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Impact of Stress on Mental Health of Students: Reasons and Interventions

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Mental health describes either a level of cognitive or emotional well-being or an absence of a mental disorder. A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization). The word 'health' is generally described in terms of working order of body and mind. But when we talk of one's mental health it means we are referring to the working order of the mind of an individual concerning to the problems that how he thinks, feels and behaves. The mental health problem is very crucial because it is related to the overall well-being of an individual, irrespective of one's status, age, gender, race or social background. Stress is mind and body's response or reaction to a real or imagined threat, event or change. The threat, event or changes are commonly called stressors. Stress is defined as any change that we have to adapt to. This includes difficult life events (bereavement, illness) and positive ones. Getting a new job or going on vacation are certainly perceived to be happy occurrence but they too are changes also known as stress that require some adaptation. Wolff (1968) described stress as an inherent characteristic of life. He emphasized that different stressors should have different meanings for different individuals which might be related to his/her past experiences and personal characteristics.

This paper was an attempt to know the impact of stress on mental health of students. Just a physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong, mental fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a state of good mental health. When we are mentally healthy, we enjoy our life and environment, and the people in it. We can be creative, learn, try, new things, and take risks. We are better able to cope with difficult times in our personal and professional lives. We feel the sadness and anger that can come with the death of a loved one, a job loss or relationship problems and other difficult events, but in time, we are able to get on with and enjoy our lives once again. Nurturing our mental health can also help us combat or prevent the mental health problems that are sometimes associated with a chronic physical illness. This seminar also helps us to know about how stress influences our healthy relationships, good life choices, physical health and wellbeing. Stress is fact of life. No matter how much we might long for a stress-free existence, the fact is stress is actually necessary. It is how we respond the stress that can negatively affect our lives. When we are free of depression, anxiety, excessive stress and worry, addictions, and other psychological problems, we are more able to live our lives to the fullest.

Introduction

The word mental health as defined in Webster's dictionary refers to a state of emotional

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and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his/her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life. In order to have clear understanding of the concept of mental health, it is imperative to describe the words mental and health separately and relate them with one's experiences and situations. The word mental means 'of the mind', it describes an individual's thoughts, feelings, understanding about himself and the world around him. The word 'health' is generally described in terms of working order of body and mind. But when we talk of one's mental health, it means we are referring to the working order of the mind of an individual concerning to the problems that how he thinks, feels and behaves. The mental health problem is very crucial because it is related to the overall well-being of an individual, irrespective of one's status, age, gender, race or social background. With the pace of growth and development one of the biggest challenges a nation has to face is in dealing with health related problems of the countrymen. Ciarrochi and Anderson (2000) studied that emotional intelligence moderate the relationship between stress and mental health. The result indicates that emotional intelligence is a distinctive construct as well as being important in understanding the relationship between stress and mental health. Perl mutter and Nyquist (1990) studied the relationship between self-reported physical and mental health and intelligence performance across adulthood. The result indicates that both self-reported physical and mental health accounted for significant variance in intelligence performance particularly in older adults.

In recent times, the concept of Mental Health becomes more and more important and the World Health Organization just recently released a report on adolescence mental health, the age group to which students belong. According to the WHO, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization 2001). As it can be seen, the definition makes use of the formulation "stresses of life", wherefore it seems reasonable to conclude that the concepts of mental health and stress are linked to each other by definition. This conclusion is also supported by findings from the literature, stating that stress is associated with poorer mental health (Stead et. al, 2010 & Chan, 2009) and showing that students, who report stress also suffer from mental health problems (Associate Press, 2008). Mathews et al. (2004) showed that there exist relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health. Montes Berges and Augusto (2007) studies conducted with nurses or nursing students has shown that emotional intelligence is a skill that minimizes the negative stress consequences. Hierarchy regression analysis pointed out that clarity and emotional repair are predictors of social support, and emotional repair is the main predictor of mental health.

