Stress of College Students of Mianyang City and their Coping Strategies: A Study

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Abstract: Nowadays, many college students have a lot of stress, which does great harm to their health. In order to examine the stress that students of Mianyang city are now undergoing and the strategies they used to cope with their stress, on October 10th, 2017, an instance of survey was conducted among 3000 students from different colleges and universities of Mianyang city. Among them 1500 were male and the other 1500 were female. The survey was carried out by means of a questionnaire given to the students to complete. There were 25 questions among which 23 were ticking items and the other two should be answered with sentences. According to the collected data, the students came to Mianyang for further education. They were experiencing stress. The main stressors, in order, were competition in study, financial pressure, homesickness and maladaptation to the circumstances. Most of them studied hard, so they got up early in the morning. Each one of them had confidence in themselves. The main harms their stress did to them, in order, were inefficiency in study, bad mood and insomnia. But a majority of them never thought of giving up. When they got a low mark, most of them would feel disappointed. The four most important strategies to cope with their stress, in order, were walking slowly, enjoying humors, telephoning relatives or friends and traveling. Few of them agreed that drinking or smoking could alleviate stress. A majority of them agreed that sleeping was the best way to reduce and control stress.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Nowadays college students in China have a lot of stress. Stress may be defined as “(pressure or worry resulting from) mental or physical distress, difficult circumstances, etc.” (Hornby, 1997a). For example, if a poor man loses his job, he will suffer from a lot of stress. College students’ stress comes from some stressors of college life. Stressor is something that causes stress to an organism. Ranjita, Michelle, Sarah, and Tony (2000) found that college students had high stress at a period that could be predicted every semester because of the following. First of all, they had to finish something in their study in a fixed time. In the second place, they were short of money. Lastly, they could not manage their time well. In China, study pressure is a main stressor. In modern society, competition is so severe that college students have to study hard to prepare for their future. Quite a number of students can not get an ideal academic record even though they study very hard. Some students come from poor families, so they are under financial pressure. Some students leave their home for the first time, they have to depend on themselves. So management of time becomes a big problem. If they can not manage their time well, they will have such troubles as inefficiency of study, sleep debt or even ill health. Besides all these, they will miss their relatives, so they suffer a lot from homesickness. What is more, almost every student is in their adolescence, most of whom are in love. If those in love go lovelorn, they may get into deep depression. Depression is the state of “being depressed”. For example, “he committed suicide during a fit of depression” (Hornby, 1997b). Students of a college come from different parts of China, so adaption to the environment, food, or climate may bring them troubles. In addition to all these, conflict between partners can be a cause of stress too. According to Campbell & Svenson’s study (as cited in Ranjita et al. 2000), when stress went in a negative way or reached college students’ limit, it could do harm to college students’ health and hinder their academic performance. In China, some students suffer from
insomnia, some from amnesia, some from nightmares, some go insane, some commit suicide or murder, even a few died because of high stress. In 2004, a college student in Yunnan university named Ma Jiajue killed four roommates of his because of depression. It was reported that in 2008 a forty-four-year-old Ph.D. candidate in Fudan university named Li Kaixue whose major was politics died in front of his desk. It was verified later that the incident was not a suicide or homicide but a case death because of great stress. So college students have to cope with their stress. It is very important that they master coping strategies. Coping strategy is a detailed plan to deal with something. Some college students’ coping strategies prove to be effective. For example, some students reduce their stress by taking exercise, such as jogging, playing ball, walking, dancing, etc. Some students travel to buffer their stress. Some students listen to music to relax. Some college students surf the internet for humorous stories, sentences and expressions to relax. But a small number of students’ coping strategies are just the opposite. Some of those college students drink alcohol excessively to reduce stress, and some smoke to relax, even a few relieve their feeling by hurting themselves, etc. These make their health from bad to worse.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this report, the following research question is investigated: what can students of Mianyang city do to relax? That is to say, the purpose of the report is to discover what the students do to cope with their stress in their spare time. Most students of Mianyang city have their own advantages over those in other cities similar to Mianyang such as Neijiang city and Leshan city because they study in the only Science and Technology City in China, i.e. Mianyang city, which provides them a very good academic atmosphere. But compared to the college students of big cities such as Chengdu and Beijing, college students of Mianyang city have their obvious disadvantage. For one thing, Mianyang is a three level city, whose libraries are small, so that college students can not get enough study materials. For another, Mianyang city is in the west of China, which is backward. This element obstructs them to broaden their horizons. Additionally, some students are poor, so they have to do part time job to reduce the financial burden of their parents. If they do not work, they will get stuck into financial predicament. So most students of Mianyang city have to experience stress.

