

Research Paper :

Studies of stressful life events among female students of pre-university courses

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the study was to know the status of stressful life events among female students of pre-university courses. The investigators selected 217 female students (PUCI-112 and PUCII-105) OF PUC randomly from five colleges of Bidar city. Stressful life events schedule (Biradar, 2007) was used in the study. The collected data was subjected to frequency and percentage analysis. Results revealed that, 14 per cent, 23 per cent, 21 per cent, 7 per cent, and 8 per cent of the female students had always been influenced by family related, peer related, academic, physical health and psychological stressors, respectively. Majority of the female students had not been always experienced stress always from family relations, peer relations, academic, physical health, psychological aspects.

Key words : Pre-university, Stressful life

In recent years the amount of research on physiological and psychological consequences of environmental stimuli perceived to be stressful has increased but, research on the problems of adolescent period has been modest. Today, PUC students are experiencing of complexities of fast growing era and their pressures. Thus PUC students are constantly pressurized to accomplish more and more in less and less time, where students' capacities are severely taxed. When this happens the students perceive that they are in endangering their physical or psychological well being. These events are nothing but stressful life events.

Stress is universal human experience. Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences can have stressful components. Stress forms an unseparable part of life and upto a degree may be essential for adequate personality development. However, if these stressors become too sever or too numerous they may affect the psychological equilibrium, producing maladaptive patterns of behaviour and possibly psychological disorders. Stress refers to a state of imbalance within an organism that is elicited by an actual or perceived disparity between environmental demands and the organisms capacity to cope with these demands and is manifested through variety of psychological, emotional and behavioural responses. The response syndrome occurs as a result of organisms exposure to environmental demands or stressors. The conditions of the social and physical environment operate as stressors to the extent that they exceed on organisms adaptive resources (Lqzarus, 1966; Salye, 1956). These annoying conditions and unpleasant events are often said

to be stressful life events.

Empirical evidences suggest that cumulative life stressors increases risk for emotional and behavioural problems. These cumulative stressors may occur in the life of students of PUC at different contexts (Aneshesl, 1992; Cohen and Gordon, 1995; Kessler *et al.*, 1997; Jackson and Warren, 2000). This subjective perspective focuses on the student's perception of his or her experience related to his/her environmental demands. The majority of the stressors identified in sophomore period were related to new responsibilities, feeling over loaded with too many things to do and learn (Abousiere, 1994; Lepore *et al.*, 1997, Sarafino and Ewing, 1999, Misra and McKean, 2000) and social relations (Ross *et al.*, 1999). Although these survey researches provide a global context that they do not identify specific everyday circumstances where subjective stress is most likely to be experienced and therefore do not pin point areas for intervention.

Review of literature mean that there is a need to study stressful life events among sophomores, because in industrialized societies, adolescence, includes a lengthy interval of education, career training and adult role acquisition. Increasing independence from parents during this interval provides adolescents with increasing opportunities to explore behaviours, roles, attitudes and values (Erikson, 1968). Due to this sophomores may experience stressors by getting confused in making use of the increasing opportunities. Hence there is a need to guide PUC students to manage the stressors. Therefore the present study was designed to study the stressful life events among female students of pre university courses.

METHODOLOGY

Size of the sample:

This is an ex-post facto research design study. The sample comprising of 217 female students of both PUC I (N=112) and II (N=105) year within the age group of 16 to 19 years was taken from five colleges of Bidar city. Twenty per cent of the total female students present at the time of testing were selected randomly.

Material used:

Stressful life events schedule: The schedule (Biradar, 2007) consisted of 100 life events. The events were related to family, peer, academic, physical health and psychological aspects. For each event four alternative answers such as always stressful, sometimes stressful, rarely stressful and never stressful with the scoring 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively were given to assess the level of stress created by each event. The schedule was pre-tested on 45 PUC II year students. The test-retest reliability of the schedule was 0.867 and it was significant at 0.01 level.

