

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG COLLEGE GOING STUDENTS

Dr.Subodh Prabhakar Bansod 1*

Assistant Professor,
Department of Psychology
RTM Nagpur University Nagpur

Dr.Bharat H Mimrot 2

Head & Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
NKSPT'S A.S.C. College Badnapur, Jalna.

Abstract

In today's competitive world we observe a lot of tension and stress in college going students. This stress may vary in moderate amount or at times may lead to serious emotional issues like suicidal tendencies or addiction to unwanted things like drugs or smoking or drinking. This is all because of psychological distress experienced by them. This study aims to find out the level of distress in different areas of college students life. For that purpose around 120 students were selected randomly as sample comprising of 60 boys and 60 girls. The researcher used a Stressful Life Event Inventory to measure distress in different aspects of life. This inventory was developed by Ravathi (1986) and it examines the possibilities of stress in a variety of different life situations like education, heterosexual relations, family, finance, health, bereavement and miscellaneous situations which are all relevant to present day scenarios. The research also aimed to study if Psychological Differences between two groups were significant or not. It also aimed to find how many of these events they experienced on an average. And we also aimed to identify the areas in which more percentage of distress was experienced by both boys and girls. For analyzing the data Mean, SD and the 't' test were used. Results show that in three areas of life events like Family, Bereavement and Other Life Experiences. Significant difference was found in these three areas (dimensions) Boys have more psychological distress as compared to girls.

Keywords: Stress, Distress, Life events, Education, Heterosexual Relations, Family, Finance, Health, Bereavement and Miscellaneous life situations.

Introduction

Stress is the term for the mental, physical and emotional reactions that people experience as results of the demands of life. All of us experience stress at one time or another, at different ages and stages of our lives.

Definition of Stress: In medical terms stress is described as, "*a physical or psychological stimulus that can produce mental tension or physiological reactions that may lead to illness.*"

According to Richard S Lazarus, stress is a feeling experienced when a person thinks that "*the demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.*"

Our body tries to cope up to different circumstances or continuously changing environment around us. In this process, the body is put to extra work resulting in "wear and tear". In other words, our body is stressed. Stress disturbs the body's normal way of functioning. Most students experience stress at one time or another. Without stress, there would be no life. However, excessive or prolonged stress can be harmful. Stress is unique and personal. A situation may be stressful for someone but the same situation may be challenging for another. For example, arranging a world level conference may be challenging for one person but stressful for another. Some persons have the habit of worrying unnecessarily and relatively minor things may stress them while others can face difficult situations without breaking down. Stress can be caused by internal factors like your own expectations or can be caused by external sources like family, relationship etc.

Stress is not always necessarily harmful. And it is not necessary that it may always be negative. It depends on whether an individual is able to take it in his stride or not. The stress of doing something creative which we like can lead to fruitful results can be positive and the work or task which you don't like or in which failure is seen all the time can be negative. For example, passing an examination can be just stressful as failing. Stress can be therefore negative, positive or neutral. There are lots of stresses at different levels and different age groups, which can be understood from different perspectives. Some stresses are positive and some are negative in nature.

This research focuses on stress among college students. Young adolescents face many emotional problems life. As this is a crucial period of their life, the nature of their interpersonal relationships also changes as youngsters begin to function in a vast era of new environment. Therefore establishing a healthy relation with peers and developing a sense of emotional wellbeing becomes very important.

In this research psychological distress among college students is measured on a scale of different dimensions which are as follows:

Distress and Education: Today there is a lot of pressure on students to perform well, to complete their assignments on time and they face many problems related to these in college. There is no consistency of teaching and the students may have to learn many a times on their own which causes stress to them. They may also face stress sometimes from the course of study they are pursuing. It may happen that under some kind of parental pressure they have taken the particular course but then they cannot learn or study well and face many disappointments and get engage in stressful situation. Some may have the guts to deny the course to parents and choose what they wish to do while the rest complete the course and then think ahead of what they can do better. According to the statistics published by National Crime Records Bureau, one student every hour commits suicide(Saha, 2017). The bureau registered 1.8% students who committed suicide due to failing in examinations and an 80% rise in suicide rates during a one-year time frame A 2012 Lancet report also quoted that the 15-29 age group bracket in India has the highest rate of suicide in the world (as cited in “India has the Highest Suicide Rate”, n.d.) And these numbers show no sign of dropping.

