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The relationship of living situation, health and academic stress among female college students

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Abstract

Health and living situations are important aspects in a college student's academic performance. This paper investigated the interrelationship of academic stress, health and psycho-social situation among 332 women undergraduates. The study reveals that health and living situations are interdependent set of physiological, psychological, and social processes that can influence, in varying degrees, girls students' academic performances. Healthy lifestyles do relate to a college student's life, such as attending classes, working, socializing and upholding interpersonal relationships. The college and University authorities must support the academic mission of student learning by assisting students in leading quality based healthier lives.

Keywords: living situation, health, academic stress, lifestyle

Introduction

Health is a state where a person functions, physically and mentally efficiently and effectively with relative comfort and sense of wellbeing. The women health is not a one-dimensional universe, but a highly complex set of parameters. Girl's students should be encouraged to get involved in sport and physical activity at an early age because such involvement reduces the likelihood of developing a number of deleterious health related conditions. A variety of psychological, social and physical environmental variables those are consistently associated with adolescents' health. Early researchers even speculated that sport and psychological activity were harmful to a woman's body (Coakley, 1998). It was hypothesized that among college students, a negative relationship exists between stressful living situations and academic performance, and a positive relationship between level of health and academic performance. A disturbing trend in college student health is the reported increase in student stress (Sax, 1997) [1]. Stressors affecting students can be categorized as academic, financial, time or health related, and self-imposed (Goodman, 1993., Le Roy, 1988) [6, 9]. Academic stressors include the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it (Carveth, Gesse, & Moss, 1996) [2]. The student's living environment, health and lifestyles, has its impact on academic performance. In living situations many sources of stress are found like roommates, neighbor's, or home environment. Stress can have various negative physical as well as psychological effects on a student. There was a greater association of stressors and reaction to stressors with time management behavior's than with leisure satisfaction (Ranjita Misra, Michelle Mckean, 2000) [10]. Academic achievement is extremely important for college students as it is a main determinant of their future. Exercising can help to release the stress that is built up in the body. The body is prepared to do something physical, and exercise will afford it a healthy way to make use of this preparation (Greenberg, 1996) [7].

The living conditions and academic stress calls into question the extent of its influence on all aspects of development, including physical and mental health.

In light of this, the following questions are investigated:

How does stress associated with living situations affect college students?

How do healthy lifestyles impact college students?

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How does stress of living situations and health relate to students' academic performance?

Other studies had attempted to research the way living environments affect academic performance (King, 1998) [8]. One study found a significant relationship between where college students resided (Residence hall, sorority / fraternity house, apartments) and their academic performance (Blimling, 1999) [1]. A study showed that the students with high levels of exercise had better relationship with their parents, less depression, were more into sports, less use or frequency of drugs, a higher grade point averages than students with low levels of exercise (Field, Diego, & Sanders, 2001) [3]. The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences in levels of stress in a student's living situation, healthy lifestyle, and their academic performance.

Method

Female college students (n 332) were assessed at age 17-22 years, studying in three women's colleges in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Measurements included, lifestyle and health related behavior's, current health status and history of illness, knowledge about exercise and attitudes and psychological variables including well-being. Body measurements (height, weight, hip girths) were measured and Body Mass Index (BMI) is calculated. BMI is defined as the individuals' body weight divided by the square of the height, and is almost always expressed in the unit kg/m². The cutoff point of BMI used for the study is based on the recommendation of W.H.O. experts BMI Classification for Asian population. Mental Health Dimensions Inventory (MHDI), adapted from Godzilla's Student-life Stress Inventory (SLSI), which is designed to assess the students' perceived academic stress and its relation to psychosocial living conditions of students was used for the study. There are 21 items arranged on yes / no response (open ended) format that assessed 5 categories of academic stressors (frustrations, conflicts, pressures, changes, and self-imposed). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests used to evaluate whether the three behavioral frequency groups differed on the nine variables (Age, BMI, Family income, Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Peer Problems, Pro-Social behavior and Academic stress). Correlation analysis was used to further distinguish relationship between groups. Descriptive data (e.g.:- Percentages, means, standard deviation) were used to evaluate the anthropometric measurements, group's efficacy patterns, and social focus.