Procedure:

The data collection was carried out with the prior permission from the principal and the class teacher to get the responses from the selected female students of PUC I and II year of arts, science and commerce of each college. The selected students of each class and course were made to sit in one hall and rapport was established with them. They were also informed that the information given by them would be kept under strict confidence. The students were instructed very clearly about the pattern of answering to each item of the questionnaire. The necessary clarifications were provided to the students as and when they raised doubts while answering the statements. The data were subjected to frequency and percentage analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Feeling "stressed" is pervasive for college age students (Rawson *et al.*, 2001), it means that as the adolescents enter from high school life to college life there is every possibility of increasing stress. Because during PUC, students have to adjust with the college environment, with the various aspects of development such as physical, psychological, emotional, adjusting with the peer group, and also there is a need to develop commitment and high exploration to meet the expectation and demands of the society. In this process of developmental adjustment, some times students experience failure in meeting these demands, as a result

there is possibility of perceiving these experiences as stressful. Therefore in the present study an attempt was made to study the stressful life events among female students of pre-university courses

Stressors of family relations:

In family relations, father related stressors, such as expectation of father to follow strict schedule in day to day activities by the student (18.40%) was the first order stressor and too much pressure by father to do best in all the subjects (17.10%) was the second order stressor experienced by the female students of PUC. Followed by argument between father and mother (7.80%) and also father and student (6.00%), father living away from family (5.10%) as the third order stressors. The least contributors to stress always were negligence of father (2.80%) and strictness of father (2.80%), criticism of father (1.40%), and father's objection to friendship (1.40%).

The stressors related to mother (Table 1) like, expectation of mother to follow strict schedule in day to day activities by the student (16.10%) was the first order stressor experienced by the students. Too much pressure by mother to do the best in all the subjects (6.90%), and objection of mother about friendship (6.00%) were second order stressors. And argument of mother with father (5.50%), strictness of mother (5.50%), mother living away from family (5.50%), argument between the mother and students (5.10%), were third order stressors. The last stressor experienced was loosing temper by mother (3.20%).

From this study it is very clear that the stressors related to father and mother had contributed about 18 per cent and 16 per cent of the students, respectively, but remaining 82 per cent and 84 per cent of the students had not been influenced by the father and mother related stressors always. This may be because the competition in educational area is increasing day by day and all the parents expect their children to score good marks in PUC examination, so that their children can get admission into good professional courses or admission in the reputed institution for further education. Therefore they make their children to follow strict schedule in day to day activities and put pressure on them to do the best in all the subjects, so that they should not waste their time in other activities instead of reading.

Among brother related events (Table 1), criticism of brother (5.50%), the argument of student with brother (5.10%), were always experienced by the students as first order stressors. Followed by death of brother (3.20%), expectation of brother to do everything for him

Table 1 : Status of the female students of PUC on stressors of family relations

| Sr. No. | Stressful life events | Stress always |
|---------|---|----------------|
| | | Girls N=217 |
| Father | | |
| 1. | My father expects me to follow strict schedule in day to day activities | 40 (18.40) |
| 2. | My father puts too much pressure on me to do the best in all the subjects | 37 (17.10) |
| 3. | My father argues with my mother | 17 (7.80) |
| 4. | I argue with my father | 13 (6.00) |
| 5. | My father loses temper with me | - |
| 6. | My father is too strict with me | 6 (2.80) |
| 7. | My father objects about my friendship | 3 (1.40) |
| 8. | My father is living away from me | 11 (5.10) |
| 9. | My father criticizes me | 3 (1.40) |
| 10. | My father neglects me | 6 (2.80) |
| 11. | My father is separated from us | - |
| Mother | | |
| 12. | I argue with my mother | 11 (5.10) |
| 13. | My mother expects me to follow strict schedule in day to day activities | 35 (16.10) |
| 14. | My mother puts too much pressure on me to do the best in all the subjects | 15 (6.90) |
| 15. | My mother loses temper with me | 7 (3.20) |
| 16. | My mother argues with my father | 12 (5.50) |
| 17. | My mother is too strict with me | 12 (5.50) |
| 18. | My mother is living away from me | 12 (5.50) |
| 19. | My mother objects about my friendship | 13 (6.00) |
| 20. | My mother neglects me | - |
| Brother | | |
| 21. | I argue with my brother | 11 (5.10) |
| 22. | My brother criticizes me | 12 (5.50) |
| 23. | My brother expects me to do everything for him | 5 (2.30) |
| 24. | My brother talks against me | - |
| 25. | My brother is short tempered with me | 5 (2.30) |
| 26. | My brother has left home | 3 (1.40) |
| 27. | My brother gets angry with me | 4 (1.80) |
| 28. | My brother acts superior to me | 5 (2.30) |
| 29. | My brother will not give his materials to me | 3 (1.40) |
| 30. | My brother will not share any experiences with me | - |
| 31. | My brother is no more | 7 (3.20) |
| 32. | My brother will not talk to me affectionately | 5 (2.30) |
| Sister | | |
| 33. | I argue with my sister | 5 (2.30) |
| 34. | My sister gets angry with me | 16 (7.40) |
| 35. | My sister talks against me | 7 (3.20) |

