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Perturbations discerned among undergraduate and post graduate students: A retrospection

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Abstract

The prime concern of the current research article is to shed light on the quarters that concerns the problems faced by the Undergraduate and Post Graduate students, pertaining to age group of late adolescence. Nevertheless, considering the age group (19-22 years) students are found to be extremely susceptible to various and psychological problems which becomes constraints in their normal living. Various environmental and psychological stimulants trigger adverse emotional fallouts, eventually disturbing normal well-being. Research instances on serious issues of self-acceptance and self-rejection as well as the fear and fondness of acceptance and rejection by others. Shape up mental health status among the late adolescents. Research outcomes have shown cases of indulgence into faulty peer mingling and anti-social group affiliations. Sequentially, non-conformity to societal norms becomes an inevitable behavioural trait among students. Faulty selection of peer group, weak family ties, academic insecurities and virtual world of mass media often make minds more cumbersome to mental health depreciation. Therefore, precisely a retrospective approach have been undertaken to re-look at the studies conducted by researchers who endeavoured to diagnose the escalating factors that triggered mental/ psychological discomforts among students, especially studying at the tertiary level of education.

Keywords: Psychological constraints, vulnerabilities, resilience, students

Introduction

Disturbances or perturbations either intrinsic or extrinsic sources were found to be unmanageable and uncontrollable by students who generally fall within the purview of late adolescence. The prolonged mental uneasiness found among the students pursuing higher studies was found to create chronic tension which gradually metamorphoses into psychological ailments. Intrinsic or extrinsic disturbances catalysed weak mental health conditions among students. It was found that lack of mental resiliency to cope with the sources of disturbances caused severe poor psychosomatic changes among students. On the contrary, good mental resilience exhibited good and positive reactivity to stressful life events (Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti and Wallace, 2004) [26]. The transition from high school to college life and further higher studies was found to create distress among students. The students were found to have immense adjustment problems with the new campus environment (Gerdes and Mallinckrodt, 1994) [9]. Their emotions seemed to be more vulnerable and prone towards quick fragility. Various environmental and psychological stimulants trigger adverse fallouts, eventually disturbing normal well-being. The psychological vulnerabilities and weak mental resiliency to combat adverse situations often take toll on a prosperous living. Psychological vulnerabilities was defined as “A pattern of cognitive beliefs reflecting a dependence on achievement or external sources of affirmation for one’s sense of self-worth” (Sinclair and Wallston, 1999) [31, 32, 33]. At this late adolescence stage of development, the emotional sensitivities and vulnerabilities are found to be at its peak. Emotions play very dominant role. Emotional insurgencies are quite common. Tumultuous inter-personal relations with ‘significant others’ were quite probable. It was found out that psychological vulnerability or helplessness was high among those individuals who had less mental resiliency. The same individuals displayed mal-adaptive behaviour with familial and societal members. A negative relation between psychological vulnerability and adaptive constructs among students pursuing higher education (S. Satici, 2016; S. Satici and Uysal, 2016; S. Satici, Uysal, Yilmaz, and Deniz, 2015) [36, 37] and positively correlated with negative health outcomes (Akin, 2014).

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Research instances on serious issues of self-acceptance and self-rejection as well as the fear and fondness of acceptance and rejection by others. Certain salient features of psychological vulnerabilities were studied by Sinclair and Wallston (1999, 2010) [31, 32, 33]. Personal dispositions comprised on total dependencies on others; dependence on approval from others negative thoughts about one's own inner attributes; and low self-esteem. Research outcomes have shown cases of indulgence into faulty peer mingling and anti-social group affiliations. Sequentially, non-conformity to societal norms becomes an inevitable behavioural trait among students (Wallston, 1999) [31, 32, 33]. Traces of psychopathological conditions were found to prevail among students with disruptive lifestyle. Ahern *et al.* (2006) observed that students with low mental resiliency and high psychological vulnerabilities had high risky sexual behaviour; eating disorder; drug usage. Besides, low social functioning and poor mental health (Olsson *et al.*, 2003) [24, 25]. Since, emotions seem to play the mainspring of impulsive actions. Impulsive action entails detrimental consequences. Faulty selection of peer group, weak family ties, academic insecurities and virtual world of mass media often make mind more cumbersome to mental health depreciation. Students are often found to have disruptive mental construct due to addictive behaviour. Thought distortion, unrealistic approach towards life and seclusion from the real world also takes place

Psychological Vulnerabilities

Psychological vulnerabilities could be explained as the helplessness of the mind to certain life situations. The mind is unable to cope up with certain strenuous life events, persons or objects around individuals.

