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Sanjeev Kumar
Department of Psychology,
CBLU Bhiwani, Haryana,
India

Umesh Kumar
Department of Psychology,
CBLU Bhiwani, Haryana,
India

A correlational study of self-esteem, stress and academic achievement among college students

Sanjeev Kumar and Umesh Kumar

Abstract

Stress and self-esteem are common issues that everyone has to cope with at some time in their lives and they could also affect other things going on in a persons' life. Stress is psychological condition often experienced by college students as, to some extent, being multidimensional variables. Among others are self-esteem is considered to have influences in explaining why college students experience stress. The objective of this study was to assess the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement and stress among the undergraduate college students. Total respondents were 70 undergraduate college students selected through purposive sampling from Government College Bhiwani (Haryana). Stress faced by students was assessed through Stress Scale by Dr. Vijaya Lakshmi and Dr. Shruti Narain (2014). Self-esteem was assessed through Self-esteem Inventory constructed and standardized by M.S. Prasad & G.P. Thakur (1977) and intermediate percentage was considered for academic achievement. Information was collected through the self-administered questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 20 software. Simple statistics measurement, percentage, means, correlation was used for the data analysis. Result of this study shows that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement significant at 0.05 level. There is a negative correlation of stress with self-esteem and academic achievement significant at 0.05 level.

Keywords: Stress, Self-esteem, Academic Achievement

Introduction

Self-esteem is generally used to describe a person's overall sense of self-worth and can involve a variety of beliefs about the self. According to Rosenberg, high self-esteem expresses the feeling that one is good enough and self-esteem is defined as a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self (Rosenberg & Pearlman, 1978) [16]. Also, self-esteem refers to the positive or negative way people feel about themselves as a whole, which is also often called global self-esteem or global self-worth. Global self-esteem is defined as the overall positive or negative attitude towards the self (Rosenberg, 1965). High global self-esteem has been found to be related to positive self-evaluations, characterized by having an accepting attitude towards one's self, and has been identified as a crucial factor in preventing stress and mental health problems such as depression (Avison & McAlpine, 1992). In contrast, low global self-esteem has been found to be associated with negative self-evaluations, characterized by self-doubts and self-rejection (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) [3] and has been shown to predict stress symptoms and ill-health (Birndorf, Ryan, Auinger, & Aten, 2005).

Stress is defined by Professor G. Chrousos as "the threat or perceived threat condition of homeostasis, which is established through a complex web of behavioral and physiological responses of the body to adapt" (Chrousos, 2009) and when persons feel that they cannot cope with the number of abilities and skills in environmental requirements, is experiencing stress" (Berjot & Gillet, 2011) [4]. In the term of stress we can attribute a negative (distress) and a positive dimension (eustress). According to Lazarus R.S. and Folkman S. the estimation of a stressful event and in continue the evaluation as a threat or not by the individual, are included in the psychological approach of stress. The person considers a stressful event as a threat, when his ability to deal with it, is assessed as less than the requirements of the event. Perceived stress is defined especially after having studied the interaction between the individual and the environment,

Correspondence
Sanjeev Kumar
Department of Psychology,
CBLU Bhiwani, Haryana,
India

psychological stress include the interpretation of the adequacy of management methods and based on the notion that stress results from the subjective assessment of the individual in his relation with the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) ^[13]. It also refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts of the individual to reduce the requirements of the stressful stimulus. Thus, stress on the one hand, is a defensive-balancing mechanism of the body to cope and survive in stressful stimuli but on the other hand, is differently perceived by individuals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) ^[13].

Academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university. School systems mostly define cognitive goals that either apply across multiple subject areas (e.g., critical thinking) or include the acquisition of knowledge and understanding in a specific intellectual domain (e.g., numeracy, literacy, science, history). Therefore, academic achievement should be considered to be a multifaceted construct that comprises different domains of learning. All criteria have in common that they represent intellectual endeavors and thus, more or less, mirror the intellectual capacity of a person. This article focuses on the explanation, determination, enhancement, and assessment of academic achievement as investigated by educational psychologists.

