

A Comparative Study of Perceived Stress among College Going Females and Males

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ABSTRACT

Stress affects people across all age groups, genders and situations, and leads to a variety of health issues. But college is a stressful time for most of the students as they enter into a new educational and a social world. Students of all years experience different kinds of stress, few of them being stressed about finding a job or a suitable life partner. There is a difference in how stress is perceived by each individual, which is affected by different factors- such as age, gender, culture. The present study was conducted to examine the gender differences in perceiving stress across different situations during the college years. It was hypothesized that there is no significant differences in stress gender, and females will be higher on perceived stress. The sample consisted of 200 college students (100 males and 100 females), aged between 18 to 25 years from different universities of North India. The sample was collected by convenient sampling. Perceived Stress Scale by Cohen, a self report measure, was used to assess the level of perceived stress. It was found out that females perceived stress more than males. They were suggested to practice meditation, lifestyle modification techniques, listen to relaxing music and managing their time. Males were also suggested to spend more quality time with family and spend time in doing some leisure activities.

Key words: Stress, Gender Differences

INTRODUCTION

Stress can be defined as “An internal state which can be caused by physical demands on the body (disease conditions, exercise, extremes of temperature, and the like) or by the environmental and social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable, or exceeding our resources for coping” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Stress is an outcome of miserable events that we want to change. Emotions also change with the changes in life situations (Lazarus, 1989).

Ongoing situations along with the changes in life work as stressors. Injury, exercise, and climate work as physical stressors. Also, hassles of everyday life related to work, finances and family

have been found to contribute to physical illnesses (DeLongis et. al, 1982). According to Compas (1987), stressors experienced in adolescence fall into three categories: (1) major life changes, (2) chronically stressful conditions, and (3) day-to-day hassles.

It is the perception of lack of resources to deal with a negative life event that lead to stress for an individual, rather than the event itself. Therefore, stress is cause by the imbalance between the perceptions made by an individual about the demands of the situations and his capabilities to meet them (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Women are more likely than men to report physical and emotional symptoms, such as headaches and feeling teary, as causes of stress. Money and economy are major contributors of stress for females, whereas for males work is the main stressor (American Psychological Association, 2010).

It has also been found that women list health related and family issues more, and men list finance, relationship and work issues more as their sources of stress (Matud, 2004).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cairo, Bettis and Compas (2017) did a studied 135 college students studying in 2 different universities, to examine how college students deal with interpersonal stress. Self report measures were used in a control based model of coping. Students who were high on interpersonal stress, were found to use more disengagement coping strategies. They also suggested some interventions to help the students deal with interpersonal stress effectively.

Devi and Mohan (2015) did a study on 200 college students of Kerala, aged between 18 to 21, studying in different streams, to study the effects of stress on college students, by using the questionnaire survey technique. They found out that the major causes of stress for the students were-academic factors, social factors, family factors, emotional factors and financial factors. They suggested students various ways of managing and coping with stress, such as- depending on family for support, being optimistic and getting more involved in college activities.

A study was conducted by Brougham, Zail, Mendoza and Miller (2009) on stress, sex differences and coping strategies among college students. The sample size was 166. Students were asked to complete a stress assessment inventory and a stress coping inventory based on a 5 factor revised cope model. Results found that females reported a higher overall level of stress and greater use of emotional focussed coping strategies than college males.

Misra and McKean (2000) conducted a study to examine the interconnection among academic stress, anxiety, time management and leisure satisfaction. They took a sample of 249 undergraduates. The results showed the existence of significant gender differences among all the measures. Females were found to have more stress and anxiety but they were able to manage the time better. Whereas, males gained from indulging in leisure activities.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives for the study

1. To measure the level of stress among college students
2. To find out the gender differences in perception of stress
3. To suggest ways of coping with stress

Stemming from the objectives following hypotheses were studied:

1. H_{01} : There is no significant difference in the means of male and female students' perceived stress level.
2. H_{a2} : There is significant difference in female students perceived stress level as compared to male students.

Methodology

The study was conducted on 200 college students, 100 males and 100 females from different universities in India. The subjects aged between 18 to 25 years. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS, Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983) was used. It is a widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a Likert scale, consisting of total 10 questions, that ask about the thoughts and feelings of the subjects he had in the last month. Also SPSS version 20 was used to compute t-score and t-ratio.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 shows independent sample t test, in which t scores of males was 38.348 and females was 35.902. The difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1: Independent Sample *t*-test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Males	38.348	99	.000*	18.750
Females	35.902	99	.000*	20.900

*p-value significant at .05 level

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for males (m=18.77, SD=4.74) and females (m=20.89, SD=5.89). t-ratio was found to be 2.99 (p<0.01)

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviation and t-ratios comparing males and female students

Variables	Males		Females		t-ratio
	mean	SD	mean	SD	
Stress	18.77	4.74	20.89	5.89	2.99**

n=200

*t-value significant at .05 level =1.97

** t-value significant at.01 level=2.60

The primary aim was to compare stress level among college going females and males. Descriptive Statistics and t-ratio. The raw scores were analyzed using appropriate statistical analysis viz. Descriptive statistics and t-test, t-ratio was calculated to find out the significant differences between means of groups on measured variables. There was significant difference between the means of males and females. Female students scored higher on Perceived stress (t = 2.99, p<1) in comparison to male students. Therefore, hypothesis 1 has been rejected and hypothesis 2 has been accepted.

The aim of this research was to find out if there exist any significant gender differences in the perception of stress by using Perceived Stress Scale among college students. The perception of stress by each individual is affected by his age, culture, gender, circumstances, ethnicity etc. This paper focused only on how gender affects the perception of stress. For the study, we examined 200 college students, out which 100 were males and 100 were females, aged between 18 to 25 years, from different universities in north India.

As per the hypothesis, results were highly significant for perceived stress. Females scored higher than male students. The following studies support our findings. Pierce and Keim (2007) did a study in which 212 students were examined using Perceived Stress Scale, out of which 75% were in a moderate stress category, 12% in high stress and 13% in low stress category. Women were found to be more stressed than men. They found that coping strategies used by college students were talking to close social groups, indulging into their hobbies and exercising. Some were also found to use less preferable coping strategies such as smoking, drinking and using drugs.

Another study done by Mazumdar, Gogoi and Haloi (2012) examined student stress on college going students. It was found out that out of total 250, 60% females were found to be prone to the symptoms of stress, whereas 40% males were prone to those symptoms. One more study was done by Day, Arla, Livingstone and Holly (2003) did a study gender differences in perceptions of stressors and utilization of social support among university students. 186 undergraduate students from a Maritime University rated the perceived stressfulness of 5 scenarios, and identified the type and source of social support they would use to cope with each of the situations. Women perceived 3 of the 5 scenarios as significantly more stressful than did men. Women indicated that they would turn to their partners and friends to a greater extent than men would. Women also reported that they would seek emotional support to a greater degree than did men.

The present study concluded that there exists a significant difference between the means of males and females. Also it was found out that females scored significantly higher than males on Perceived Stress Scale.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The hypothesis is accepted. Females scored higher on Perceived Stress Scale than males. The gender differences found are statistically significant.

Females facing high levels of stress can be suggested to:

- Adopt some lifestyle changes like practicing relaxation techniques, doing meditation
- Planning the next day in advance
- Setting realistic, short and achievable goals
- Practice positive thinking every night at bed time
- Listen to calm and romantic music when feeling stressed

Males can be suggested to:

- Indulge in leisure activities
- Spend more quality time with their families

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