The report consisted of seven sections. The first section was the abstract, which displayed a concise summary of the contents of the report. The second section is the introduction, which contained two subsections. One subsection was the background, in which the problem was told and described, the other was the statement of the problem, which told the reason why the report was undertaken, and presented the nature of the report. The third section was the review of the literature, which provided other people’s thoughts, viewpoints, and statements relevant to the subject. The fourth section was called design and measurement, telling the methods and techniques used to do the research. The fifth section was the results telling the main findings of the report. The sixth section was the conclusion displaying a concise account of the main findings. The seventh section was called recommendation, which contained two subsections. One subsection was the research-related recommendation, which recommended further research based on the report. The other subsection was issued-related recommendation, which provided suggestions to relevant persons.

2. Review of the literature

Almost everyone theorist agrees that college students have a lot of stress, and the stress has a very bad effect on them. According to the discovery of Lau (2003) and Tinto (2006) (as cited in Goldshstrom, 1994a), Students suffer from high stress during their college life, and as many as 56% of freshmen can not finish their study. This is a large proportion of the freshmen. Some college students drop out because of their failures to get a degree. Stress from daily life and academic commitment bring more trouble and do harm to college students’ mental health (Gao, Wang, Veronica & Marcela, 2011). A number of students have psychological problems. In some colleges, psychologists are busy helping students every day. Friedlander, (2007); Napoli & Wortman, (1998); Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat (2000) revealed the truth (as cited in Goldshstrom, 1994b) that
stress has a negative effect on college students’ social life, self-esteem, and academic commitment. What is more, stress associates with some other diseases such as cardiovascular disorders (Theorell, 1974) and cancer (Jacobs & Charles, 1980)( as cited in Gao et al. 2011). So college students’ stress should be paid more attention to.

Not all the college students are passive to their stress. Most of them try to cope with their stress. Brown (1991) (as cited in Ranjita et al. 2000) found that by managing their time effectively and applying study techniques properly, students can reduce and control their stress. In reality, a lot of students can manage that. Enjoying relaxation and doing sports can ease college students from stress too.

Besides all the above mentioned, a lot of coping strategies to stress have been found. But how to classify these strategies into a wider structure still remains a question.

Weiten & Lloyd (2008) said that there were three broad types of coping strategies. The first strategy was called appraisal-focused. By using this strategy, people could change the way they think to reduce stress. The example of this is to apply humors. Some people recommended that humor could moderate the stress greatly among men and women. (Worell, 2001) The second one was called problem-focused. By using problem-focused strategies, people try to discover the cause of the stress, and then alleviate or remove the stressor. The last one was named emotion-focused. By using this strategy, people relax their tensions, decentralize their attention from stressors, use opposite feeling, think another way or relax in a right way.

Elizabeth Scott (2011) introduced ten top stress-coping strategies to college students. They are “power naps, visualizations, exercise, breathing exercise, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), music, staying organized, eat right, self hypnosis and positive thinking and affirmations”.

Power naps means if you nap, you will have power. Students are too busy to sleep, which put them in a very disadvantageous and dangerous position. It is very necessary of the students to set some time to sleep. Visualizations means seeing yourself doing well. That is to say, just think of the good, reject the bad. This is very valid in coping with stress and promoting your degree. Doing exercise can keep students healthy and expel depressions. Breathing exercise can make people calm down in a short time. This is very effective when under heavy pressure. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) indicates relax all your muscles until you feel comfortable. Listening to music can release students’ tensions, reduce their stress and make them feel comfortable. Staying organized means if students keep things in order, the place where they stay or study will look nice, which can reduce their stress. “Eat Right” means healthy diet helps to keep students conscious and energetic, which can alleviate anxieties. Self hypnosis is something like daydream. It means to imagine good thing can release your tension. Positive thinking and affirmations means to think positively and to be optimistic.

All these are effective in coping with students stress.