'Self' as a psychological constraint

Psychological constraints are often found to stem from the concept of 'self' one carries at this stage of life. In a research conducted by Zhang, Zhang and Wen (2010) the concept of 'Self' is a belief. It is multi-layered. Multi-faceted cognitive faculties work in order to establish a self-concept. Moreover, the 'self' is highly related to the surrounding. In the research finding, however, Zhang established that fact that university students are more mature at having a better concept of self rather than the undergraduate students. With better development of self-criticism the concept of 'self' evolves better among students. Therefore, it could be reflected back to what Franken (1994) [7] had rightly justified as self-concept. According to the researcher, "People who have good self-esteem have a clearly differentiated self-concept. When people know themselves they can maximize outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do". However, the various stresses are faced by students which are sometimes self-induced. The sense of self-appraisal is found to be lacking. At this stage of adolescence, individuals generally formed outer-self-awareness (Bayne *et al.*, 2008) [4]. One is more cautious about own appearance, manners and actions. Presence of inner fluid self-awareness such as sensations, intuitions, thoughts, feelings, emotions, wishes, fantasies, wants and intentions are more or less present but formation of more stable inner awareness like values, attitude, motives and needs needed greater attention. Thwarted behaviour from others was found to hamper self-image. It was found out by Kessler (2005) [17, 18] that panic disorders or agoraphobia generally had its onset from the period of adolescence. Social phobia was found to be strongly prevalent among college students (Kugu, 2004). It was concluded by

Wells and Clark (1997) that as per the emotive and cognitive model, people with social phobia tended to fear social performances and negative evaluation by others. Often college and university students were found to harbour anxious thoughts about their acceptability by others. Social anxiety was found to exist among college students by Villiers (2009). In fact, a negative correlation was found between social anxiety and perfectionism. The researcher also demonstrated a strong relation between perfectionism and psychopathology among students. Individuals who wanted to be perfect had a high sense of self-criticism Frost, Marten, Lahart and Rosenblate, 1990). Being the best in view of others often was found to create psychological distress among students pertaining to the age group of 19-24 years.

Effect of Peer group affiliation

Entailing the previous study outcome, peer groups played a substantive role on shaping mental construct among students. According to Alexander, Astin (1993) [1], "Peers are a collection of individuals with whom the individual identifies and affiliates and from whom the individual seeks acceptance or approval". The definition expressed two distinct features namely, connection and acceptance. Rejection by peer group member brought psychological distress among students. Constructive relation with peers was found to produce better mental health among students. High academic performance was found among college students who seemed to share better bond with their peer. Interpersonal exchange of good value, emotion and feelings among peers helped in positive wellbeing (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser and Davis-Kean, 2006) [42]. However, rejection from peer group was found to create adverse effect on psychological wellbeing. Peer influence was found to be one of the most robust influencers in psychological damage. Relation between risky sexual behaviour and peer influence among adolescents was studied by Potard, Rusch and Courtois (2008) [27]. Predominance of risky sexual behaviour during the period of adolescence was found to be a result of social influence especially peers played the pivotal role. The aftermath of sexual act of indulgences was often found to produce emotional disturbances and moral conflicts among students. Besides, drug chase and indulgences into risky practice of drug intake was studied by Ross *et al.* (2004) [29]. Peer encouragement of intake of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) was found to be highly related to depression and anxiety among college students. The study showcased almost 84 percent of students to have psychological problems due to faulty social/peer mingling and AOD usage. Suicidal ideation also found to prevail among the students pursuing graduation degree.

Sabotaging effect of technology on realistic existence

Even though Iordache and Lamanauskas (2013) [12] applauded social networking websites for playing an integrating role in socializing, Rotaru (2014) [30] contradicted this view. As per the researcher people have isolated themselves. There is a dearth of establishment of face to face relationship with each other. Valkenburg and Peter (2011) [40] found out that college students were badly affected by virtual environment produced by technology. Sanyal, Fernades and Vundi (2017) opined from their study outcome that virtual socialisers exhibited behavioural traits of narcissism. Students pertaining to the age group of late adolescence were found to be affected by an exaggerated sense of grandiose, a sense of entitlement, lacked empathy and heightened egotism. Vanity was found to prevail

strongly in the college students who were regular social site users. College students were found to lack realistic views on life. Moreover, the imagined virtual world gave rise to feelings of superiority, exhibitionism and exploitativeness. Unrealistic approach towards life was found to create psychological ailments among college students. Ross *et al.* (2009) found social network user students to have traces of neuroticism among them.

Emotional Inadequacies

Emotional intelligence was found to be comparatively low among students pursuing higher education where parental thwarting was found to exist. The students with better parental-child communications were found to handle stressful life situation in more deft way (Goleman, 1995) [8]. Such students displayed high emotional intelligence and adjustment capacities. College students with low social adjustment and emotional disturbances were found to suffer from anxiety disorder. Leta (2001) [19] found out that pangs of anxiety among college students revolved mostly around difficulty in understanding new subjects, new peer, roommates, lack of sense of identity, cultural shock, and relationship problems in maintain stable interpersonal relation with others. It was found that chronic anxiety had its detrimental effect on mental health among students. Mental strength for facing life-challenges was found to be lowest among such students. Academic performance was greatly disturbed by anxieties (Luigi, Francesca, Maria, Eleonora, Valentina and Benedetto, 2007; McCraty, 2007) [21]. Psychological problems stemmed from mental anxiety which was found to be produced due to poor teacher-pupil relation. A research showed negative correlation between teachers' behaviour towards students and success in overcoming personal vulnerabilities and environmental adversities/hazards. Caring teachers were found to influence students' mental status. Good empathetic teachers helped students to gather mental strength to fight adverse situations in life and vice versa (Wang, Haertel and Walberg, 1994) [41]. Students who lacked support from teachers and parents or any authority figure were found to be psychologically vulnerable.

