

## ACADEMIC STRESS TAKING A TOLL ON MANAGEMENT

### POST GRADUATES: A MYTH OR REALITY

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#### ABSTRACT

Stress has existed throughout the evolution. Students stress is an unavoidable phenomenon which is often seen in their lives. Post graduate students were easily target of stress than the graduate students. Factors such as physical and mental, family, job, relationship and social were the main source of stress among the students. There is always a dilemma for the students regarding its performance in exam and to secure a good job. Academic stress among students has long been researched on, and researchers have identified different stressors affecting the students. Students have different expectations, goals and values that they want to fulfil, which is only possible if they are integrated with that of the institution. The prima facie goal of this research is to evaluate the impact of the components of academic stress such as such as curriculum and instruction, team work related issues, assessment, and placement, impact on performance, etc. on the students. The study takes into account various criteria like physical, psychological, individual, and psychosomatic factors of stress among the management students. Research was supported by sampling 100 post graduate management students from various management institutes spread across Ahmedabad, a city in Gujarat, India. Data was collected through structured academic stress questionnaire.

**KEYWORDS:** Stress, Psychological Impact, Academic Performance

#### INTRODUCTION

Stress is one factor that influences academic success and compromises academic performance (Salas, Driskell, & Hughes, 1996). Stress occurs when individuals feel pressure to adapt to their environment (Seyle, 1993). When faced with demands or pressure to adapt or change, people cognitively appraise their resources, coping skills, and ability to respond to demands of the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping is the management of these demands (Larose & Bernier, 2001). College is an environment that places demands upon students to adapt. If individuals believe they cannot meet demands, they might experience stress that may result in lowered self-esteem, poorer health habits, poorer self-management choices (Hudd, et al, 2000), impaired information processing (Lok & Bishop, 1999), and impaired memory (Vondras, Powless, Olson, Wheeler, & Snudden, 2005). Studies (e. g, Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999) indicate that when four-year college students interact with the college environment, they experience many new demands such as increased work load, pressure to maintain grades and earn a degree, establishing relationships with new faculty members and new friends, increased responsibilities for time-management, and increased independence from their families. Studies of four-year college students also indicate stress reduces grade-point average (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). For example, Andrews and Wilding (2004) found that stress such as depression and financial difficulties were negatively associated with poor academic performance; Chemers and colleagues (2001) found stress resulted in lower

grades and decreased commitment to remain in school. Furthermore, De Meuse (1985) found inverse relationships between classroom performance and stress. Further evidence was provided by Struthers and colleagues (2005) who found that stress inversely predicted course grades at the end of the academic year.

Although the relationship between stress and academic success among four-year college students is well documented, little is known about this relationship among two-year community college students (Miller, Pope, Steinmann, 2005a; Miller et al, 2005b; Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Academic stress is best understood with respect to how individual students react to stress. Some students presumably cope with stress more effectively than others.

Stress is a subjective feeling that occurs when an event requires a change in an individual's behavior, physical status, or cognitions based on his/her personal appraisal of the environment (Selye, 1976). Subjective stress varies from person to person. Some people are more vulnerable to stress, as hypothesized in the diathesis-stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos & Schaefer, 1993). The diathesis-stress theory postulates that psychological and physiological vulnerabilities make some people more sensitive to stress, more likely to perceive environmental events as threatening, and more likely to react to perceived threats or stress in their environment.

Another type of stress that students might encounter is acculturative stress (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996). Acculturation refers to the broad range of changes that occur when there is intercultural contact (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006). Acculturative stress occurs when people come into contact with cultures that are different from their own and feel pressure to change. As people become involved in the new culture, they might perceive the new culture as threatening to their previous way of life. In general, understanding and using a new language, new life-styles, new cultural practices, and possibly giving up one's previous cultural beliefs and practices are stressful situations for people who have contact with other cultures.

Learning and memory can be affected by stress. Although an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability (Kaplan & Sadock, 2000), too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems (Niemi & Vainiomaki, 1999), reduce self-esteem (Bressler & Bressler, 2007) and may affect the academic achievement of students (Choi et al, 2007).

University students might experience high stress due to academic commitments, financial pressures and lack of time management skills. When stress is perceived negatively or becomes excessive, it can affect both health and academic performance (Campbell & Svenson, 1992) and can have an adverse effect on students (Amirkhan, 1998; Covington, 1997). Moreover, if the pressure is prolonged and perceived as unmanageable, these experiences have been shown to elicit helplessness, depression and stress (Carver & Scheier, 1994), thereby placing the academic futures of some students in jeopardy (Marcos & Tillema, 2006).

