

Positive Well Being as a Catalyst for Major Stressful Life Events in College Life

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Abstract:

Life event is a major change in a person's circumstances that affects or effects interpersonal relationship and leisure activities. This study focuses on major stressful life events of college students like parental issues, relationship issues, self-awareness, anxiety etc. which majorly affects coping skills, hardly change, not able to challenge and face risk and therefore fail to bring positive wellbeing.

The researcher has taken data's from 2012 Jan to October 2015 of engineering college students of age group 18 to 22 yrs. with low socio economic status. And identified most frequently appeared issues. Being a quantitative research major case study is taken to show change in stress with balance and coping mechanism through strength focused strategy, triple column technique and three blessing, etc. from the school of positive psychology counseling and CBT.

I. INTRODUCTION

Encyclopedia.com (Jang & Haley, 2002)^[1] defines Life Events as discrete experiences that disrupt individuals' usual activities, causing a substantial change and readjustment. Examples of life events include marriage, divorce, illness or injury, and life changing or losing a job. In the literature on Stress, life events can be considered as one type of stressors, along with chronic strain. It seems today's college student's experience more complex problems and far more stress than previous decades and the number keep increasing. The common stressors in college life include family issues, low self-esteem, greater academic demands, communication issue, anxiety, making decision, peer pressure, self-identity, etc. (Ross, June 99)^[2]. When stress is perceived excessively, students experience physical and psychological problems that affect their wellbeing. One of the major stressful life events affecting college life and creating turmoil in their college life is family issues such as financial burden, parental conflict, strict parents, blaming parents, protective parent, single parent, etc. Family plays a major role in student's wellbeing. Academic Success begins at home. (C. Kim, 2008)^[3]. When there is discrepancy in family, students are stuck with emotional problems like feeling inferior to others, not able to think properly, worrying too much, feeling life is not worth living, feeling anxious for any test or seminar or any presentation without any apparent reason even though they have prepared well. Also students face difficulty in studies, adjusting to peer, anger towards others, anxiety towards exams and lack of coping skills.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To identify major stressful life events affecting college life and find the frequent variable that causes distress. Thus bringing a qualitative case study to explore, describe and examine the most common attribute that affects their wellbeing through CBT and Positive Psychology.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stress is any situation that evokes negative thoughts and feeling in a person. Stressful life events can be appraised by individual as Challenging or Threatening (Lazarus, 1966)^[4]

IV. WHY COLLEGE LIFE SEEMS TO BE STRESSFUL?

Stress varies from person to person. Students react to college life in variety of ways because of transition to adulthood especially with college entry process. (R. Dyson, 2006)^[5]. College student specifically are termed as late adolescent. Parent and late adolescent relationship is very complex paradox mostly because of contradictions. Literature shows relationship between late adolescent and parent or family support can act as a buffer against negative effect during stressful life events (M. Killilea, 1985)^[6]. If additional support is not rendered, college students will be unable to deal successfully with the stress. If support is yielded by family they may not be susceptible to low esteem, peer pressure, peer adjustment, academic failure etc. A significant number of college students reported that parental expectation were major stressors of college life. (W. Anderson, 1987)^[7]; (J Archer Jr, 1985)^[8]. Some studies show depression as stressful event in college student (Kumaraswamy, 2013)^[9], some shows perspective of young adult of single parenting (Burrow, 2012)^[10]. This paper talks about various stressful life events in the college life of adolescents and discusses on one major stressful life event affecting the students through a case study.

V. METHODOLOGY

This paper is designed to understand the most prominent behavior of stress in college life, which affects their wellbeing and how positive intervention linked with CBT psychotherapy helps to achieve its wellness.

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VI. PARTICIPANTS

The participants include engineering students from the city of Madurai. The participants were of the age range 18 to 21 yrs. The total number of members participated in this research were 318 students who came for counseling from various engineering streams namely ECE, EEE, CSE, and CIVIL. The social income of the participants was lower middle class. The sample includes data from the Jan 2012 to Oct 2015. The sample size is 318, which was implemented in excel. Through counseling the major stressors found were family issues, self-esteem issues, relationship problem, peer pressure, procrastination, and staff issues. Analysis was done to identify the root cause of all the various stressors. Depicted below is the categorization of stressors.

Family issue	Single parent
	Separated parent
	Loss of parent
	Personality disorder parent
	Conflict in parent
	Alcoholic parent
	Strict parent
	Over protective parent
	Sibling conflict
	Comparing parent
	Discord with grandparents
	Close relatives
	Financial burden
	Jobless father
Parental influence	
Sick parent	
Self esteem	Difficulty in English communication to speak and write
	Anxious of taking seminars
	Presentation or attending symposium
	Shyness of opposite gender
	Bullying, difficulty in studies
	Problems or theory, fear of failure
	Poverty in family, body image
	Culture difference because of rural area
	Attention deficit disorder
Peer Pressure	Identity crisis
	belongingness
	Power & expectation
	Culture difference
	Lacking assertiveness
Relationship	Lack of friends
	Loneliness
	Breakup with girl or boy friend
	Conflict within relationship
	More expectation
Procrastination	Triangulation of love
	Addiction to gadgets
	Obsessed with sports
	Postponing assignments
	Postponing submission
Staff issues	Postponing studying
	Dissatisfaction
	Misunderstanding with Staff
	Staff favoritism

The most common sources of stress in college life in order were found by the frequency of the mode. Frequently occurring from the mode as demonstrated below.

