

Importance of Resilience through Leisure Satisfaction to overcome Academic Stress

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Abstract : Academic concerns are repeatedly reported to be one of the most common sources of stress amongst college students. It is harming their mental health and increasing the incidence of suicides among the youth. Though previous research has devised ways to reduce stress, they mostly focus on time management and social support.

The present study was conducted to devise innovative ways of reducing academic stress and increasing levels of resilience. The sample comprised 608 female undergraduate students from University of Delhi. A mixed methodology was employed. Qualitative data was collected by asking an open-ended question from all the participants, in which they were asked to describe the most stressful event(s) of their lives in the previous 6 months. For quantitative data, two standardised tools were used: to assess the level of stress, Perceived Stress Scale and to measure the resilience among the participants, Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale. Various leisure satisfiers were identified which were found to be negatively correlated with levels of academic stress and were positively correlated with academic satisfaction. By employing Analysis of Variance, the effectiveness of leisure satisfaction to reduce stress and increase resilience was assessed. The benefits of these various leisure satisfiers among undergraduates have been elaborated in the paper.

Keywords: Resilience, adolescence, academic stress, social support

Introduction

Academic problems have been repeatedly reported to be one of the most common sources of stress for college students (Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987; Frazier and Schauben, 1994; Ross et al., 1999; Garrett, 2001; Phinney and Haas, 2003). Lately, a study of 500 youths from five universities in NCR, including Delhi University and JNU, has found that academics-related anxiety has become major concerns among students today. Nearly 17.8% of the participants have had thoughts about self-harm and suicide, while an alarming 64.6% have experienced depression symptoms. At least 20% of the respondents have indulged in alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse as well (Gohain, 2015).

There is an impending need to promote life skills among college students for coping with stressful life events and prevention of suicide (Gohain, 2015). Research has revealed that the methods to reduce stress by students often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits (Blake & Vandiver, 1988; Mattlin, Wethington, & Kessler, 1990). Leisure satisfaction is defined as the positive feeling of contentment one perceives as a result of meeting personal needs through leisure activities (Seigenthaler, 1997).

Although relationships among some leisure domains and perceived stress have been studied in previous researches, however, relationships



between leisure satisfaction and academic stress of college students have not been addressed directly. The only scientific research that specifically related leisure satisfaction to academic stress was that of Ragheb and McKinney (1993), who established a negative association between academic stress and leisure satisfaction.

In the present study, the effectiveness of leisure satisfaction on reducing stress and increasing resilience would be assessed in terms of pursuing one's passion, aspiring to be like a role model and spending time on social networking applications.

Leisure Satisfiers: Passion, Role Model and Social media applications

Passion is a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one likes (or even loves), finds important, and in which one invests time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003). Research has revealed various benefits of inculcating passion. For instance, in a study with elderly individuals, Rousseau and Vallerand (2003) showed that passion positively predicted positive indices of psychological well-being (life satisfaction, meaning in life, and vitality) but negatively predicted negative indices (anxiety and depression). Research with young adults and teenagers using different measures of psychological well-being has yielded similar findings. Passion is positively related to life satisfaction and vitality (Vallerand et al., 2007, Studies 1 and 2; Vallerand et al., 2008, Study 2).

Role models, according to Shapiro, Haseltine & Rowe (1978) are individuals whose behaviours, styles and attributes are emulated by others. Murrell and Zagenczyk (2006) offer a more intricate definition of a role model and define one as a "cognitive construction based on the attributes of people in social roles that an individual perceives to be similar to in terms of attitudes, behaviours, goals, or status position to him or herself to some extent and desires to increase perceived similarity by emulating those attributes." The role models' behaviours are examined for guidance as to what is appropriate for success, for the level aspired to by the user, and relevance for the particular culture and context

within which users are building their identity (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2003). Role models have been shown as a way to inculcate professional values, attitudes, and behaviours in students and young professionals (Paice et al., 2005).

Social media applications are gaining immense popularity. It seems that the human preference for novelty first described by Lord Kames (Home, 1823) plays into the attractiveness of social media. Previous research has had mix findings in terms of the consequences of social media on individual and society. However, in the present research the focus is on the positive impact of these applications for undergraduate students.

