

Stress Among College Students: An Interpretation of Meanings and Management of Stress among Undergraduates at the University at Buffalo

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to interview students at the University at Buffalo in order to obtain a better understanding of how stress affects their physical and emotional wellbeing. Respondents were asked three questions during interviews and results were tabulated and categorized. The compiled data demonstrates a large variety of symptoms and coping mechanisms experienced by students here at UB.

While some symptoms of stress were moderate, like fatigue or acne, others can be considered quite severe, such as anxiety attacks and breaking out in hives. Similar results were found when analyzing coping mechanisms, as some stress outlets can be as simple as "surfing the web;" others can become much more complicated, such as counseling or "needing a few drinks" by the end of a long week.

From this study, it can be concluded that while college students at the University at Buffalo are showing adaptation patterns to a collegiate lifestyle by the end of four or five years, students are still unable to completely manage and maintain their reactions to an abundance of stress.

Introduction

Previous studies relating to stress and college students have involved extensive questionnaires, analyzing a number of variables linked to statistical analysis. All of these studies involved a population that was pre-screened prior to giving the surveys. Many of these studies were conducted over several months and typically thousands of respondents participated (1,2,3).

While previous studies made extensive conclusions regarding correlations among the data, these studies did not give respondents an opportunity to stray beyond a few answer choices. The advantage of this study is that students were able to list not only their symptoms in relation to stress but also their unique coping mechanisms as well. This method leads to a larger array of data that can be used to analyze many aspects of student culture.

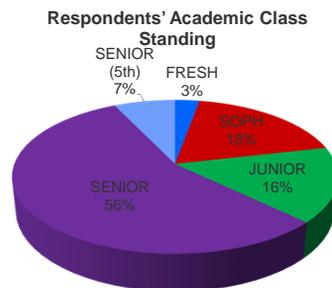
Introduction

The significance of this study led to a number of conclusions for improvement of services on campus at the University at Buffalo. Social outlets for stress, involving Counseling Services, and physical outlets, involving the Student Wellness Center, are just a few examples of how students can release some of their stress and manage it more efficiently.

Methods

70 students were interviewed for this study. Respondents were asked three open-ended questions about stress and how it relates to them. These questions included, "What does stress mean to you," "How does stress affect your body, physically and emotionally," and "How do you reduce or manage your stress?" By using this method, the primary investigator was not violating students' right to privacy.

Respondents were chosen at random; the study did not use pre-screening methods for applicants. Of the respondents, 41% were male and 59% were female. Class distribution is described in the figure below.



Results

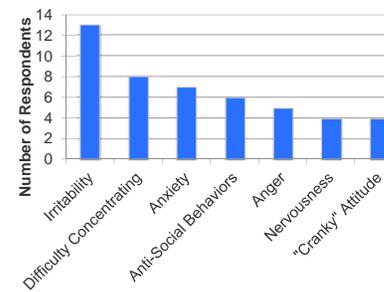
The meaning of stress to respondents mostly encompasses academic related tasks. Students said that stress means having too many responsibilities and too little time to complete their tasks efficiently. Many respondents also noted the feeling of pressure to succeed or perform more efficiently, especially from professors and other faculty members at the University at Buffalo. Other students went on to say that stress is a state of mind that they cannot escape.

Results

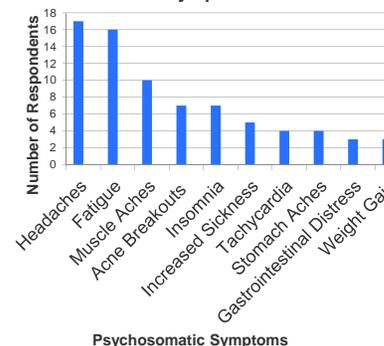
A variety of patterns were analyzed through this study. For example, 74% of respondents claim that they sleep less when they are stressed. Some students even develop insomnia. Eating habits vary significantly among UB students, 42% stating they eat less and 37% stating that they eat more food with little nutritional value. Students feel that these two variables combined result in a universal decreased health status among college students.

The physical and emotional symptoms respondents reported during interviews were placed in two categories: psychological symptoms and psychosomatic symptoms. A large variety of symptoms were found in both categories and the most frequent responses are shown in the bar graphs. Not all findings are reported here.

Frequently Reported Psychological Symptoms



Frequently Reported Psychosomatic Symptoms



Results

Exercise was listed as the most frequently reported physical coping mechanism among students. Other physical outlets include participating in sports, yoga, Pilates and going for a walk. Some students mentioned using medication, both prescription and over the counter drugs, to combat issues with anxiety, sleep and headaches in relation to stress. Specific foods and beverages are also used during the coping process, including alcohol consumption. In addition, cigarette smoking was mentioned.

Social coping mechanisms include a large array of activities such as hanging out with friends, reading and relying on entertainment resources. Many students use the internet, music, television and video games to cope with stress. Family members and friends seem to play a large role in coping strategies, as 69% of respondents said they vent their stress to these individuals.

Students are developing adaptation patterns.

This is evidenced by the fact that students feel less threatened by stress when they organize their thoughts and make "to do" lists. Furthermore, many students did not report any one route of coping with stress; instead they responded that they "just deal with stress," suggesting that coping has become a more fundamental part of students' everyday routines.

Though 11% of respondents identify both positive and negative sides to stress, the majority of students at the University at Buffalo still associate stress with negative events. Some respondents even said, "Stress is bad, avoid it whenever possible."

Services on campus at the University at Buffalo should continuously be developed in order to ensure that students are able to manage their stressors efficiently. Activities such as expanding Counseling Services or improving athletic facilities will help students cope and release some of their built up stress; this may result in less physical and emotional side-effects for students in the future.

References

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