Express India, on Jan 10 2010 reported that Crime Records Bureau figures show India's suicide rate has risen 8 per cent a year for 10 years. According to a 2007 estimate, 45 per cent of suicides involve people between 15 and 29. And WHO lists suicide among the top three causes of death in the age group 15-35. The motive when students kill themselves is invariably academic pressure – this accounts for 99 per cent suicides in the age group 12-18 – but psychiatrists sought to assess why the trend has risen of late and put it down to three reasons: deprivation of sunshine, exam results, and the copycat syndrome.

Our education system has gradually evolved into a rat race, where in the exciting and enriching experience of learning has been stripped down to a mere number game. By now we are conveniently oblivious of the thousands of dreams that could not be fulfilled because of the pressure and stress inflicted on them because of the so called rat race so there has to be study of impact of stress on performance and mental health.

In addition, a review of literature indicates that not much have been prioritized on stress-related research, particularly in Malaysia. The majority of investigations has taken place in the United States and was primarily concentrated on students in the medical field (e.g. Moffat et al, 2004; Niemi & Vainiomaki, 1999; Pickard et. Al, 2000; Ratana, 2003; Sanders & Kurt, 2001; Shapiro et. al, 2000). Furthermore, prior studies have concentrated on collecting cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data (Misra et al, 2000; Trockel et al, 2000). This paper thus attempts to address the research gaps by including a more comprehensive list of stress factors and empirically test them against the academic performance of management post graduates.

## ACADEMIC STRESS

Academic stress among students have long been researched on, and researchers have identified stressors as too many assignments, competitions with other students, failures and poor relationships with other students or lecturers (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Academic stressors include the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it (Carveth et al, 1996). Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). When stress is perceived negatively or becomes excessive, students experience physical and psychological impairment. Methods to reduce stress by students often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits (Murphy & Archer, 1996). The only scientific research that specifically related leisure satisfaction to academic stress was that of Ragheb and McKinney (1993) who established a negative association between academic stress and leisure satisfaction. Institutional level stressors are overcrowded lecture halls, semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work (Awino & Agolla, 2008).

The pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006). This is likely to affect the social relations both within the institution and outside which affects the individual person's life in terms of commitment to achieving the goals (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Knowing the causes of students stress will make the educational administrator know how to monitor and control the stress factors that are responsible for the students' stress. Often, graduate students perceive that faculty exert great power over their lives and feel that they live in a state of substantial powerlessness (Altbach, 1970). Another source of stress is the difficulty of achieving social intimacy. It is difficult to find a mate or maintain a relationship with an existing one. Graduate students tend to lack the time and/or the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships (Hartshorn, 1976). Fear of academic failure related to these tasks is a definite stressor (Kolko, 1980). Thus, stressors affecting students can be categorized as academic, financial, time or health related, and self- imposed (Goodman, 1993). Academic stressors include the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it (Carveth et al, 1996). Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master

in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). College students have many obstacles to overcome in order to achieve their optimal academic performance. It takes a lot more than just studying to achieve a successful college career. Different stressors such as time management and social activities can all pose their own threat to a student's academic performance.

## **STRESS FACED BY MANAGEMENT STUDENTS**

Management education is an important medium that facilitates improvement of leadership qualities and turns out excellent future managers. Students entering into the professional education need to face many challenges to which they have never been exposed earlier. The pressure to earn good grades and to earn a degree is very high (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996). Other potential sources of stress include excessive homework, unclear assignments, and uncomfortable classrooms (Kohn & Frazer, 1986). In addition to academic requirements, relations with faculty members and time pressures may also be sources of stress (Sgan-Cohen & Lowental, 1988). It is important that students should learn and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that will in turn make them contribute positively to the development of the general economy.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Objectives**

- To find out the components of academic stress experienced by management students.
- To analyze the curriculum and instruction related components responsible for stress.
- To know the assessment related factors of academic stress.
- To find out the placement related issues causing stress among management students.
- To examine the relationship between stress and academic performance.
- To identify the impact of academic stress among the MBA students.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Types of role stress present among the engineering and management students in India was explored in a study conducted by **Rakesh Kumar Agarwal and Shailendra Singh Chahar (2007)**. Role overload, role stagnation and self-role distance were found to be the major stressors experienced by the students. Male students experienced more role stagnation than females. The results did not show any significant differences on any of the role stressors between first year students and their seniors, or between management and engineering students. The results of this study are helpful in understanding the social and educational environment prevailing in the country. Teachers often emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, so they often neglect the emotional feelings of students during the teaching process, which can cause emotional stress and learning problems for students. In addition, students may feel unfamiliar situations like nervousness, worry, frustration, abasement, depression, etc. The instability of these emotions easily initiates unusual behavior, which then affects the learning achievements and adjustment ability of students if appropriate timely counseling is not given by the institutions, teachers and parents, or if they cannot obtain appropriate concern from their peers or siblings (**Chen et al, 2006**). **Rao K and D K Subbakrishna (2006)** of National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) conducted an appraisal of stress and coping behavior, on a group of 258 male and female undergraduates.