Method

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in the present exploratory study. Focus group discussion was carried among the researchers, based on which common leisure satisfiers among undergraduate girls were extracted. On this basis, demographic profile was developed to be administered on the participants.

Two standardised tools were also used to assess the level of Stress and Resilience among the participants. To collect qualitative data, an open ended question was asked from the entire sample, asking them to describe the most stressful events of their life in past 6 months. Quantitative data was analysed by employing descriptive and inferential statistics and content analysis was carried out for interpreting the qualitative data.

Tools Used

Demographic Profile: It comprised of quantitative questions on perceived satisfaction with academic performance; **Passion:** its presence, type, extent of time devoted in its pursuance; **Role Model:** its presence, type, extent to which one wants to become like him/her, extent to which it is propagated amongst others and **Social media applications:** types, extent of active usage in terms of updates, followers, friends and so on.

The Perceived Stress Scale: The Perceived Stress Scale is a self-report Visual Analog Scale (VAS), a global measure of perceived stress (Hill, Aldag, Chatterton, & Zinaman, 2005, p. 681). The VAS is



a unidimensional instrument quantifying intensity of stress. A horizontal line 100 millimetres long with anchors at either end (none, extreme) is used where scores are recorded to the nearest millimetre. Revill, Robinson, Rosen, and Hogg (1976) reported test-retest reliability ranges from .95 to .99 for most visual analog scales.

Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor and Davidson 2003): The CD-RISC is a 25-item scale that measures the ability to cope with stress and adversity. Respondents rate items on a scale from 0 ("not true at all") to 4 ("true nearly all the time"). The reliability coefficient in the Indian context of the CD-RISC is 0.89. The internal consistency alpha values of the 4 factors found based on the factor analysis done in the Indian context are: $\alpha=0.80$ for factor 1, $\alpha=0.75$ for factor 2, $\alpha=0.74$ for factor 3 and $\alpha=0.69$ for factor 4. Furthermore, all factors are significantly highly correlated with each other and with total resilience score (Singh, K. & Yu, X, 2010). The scale comprises of four factors/dimensions: Hardiness, Resourcefulness, Purpose and Optimism.

Sample: The sample comprised of 608 undergraduate female students from a women's college, University of Delhi. They were selected using random sampling, incorporating 20% of students from each course.

Results and Discussion:

Various stressors related to academics were expressed by the participants while responding to the open ended question on the most stressful events of past six months. Content analysis displayed various themes such as academic pressure and examination, difficulties with time management, uncertainty of career, admission to higher education institutes, internal assessment, assignment overload and so on (Table 1).

Further the impact of perceived satisfaction with academic performance on the students' psyche was assessed through employing ANOVA. It was found that the participants who were not satisfied with their academic performance were significantly higher on levels of stress, were suffering from low levels of resilience as they were low on all the four dimensions of resilience in comparison to the ones

who reported to be satisfied with one's academic performance (Table 3).

The leisure satisfiers which were found significantly and positively correlated with academic performance as well as perceived satisfaction were use of social media, pursuing passion and following a role model (Table 2).

The participants using social media applications such as LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Whatsapp and so on were found to be higher on overall resilience and its three dimensions (Table 3). The qualitative data analysis through content analysis was separately done for the two groups of participants; first, those who use these applications and second, those who do not use them.

The ones who were not using these applications were commonly facing stressors such as loneliness, lack of confidence, lack of social support, burdened by expectations, homesickness for the ones staying away from home (Table 1). Observation of these themes somehow reveals a lack of social contact for the ones who are not using these applications. Previous research has provided evidence that strong, intimate social relationships online tend to be also strong, intimate social relationships offline (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Dutton, Helsper, and Gerber, 2009; Hampton, 2009). Research has also found that people who tend to communicate more online also tend to do so offline (Quan-Haase, 2008; Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). However, it was also observed that the ones who were overly active (more than an hour a day) on these applications were the ones who reported to be lacking a passion in life, having problems managing time and facing multiple real life issues which they seem to be ignoring by being active in the virtual world (Table 1).