Family issues	32%
Low esteem issues	30%
Relationship issue	12%
Peer pressure	10%
Procrastination	4%
Staff issue	3%

It's understood family issue is the major stressful life event for a college student. Pediatrics Report (2003)^[11] pointed that children of divorced or separated parents are at greater risk of emotional and behavioral problem. Such students have difficulty in problem solving, decision-making, and social adjustment. They are not able to cope with normal distress thus leading to peer pressure and low esteem. Their confidence level gets skewed and they lack self-motivation and inability to perform thus labeling themselves as losers. They always live within the vicious cycle that their wellbeing is affected. Development of the child's behavior is strongly influenced by how well his or her family functions. This applies not only for divorced or single parent but also for all dysfunctional family. Researcher has interviewed all participants of family issues and found few outcomes common to all. So the researcher tries to explain it through phenomenological qualitative approach with constructivism. By conducting a qualitative methodology the research was able to explore in-depth meaning and experience instead of only learning experiences.

VII. CASE STUDY

A student named Priya (pseudonym is taken protect client's privacy and confidentiality) came for counseling sent by HOD of computer science stating in spite of being bright student she fails to perform. In the first session focus was on building rapport, eye contact and encouraging better understanding of the student. Priya 19 yrs. old female grew up with her mom and younger sister. Her father works abroad. She was in her 2nd yr. engineering. She was a bright student in her school days and she had a good relationship with her mom, who was a homemaker. Her current problem was she loses her confidence and not able to perform well. She had problem with her friends because of her language as she is from the northern region of India, thus she had no close friends. One incident to quote is, she won preliminary competition at a symposium and was even appreciated by judges but she failed the finals. This made her feel restless and stressful. She states, "Everything seems to be negative, I am worthless and dumb to perform, in spite of this people have hope on me".

Interventions identifying automatic negative thoughts in the mind were found and guided discovery tool was done. Reframing was given through CBT an interaction between thoughts, mood and behavior. Triple column technique was applied for a week and estimated with two more sessions. Priya had negative core belief about self, which was derived from neglect, abuse and absence of sufficient warmth, affection and praise from her mother.

In the fourth session she expressed inability to study as she forgets whatever read and showed text anxiety. Questions were asked throughout the interview and relevant topics were discussed. Researcher began by asking patient to describe the family she grew up which caused her to start think about her family background that helped the researcher to understand the context of her experience. When intervened it was found that she loves her mom and her mother never trusts her. Quoting an example if Priya goes out with friends to a temple visit or to submit assignments on a holiday her mom will distress Priya by asking hurtful questions of distrust.

The mother is a teacher as she is separated from her husband slowly her relationship with her daughter reduced. The uncle of the family supported them when in financial crisis. Priya felt that she should also take the responsibility, thus stressing herself in studying, performing, and writing her test. Priya says she is unable to recall during her exams and thus started losing confidence and performing poorly. Priya’s mother was also interviewed that helped her to be expressive, her love towards kids. Since mother had more responsibility due lack of a fatherly figure to her kids she was more stressed, than her kids.

Students lose confidence in themselves when lack support from family. It not only includes single parent, but also for blaming parent, conflicting parent, strict parents or alcoholic father. Young adults are ashamed and fail to view their strength. Here positive psychology intervention plays a major role.

Martin Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi describe positive psychology is the scientific study that enables the individual to thrive and lead a meaningful fulfilling life. To cultivate what is best within them and to enhance their experience of love, work and play. To discover what works well in you Dr. Seligman theorizes character strength is the pathway to each of the 5 areas of wellbeing. (PERMA).

- More positive emotion
- More engagement
- Better relationship
- More meaning
- More accomplishment

Mindfulness therapy was given to the student. Realistic thinking for everyday helped to self-talk in any situation. Chill out tools were introduced like visualization, relaxation exercises, mindfulness strategies, and positive affirmation were asked to try daily. Three good things named “Three blessings that happened” and why it happened was written daily which took over three more sessions. Researcher was able to share similar experience to show empathy and neutral to information. The more validating clients feeling were the more progress happened. CBT along with positive psychology helped Priya to move gradually to growth. (Dennis Greenberger, 2014)

VIII. RESULT

All the data with sample size of 318 was implemented in Excel. The root causes of each patient was identified and listed in the column as a stressor. Below depicted is a bar graph of the mode of frequency across each stressor.

Now that family issue is the most occurring stressor, below shown is a table that captures various issues leading to family issues stressor and problems due to family issues stressor.

Causes Of Stressor	Stressor	Effect Of Stressor
Single parent	Family Issue	Low Self esteem
Separated parent		
Loss of parent		
Personality disorder parent		Inability to focus
Conflict in parent		
Alcoholic parent		
Strict parent		
Over protective parent		Lack of friends
Sibling conflict		
Comparing parent		
Discord with grandparents		
Close relatives		
Financial burden		Self-criticism
Jobless father		
Parental influence		
Sick parent		

IX. DISCUSSION

The study found the family issues as major stressors that affects the student’s wellbeing. When further diagnosed, students of family issues were detrimental to low self-esteem, inability to study and lack close friends. The researcher took effort to counsel the parent of the client in the above case study. This encourages both parent and child to understand and consider their needs. In present life style of college, parent counseling or workshop to parent is utmost needed for the sense of purpose and healthy wellbeing of the student and parent. In the quoted case study because of counseling the parent, there was gradual improvement in the client side along with the interventions. The client had changed negative thoughts, shift from low mood, and better relationship with her mother as referred in case study. Both CBT and positive psychology interventions were effective to change the core belief, shift the perspective and give meaning to life. Integrating positive psychology principles and finding into CBT model not only helps client to be better but also develop a sense of purpose and wellbeing. Further studies can be implemented which could be motivating and beneficial of stressors in the same demographics.

X. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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