Table 1 contd....

Contd... Table 1

| | | |
|---------------------|--|------------|
| 36. | My sister expects me to do everything for her | 7 (3.20) |
| 37. | My sister will not share any experiences with me | - |
| 38. | My sister will not give her materials to me | 4 (1.80) |
| 39. | My sister has left home | - |
| 40. | My sister criticizes me | 4 (1.80) |
| 41. | My sister is short tempered with me | - |
| 42. | My sister acts superior to me | 9 (4.10) |
| 43. | My sister will not cooperate with me | 6 (2.80) |
| 44. | My sister will not talk to me affectionately | 7 (3.20) |
| Other family events | | |
| 45. | I experience financial problem | 32 (14.10) |
| 46. | Our relative creates problem | 11 (5.10) |
| 47. | My close relative is expired | 4 (1.80) |
| 48. | My family member met with an accident | - |

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

(2.30%), short temperedness of brother (2.30%), superiority of brother (2.30%), and non-affectionate talking by brother (2.30%) were second order stressors. The last order stressor experienced by the female students of PUC were, getting angry by brother (1.80%), brother had left home (1.40%), brother would not give his materials to the student (1.40%). The fact is very clear that brother had also contributed about 6 per cent of the students in developing stressors always but remaining 94 per cent of the students were not experiencing always stress by the other related stressors.

The sister related stressors (Table 1) like, getting angry by sister (7.40%) was experienced by female students as first order stressor. Followed by superiority of sister (4.10%), talking against by sister (3.20%), expectation of sister to do everything for her (3.20%), and non-affectionate talking by sister (3.20%) as second order stressors. And non co-operation of sister (2.80%), argument between the sisters (2.30%), sister would not give her materials (1.80%), and criticism of sister (1.80%), were the last order stressors experienced by the female students of PUC.

The present study makes it clear that sisters also contributed about 7 per cent of the students in developing stress always and remaining 93 per cent of the students had not been always influenced by sister related stressors always. The brother related stressors and sister related stressors (Table 1) clarified that the brother and sister were the main contributors to the stressful life events among female students of PUC. This may be due to the fact that children try to develop their own identity and separate emotions from siblings and parents and showing

interest in peers and friends. This development may lead to the decrease in interaction between the siblings and this in turn may lead to the less intensive relationship between siblings. These results support to the studies of Dunn *et al.* (1994), Buhrmester and Furman (1990).

The results of other events (Table 1) revealed that financial problem was experienced by the students (14.10%) as first order stressor, followed by problem created by relatives (5.10%) as second order stressors. The least contributor to stress always among female students of PUC was death of a close relative (1.80%).

The fact is very clear that the other family events had also contributed upto 14 per cent of the students in developing stress always but remaining 86 per cent of the students had not been influenced by the other family events related stressors always. This may be because sophomores have some extra financial commitments. Sometimes they yield to the peer pressure, which results in extravagant behaviour and dependence on parents. This stress is the result of dependence on the parents and demands of the peer acceptance (Clare and Mark, 1998).

Stressors of peer relations:

To most sophomores, popularity means having a large number of friends. As they grow older, the kind of friends they have becomes more important than the number. However, values regarding the "right" kind of friends tend to change from one year to another, depending on the values of the group with which they are identified at the time. Sometime if these sophomores are not accepted by the peer group, or if they are not popular in their peer group then it acts as a stressful life event in the life of sophomores.