Another leisure satisfier that has been found to be promoting resilience is pursuing a passion in life. The common passions revealed by the participants were dancing (13%), music (11%), travelling (10%), reading and writing (10%), holding leadership positions (9%), creative endeavours (6%) and the rest were interested in others such as sports and photography. It was found through

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analysis of variance that the ones having a passion were significantly higher on overall resilience as well as its dimensions of optimism and resourcefulness (Table 3). Passion holders might be more optimistic towards life as they are indulging into an activity which they admire, making them view world as a just place allowing one to explore one's talent. Also they might appear more resourceful as they are investing their time and energy in reaching a passionate goal. Previous research on passion does reveal that passion can positively affect a number of outcomes such as flow and positive emotions, psychological well-being, physical health, relationships, and performance (Vallerand, 2010).

Along with social media applications and passion, following a role model also emerged as a leisure satisfier. The common role models for the participants were parents, intellectuals, media celebrities, political leaders, social activists, teachers, siblings, other family members. Using analysis of variance, it was found that the ones having a role model were higher on overall resilience and all its four dimensions (Table 3). Another interesting finding was that the ones who had socially revealed following the role model were higher on overall resilience and its dimension of hardiness, resourcefulness and optimism. It could be because they might believe to be viewed as competent and focussed.

Conclusion and Implications

Overall, the findings of the present study provide an insight about the causes of growing academic stress among undergraduates and more importantly the ways of reducing it. It has emerged that various leisure satisfiers can help reduce stress and increase the level of resilience among students. Few benefitting leisure satisfiers that surfaced in the present study were optimal usage (an hour a day) of social media, pursuing a passion and following a role model. Future research can study the impact of other leisure satisfiers such as writing blogs, exercising, creating/inventing/discovering and so on.

Tables

Table 1: Themes that emerged through content analysis of qualitative data based on the open ended question on most common stressors.

Common Academic Stressors
Academic pressure and examinations (50%)
Time management (19%)
Admissions to higher educational institutions (11%)
Uncertainty of career (11%)
Internal assessment (2.8%)
Assignment/Practical work overload (2.7%)
Board exams/ Results (2.6%)
Course structure/CBCS (.80%)
Lack of interest in studies/course (.70%)
Self-expectations and fear of failure (.50%)
Preparing for entrance exams (.49%)
Common Stressors Among Those Not Using Social Media
Loneliness (24.6%)
Lack of confidence (7.9%)
Lack of social support (17.2%)
Burden of expectations (28.5%)
Homesickness (14.5%)
Common Stressors Among High (more Than 1 Hour/day) Social Media Users
Lack of passion in life (17.6%)
Time management problem (11.6%)
Real life difficulties (25.3%)



Table 2: Correlations of Academics (performance and perceived satisfaction) with various Leisure Satisfiers

Variables	Use of social media	Pursuing a passion	Following a role model	Extent to which one is willing to become like the role model
Aggregate in Academics	.112**	.058*	.030	.007
Perceived Academic Satisfaction	.128**	.000	.117**	.081*

*.05 level of significance

**.01 level of significance

Table 3: F values depicting differences between participants in the level of stress, resilience and its 4 dimensions based on variables such as academic performance, perceived academic satisfaction, use of social media, pursuing a passion, following a role model and socially revealing about the role model

Variables	F values						
	Stress	Hardiness	Optimism	Resourcefulness	Purpose	Total resilience	
Academic performance	1.323	1.157	1.048	1.666	1.809	1.846	
Perceived Academic satisfaction	5.439**	3.352**	4.936**	4.143**	2.388*	5.112**	
Leisure satisfiers							
1	Use of social media	3.616	5.355*	5.155*	4.295*	3.655	3.924*
2	Pursuing a passion	0.133	1.937	2.937*	4.831**	1.304	3.420*
3	Following a role model	1.617	4.097**	3.524*	5.513**	3.199*	5.826**
	Socially revealing the role model	0.552	3.966**	4.813**	4.272**	3.361*	5.904**

*.05 level of significance

**.01 level of significance



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