Self-esteem and academic achievement

Past research has shown that self-esteem and academic achievement correlated directly to a moderate degree (Wiggins and Schatz, 1994) ^[18]. Having one's academic achievement meet one's academic expectations and desires was a major support to most college students self-esteem. A high self-esteem had many positive effects and benefits, especially among college students.

Students who felt positive about themselves had fewer sleepless nights, succumbed less easily to pressures of conformity by peers, were less likely to use drugs and alcohol, were more persistent at difficult tasks, were happier and more sociable and tended to perform better, academically. On the other hand, college students with a low self-esteem tended to be unhappy and less sociable, were more likely to use drugs and alcohol and were more vulnerable to depression, which were all correlated with lower academic achievement. Honors students demonstrated higher academic self-esteem and competency. For them, this academic self-esteem was a motivational factor (Moeller, 1994). For many college students, their self-esteem was based or enforced by their academic success or achievements. Academic achievement was influenced by perceived competence, locus of control, autonomy and motivation (Wiest *et al.*, 1998). Students' self-evaluation was related to academic achievement, reflecting quite accurately their performance at school (Pullman & Allik, 2008).

Self-esteem and stress

Stress and self-esteem can be related because stress may worsen the symptoms of almost all medical and emotional conditions. So, if you are suffering from depression, mood disorders, or other conditions that result in low self-esteem, you may end up suffering more from stress and less able to manage day-to-day stresses. Zuckerman (1989) ^[22] proposed

that if the level of self-esteem is higher, it can protect one from being victim of stressful episodes; similarly, people with low levels of self-esteem can experience high stress within their surroundings. The extent and strength of an individual's social support system correlates strongly with their perceptions and experience of stress. People with adequate social support systems report lower stress levels than their less-connected peers. Since people with low self-esteem may also have poor social support systems, low levels of self-esteem could be correlated with a greater perceived level of stress.

Stress and academic achievement

Students are subjected to different kinds of stressors, such as the pressure of academics with an obligation to succeed, an uncertain future and difficulties of integrating into the system. The students also face social, emotional and physical and family problems which may affect their learning ability and academic performance (Fish & Nies 1996; Chew-Graham, Rogers, & Yassin 2003). Too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems, reduce students' self-esteem and may also impinge on students academic performance (Silver & Glickman 1990; Niemi & Vainiomaki 1999).

Kaplan & Sadock (2000) reported that an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability. Brown, Dowling & Torres (2009) stated that a state of emotional stress was reported to have a significant positive relationship with reported school performance. Felsten & Wilcox (1992) ^[9] found a significant negative correlation between the stress levels of college students and their academic performance.

Objective

The objective of the study is to find out correlation between self-esteem, stress and academic achievement of undergraduate college students.

Hypotheses

On the basis of objective of the study and review of literature following hypotheses are formulated

- Hypothesis 1:- There would be a positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement
- Hypothesis 2:- There would be a negative correlation between self-esteem and stress.
- Hypothesis 3:- There would a significant correlation between stress and academic achievement.

Method

Participants

For the present study, 70 undergraduate students were selected from Government collage Bhiwani (Haryana) through purposive sampling. Age range of participants was 19 to 23 years.

Measures

Stress Inventory

Stress faced by students was assessed through Stress Scale by Dr. Vijaya Lakshmi and Dr. Shruti Narain (2014). This is a 40 item measure to assess the stress among people within age group of 12 to 25 years. It has four different subscales: (a) Physical stress, (b) Frustration (c) Anxiety (d) Pressure. Responses are rated on a 2 point scale and range between Yes or No.

Self-esteem inventory

Constructed and standardized by M.S. Prasad & G.P. Thakur (1977). The inventory has two parts. Part one measures personally perceived self and part two measures socially perceived self. Of the thirty items, 17 are socially desirable and 13 are socially undesirable. Both parts of inventory have been included in the study.

Procedure

For the present research, primary data was obtained through purposive sampling method using questionnaires for each variable. Editing, scoring and coding were done manually. The data was then processed and analyzed using SPSS. Results obtained in the form of tables are discussed below.

