

CAUSES OF YOUTH STRESS- AN EXPLORATION**Rinju George**

Research Scholar,

Department of Psychology, University of Calicut,

Thenjippalam Post, Malappuram Dist, Pin 673635,

Kerala

Mail Id : rinjuhere@gmail.com

Dr. Baby Shari. P. A.

Head and Associate Professor,

Department of Psychology, University of Calicut,

Thenjippalam Post, Malappuram Dist, Pin 673635,

Kerala

Abstract

Stress is inevitable and is a part of our everyday life. People from every age group experience stress of one form or the other. A young man who is in his youthful stage may feel stressed due to various instances in his/her transitional stage of life to adulthood. India is a young nation. Youth contributes to success and progress of our nation. An estimated 65 per cent of India's population comes under the age of 35. The Government of India defines the youth as those between the age of 13 and 35. Issues of youth are increasing in this society and media reports shows that youth are involved in most of social problems. Hence a study about youth stress is relevant in present scenario. Issues which youth face have to be addressed and dealt with effectively and manage the same for their resource awareness and utilization for social benefits. Through a qualitative enquiry the present study explore in-depth about various stressors experienced by our powerful youth population. Sample of 150 male and female, age ranging from 18-40 years hailing from Malappuram and Calicut districts of Kerala participated in the study. Data was collected using semi-structured interview and was content analyzed. From content analysis of data collected ten major areas of stressors were identified. This included personal factors, familial factors, social factors, emotional factors, health factors, factors related to intimate relationships, financial factors, job related factors, study related factors and environmental factors. Details are discussed in the paper.

Key Words: *India, Youth, Stress, Qualitative Enquiry*

Stress is a part of our everyday life. Stress is the topic of many conversations, people talk about the stress of balancing home and work life, stress of maintain relationships, stress of being in a romantic relationship, pressure from family and authority figure, work tension, dealing with a crying child, getting through traffic jam, etc. Due to individual differences each one interprets and reacts to events that make stress differently. For some social gathering may be considered as a fun time, but for some facing people may be stressful. If our stress level is too high, it can result in serious medical and social problems.

According to Baumann, &Turpin, 2010 and McEwen, 2008 stress is used to design an unpleasant phenomenon, although it is related to functions necessary to our life. A lay person may define stress in terms of pressure, tension, unpleasant external forces or an emotional response (Ogden, 2004). In 21st century stress is considered as the cancer of the mind which prevents a person to think and act wisely.

People from every age group experience stress of one form or the other. An adolescent may feel stressed due to the transitional nature of their life stage. When faced with diverse and complicated new items and establishment of personal values, they are subjected to considerable stress in their bodies and minds (Williams and McGillicuddy 2000).

A young man who is in his youthful stage may feel stressed due to various instances in his/her transitional stage of life to adulthood. This includes completing an education, employment, marriage, and even parenthood (Furstenberg,et.al. 2005, Harley & Mortimer, 2000, Shanahan,2000). Youth generally refers to a time of life that is neither childhood nor adulthood but rather somewhere in between (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004). According to Hurlock (1997) early adulthood starts from age eighteen to approximately age forty when the physical and psychological changes which accompany the beginning of the loss of reproductive capacity.

The youth contributes to success and progress of our nation. India is a young nation. An estimated 65 per cent of India's people come under the age of 35. The Government of India defines the youth as those between the age of 13 and 35. A population that is skewed towards the young will have more people looking to get into productive work and fewer older people dependent on pensions and other forms of income support. This is potentially significant for India's economy and politics (Purie, 2011).

Issues which youth face have to be addressed and dwelt with scientifically, as they are considered as the foundation of our nation. Most of the studies on youth problems have been conducted in Western context (Lindrive,*et.al.* 2005). Very limited studies have been conducted in Indian setting which focused on various stressors experienced by the productive group. The present study aims at identifying various stressors experienced by youth of India. Through a qualitative enquiry the researchers are trying to explore in-depth about various stressors experienced by our youth population.

The present study serves an important purpose in identifying various issues faced by youth in Indian context and helping organizations like UNO and policy makers to come up with suitable policies for managing stress level of youth. The findings of the study can also help life skill trainers and people working with youth to come up with training packages which can be used to help youth to deal with their stress by means of using positive and effective coping strategies.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- An exploration into stress experience of young adults to identify the causal factors.

OBJECTIVES

1. To explore different varieties of stress among youth
2. To do initial steps for the development of a youth stress inventory

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

For in-depth exploration of the data the study utilized a qualitative analysis.

PARTICIPANTS

A sample of 150 male and female young adults had taken part in the present study. They were selected purposefully as per their willingness for participation. Their age ranged from 18-40 years and they hail from Malappuram and Calicut districts of Kerala, India.

MEASURES

- **Descriptive/ Semi-structured Interview**

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Here the researchers prepared open ended schedule of questions. Participants were given the opportunity to relate the questions to

their personal life experiences and they could give their responses either by writing in a piece of paper or in a face to face conversation.