Table 3: Multivariate correlation analysis of various factors

Parameters	Age	BMI	Family Income	Emotional Symptoms	Conduct Problems	Peer Problems	Pro-Social Behaviour	Academic Stress
Age	1							
BMI	-0.061	1						
Family Income	-0.037	-0.06	1					
Emotional Symptoms	-0.083	0.055	0.192*	1				
Conduct Problems	0.002	0.041	0.485**	0.622*	1			
Peer Problems	-0.016	0.029	0.279*	0.038	0.299**	1		
Pro-Social Behaviour	0.125*	0.059	0.257**	0.179**	0.521**	0.189**	1	
Academic Stress	-0.085	-0.01	0.225**	0.271**	-0.054	-0.023	-0.161*	1

It is hypothesized that among college students, there would be an inverse relationship between family income and academic performance. The study shows that the students are hesitant to seek the help of teachers to address their psycho-social problems (18.7%). A whopping majority share their problems with parents (95%) and friends (81%). People respond to pressure and competitions differently, and different colleges

Results

The results of the study revealed that healthy lifestyle affected academic performance along with other factors. Only 9% of the college students reported ailments (cold, nausea, upset stomach, and such). These symptoms were all considered typical when individuals are suffering from stress. As a result, they were related to the pressures of academic achievement. For this reason, we have to agree with the past theorists statements that the mind and the body are indeed connected.

Table 1: BMI Status

Under Weight (<18.5)	25.3%
Low Risk (Healthy Range 18.5 - 22.9)	51.8%
Moderate Risk (23 - 27.4)	19.9%
High Risk (>27.5)	3%

This table shows that only around 52% of the informants are of healthy BMI range. More than a quarter of student's falls on underweight category, this indicates nutritional deficiency. Though not statistically significant results show low mean value of moderate and high risk category female students had lower academic stress.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (One Way ANOVA) comparing BMI & Academic Stress

Under Weight	9.98	1.05	1.082
Low Risk	10.23	1.73	
Moderate Risk	10.09	0.97	
High Risk	9.60	0.97	

The Correlation analysis shows time management behavior's had a greater buffering effect on academic stress. Due to long communication and family commitments, students comment that they don't get time for leisure or socializing. All this can lead tremendous exhaustion and stress. It is hypothesized that students have an inverse relationship between stress of living situations and academic performance, and there is a positive relationship between level of health of lifestyle and academic performance.

Family is a source of stress for many college students. Some families place a great deal of stress on college students by telling them that they need to acquire good grades.

The relationship of academic stress and pro social behavior shows the real range of psycho-social factors causing stress. Thus it is proved that individual health and environmental factors are basic building blocks on student academics.

have vastly different climates. Some women's colleges carry reputations for being extremely demanding and competitive. But this study shows no such pressures among the students of three colleges.

Discussion

The results of the study showed a possible reverse

relationship between stress of living situations and academic performance. Many of the associations, although statistically significant, were not strongly correlated. The hypothesis that among college students there would be a positive relationship between level of healthy lifestyle and academic performance was supported. It can be concluded that healthy lifestyles do relate to a college student's life, such as attending classes, working, socializing, and interpersonal relationships. Health also relates to student's academic performance. Living situations also had impact on stress levels of students. One of the suggestions to investigate stress in living situations is recording the daily activities in different home-settings. This would be a good description of the daily events and how the residents react to such events in their outside environments. The results from studies on stress in living situations are needed in order to be able to deal with the problem of low levels of academic performance due to stress. Findings about stressful living environments might influence the college students to involve in many programmes related to this. Anxiety reduction and time management in conjunction with leisure activities may be an effective strategy for reducing academic stress among college students. It is recommended that college students should be made aware about the importance of healthy living conditions which in turn affect the academic performance.

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