considerable percentage difference can also be observed in the age group of 22-24 years, which is supported by the t test that shows a significant difference between age group and perceived stress (t=-2.260; df=120; p=.022) at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3: Perceived Stress Level

Sl. No.	Perceived Stress	Gender		Age Group		Total N=122
		Male n=45	Female n=77	19-21 yrs n=104	22-24 yrs n=18	
1	Low	5 (11.1)	6 (7.8)	10 (9.6)	1 (5.6)	11 (9.0)
2	Moderate	38 (84.4)	65 (84.4)	90 (86.5)	13 (72.2)	103 (84.4)
3	High	2 (4.4)	6 (7.8)	4 (3.8)	4 (22.2)	8 (6.6)

Source: Computed Figures in the parentheses are percentages.

3.2 Psychosocial factors of stress

Among the five psychosocial factors of stress, academic factor is found to be the major factor of stress for both male and female students as shown in table 4. It can be observed that, as the perceived stress level goes higher, the mean score of family, social, physical/mental and peer factors also goes higher.

The highest mean score, irrespective of gender and age group were academic factor and family factor. Among the stream of study, both Arts and Science students perceived academic factor as the major factor of stress, while it was the family factor for the commerce students. Respondents from the broken and reconstituted family perceived family as the major factor of stress and social factor as the next major factor. Among the highly stressed student, the major factor of stress is seen to be the social factor and the family factor.

Table 4: Perceived Stress and Psychosocial factors of stress

Sl. No.	Characteristics		Academic	Family	Social	Physical/ mental	Peer
1	Gender						
	Male	Mean	14.53	13.93	12.8	13	12.2
		Std. D	1.766	2.499	2.825	2.306	2.642
	Female	Mean	14.14	13.7	13.4	12.65	11.94
Std. D		1.579	2.213	2.652	2.095	2.214	
2	Age Group						
	19-21 years	Mean	14.34	13.72	13.21	12.66	11.99
		Std. D	1.611	2.283	2.761	2.254	2.403
	22-24 years	Mean	14	14.17	13	13.44	12.28
Std. D		1.91	2.526	2.544	1.504	2.244	
3	Stream						
	Arts	Mean	14.37	13.59	13.02	12.69	12.04
		Std. D	1.469	2.09	2.486	1.965	2.349
	Science	Mean	14.4	13.85	13.93	13	11.98
		Std. D	1.63	2.248	2.786	2.16	2.337
	Commerce	Mean	14	14.03	12.48	12.65	12.1
Std. D		1.966	2.763	2.862	2.537	2.534	
4	Form of Family						
	Stable	Mean	14.34	13.73	13.16	12.79	12
		Std. D	1.637	2.251	2.633	2.169	2.307
	Broken	Mean	13	15	13.33	12.67	10.67
		Std. D	1	5.292	3.055	3.215	1.155
	Step/ Reconstituted	Mean	13.33	14.67	14	12.33	14.67
Std. D		2.517	1.155	6.245	2.082	4.509	
5	Perceived Stress						
	Low	Mean	13.36	13.45	12.09	12.09	11.64
		Std. D	2.063	2.423	1.758	1.758	1.912
	Moderate	Mean	14.43	13.71	13.08	12.69	11.95
		Std. D	1.625	2.243	2.743	2.192	2.37
	High	Mean	13.75	15.25	16	14.88	13.63
Std. D		0.886	2.866	1.69	1.126	2.669	
Total	Mean	14.29	13.79	13.18	12.78	12.03	
	Std. D	1.654	2.315	2.721	2.172	2.374	

Source: Computed

3.3 Correlation

The data in the following table 5, shows a positive correlation existing between perceived stress and physical/mental factor of stress at 0.01 level of significance (.234); between perceived stress and social factor at 0.01 level of significance (.265), which indicates that as the respondents experiences stress from physical/mental and social factors, their perception

of stress level increases as well and vice versa. There is also a positive correlation of physical/mental factor with family factor, academic factors, peer factors and social factors which signifies that when respondents face stress from family, academic, peer and social factors, they experience stress in physical/mental factor as well and vice versa.

Table 5: Correlation matrix of Perceived Stress and Psychosocial factors of stress

Sl. No.	Variables	Perceived Stress	Physical/ Mental	Family	Academic	Peer
1	Physical/Mental	.234**	1			
2	Family	.139	.385**	1		
3	Academic	.074	.232*	.042	1	
4	Peer	.151	.343**	.225*	.204*	1
5	Social	.265**	.514**	.250**	.141	.529**

Source: Computed *P<0.05 **P<0.01

3.4 t test

The t test conducted between gender and psychosocial factors of stress indicates that there is no significant difference of gender with any of the factors of stress. The t test between age

group and psychosocial factors of stress presented in table 6, shows that there is a significant difference between age group and physical/mental factor (t=-1.414; df=120; p=.017) at 0.01 level of significance.

Table 6: Age and Psychosocial Factors of Stress

Sl. No.	Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	P
1	Physical/Mental	-1.414	120	.160	.017**
2	Family	-.752	120	.453	.749
3	Academic	.796	120	.428	.712
4	Peer	-.473	120	.637	.983
5	Social	.303	120	.762	.433

Source: Computed ** $P < 0.01$

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that student youth perceives moderate level of stress irrespective of gender. The finding is similar with Thawabieh and Qaisy (2012)^[7], Elias, Ping and Abdullah (2011)^[10] and Pierceall and Keim (2007)^[13]. Perceived stress had no relationship statistically with gender; while there was statistically significant relationship with age group. Academic stress constituted the most dominant factor of stress. This is similar with the findings of Radeef *et al.* (2014)^[3], Akande *et al.* (2014)^[9], Britz and Pappas (2009)^[14], Alawad and Slamah (2014)^[15] and Sreeramareddy *et al.* (2007)^[16]. The second dominant factor of stress was family factor. However, among the broken and reconstituted families, family related stress was the most dominant factor of stress. Among the high stress category, social and family factor were the most dominant factors of stress. Statistically there was relationship existing between perceived stress and physical/mental factor and also between perceived stress and social factor. Physical/mental factor, on the other hand, had statistical relationship with all the other factors of stress.

5. Conclusion

There is rising trend of cases of mental distresses, illnesses and suicides among the young people all over the world. The pressure of life, that the competitive world puts young people into, is increasing as the world keeps on developing. Parents of the older generation or parents who are less educated may not understand the harmful lifestyle these developmental changes have on their children. Furthermore, the developmental challenges of youth, such as the hormonal changes and the period of 'storm and stress' also need to be understood by the parents. Hence, it is essential to educate the parents about the challenges of the physical and psychosocial development and also the evil effects of the challenging world that the youth encounters. These will benefit the parents to understand, motivate and support their children during their transitional phase.

The finding of the present study indicates the prevalence of a moderate level of stress among the student youth and very few of them perceived high stress, which is not alarming. This, however, is a result collected at a particular point of time and could alter at another point of time. Hence, it is important to equip youth with the knowledge of mental distresses such as stress and depression and its negative outcomes; and also equipping them on stress management and on adaptive and maladaptive coping. For this purpose, courses on mental health and ill-health can be incorporated into the educational curriculum since the ultimate purpose of educational institutions is to produce well learned, well equipped and well educated individuals.

Students need to be made aware of the ill effects of stress and its associated issues such as depression, self-harming behaviors, suicides and its long term effect on health and social relationships. Along with promoting awareness, adaptive stress management skills also need to be taught at the school and college level. Seminars or workshops, if conducted with the assistance from specialized professional counselors and Social Workers, will never go futile.

6. References

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