Procedure

Sample was selected using purposive sampling technique. Using review of literature, discussions with experts in psychology and social work and also by using personal observations and experience of researchers, two major questions were identified. To explore in-depth about the issue the researchers met the participants who comes between the age limit of 18-40. Without sticking to a particular group of youth, the researcher spoke to youth which comes under wide varieties of categories. This was mainly done to understand the problem of youth in a holistic perspective. Rapport was established prior to the interview. Only participants who expressed willingness were included in the study. Each participant was given a brief description about the whole study. For individuals who found it difficult to give their responses on the spot, papers were given to note down their experiences whenever they are comfortable.

When the interviews were over, content of each participant's conversation was analyzed. The researcher intended to have an objective relationship with the informants. It is to avoid personal involvement that might bias the study. All the ethical issues were taken care throughout the research process.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data collected using interviewing technique was analyzed using the method of content analysis. For analyzing the data using content analysis the researcher first developed sub-categories and from the different sub-categories which emerge from the data the researcher developed categories.

Here the sample population consisted of males and females, who are working/not working, married/unmarried and also youth who are pursuing their higher studies. Eleven major categories were emerged from various sub-categories which talks about various stressors.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Informed consent of the participants was taken prior to the interviewing session. The participants were given a broader idea about the whole study before the whole process of the research starts. All the participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time they feel like. The investigator also ensured about the physical and psychological well-being of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aim of the present study was to identify various stressful experiences of youth population. One hundred and fifty young adults age ranging from 18-40 participated in the study. Using semi-structured interviewing technique various stressors experienced by youth were explored, later content analyzed and classified.

From content analysis of data collected ten major areas of stressors were identified. This include personal factors, familial factors, social factors, emotional factors, financial factors, job-related factors, health related factors, factors related to intimate relationships, study related factors and environmental factors. These factors are given in table (1).

Table (1) showing categories of various stressors experienced and reported by youth

No	Categories
1.	Personal Factors
2.	Familial Factors
3.	Social Factors
4.	Health Factors
5.	Emotional Factors
6.	Factors Related to Intimate Relations
7.	Job Related Factors
8.	Financial Factors
9.	Study Related Factors
10.	Environmental Factors

1) Personal Factors

This includes factors which personally creates stress to individuals. Some of the factors identified under this category are lack of punctuality, increasing age, waking up early and late, feeling of loneliness, bad dreams, inability to take responsibilities, worries about own character, concerns about future, personal problems, lack of assertive behaviour, life planning and failure in life.

From the content analysis it was found that unmarried male students responded the most on stressors related to personal factors when compared to other sample population. Unmarried female students were found to be scoring second highest position in personal stressors. Married female students and married female who are not working are found to be the least in personal stressors.

Among unmarried male students highest number of participants reported ‘future related factors’ causing stress. Reasons given by unmarried male students include lack of income, lack of suitable job, dependence on family at this age and they are worried whether they will get a good job to take care of family. Insecurity felt was identified as the common stress.

Majority of the unmarried female students’ reported ‘increasing age’ as causing stress to them. According to a female participant *“I am 28 year old, still studying, haven’t reached anywhere in life. I am worried about the increase of my age. I don’t know whether I will get a good job in near future. Difficulty in finding a partner at this age also builds tension in me”*. Though the stressor seems to be very personal, while exploring more, it could be found to be complex and interlinked with many other factors. It indicated that females experienced a social pressure to get married and be settled with a job. This indicates the gender stereotype existing in shaping female roles in a family.

Justification given by married female students and married females who are not working for least stress in personal factors when compared to other groups was that after marriage they are giving more importance to family, husband and children. They are more concerned with the happiness of family whereas while analyzing the contents it was found that familial stressors create more problems to married females. They are over concerned about family and under concerned about them, which is also an indicator of gender discriminated stereotype in shaping female role in a family. While analyzing the whole sample population it was found that “future related factors” caused stress to majority of the youth population.

2) Familial Factors

Familial factors consist of issues related to family which cause stress to the participants. Factors evolved from discussions with the participants consist of retirement of parents, familial fights, lack of time to take care of child and home, dependency on family, issues with mother-in-law, work overload, pressure from parents issues with husband, lack of freedom at home, lack of

support from family to study, lack of own house, house construction and also tensed about education, illness and future of children and being away from parents, husband and home.

Married females who are working reported highest number of responses in stress related to familial factors. Female students who are unmarried were found to have second highest in familial stressors. Male students who are unmarried were observed as having least stress in this area.

From the content analysis of data collected in married female group who are working, it was found that they face stress in familial factors due to issues with husband, lack of freedom at home, lack of support from family to study, lack of own house, house construction and also tensed about education, illness and future of children. Majority feel stressed due to concern about education, illness and future of their children. Stereotypical roles of women existed in families are confirmed by the data.

From the discussion with unmarried female students who are staying in hostel for study purposes it was found that majority are stressed up due to 'homesickness'. *"I really feel sad for being at hostel. I miss my home and parents. Monday morning is a very tough day"* says a postgraduate female participant. Males who are working and married reported that fights with wife cause stress for them. While analyzing the reports of the participants as a whole it was found that the familial issues cause stress to majority of the sample population.