The results of Table 2 revealed that the stressor of peer relations such as student was in love with friend was experienced by the students (23.00%) as first order stressor. Followed by argument with friend (12.00%) and joining of the friend to a new group of friends (10.10%) as second order stressor. Moving away of friend (7.80%) and too much expectation of friend were (7.40%) third order stressors and death of a best friend (4.60%), getting angry by friend (4.60%), broke up of friendship with boy (4.10%) were fourth order stressors. The last order stressors experienced by female students of PUC were broke up of friendship with a girl (2.80%), criticism of friend (2.30%), student's friendship was denied by a group of friends (1.80%).

The present study makes it clear that peers had also contributed to stress always among 23 per cent of the students but remaining 77 per cent of the students had not been experienced stress always by the stressors of

Table 2 : Status of the female students of PUC on stressors of peer relations

| Sr. No. | Stressful life event | Stress always Girls N=217 |
|---------|--|------------------------------|
| 1. | I am in love with a friend | 50 (23.00) |
| 2. | My friend has joined new group of friends | 22 (10.10) |
| 3. | I argue with my friends | 26 (12.00) |
| 4. | A girl has broke up friendship with me | 6 (2.80) |
| 5. | My best friend is no more | 10 (4.60) |
| 6. | My friend has moved away | 17 (7.80) |
| 7. | My friend expect too much from me | 16 (7.40) |
| 8. | My friend/friends criticizes me | 5 (2.30) |
| 9. | My friend pressurize me to smoke | - |
| 10. | My friend/friends get angry with me | 10 (4.60) |
| 11. | A group of friends deny friendship with me | 4 (1.80) |
| 12. | A boy has broke up friendship with me | 9 (4.10) |
| 13. | My friend pressurize me to take drug | - |
| 14. | My friend pressurize me to drink alcohol | - |

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

the peer relations. This may be because of the forming a new and mature relationship with members of the opposite sex and playing an approved role for their own sex is important during the period of sophomore. Thus they have to develop new attitudes towards members of opposite sex and they have to adjust with the new peers, acceptance and rejection by the peer group all these leads to the development of stress among students. The results supports to the study conducted by McCreary *et al.* (1996).

Academic stressors:

Another important source of stress among sophomores is academic experiences. The vocational interests of adolescents generally influence their attitude towards education. Academic stress has emerged as a significant mental health problem in adolescents in recent years. Anxiety about examination and competitiveness in college cause stress and tension in students. Consequently they feel worried and frustrated (Bhattacharji, 1989). The results of academic stressors (Table 3) evidenced that problem of English language (21.20%) was the first order stressor experienced by the students. Followed by not punctual in studies (13.80%) as second order stressor and postponing the studies (10.60%) getting low marks in the examination (9.70%) were the third order stressors. The student was not selected in the team of college (5.50%), and not able to adjust with the college

Table 3 : Status of the female students of PUC on academic stressors

| Sr. No. | Stressful life event | Stress always |
|---------|--|---------------|
| | | Girls N=217 |
| 1. | I have the problem of English language | 46 (21.20) |
| 2. | I am not punctual in studies | 30 (13.80) |
| 3. | I post pone my studies | 23 (10.60) |
| 4. | I get low marks in the examination | 21 (9.70) |
| 5. | I am not able to adjust with the college environment | 11 (5.10) |
| 6. | I miss classes | 3 (1.40) |
| 7. | I get into trouble in the class | 6 (2.80) |
| 8. | Teacher has done partiality with me | 6 (2.80) |
| 9. | I am not selected in the team of the college | 12 (5.50) |
| 10. | I argue with teacher/teachers | 4 (1.80) |
| 11. | I am criticized by the teacher/teachers | - |
| 12. | I am sent out of the class | - |
| 13. | I failed in the previous year | 7 (3.20) |

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

environment (5.10%) were the fourth order stressors. The last order stressors experienced by the students of PUC were student failed in the previous year (3.20%), getting into trouble in the class (2.80%), partiality done by the teacher (2.80%), and argument of the student with the teacher (1.80%). The fact is very clear that academic stressors had contributed to stress always among 21 per cent of the students but remaining 89 per cent of the students had not been influenced by the academic stressors always. This may be due to the language problem and no involvement in the studies regularly and habits of the students. These results supports to the studies conducted by Mischel (1974) and Elder (1972).