3. Design and measurement

In order to carry out the research, on 10th June 2017, an instant survey was carried out among 3000 students from different colleges and universities of Mianyang city. The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire given to the participant to complete. There were 25 questions among which 23 were ticking items and the other two should be answered with sentences. There are six Likert scales in the questionnaire. The first five questions were about their age, sex, income, job and grade. Question six asked why they came to study in Mianyang city. Question seven to question nine were mainly about whether they had stress and what the stressors were. Question ten to question fourteen were mainly about their attitude to their life, how they handle difficulties and what their hard subjects were. Question fifteen and question sixteen looked at what effect their stress had on them and to what extent their stress influenced them. Question seventeen asked if they had thought of giving up. Question eighteen and question nineteen is about their courage and mood when encountering difficulty. Question 19 to question 25 were the most important part in the questionnaire, they are all about their coping strategies to their stress. The purpose of the survey was to discover what the students’ stressors are and what strategies they apply to cope with their stress.
4. Results
The main findings were as follows. Among the 3000 college students, 1500 were male and 1500 were female. They were aged from 18 to 22. They came to Mianyang city for knowledge. 93% of the students were very satisfied with their teachers; this was followed by study atmosphere, chosen by 87%. 80% of the students said that their stress was high. The most important stressor is study competition, chosen by 93%; this was followed by financial pressure, selected by 87%, homesickness with 73% and maladaptation to the circumstances with 60%. The first harm their stress did to them were inefficiency in study, chosen by 87%; this was followed by bad mood, selected by 80% and insomnia with 60%. All of them studied hard and went to bed late in the evening. They all had confidence in themselves and had their own study methods. Religion theory was the most difficult subject, chosen by 80%; this was followed by philosophy selected by 60%. Stress influenced 80% of the students to a moderate extent. A majority of them had never thought of giving up; only 7% of the students had that idea. When they got a lower mark, 93% of the students felt disappointed. The most important way to cope with their stress was walking slowly, chosen by 93%. The second most important coping strategy was enjoying humors, selected by 87%. The third most important methods to control stress is telephoning relatives or friends, selected by 80%; this was followed by going home with 73% and traveling with 60%. A majority of the students sometimes listened to music as they studied. 93% of them were strongly against the idea that people could relax by drinking much alcohol and 87% were strongly against smoking. 93% of the students agreed that sleeping was a very good way to reduce stress. 87% of them suggested that distraction of attention also be a very good method to abate stress.

5. Conclusion
In this report, the following research question is investigated: what can students of Mianyang city do to relax? It is not easy to reach any definite conclusions based upon such a small sample of students from such widely differing background. However, some general comments can be made. Teachers of Mianyang city and study atmosphere were the most satisfactory to the students. A majority of them had high stress. The four most important stressors, in order, were study competition, financial pressure, homesickness, and maladaptation to the circumstances. The first three harmful things their stress did to them, in order, were inefficiency in study, bad mood and insomnia. The two most difficult subjects were religion theory and philosophy. A majority of them had never thought of giving up. Most of them would become disappointed if they got a lower mark. The four most important coping strategies to cope with their stress, in order, were walking slowly, enjoying humors, telephoning relatives or friends and traveling. Most of the students listened to music as they studied. A majority of them were strongly against the idea that people could relax by drinking much alcohol and 87% were strongly against smoking. 93% of the students agreed that sleeping was a very good way to reduce stress. A great number of them suggested that distraction of attention also be a very good method to abate stress. It was clear that most of the students of Mianyang city were experiencing stress and that a majority of the students who had stress had coping strategies to their stress.

6. Issue-related Recommendation
From the collected data, it is clear that most of the students of Mianyang city have a lot of stress, that more than a half of the students’ stress is much higher. If their stress remains like that, something bad may happen. So the students stress should be paid enough attention to and effective measures should be taken to reduce the students stress. Students in deep depression often seek help from other people. So a psychological consulting center should be set up in the academy to meet the students need. In the center, there should be enough skilled psychologists. It is suggested that teachers in charge of the classes should be sensitive to the students’ stress. In Mianyang city, the teachers in charge of classes works hard to create good conditions for the students. But they somewhat neglect the students stress because they think that all the students in this academy are
mature. So they should be reminded to help the students to reduce their stress. As for the students, some good coping strategies can be recommended too. From the collected data, walking slowly, enjoying humors, telephoning relatives or friends and traveling are the four most useful strategies to cope with stress. Students with stress can learn to do these things. The students’ relatives and friends can play a role in buffering the students’ stress too. They can reduce the students’ stress by telephoning the students frequently.