**Piekarska (2000)** pointed out that the essential factors for the formation of stress are frequent and strong. There is a related connection between the results of stress and psychological and personality characteristics. 'College Chronic Life Stress Survey' constructed by **Towbes and Cohen (1996)** focuses on the frequency of chronic stress in the lives of college students. This scale contains items that persist across time to create stress, such as interpersonal conflicts, self-esteem problems, and money problems. These stressors were evaluated in relation to the number of times, a student had to deal with them on a weekly basis. It was found that with regard to chronic stress, first-year students scored higher than other students. **Rocha-Singh (1994)** have examined sources of stress among undergraduates through similar studies. According to **Hirsch and Ellis (1996)**, the dynamic relationship between a person and the environment, in stress perception and reaction, is especially magnified in college students. The problems and situations encountered by college students may differ from those faced by their non-student peers. The most significant academic stressors reported were items that are time-specific or subject specific which supports **Carroll's (1963)** contention that learning is a function of time allowed, aptitude, quality of instruction and ability to understand instruction. These core academic stressors were found to be relatively unchanged over time, as observed by **Murphy and Archer (1996)** who compared the academic stressors of their previous study with those experienced eight years later. Past research found that collegiate stressors included: academics, social relationships, finances, daily hassles (for example, parking and being late) and familial relationships (**Larson, 2006**). Within each domain conflict, insufficient resources, time demands, and new responsibilities had characterized stress.

## HYPOTHESIS

- The impact of stress is independent on Gender
- The evaluation pattern has an impact on the level of stress among management students.
- The placement related issues outlines a major stressor among management students.

## Sample Size

The study was conducted to examine the relationships of independent and dependent variable by applying the survey questionnaire. In the research the procedure adopted is quantitative approach. Respondents were random 100 students who are taken from Management Colleges located in Ahmedabad

**Sampling Method:** Non- Probability, Convenience sampling method

**Sampling Unit:** Management post graduates of Ahmedabad

**Research Design:** It is a descriptive research study.

**Research Tool:** Structured self-administered survey questionnaire consisting closed ended questions

## Beneficiaries

The findings from the present study would benefit various parties, such as the Education Ministry and universities in planning and conducting necessary programs for the students so that the stress factors could be reduced to an optimal level in order to help the students in attaining better academic performance. The results would also benefit the parents. By knowing and acknowledging the causes of stress, parents are in better positions to give advice, motivation and/or moral support to reduce the stress factors which could enhance the academic performance of their children.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Part I

#### Hypothesis Testing

**H0:** The impact of stress is not independent on Gender

**H1:** The impact of stress is independent on Gender

**Table 1**

Case Processing Summary						
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
What is the impact of Stress? * Does it depend on gender?	100	100.0%	0	0.0%	100	100.0%

### INTERPRETATION

According to Chi Square evaluated observed value which is 8.382 which is greater than the critical Chi-square value of 7.7193 so the null hypothesis has been rejected. In other words gender is independent on stress. (.05, N = 107) = 8.382,  $p = 7.7193$

**H0:** The evaluation pattern does not have an impact on the level of stress among management students.

**H1:** The evaluation pattern has an impact on the level of stress among management students.

**Table 2**

Evaluation Pattern* Level of Stress among Students in Colleges							
Count		Level of Stress					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Evaluation pattern	Internal	0	4	5	17	10	36
	External	0	2	6	39	17	64
<b>Total</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>
Chi-Square Tests							
		Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)			
Pearson Chi-Square		29.806 <sup>a</sup>	8	.000			
Likelihood Ratio		25.543	8	.001			
N of Valid Cases		100					

### INTERPRETATION

As per the acceptance rule of chi square the significance level should be more than 05 to accept the null hypothesis.

**Here in the above hypothesis the sign value is 0.000 i.e. less than 0.05 so the null hypothesis i.e.**

**“The evaluation pattern does not have an impact on the level of stress among management students” is rejected**

**H0:** The placement related issues does not contribute as a major stressor among management students.

**H1:** The placement related issues contributes as a major stressor among management students.

Table 3

Placement Related Issues* Levels of Stress in Students Cross Tabulation								
Count		Level of Stress						
		Highly De Stressed	De-Stressed	Neutral	Stressed	Highly Stressed	Total	
Placement	Aptitude tests	0		1	2	5	2	10
related issues	Grades to qualify	0		0	1	2	1	4
	Job Profile	0		0	2	2	0	4
	Placement	0		3	12	38	29	82
	Interview							
<b>Total</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>
Chi-Square Tests								
		Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)				
Pearson Chi-Square		34.326 <sup>a</sup>	12	.001				
Likelihood Ratio		27.335	12	.007				
N of Valid Cases		100						

## INTERPRETATION

As per the acceptance rule of chi square the significance level should be more than .05 to accept the null hypothesis.

