

IRANIAN STUDENTS' STRESS: ACCESS TO SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES FOR COPING

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between access to social support and coping strategies with stress.

Method: This research is a cross-sectional study which was done on 375 students in Islamic Azad University in North of Iran. The multi-stage cluster was sampling method in this study. The data collected were based on three standard questionnaires about student-life stress, coping strategy and social support. The result was analyzed by Regression and correlation coefficient using SPSS version 16.

Results: The results showed that though majority of the samples were male (73.9%), there was no significant difference between stress management of male and female ($p > 0.05$).

In addition, there is a significant negative relationship, between stress and access to social support ($p = 0.000$). Stress also had a significant negative relationship with coping strategies ($p = 0.000$). The stepwise regression analysis revealed that the predictor variables can explain 15% of the students' stress variance.

Conclusion: The phenomenon of students' stress is important because, student health, affect the health of the community. These results may be beneficial, for educational institutions to provide support and help them to cope adverse situation. This study will help to formulate strategies and counselling methods necessary for decreasing the stress of the students.

Key words: Coping strategy; Social support; Stress among Students.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is defined as an individual total response to environmental demands or pressures. It can be conscious or subconscious which can be hazardous for health. Stress in any condition can evoke negative thoughts and feelings in a person (Jaffri and Jaleel, 2012). Many studies that have been carried out on stress and their outcomes concluded that this topic needed more attention (Rees and Redfern, 2000; Ellison, 2004; Ongori and Agolla, 2008; Agolla and Ongori, 2009; Rezakhani *et al.*, 2009; Bahrami *et al.*, 2012).

This stressful conditions may arise in every individual. Students are not exempted from this dreadful situation. Pay the costs, work during education, intellectual preoccupations, spending time on curriculum, course assignments, continuous assessment and family expectations are the kinds of stress that students face (Dehghan Nayeri and Adib Hajbaghery, 2006). A number of studies have revealed that the time of adjusting to university life makes people susceptible to the emotional disorder (Camara and Calvete, 2012). This period is a stressful time for many students as they go through the process of adapting to new educational and social

environments as stressors (Misra and Castillo, 2004). This academic pressure arouses feelings of fear, ineffectiveness, worthlessness, anger, guilt and can be associated with both psychological and physical problems (Toyin and Akoraro, 2009). Therefore stress has become an important topic in academic environment as well as in our society (Agolla and Ongori, 2009). A critical issue concerning stress among students is its effect on learning. Individuals under low and high stress levels learn the least, which causes failure and low achievement in students (Jaffri and Jaleel, 2012). Such a situation is harmful because students' health will in turn effect the community health and that is one of the most important factors for the country's progress (Sohrabi *et al.*, 2008). In some cases, a supportive network of family, friends and important people can help them deal with stress. In addition to these, learning coping techniques and its proper application them can control this problem.

Iran is one of the countries where the number of youth is very high and most of them are students. Review of studies shows that stress in Iranian students is widespread which causes some psychological damage (Heidari and Saedi,

2011; Rezakhani *et al.*, 2009; Bahrami *et al.*, 2011). Therefore the purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between access to social support and coping strategies with stress.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a cross-sectional study. 375 students, who fulfilled the inclusion criteria (Undergraduate student, Student at the School of Humanities), were selected according to the population size. The multi-stage cluster was the method of sampling in this study. To gather the samples, first all branches of Islamic Azad University in North of Iran Mazandaran state, were identified as clusters. Many variables which could be disruptive in the result of this research were also controlled by deletion (Course variable in Different fields of human sciences were selected except psychology). The position of students and the condition of university branches were similar. Then, based on sample size required, each cluster was selected randomly. In the next step, samples were selected based on the number of students in each educational department.

The main data was collected based on three questionnaires namely Gadzella student-life stress questionnaire, the questionnaire of Blings-Moss Copying Responses and Zimet, Dahlam, Zimet and Farley's Multidimensional Scale of Social Support. Students must answer each question in presence of the researchers. These questionnaires after translation were validated using content validity and were confirmed by experts and scholars. The reliability of the questionnaires was evaluated within the internal consistency. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0/88 for Gadzella student-life stress Questionnaire, 0/89 for the questionnaire of Blings-Moss Copying Responses and 0/75 for Zimet, Dahlam, Zimet and Farley's Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

The result was analyzed by Regression and correlation coefficient using SPSS version 16.

