Exploring the relationship between Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction among college students: the Indian context

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ABSTRACT

Background: The current study attempted to examine the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among college students in the Indian context and is based on prior research conducted on college students in Barbados.
Methodology: Sample comprised 50 undergraduate students who completed the following questionnaires: Perceived Stress Scale- 4 item version, Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and an adapted version of Chow's satisfaction with specific aspects of life scale. Data obtained from the participants were subjected to relevant statistical analyses.
Results: A significant negative correlation was obtained between perceived stress and life satisfaction (both generic and domain-specific). Findings obtained in the current study have been discussed in the light of existing literature.
Conclusion: The study has crucial implications for mental health professionals to design appropriate psychosocial interventions for the target population.

Key words: perceived stress, life satisfaction, students, mental health.

INTRODUCTION

College students are prone to experiencing higher levels of stress [1]. This is because they face multiple challenges during college life with respect to maintaining excellent academic record, increased academic responsibilities, making adjustments to the new environment [2-3]. When understanding the phenomenon of stress, it is also important to comprehend the concept of stressor. It is defined as anything "that which produces stress" [4]. Stressors impacting college students can be grouped into four categories: academic, financial, time or health related, and self-imposed [5-6].

Stressful circumstances have been found to be linked with psychological disturbances among this target group on account of undesirability associated with the change [7]. Perceived stress, which reflects appraisal of these stressful circumstances [8], has been found to be a significant associate of perceived health and mental well-being in some studies [9-10]. In a research conducted on university-going students in Barbados, researchers found an inverse association between perceived stress and life satisfaction [11], an important aspect of well-being [12]. Additionally, they found that students experienced dissatisfaction on account of factors such as on-campus facilities, financial security, job situation, and quality of academic instruction.

The current study looks into the concept of perceived stress among college students and its association with life satisfaction. Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that:

1. Perceived stress will demonstrate a significant negative correlation with overall life satisfaction.
2. Perceived stress will demonstrate a significant negative correlation with domain-specific life satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Description

Data were collected from 50 undergraduate students from different colleges in the metropolitan city of Mumbai, whose average age was 19.92 years (SD=1.16). The sample consisted of 6 males (12.0%) and 43 females (86.0%); gender of one participant was unknown. With respect to religion, the break-up was as follows: Hindus (66.0%), Muslims (22.0%), Jains (6.0%), and Christians (6.0%). With respect to annual family income (in INR), the break-up was as follows: below or equal to 2,00,000 (14.0%), 2,00,001 to 5,00,000 (22.0%), 5,00,001 to 8,00,000 (14.0%), 8,00,001 to 12,00,000 (16.0%) and above 12,00,000 (34.0%).

Measures

This section focuses on measures used in the current study to assess perceived stress and life satisfaction.
1. Demographic sheet involved responding about age, gender, religion, and annual family income.
2. Perceived stress was evaluated using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4) [13], a 4-item questionnaire which requires respondents to assess "the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful" [13]. Participants are required to indicate the frequency of one's feelings and thoughts in the last month (0=Never to 4=very often) on a 5-point Likert scale. The scores range from 0-16 with higher scores indicating higher levels of stress. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha value of .806 was obtained for this scale.
3. Life satisfaction was measured using Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) [14], a generic measure of life satisfaction, consists of 5 items which are expected to be responded on a 7-point rating scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 7= Strongly Agree). The scores range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha value of .925 was obtained for this scale.
4. Additionally, adapted version of Chow's (2005) Satisfaction with Specific Aspects of Life (SSAL) [15] was used to measure domain-specific life satisfaction. The scores range from 19 to 95, with higher scores indicating higher levels of domain-specific life satisfaction. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.946 was obtained for this scale.

The data was collected online from the undergraduate students after they indicated their approval to participate in the study.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

SPSS 16.0 was used to enter and code raw data. Basic descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were calculated for all the relevant variables. The relationships between these variables were examined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, for each of the relevant variables have been represented in Table 1. The relationships between PSS, SWLS, and SSAL, as measured using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, have been represented in Table 2. From this table, it can be inferred that PSS demonstrated a significant negative relationship with both SWLS ($r = -0.85$, $p < 0.01$) and SSAL ($r = -0.743$, $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, SWLS and SSAL were found to demonstrate a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.863$, $p < 0.01$). The obtained findings are consistent with research findings, which indicate an inverse correlation between perceived stress and life satisfaction [11]. The study is nevertheless not without its own share of limitations. The sample size was small, making it difficult to generalize the

obtained results to the larger population. Additionally, the study relied on the self-report questionnaires, which could have triggered a social desirability bias [16]. Future research can include a larger sample size and adopt a regression framework to understand the dynamics of the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Nevertheless, the study lays down crucial implications for mental health professionals to design appropriate mental health interventions for the target population.

The students in this sample were relatively young undergraduates, who are preparing to go into the job market. Thus, the need to secure a job would be foremost in the minds of the students. In addition, these findings can be useful to educators and campus administrators by sensitizing them to ways to improve student life and develop coping strategies for stress. In particular, campus administrators will need to pay more attention to the areas where students were most dissatisfied.

These areas included campus facilities and instructors' quality of teaching, which can influence students' satisfaction with life at the university. It may be argued that inadequate facilities and poor teaching can lead to low levels of life satisfaction at the campus, which can negatively impact on students' academic performance. Thus, university administrators need to look at ways to improve campus facilities and methods of teaching. For example, there can be greater use of electronic computer-assisted teaching and the creation of more comfortable classrooms. These findings are even more important for the development of education in small developing countries. We see that these countries have to struggle with limited resources to meet the needs of their constituents, and this problem can affect the delivery of quality education.

Given the increased number of students that are on campus, it is important to examine how this increase impacts on students' life satisfaction at this university. This is imperative, as an increase of students each semester creates pressure on existing facilities, both the physical plant and the human resource component which consists of academic and non-academic staff. This pressure is inevitably transferred to the student population

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics: Mean and Standard Deviation

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
PSS	5.58	3.70
SWLS	24.90	8.16
SSAL	71.20	15.58

PSS= Perceived Stress, SWLS= Satisfaction with Life, SSAL= Satisfaction with Specific Aspects of Life

Table 2 – Overall Correlations between Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction

	SWLS	SSAL
PSS	- 0.85**	- 0.743**
SWLS		0.863**
SSAL		

(** $p < 0.01$ significant)

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