Mental health describes either a level of cognitive or emotional well-being or an absence of a mental disorder. A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization). WHO stresses that mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder. Mental health is the balance between all aspects of life. Kaur (1982) examined that intelligence neither correlates positively with mental health total nor with sub areas of mental health. But intelligence in combination with some of the personality factors best determined the mental health of adolescent girls. Sharma (1984) conducted

a study on the effects of social disadvantages on mental health and mental health of adolescents. The result indicates that significant differences in the IQs of advantaged and disadvantaged adolescents with regard to psychiatric morbidity. Dulewicz and Slashi (2003) examined the role emotional self-management such as stress, distress, morale and poor quality of working life in everyday life. They demonstrated that emotional intelligence was strongly correlated with both physical and psychological health.

Stress

The concept of stress has its origin in 1936 where it was defined as the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change (Selye). Stress can be defined as an organism's response to circumstances or events (stressors) that threaten the capability to adjust to those conditions (Gerrig, R. & Zimbardo, P., 2010). Speaking of stress, most of the people tend to think of it as being a negative thing, although there are two forms and different amounts of stress. The two forms of stress are called distress and eustress (Gerrig, R., Zimbardo, P., 2010), whereas the latter, eustress is a positive form and people are likely to experience it if an external event causes high arousal, for example a football game. On the contrary, distress is indeed that form of stress which has negative effects on wellbeing and health. Korotkov (2008) conducted a study on relationship between stress and health behavior. The result indicates the openness to experience; extroversion and neuroticism were found to moderate the stress to health behavior relationship. The result also revealed that conscientiousness was found to buffer the stress to distress connection. Wolff (1968) described stress as an inherent characteristic of life. He emphasized that different stressors should have different meanings for different individuals which might be related to his/her past experiences and personal characteristics. Cox (1978) and McGrath (1970) defined stress as the imbalance between the perceived demands placed on an individual and his/her perceived capability to deal with the demands. Delongie (1985) studied the relationship of everyday stress with mental health and wellbeing. The results indicate that those who received low emotional supports from family, friends and co-workers were about twice as likely to develop mental health problems as compared to those who received high emotional support.

Among the risks of stress, a difference has to be made between the direct and the indirect effects of stress. While direct effects concern physiological changes that is headache, pain, or weight changes which have an influence on the functioning of the immune system, the indirect impacts of stress on health are those which result from behavior as a consequence of stress (i.e. from less sleep, smoking, unhealthy nutrition (Morrison and Bennett, 2010) and that are of emotional or mental character (Aheme, 2001; Hicks & Miller, 2006, Bruce, 2009). Because direct/physiological impacts can be very individual and surpass our possibilities to measure them within this study, the present study focuses on the indirect or reportable impacts of stress

Stress is mind and body's response or reaction to a real or imagined threat, event or change. The threat, event or changes are commonly called stressors. Stressors can be internal (thoughts, beliefs, attitudes) or external (loss, tragedy, change). Eustress or positive stress occurs when your level of stress is high enough to motivate you to move into action to get things accomplished. Distress or negative stress occurs when your level of stress is either too high or too low and your body and/or mind begin to respond negatively to the stressors.

Stress is defined as any change that we have to adapt. This includes difficult life events (bereavement, illness) and positive ones. Getting a new job or going on vacation are certainly perceived to be happy occurrence, but they too, are changes also known as stress, that require some adaptation. Kaur (2014) conducted a study to see the impact of academic stress on mental health among school going adolescents. The result reveals that the significant differences exist in mental health of adolescent with regard to level of academic stress they experience. Further significant difference was also found in the mental health of students with respect to their gender in terms of high and low level of academic stress. Kapil and Alpana (2011) examined the impact of stress management techniques of adolescent's performance level. Results showed that girls preferred social support technique more as compared to positive attitude technique for improving the emotional intelligence, academic performance, whereas boys preferred positive attitude technique more than social support technique.

Reasons and Interventions for Students

Reasons

1. Physical/mental factor: Adolescents are mostly concerned about their physical appearances than about other aspects. Many of them are even dissatisfied with their physical appearances (Siegel and Lane, 1982). Wang and Ko (1999) pointed out that girls feel upset more easily than boys, mainly because of their concerns about physical appearances. Girls may perceive themselves as very ugly, feel that they are too fat, too short, too high, or dislike their hair color or skin color. Lan (2003) mentioned that some physiological symptoms such as headache were signals of a mental overload. Other signals included fatigue, depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction with certain interpersonal relations, change of the current sleeping habit, and a drastic gain/loss of body weight. Feng (1992) pointed out that setting high goals, being a perfectionist, and comparing the self with others, and self-degradation may all cause stress and result in depression.