RESULTS

The results showed that majority of samples were male

Table3: Multiple regression coefficient in each step

	Regression model	Non standard coefficient		Standard coefficient coefficient Beta	t	p
		b	Std. Error			
Step1	Dependent variable (stress)	67.674	3.22		21	0.000
	Access to social support	0.540-	0.071	0.377-	7.649-	0.000
Step2	Dependent variable (stress)	72.016	3.698		19.476	0.000
	Access to social support	0.465-	0.77	0.324-	6.014-	0.000
	Coping strategies	0.238-	0.101	0.127-	2.350-	0.019

(73.9%). The mean and standard deviation scores for females were compared with male in stress (x=43. 97, s=14. 1). The mean scores of male versus females is perceived with respect to social support (x=44. 8, s=9. 6) and strategies for coping (x=68. 1, s=11. 3). Though the scores for coping strategies was higher but there is no significant difference in stress management between male and females (p>0.05). Table 1 details mean and standard deviation of these variables.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of study variables in term of sex

Variables	Male		Female		AllStudents	
	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.
Stress	43.20	13.18	43.97	14.13	43.56	13.61
Access to social support	44.82	9.61	44.43	9.36	44.64	9.49
Coping strategies	68.06	11.33	66.60	9.97	67.39	10.73

In addition, the results of the correlation matrix show that there is a significant negative relationship, between stress and access to social support (p=0. 000), also stress has a significant negative relationship with coping strategies (p=0.000) (Table 2). It means that better the support resources and strategies for coping, the stress of the students will lessen.

Table 2. Correlation analysis between predictive variables (access to social support and coping strategies) and the dependent factor (Iranian students' stress).

Variable	Access to social support	Coping strategies
Stress	*-0.4	*-0.2

Note: *Correlation is significant at the. P<0.05

To determine the best predictor of stress between the predictor variables, the regression model with the stepwise method was used. 'Access to social support' and 'Coping strategies' variables were included in the model. The results of regression analysis revealed that 'access to social support' and 'coping strategies' (as predictive variables) were correlated with students' stress and have been able to reduce students' stress. (Table3)

So that in the first and second step, the values of 0.142 and 0.155 stress variable can be explained by the above variables. (Table4)

Table4: The multiple correlation coefficient and Squared multiple correlation coefficient in each step

Regression model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error
Step1: Access to social support	0.377	0.142	0.139	12.63
Step2: Access to social support, Coping strategies	0.394	0.155	0.150	12.55

Dependent Variable: Stress

Results of analysis of variance for a validation regression equation, were significantly related with the amount of F, in the first and second steps, respectively, 58.501 and 32.386, (p<0.01). This analysis shows the validity of the results is such that it can explain 15% of the students' stress variance. (Table5)

reduced. This finding was confirmed by other studies. In this regard, Farahani (2009) found in his study that coping strategies reduced level of academic stress.

Many literatures reported results similar to the present study (McCarthy, Moller and Fouladi, 2001; Ptacek, Smith and Zanas, 2003; Crockett *et al.*, 2007; Berkel,

Table5: Analysis of variance for each step of stepwise multiple regression

Regression model		Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	p
Step1	Regression	9326.639	1	9326.639	58.501	0.000
	Residual	56437.237	354	159.427		
	Total	65763.876	355			
Step2	Regression	10196.107	2	5098.053	32.386	0.000
	Residual	55567.770	353	157.416		
	Total	89912.833	355			

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the mean of stress score was 44.38, also the mean score regarding the access to social support was 44.64 and in coping strategies, the mean score was 67.39. There is no significant difference between men and women from these variables. This maybe due to the structural, social and cultural similarities in the living and education environment. Results of some related studies in this field show similar outcome to the current study (Hashemzadeh, Aurangi and Bahrehdar, 2000). Masih and Gulrez (2006), in a study among 346 students consisting of 180 females and 166 males, revealed that there is no significant difference in terms of gender with respect to amount of stress experienced. However many related literature in this field, is against the result of this current study as they report significant differences on the effect of stress in females as compared to males (Angela Decarla, 2004; Taragar, 2009; Gupta *et al.*, 2011; Sharma *et al.*, 2011).

2009; Foladvand, 2010; Khan and Achour, 2011). But on the other hand, some study reported contrasting results which are different from the results of the current study (Samari, Laelifaz and Asgari, 2006; Kline and Snoww, 2005). Finally, considering the difference between the results of the previous studies in this regard, more concern is needed for investigation in different geographical, cultural, and social domains.

CONCLUSION

As the phenomenon of students' stress is a broad issue, it should be considered with utmost concentration. This is important because, student health, affect the health of the community. The results of this study confirm the hypothesis based on the positive effect of coping strategies and social supports, on students' stress reduction. These results may be beneficial in the educational institutions. The researchers recommend that university decision makers and students' parents have to provide students with a support and coping strategies counselling in order to decrease the students' stress. So this way the students can achieve better and will maintain a good mental health.

Other studies revealed that both 'access to social support' and 'coping strategies', influence the level of the students' stress. So with the increase in the access to social support and usage of coping strategies, the stress is

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