But here as seen in table the significance is 0.01 i.e. less than 0.05 so **the null hypothesis i.e.** “The placement related issues does not contribute as a major stressor among management students” **is rejected**

## DATA ANALYSIS

### PART – II

While doing the study, one of the vital factor that the researchers came across was, there were some other symptoms that also contributed to stress in students, these were psychological and psychosomatic factors. Further the analysis and interpretation of the same is described below:

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

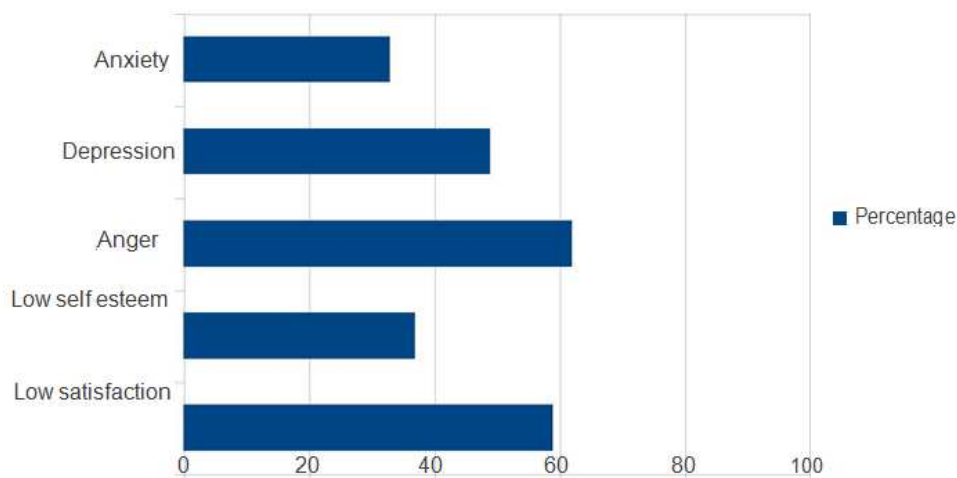


Figure 1

### Percentage of Students Affected by the Psychological Factors

Regarding psychological factors, Anger and lower satisfactions levels contribute highest percentages for the affected students. The above are the psychological problem faced by people experiencing stress. Low self esteem accounted for the lowest percentage. Depression and Anxiety were the other factors which marks the presence of stress in the students.

### Psychosomatic Factors

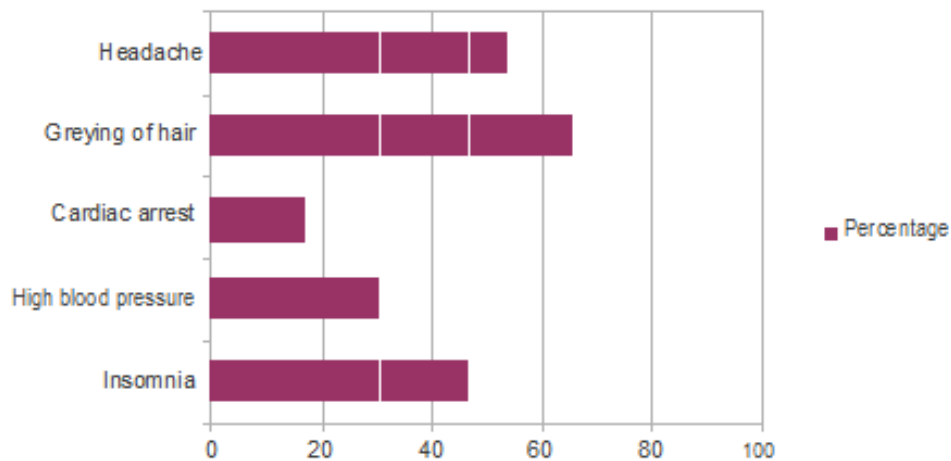


Figure 2

### Percentage Reflecting Psychosomatic Analysis of the Participants

There were different symptoms regarding psychosomatic factors. Greying of hair and headache was found in more percentages which pointed towards the high level of stress that persisted in students. Some more problems were also observed such as Insomnia, high blood pressure. However cardiac arrest was the minimal factor that accounted because of stress. High blood pressure, headache and sleep problems were mainly observed during exam days.

### CONCLUSIONS

As academic stress was found to be more prominent among the students of professional courses by many research studies, this study primarily concentrated on exploring the micro issues of different components of academic activity in the professional course work setup. The components of academics, in general, are curriculum and instruction, assessment and placement.

Thus, by identifying the sub issues of each component of academic stress among the postgraduate management students, the study could provide better insights to the academic administrators for initiating efforts to reduce the intensity of academic stress.

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