2. Family factor: Families with constant conflicts are characterized by a lack of parent-child communication and in-depth understanding of each other's expectations (Liu and Chen 1997). Totalitarian parents seldom show their care about their children. The control or punishment they impose will only increase the psychological stress on their children (Liu and Chen, 1997).

3. School factor: Chiang (1995) proposed that school is one of the main sources of stress among adolescents. Such stress comes from too much homework, unsatisfactory academic performance, preparation for tests, lack of interest in a particular subject, and teacher's punishment. Generally, parents are very concerned about their children's academic achievement and moral behaviors. Parents expect their children not only to respect teachers and follow moral norms but also become elite in the future (Liu and Chen, 1997). The educationist Dewey once said "education is a pursuit of a perfect life". However, school teachers and parents in Taiwan usually use academic achievement as the sole criterion for evaluating a student's performance at school. This criterion causes double stress on adolescents. Stress from high expectations of teachers, parents, and self is usually an agony for students studying in schools (Cheng, 1999).

4. Relationship factor: Most adolescents are urgent to develop a relationship with the opposite sex. As there are no absolute ways for making friends with the opposite sex, many of them usually do not know what to do when in face of the opposite sex. Besides, adolescents

often suffer stress induced by “a sense of insecurity” when they are dating someone. They are worried that they may lose their dates and their parents or friends may have negative views of their dates. Therefore, developing a heterosexual relationship is a challenge and also a stressor for adolescents (Wang and Ko, 1999).

5. Social factor: With the progress of human civilization and increasing plurality of our society, people need to play more roles. In the workplace, people may be a subordinate, a supervisor, a boss, a colleague to other employees, a member of an organization or a leader; at home, people need to be the wife or husband to our spouse, mother or father to our children.

Interventions

1. Do not take things so personally: Part of what creates stress is thinking that what other people do is something that is being done to us or is a reflection of us or our actions.

2. Change your expectations: If you expect a co-worker to always be nice and they continue to be cranky, you will be disappointed when you expect others to do something even when you have evidence to suggest that the behavior is highly unlikely.

3. Express your needs: Deciding to take responsibility for meeting your own needs is liberating. Without this decision, you lose time and energy waiting for others to figure out what you need and how, expecting them to deliver. If you need to hear compliments, say so. It's up to you to get your own needs met and no one will know what they are better than you.

4. Don't make assumptions: Often we make assumptions about what others are thinking. Catch your assumptions before they come beliefs. Catch them before you take action on something you have assumed, but not verified. You will be better off learning you were wrong than fixing the wrong action you took as a result of you assumption.

5. Face your feelings: A favorite workplace mantra is checking your emotions at the door. The problem it creates is many never open the door to face their emotions even when they get home. Feelings that are stuffed create a ticking time bomb of emotions likely to come out at the most inopportune moment. Find a steam valve for early expression so you do not have to find time off to recover from a later explosion.

Conclusions

Stress is fact of life. No matter how much we might long for a stress-free existence, the fact is, stress is actually necessary. It is how we respond to the stress that can negatively affect our lives. When we are free of depression, anxiety, excessive stress, worry, addictions, and other psychological problems, we are more able to live our lives to the fullest. Stress is mind and body's response or reaction to a real or imagined threat, event or change. The threat, event or change is commonly called stressors. Therefore there are broadly four signs of stress which are physical signs of stress include, cognitive signs of stress, emotional signs of stress and behavioral signs of stress. There are various reasons of stress on mental health of students; the few reasons are physical/mental factor, family factor, school factor, relationship factor, social factor. So, therefore, the interventions to overcome the reasons which are: do not take things so personally, change your expectations, express your needs, don't make assumptions, face your feelings. Learning to effectively cope with stress can ease our bodies and our minds. Meditation and other relaxation methods, exercise, visualization are helpful techniques for reducing the negative impact of stress.

Stress can be beneficial in moderation that is because short episode of stress trigger chemicals that improve memory, increase energy levels and enhance alertness. Hence, it was suggested that parents should not overburdened the children and should not set over expectations in terms of excellence in academic pursuits beyond the capability and capacity of the child.

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