Stressors of physical health:

The period of adolescence results in variations in physical changes and many adolescents experience Body Cathexis or satisfaction with their bodies. However, sometimes they do experience more dissatisfaction with some parts of their bodies than with other parts. This failure to experience Body-Cathexis is one of the causes of unfavourable self-concept, which may be a potential source of stress. The results of Table 4 showed that the stressors related to physical health such as, feeling tired (6.50%), developing the problem of pimples (5.50%), and experiencing headache (5.50%) were the first order stressors .Followed by developing the problem of physical appearance (3.70%) menstruation (3.70%) and backache (3.20%) as second order stressors. Having the problem of vision (2.80%), under weight (1.80%), bodily pains

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Table 4 : Status of the female students of PUC on stressors of physical health

| Sr. No. | Stressful life event | Stress always |
|---------|---|---------------|
| | | Girls N=217 |
| 1. | I have developed the problem of pimples | 12 (5.50) |
| 2. | I am under weight | 4 (1.80) |
| 3. | My physical appearance is not good | 8 (3.70) |
| 4. | I experience dizziness | - |
| 5. | I feel tired | 14 (6.50) |
| 6. | I am anemic | - |
| 7. | I feel sleepy in class | - |
| 8. | I experience headache | 12 (5.50) |
| 9. | I have the problem of sleeplessness | 3 (1.40) |
| 10. | I experience back ache | 7 (3.20) |
| 11. | I have the problem of vision | 6 (2.80) |
| 12. | I have the problem of bodily pains | 4 (1.80) |
| 13. | I have the problem of sneezing | - |
| 14. | I have the problem of kidney | - |
| 15. | I met with an accident | - |
| 16. | I have developed the problem of mouth ulcer | 4 (1.80) |
| 17. | I have the problem of respiratory system | - |
| 18. | I have the problem of hearing | - |
| 19. | I have developed the smoking habit | - |
| 20. | I have the problem of digestive system | - |
| 21. | I have developed the menstrual problem | 8 (3.70) |

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

(1.80%), and mouth ulcer (1.80%) were the last order stressors experienced by the female students of PUC.

About 7 per cent of the students had experienced stress always due to physical health stressors but remaining 93 per cent of the students had not been experienced the stressors of physical health. This might be because of the fact that many adolescents experience satisfaction with the variations in physical changes. However, some times they do experience more dissatisfaction with some parts of their bodies than with other parts. This failure to experience body cathexis may be potential source of stressor. These results support to the study conducted by McGrath and Patrick (1999).

Psychological stressors:

Adolescence is an age where these adolescent female students have to develop new social relationships and play different social roles in the society and thus the adolescents experience psychological stressors. In the present study results of Table 5 showed that, experiencing unnecessary fear (7.80%) was the first order stressor experienced by the students of PUC. Followed by

Table 5 : Status of the female students of PUC on psychological stressors

| Sr. No. | Stressful life event | Stress always |
|---------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| | | Girls N=217 |
| 1. | I experience unnecessary tension | 5 (2.50) |
| 2. | I experience unnecessary fear | 17 (7.80) |
| 3. | I have developed the eating disorder | - |
| 4. | I have attraction of opposite gender | - |

Note : Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

experiencing unnecessary tension (2.50%) as the last order stressor. This study clearly express that the psychological stressors had contributed to stress always among 8per cent of the students remaining 92 per cent of the students had not been influenced by the psychological stressors always. This may be because some students of PUC might have been experiencing frustration, depression and more tension. These results supports to the studies conducted by Anand *et al.* (2001) and Patric Mischel (1999).

Conclusions:

– About 14 per cent of the female students had experienced family related stressors always but remaining 86 per cent of the students had not been experienced the family related stressors always.

– 23 per cent of the female students were peer related stressors always, but remaining 77 per cent of the students had not experienced the peer related stressors always.

– About 21 per cent of the female students were experienced academic stressors always but remaining 89 per cent of them had not been experienced academic stressors always.

– The stressors related to physical health had contributed to stress always among 7 per cent of the students but remaining 83per cent of the female students had not experienced the physical health stressors always.

– Whereas psychological stressors had contributed to stress always among 8per cent of the female students but remaining 92 per cent of them had not been experienced psychological stressors always

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