Resiliency

Various discussions on mental resilience were held and dispensed by various researchers and psychologists. In lay man's word the term resilience could be simply described as the ability to bounce back from a stressful situation or life event. It was Joseph (1994) [13] who explained that the term resilience has its origin in Latin which meant 'pliant or elastic quality of a substance' (Joseph, 1994). However, over the time several researches defined the term in multifarious and modified ways. In the following years, 'resilience' was defined as "The process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event" (Richardson, 1996) [28]. Further, modification of the term was changed as per the changing time; human life; life demands and nonetheless revolutionised research in the field of human psychology. Luther and Cicchetti, (2000) [20] explained 'Resilience' in the context of a two dimensional construct which concerned the exposure of adversity and the positive adjustment outcomes of that particular adversity. Resilience was also seen as a dynamic process that could convert any life event into successful adaption to adversities (Olsson *et al.*, 2003) [24, 25]. A very keen observation was expressed by Wilks (2008).

According to the researcher competency skills, familial support, good peer influence contributed positively to the construction of good mental resiliency among college undergraduates. In previous researches showed that poor mental resiliency. Hartley (2014) examined that poor mental resiliency was strongly related to interpersonal and intrapersonal disruptive relations with others. In fact the students, who had poor ability to be resilient about adversities in daily life, score low grade point average (GPA) in academics. Mental health status was also found to be at an alarming state of debilitation.

However, mental resilience was found to get strengthened with various tools and strategies. Several researchers had worked on the amplification of good mental health or better mental resiliency. With the intervention of Positive psychology, which was targeted to balance the positive aspects of human life, in fact, the sole attempt was to generate feelings of positive behaviour, positive emotions happiness and feeling of fulfilment (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon and King, 2001) [34]. Among the several studies, one study conducted by Wong (2010), outlined that the four pillars found in positive psychology. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) [34] positive psychology emphasised on three major areas- (i) Positive subjective states (ii) positive individual traits and (iii) positive institutions. Mental resiliency formed better in the individuals who had nurtured positive emotions; maintained inner values and esteemed courage, wisdom and determination and; had a good family environment and work atmosphere. Thus, targeting towards a healthy and 'Good life' (Compton and Hoffman, 2013) [6].

High mental resiliency was found among individuals who were religious people (Myers, 2008). Following the same Wolin, *et al.* (2009) [44] also found out religion and spirituality played a vital role in booting good mental health. However, a contradictory study outcome by Lower (2014) showed negative correlation between mental resilience and religiosity/spirituality.

Hjemdal *et al.* (2006) [10] opined that resiliency was a personality trait. According to the researcher's vivid specification about Big Five personality factors of resiliency, person's resilient personality would have the qualities of emotional stability; extraversion, openness and agreeableness and consciousness. Individuals with high mental reliance were found to have positively social orientation.

Parental support was found to build excellent mental resiliency among students. The transition period from college to university often was found to create stress among the university freshmen. However, parental support and encouragement was found to generate resiliency mechanism in students (Tusaie, Puskar, & Sereika, 2007) [39]. High mental resiliency among university students helped them function independently and handle academics as well as environmental hazards with greater efficiency and skill (Soenens *et al.*, 2007) [35].

Conclusion

In the opinion of Alva (1991) a mentally resilient individual, especially students would be characterised by personality traits a - (a) feel encouraged and prepared to go to college, (b) enjoy coming to educational institutions/ colleges / universities and being involved in high school activities, (c) experience fewer conflicts and intergroup relations with other students, and (d) experience fewer family conflicts and difficulties". However, with changing global scenarios and

high resource demands, ever changing needs of people definitions of mental resiliency has undergone various changes. With increasing demands negative emotional outcomes are found to be quite inevitable. Even though, helpful interventions of various psychological therapies are getting implemented to cure mental bruises of the victims of psychological vulnerabilities, human lives are becoming more susceptible to mental illness and emotional helplessness. Students are the worst hit casualties. As Adler, A. (1912), in his famous work, 'About the Nervous Personality' opined that encouragement as the most effective tool to increase an individual's confidence level. Courage could be instilled in the hearts of the most discouraged. Therefore, it could be stated that psychological vulnerabilities occurring from environmental threats or even sometimes self-induced, could be treated by solely by support, encouragement and deliverance of hopefulness to the students by the most significant quarters in their lives i.e. by parents, teachers and peers. Society at large can change, if the students, who constitutes to be the future of any nation, can grow and evolve with least vulnerabilities and best mental health.

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