The Causes of Stress and Its Effect in College Students

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Abstract

This research paper will explore the main causes of stress in the majority of college students including its effects on their mental health. Additionally, this paper will also discuss strategies in which students may cope with or tolerate stressors in order to receive the optimum education and experience from their college career. Finally, it will cover past and current research inclusive for a thorough understanding of stress in college students.
The Causes of Stress and Its Effect in College Students

As a junior in High School, I feel as if it is of vital importance that I realize the various things I will be exposed to when I attend college in my near future. Though I have experienced stress to some extent in High School, I know the amount of stress will proliferate and become more detrimental than ever before. It will be helpful to be aware of strategies to decrease my stress levels when stressors come my way in order to achieve the optimum academic success without harming my psychological health. While researching and writing this paper, I hope to enlarge my knowledge towards the subject of stress in college students. More specifically, I hope to learn the causes, effects, and ways in which I can cope with stressors I may encounter in college. Educating myself about the causes and effects of stress will not only be beneficial for my life in college, but it can be applied to many aspects of my life post college as well. For these reasons, I chose this topic.

Personal, social, and educational aspects are ubiquitous in the lives of college students and may include problems with relationships, finances, arrangements, decisions, etc., painting a stress-prone environment for any college student (Bland, 2014). Due to the transition of environment, students must accommodate to their new social, academic, and cultural lives. Leaving all sources of support from their old environment, psychosocial stress appears in students. Ekpenyong (2013) suggests that undergraduates who undergo unsupportive interaction with other students, teachers, and finances are significantly more susceptible to psychosocial stress. Unique circumstances and transitions from home-life to the college setting increase independence and decrease parental dependence, it also provides for new social opportunities. Moreover, the experience of and reaction to stress may vary for students of different cultures. Students coming from a minority background may be more prone to experience increased stress
and issues with adjustment (Holinka, 2015). This form of stress is typically prevalent among freshmen, women, and international students when exposed to loneliness, anxiety, depression, and disorientation (Ekpenyong, 2013). The most common academic stressors may include taking and studying for exams, most especially when the student crams and needs to learn mass material in a short period. Additionally, students who possess the knowledge required to complete their intensive academic workloads but think they won't have enough time, acquire high stress levels (Ekpenyong, 2013). When used inappropriately and carelessly, various coping strategies actually precipitate stress, instead of eliminating or decreasing it, being an additional source to stress (Ekpenyong, 2013). Many college students use mindless drinking to avoid stress, though drinking is actually a major correlation in heightened stress levels and may result in more stress rather than no stress (Bodenlos, 2013). Apart from mindless coping, distinguishing a healthy and appropriate amount and intention for a student’s use of the web is the difference between the internet being a stressor or a coping strategy (Deatherage, 2014).

Stress is an unavoidable and universal epidemic for college students worldwide. Stressors associated with college possess a correlation of detrimental impact on the psychological health of college students. Mental health disorders are becoming more and more apparent in quantity and austerity amongst college students (Bland, 2014). More specifically, pervasiveness of psychological and psychiatric symptoms have been recorded to be from 30% to 50% among randomly selected non-clinical samples of these students. During 2010 in a nationwide survey, 91% of counseling directors noted a proliferation of pupils with severe psychological concerns, noting depression rates have risen over the last years (Bland, 2014). Academic stress may manifest disruption in both the internal and external environment of the student, subsequently interfering in homeostasis. Additionally, sleep disturbance, resulting in not only mental but
physical stress, has a positive correlation with high stress levels. In relation to physical stress, some effects may include poor posture resulting in muscles, joints, and soft-tissue more prone to strain, imbalance, and tension. If poor posture becomes a habit, it may lead to a harmful cycle of pain and stress on the body. Musculoskeletal disorders among undergraduates may be directed by a physical strain on the body, positively correlated by academic stress, occurring most especially during exams (Ekpenyong, 2013). Essentially, there is a heavy correlation between high-stress levels and life dissatisfaction, as well as a heavy positive correlation between low-stress levels and life satisfaction in college students (Holinka, 2015). As a result of mindless coping strategies, one may expect poor academics, neurological deficits, memory problems, and strained relationships with family and peers concluding in undesirable psychological health (Bodenlos, 2013). Furthermore, internet addiction, depression, isolationism, procrastination, and lack of sleep may be directed by extreme uses of the internet in hopes of decreasing stress (Deatherage, 2014).

The term stress tolerance may be defined as the ability to effectively cope with stress, rather than ineffectively avoiding stress. Consequently, students with high stress tolerance are able to handle mass amounts of stress without being affected by the detrimental consequences it may have on their health psychological health. With the intention of effectively coping with stress, it would be at a student’s best interest to employ protective coping mechanisms. These mechanisms include strategies such as receiving support from family, friends, and/or instructors, participating in social interaction, and being physically active (Bland, 2014). Regardless of being a college student or not, physical activity is proven effective for reducing stress levels; people who are more active manifest lower levels of stress in relativity to those who are less active and vice versa (Bland, 2014). Additionally, mindfulness based strategies derived from Buddhism are
demonstrated to be negatively correlated with higher levels of stress among college students and vice versa. In both clinical and nonclinical populations, mindfulness promotes and improves psychological health while decreasing stress levels and anxiety, proving to be an effective means of coping with stress used in mental and medical health settings. Conclusively, students who exhibit high levels of this attitude/mentality are significantly more resilient to the harmful short and long term consequences of stress from their college environment (Bodenlos, 2013).

College students have a propensity to endure higher levels of stress due to the ubiquitous academic responsibilities and social pressures they face in their environment, resulting in a need to escape stress. A large percentage of college students use heavy drinking, or binge drinking, as a way to cope with stressors in their lives. Unfortunately, this mindless act has been associated with a various amount of detrimental consequences (Bodenlos, 2013). Additionally, Deatherage’s (2014) study demonstrates 80% of college students believe the internet is a primary need in a human's life, further supporting the idea that the internet is in all major aspects of college students’ lives. For many college students, going online for recreation and entertainment is correlated with lower stress levels while going online for stress relief and problem avoidance is correlated with higher stress levels (Deatherage, 2014). When it comes to poor coping strategies, students subsequently increase their stress levels instead of decreasing them, resulting in the negative consequence of more stress than they had before they attempted to "cope", or eliminate their stress (Ekpenyong, 2013).

Today, there are more college students with mental issues correlated with stress than I thought prior to doing my research. Additionally, I was surprised to learn that musculoskeletal disorders can be developed through some of the harmful effects of stress. Furthermore, I learned that a horrifying percentage of college students believe the internet is a primary necessity to life,
similar to air, water, etc. I thought it was interesting that some coping strategies undesirably further stress instead of decreasing it. For this reason it is vital to use mindful and protective coping strategies rather than mindless and unprotective coping strategies. After further research and writing, I have learned an abundance of extremely helpful facts that I may use to my advantage currently, in my college life, and after my college life. Knowing that college will be a stressful environment for me, I want to make sure my psychological and physical health is a top priority and in good shape to be able to live a happy life. Keeping myself at an equilibrium regarding my health will obviously require effort, but the value of a healthy body beats anything.
References