Distress and Heterosexual Relation: Young college students are aware of and interested in romantic relationships, but these relationships can also be a source of stress. Often they face problems in even talking about their relationships with elders. Though we term them as adults at 18 years but giving them freedom is quite a task for the parents. As a result, a student may face lot of stress in their life due to their inability to speak up and take a stand for themselves. They may also face stress if they have difference in attitudes and value system from the opposite gender they are dating. Such differences lead to break up which are often a source of stress. Kate B. Wolitzky et al (2008) were found that Prevalence of dating violence was 1.6% (2.7% of girls, 0.6% of boys), equating to approximately 400,000 adolescents in the U.S. population. Risk factors included older age, female sex, experience of other potentially traumatic events, and experience of recent life stressors. Findings also suggested that dating violence is associated with PTSD and major depressive episode after controlling for demographic variables, other traumatic stressors, and stressful events. These findings indicate that dating violence is a significant public health problem in adolescent populations that should be addressed through early detection, prevention, and intervention.

Distress and Family: As far as family is concerned they may have adjustment problems due to any one parent being separated or remarriage issues too. Or it could be that one parent leavers home for earning purpose or has a transferable job or sudden dismissal from job for any reasons then these factors too lead to lot of crisis situation and affects the students physical and mental wellbeing and lead to stress in college students. Moving to a new place can add to a person’s stress. Marriage can also lead to stress as they have to live with another person and even adjust to the demands and needs of the other person. Moreover if there are lot of issues with the inlaws or third person intervention it may lead to severe cases of divorce which may add to distress among the students.

Distress and Finances: In this technologically savvy age money is the most important resource for our desires to be fulfilled. Students always crave new things that they see around them in the environment. At times due to bad company if they lose a significant amount of money that may also stress the young adult through the worry of repaying the debts. Sometimes unemployment or financial problems on the parents’ part May also causes stress among students as they worry about security and how their expenses will be borne.

Distress and Health: Health is also one of the major concerns of stress. It may be related to one’s own health issues or related to anyone close in the family. It always takes a toll on our mind if some health issues go on for a long time in the family. It can be any type of illness it could be minor say cold or fever or a major one like any type of surgical needs it is natural that it would cause some amount of stress. At times if the illness is major then it might require regular visit to hospitals too such environment also triggers stress and disturbs the routine of the student.

Distress and Bereavement: Any kind of loss of a loved one in the family is a major cause of stress. We may come out of a physical injury soon and get well also but psychological loss and grief may take a long time for a person to get back to normal. Students minds too are very sensitive and they face lot of stress if any such situation occurs in their life. Some are able to cope with such situations of loss of beloved while for some it

may be very hard to cope up and may even end up getting depressed or having negative thoughts. Such thoughts may lead them in some cases to affect health and have issues like high blood pressure or change in habit of eating and in severe cases they might even have thoughts of suicide.

In the research paper named Long-term Consequences of Bereavement in Children, Adolescents and Young Adults **Sponsored by Danish Cancer Society** it was found that Early parental death experienced by 4% of the children in Western countries, is considered to be the most stressful and potentially harmful childhood life event and the health consequences may depend on the nature of the bereavement (e.g. relationship with bereaved), as well as by interpersonal (e.g. social support), intrapersonal (e.g. age and genetics), appraisal and coping factors. Studies have shown that children and adolescents who have faced such a situation have a greater risk of getting a psychiatric diagnosis as well as psychological and social problems.

Distress and Other Life Experiences: These kinds of stresses are related to any kind of life events the student may experience like falling into maladaptive practices like drugs or alcohol or smoking and may come in the company of bad students who usually love to break the norms. Such kinds of situations too lead the minds of young adults into lot of stress and they may even find it difficult to come out of such practices.

Thus, it becomes apparent that students can face stress from a variety of situations, some related to their home environment and some to the outside world. As part of their transition into adulthood, students have to learn to deal with such stress and not let it hamper their growth and development. They have to accept distress as a part of life and stop it from taking over their lives and destroying their ability to focus on studying, developing career opportunities and developing satisfying interpersonal relationships. Understanding the stresses faced by students in the first step in identifying and developing potential resources to deal with the problems and develop impactful solutions for students, teachers and parents that will help them all in creating respectful communities.