Statistical analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 20 software. Simple statistics measurement, percentage, means, correlation was used for the data analysis.

Results and discussion

Table 1: Relationship between self- esteem and academic achievement

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	ρ
Self Esteem	70	4.64	9.74	.252*
Academic Achievement	70	70.13	9.92	

Results of table 1 show that there is a positive correlational between self-esteem and academic achievement significant at 0.05 level. Hence hypothesis 1 has been proved. The results revealed that those students who get higher grades tend to develop higher level of self-esteem. Additionally, the results supported the findings of Wiggins and Schatz (1994)^[18] who found that increases in self-esteem are positively correlated with increases in academic achievement. They exhibited that students' grade point averages boost when they acquired more points on a self-esteem questionnaire. Similarly, the other study demonstrated that experiencing success or failure consistently is extremely important as it affects one's self-esteem and self-concept (Kifer, 1973). In contradiction with our results, recent studies have shown that the association between these two variables was modest (Pullmann and Allikk, 2008; Nagar *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, an earlier meta-analysis indicated a modest relation of 0.08 between self-esteem and academic achievement (Valentine *et al.*, 2004).

Table 2: Relationship between self- esteem and stress

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	ρ
Self Esteem	70	4.64	9.74	-.202*
Stress	70	15.27	6.88	

Results of table 2 show that there is a negative significant correlation between self- esteem and stress, significant at 0.05 level. Hence the hypothesis 2 has been proved. Moreover, studies show that self-esteem is associated directly and indirectly to the development of depression. Specifically, low self-esteem combined with stress is risk factors for developing depression. Furthermore, self-esteem plays an important role in stress experienced by students. In particular, students with high self-esteem can efficiently manage stress and therefore have better academic performance. What is more, the self-esteem is related with

occupational stress, job performance and job satisfaction. The higher occupational stress workers have the lower self-esteem they have and thus have strong possibility for burnout. Finally, there are many stress management techniques that improve people's self-esteem for example yoga, meditation, humor, mindfulness and counselling. Therefore, we conclude that techniques of stress management can improve people's self-esteem, which can be as a buffer against psychological disorders plus improving both personal and professional quality of life.

Table 3: Correlation between stress and academic achievement

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	ρ
Stress	70	15.27	6.88	-.260*
Academic Achievement	70	70.13	9.92	

Results of table 3 shows that there is a negative correlational between stress and academic achievement which is significant at 0.05 level. According to third hypothesis, academic stress effects student's performance. Result found it significant because with the semester system, students have less time period but they are required to accomplish many modules and this leads to stress. It was also supported by the existing literature. A study by Safree, Yasin and Dzulkifli (2010) also indicated the same results. They found that depression, anxiety, and stress are negatively correlated with academic achievement. The higher the stress, the lower the academic achievement of students. The study found that the ability to manage stress was equally important. The way students perceive the stress is an important factor in its seriousness. Negative or excessive stress perception contributes to the students experiencing psychological and physical impairment (Murphy & Archer, 1996). Students who are able to handle their stress effectively perform much better than those who are unable to control their stress.

Conclusion

Positive self-esteem can be a double-edged sword in relation to academic stress. College students should get good support from parents, lecturers, as well as from other parties so that expectations of attaining high academic achievements generated from positive self-esteem do not trigger academic stress. However, it is also important to have positive self-esteem, considering that it can help students feel, psychologically, in the state of well-being so students will not experience academic stress. It could be concluded that school authorities especially counselors and teachers should be aware of the link between self-esteem and academic achievement in students. When the students understand that their failures are a result of effort rather than ability, they will probably exhibit a greater persistence to overcome their failures rather than developing an attitude of helplessness. Teachers must be trained about the strategies which are related to the self-esteem building and have to observe students and their interactions with peers carefully to meet the needs of them.

Additional research needs to be conducted to confirm these findings and to investigate whether they have any implications for working with students to improve their academic performance. Finally, practical research needs to be done to develop and assess programs for counselors, teachers and school administrators to use on an individual, in the classroom and on institutional level respectively.

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