References

Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear students:
In order to track down the cause of the your stress and find the method to cope with the stress, please fill in the questionnaire. Thank you for your cooperation.

Questionnaire on stress of college students of Miangyang city

Please answer the following questions

1. How old are you (years old)?  Tick one of the age groups below.
   - 16-20
   - 17-21
   - 18-22
   - 22+

2. Are you male or female?  Tick one of the following.
   - male
   - female

3. What’s your job?  Fill in the blank.  _______________________

45
4 How much is your income (yuan per month)? Tick one of the following.
☐ below 1000 yuan
☐ 1000-2999
☐ 3000+

5 Are you a master degree candidate or a PHD candidate? Tick one of the following.
☐ a master degree candidate
☐ a PHD candidate

6 What do you study for in your college? Tick at least one of the following. Add to the list.
☐ knowledge
☐ diploma
☐ ……

7 Are you satisfied with the following things? Circle the most appropriate number.
(1=very satisfied, 2=quite satisfied  3=neutral  4=dissatisfied 5=sharply dissatisfied)
your academic record 1 2 3 4 5
your studying ability 1 2 3 4 5
your study atmosphere 1 2 3 4 5
your teachers 1 2 3 4 5

8 How great is your stress? Tick one of the following.
☐ very great
☐ quite great
☐ somewhat great
☐ not so great
☐ not at all great

9 What are your main stressors? Tick at least one of the following.
☐ study competition
☐ being short of money
☐ homesickness
☐ maladaptation to the circumstances

10 What time do you usually go to bed in the evening? Tick one of the following.
☐ 22:00~23:00
☐ 23:00~0.00
☐ after 00:00

11 Do you have confidence in yourself? Tick one of the following.
☐ yes
☐ no

12 Do you have your own study methods? Tick one of the following.
☐ yes
☐ no

13 When you have difficulty in your study, what should you do? Tick one of the following.
☐ refer to teachers
☐ refer to reference books
☐ ask classmates
☐ ignore the difficulty

14 How easy are these things when you study? Circle the most appropriate number.
(1=very easy, 2=quite easy, 3=quite challenging  4=very challenging)
English 1 2 3 4
your own major 1 2 3 4
philosophy 1 2 3 4
history 1 2 3 4
15 What are the first three greatest harms the stress does to you? Tick one of the following.

☐ inefficiency in study
☐ bad mood
☐ ill health
☐ insomnia
☐ amnesia

16 To what extent does the stress influence you? Tick one of the following.

☐ to a little extent
☐ to somewhat extent
☐ to a moderate extent
☐ to a large extent

17 Have you thought of giving up? Tick one of the following.

☐ yes
☐ no

18 When you have to finish something at the time you are very tired, what should you do? Tick one of the following.

☐ stop doing
☐ go on doing

19 When you get a lower mark, how do you feel? Tick one of the following.

☐ Not at all disappointed
☐ Not so disappointed
☐ somewhat disappointed
☐ quite disappointed
☐ very disappointed

20 How important are the following when you cope with your stress? Circle the most appropriate number.

(1=very unimportant, 2=somewhat unimportant, 3=neutral 4=somewhat important, 5=very important)

playing ball 1 2 3 4 5
listening to music 1 2 3 4 5
walking slowly 1 2 3 4 5
jogging 1 2 3 4 5
telephoning relatives or friends 1 2 3 4 5
going home 1 2 3 4 5
surfing internet 1 2 3 4 5
watching TV 1 2 3 4 5
seeing films 1 2 3 4 5
enjoying humors 1 2 3 4 5
traveling 1 2 3 4 5

21 How often do you listen to music as you study?

☐ never
☐ seldom
☐ sometimes
☐ often
☐ always

Do you agree with the following statements?

(1=strongly agree , 2=agree, 3=neutral 4=disagree, 5=sharply disagree)
22 Drinking can cope with stress. 1 2 3 4 5
23 Smoking can do away with stress. 1 2 3 4 5
24 Is sleeping a good way to cope with stress?
25 What is the best way to deal with stress?