Problem:-

To Study Gender differences in Psychological Distress among College going students.

Objectives:

1. To find out level of psychological distress among college going boys and girls.
2. To find out level of psychological distress among college going boys and girls on seven dimensions of psychological distress.

Hypotheses:

Keeping in view the objectives of the study the following hypotheses have been framed

Main Hypotheses

1. There is significant gender difference in psychological distress.

Sub Hypotheses

1. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of education.
2. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of heterosexual relations.
3. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of family.
4. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of finances.
5. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of health.
6. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of bereavement.
7. There is significant difference in psychological distress among boys and girls in relation to dimension of life experiences.

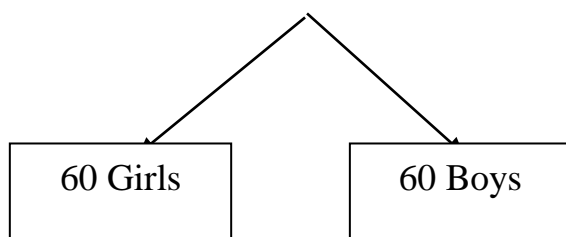
Method

Sample

The study was conducted on 120 undergraduate students (60 male and 60 female). The participants were selected incidentally and the age of participant range between 19 to 21 years. The participants were selected from Nagpur city.

Total Sample

120 Total
samples



Research Tool

1. Personal Data Sheet with details of Name, Age, College and Male / Female
2. Stressful Life Event Inventory. (Ravthi 1986)

Ravthi’s modified (1986) was used. It is open ended and consists of 56 discrete events covering 7 different areas of stress. A one year time was used and events were dated to the nearest month. Scoring of the inventory is most easy. You have to count the number of responses where the individual has tick marked “YES” only.

Reliability:

The stressful life event inventory possesses high reliability. The reliability Co-efficient were determined by Split half and Test-Retest method. For Split half, the correlation between odd and even items was calculated and corrected by Spearman-Brown formula. Similarly, in case of Test-Retest method the inventory was again administered on a sample of 100 students after a period of 14 days. The reliability coefficients are 0.84 (Split half) and 0.87 (Test-Retest).

Validity:

The content validity was ensured through the method of selection and classification of items. It is widely used scale and consistency coefficient is satisfactory.

Procedure

The present study was carried out by giving the SLE questionnaire to participant. Personal Data Sheet (PDS) was also a part of the process. Assurance was given to each participants that the personal information given would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purpose only.

Statistical Analysis, Result and Discussions

Collected data was analyzed by appropriate techniques. For that “t” test were used to find out differences between boys and girls.

Table 1: Mean, SD and t-value of psychological distress of boys and girls (N=120)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance
Boys	60	42.97	25.30	1.82	NS
Girls	60	35.43	19.67		

Table 1 show that the t-ratio is **1.82**, which is non-significant. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected. It suggests that there is no significant difference among boys and girls with respect to psychological distress.

Boys and girls face turmoil and stress in day to day life. It can be seen from the above results also that both boys and girls face distress in their day to day life events.

Table 2: Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Education (A)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance
Boys	60	9.50	5.70	0.21	NS
Girls	60	9.30	4.41		

Table 2 shows that the t – ratio **0.21** which is non-significant. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected. It suggests that there is no significant difference among boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Education.

In the field of education issues like passing and failing an exam or even just appearing for some competitive test or issues like change in college or winning and losing some competition are experienced by both boys and girls. Thus we can say that, they both face distress and disappointments from time to time. And from the study it can be concluded that with respect to education for both boys and girls there is not much of significant differences in the issues that they face and the ways in which they cope. The type of stressful situations may also be of a similar type.

Table 3: Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Heterosexual Relations (B)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance
Boys	60	6.77	5.81	0.11	NS
Girls	60	6.63	7.06		

Table 3 shows that the t – ratio **0.11** which is non-significant. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected. It suggests that there is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Heterosexual relations.

Here too it can be seen that issues regarding romance and dating and break up in friendship or breakup in a relationship can be observed in both boys and girls and the level of distress is also the same. Therefore it can be said that boys too who are often seen as strong individuals can also get affected by these issues and they too are sensitive equally as girls. From the above scores here too we can see that there is not much significant difference in their distress level.

Table 4: Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Family (C)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance
Boys	60	6.77	5.15	2.70	0.01 S
Girls	60	4.17	5.40		

Table 4 shows that the t – ratio is **2.70** which is significant at both level (0.01 and 0.05 levels). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted. It suggests that there is significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Family, boys experience more distress than girls. Here it can be seen that in family relations, boy's distress level is more as compared to girls. Boys are more affected due to life events like transfer of parents, unemployment or separation in the family. Boys are also seen as sensitive people and get affected by family pressures compared to girls who can be pillar of strength in the non-favorable circumstances.

Table 5: Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Finances (D)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance
Boys	60	7.28	7.02	0.45	NS
Girls	60	6.73	6.25		

Table 5 shows that the t–ratio is **0.45** which is non-significant. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected. It suggests that there is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Finances.

In this category there is not much difference between the distress level of boys and girls. It could be due to the fact that for today's generation any kind of financial related issues are not a major concern. On the contrary they are able to cope and take on financial responsibilities.

Table 6: Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Health (E)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance	
Boys	60	6.57	5.57	0.07		NS
Girls	60	6.63	5.47			

Table 6 shows that the t – ratio is **0.07** which is non-significant therefore the hypothesis is rejected. It suggests that there is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Health.

In the events related to health both boys and girls level of distress is non-significant. From which it can be concluded that illness issues can be coped by both sexes effectively and sensibly. They may get affected by the issues initially but when taken care of them they can responsibly tackle them.

Table 7: Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Bereavement (F)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance	
Boys	60	3.93	4.03	4.21	0.01	S
Girls	60	1.35	2.52		0.05	

Table 7 shows that the t – ratio is **4.21** which is significant at both levels(0.01 and 0.05 levels). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted. It suggests that there is significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Bereavement.

Life events related to loss of someone beloved is the most difficult loss one has to go through in life. But as the data suggest here too boys seem to be affected more than girls and they might take a longer time to come out of such situations.

Table 8 Mean, SD and t- value of psychological distress of boys and girls with reference to Other Life Experiences (G)

Group	No	Mean	SD	t	Significance	
Boys	60	2.15	3.00	3.60	0.01	S
Girls	60	0.62	1.38		0.05	

Table 8 shows that the t – ratio is **3.60** which is significant at both levels (0.01 and 0.05 levels). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted. It suggests that there is significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of Other Life Experiences.

In issues related to other situations too the boys experience more distress in situations like having drugs or smoking or consuming alcohol. They might take all this for pleasure or under some influence of a friend but then fall prey to distress also and might take a long time to come out or cope in such situation.

Therefore we can conclude that in three areas of life events like Family, Bereavement and Other Life Experiences there is a significant difference found in boys and girls. In these three areas more level of psychological distress is found in boys as compared to girls.

Conclusions

From the above study following conclusions have been drawn:

There is no significant difference found on psychological distress with reference to gender.

There is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of education.

There is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of heterosexual relations.

There is significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of family.

There is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of finances.

There is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of health.

There is significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of bereavement.

There is significant difference between boys and girls with respect to psychological distress related to area of life experiences.

Thus, three hypotheses are accepted and one main hypotheses and four hypotheses are rejected.

In the above study it was found that distress is experienced by both boys and girls in various life events. But overall it can be seen that one particular pattern is common in all and that is psychological distress is experienced more by boys as compared to that of girls. Girls though termed as sensitive are able to take stressful events in their stride compared to that of boys. And as a researcher we personally feel that it's perfectly ok even for boys to cry sometimes and speak up their feelings.

Suggestions to cope with distress

- Eat healthy meals with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Maintain daily routine and schedule
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid caffeine (can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation)
- Do things you enjoy (for example: art, listening to music, being outdoors, dancing, writing poetry, reading, etc.)
- Get good amounts of rest and sleep
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco and drugs
- State feelings in a clear way (for example: "I feel angry when you yell at me.")
- Decrease negative self-talk and stop criticizing yourself always.
- Be with friends who help you cope in a positive way
- Learn relaxation techniques (such as: deep breathing, muscle relaxation, Meditation)
- Talk to caring adults or professional in need of help
- Learn to say NO at times

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