3) Social Factors

Stress on social factors stems from one's relationships with others in society and from the social environment in general. Humans are social beings by nature, and they have a desire to maintain positive social relationships. As a result anything that disrupts their positive social relationship results in stress. This can include low social status in society or in particular groups, giving a speech and facing interviews.

Stressors identified in this category include fear of travelling alone, hostel issues, lack of close friends, irresponsible behavior from other people, irritating people and relatives, guests, phobia of snakes, dogs and insects, friends keeping away, being with stranger, crossing road, stage fright, maintaining eye contact, inflation, issues in campus life, issues with friends, social issues, political issues and issues with friends, inflation or increase in rates of commodities.

When stress on social factors was studied among eight groups of participant's unmarried female students reported highest stress in social factors, followed by unmarried male students. Married females who are not working were observed as having least stressors on social factors.

Stressors identified by unmarried female students which can be classified under social factors include fear of travelling alone, hostel issues, lack of close friends, irresponsible behavior from other people, irritating people and relatives, guests, phobia of snakes, dogs and insects, friends keeping away, being with stranger, crossing road, stage fright, maintaining eye contact, inflation etc. While analyzing the items reported by female students it can be identified that 'loneliness/being alone' is something which hurt them a lot. Till in youthful stage females are under the safe hands of family and when they move to college hostels for higher studies they feel discomfort due to the feeling that they are alone and away from home.

For unmarried male students social stress causing factors include issues in campus life, social issues, political issues and issues with friends. This indicates that college youth are more focused on public issues and issues with friends. Married females who are not working reported that inflation or increase in rates of commodities day by day caused stress to them. This shows that married females who act as only homemakers are more concerned with their family and their main focus is on running the family on a day today basis.

Influence of social life on each individual was evident on the data. While in student life male youth are more stressed on social issues but female youth are stressed due to the feeling of being alone in life indicating that females always wish to be with someone close to them. When a female gets into married life their main focus shifts to family and now they move from self to family. While analyzing the sample as a whole it was found that majority feel stressed due to issues with friends e.g.: lack of time to be with friends, lack of friends, fights with friends.

4) Health Factors

Different disease can be the cause of stress. Unmarried female students reported highest number of responses in health related issues. Factors identified by this group includes health problems, tension about illness, tension about health of loved ones, menstrual problems, unlimited sleep, illness of parents, lack of proper food in hostel, over-weight, hair fall, unhygienic surroundings, lack of sleep. Majority of unmarried female students stated that they are tensed when minor illness happen to oneself and loved ones.

Factors identified by other groups which can be included under health factors consists of health issues, illness of husband, illness of parents, health issues of parents, parents getting aged, personal health issues and lack of proper sleep.

A higher secondary teacher of 35 year old states *“In family it’s difficult to find time to teach my son, manage kitchen and all other responsibilities in the presence of my husband who is a mental patient after brain surgery”*. This indicates that youth are more stressed due to the health issues of their parents and loved ones.

5) Emotional Factors

Emotional factors include a major area of stress. Feeling unable to relate to someone or want to express emotions but not being able to can weigh down a person with additional stress. Emotional problems such as suppressed anger, [depression](#), [grief](#), guilt, or low self-esteem leads to stress.

Items evolved from the discussion with the sample which can be classified under emotional factors are inferiority complex, superiority complex, sadness, lack of satisfaction, lack of trust, masochism, lack of loved ones, pessimism, low anger management etc causing stress to the sample.

From the content analysis it was found that unmarried males who are working reported the highest number of items in this area. Factors identified by this group includes stress due to cheating from trusted ones, lack of satisfaction from life and lack of love and care from parents and friends. Among these sub-factors highest number of responses was given for ‘lack of satisfaction from life’. *“I am 23 year old. But not having a permanent job. I get tensed when I see my friends spending lavishly from their income and I get jealous because my bank balance is low. I have an elder sister who is about to marry. I am not satisfied with my past and I am anxious about my future. Presently I am not so satisfactory”* says a working male participant.

Unmarried female students were observed as having the second highest stress in emotional factors. They reported that inferiority feeling, scolding from beloved ones, teasing from friends and denying freedom resulted in stress. This group reported the highest number of items in emotional factors. In this majority of the participants reported that ‘inferiority feeling’ caused stress to them.

Unmarried females who are working were found to report least in this area. For this group inferiority feeling caused emotional stress. While analyzing the sample as a whole it was found

that “inferiority feeling” and “insecurity feeling” as causing issues in most of the samples life. This indicate that youth population always wish to be secured in life and they wish to settle in life at the most earliest and when this doesn’t happen they become stressed out. In the course of their feeling of being inferior and insecure, youth enter into gangs and most of the time this gang leads to national issues. This is a serious issue which has to be tapped and youth has to be guided to lead a productive life.

6) Factors related to intimate relationships

Issues related to intimate relationships come under this category. In this factor unmarried females who are working reported highest number of responses which was followed by married males who are working. Unmarried male students responded least to marital issues.

Factors identified in this category includes marriage proposals, love affairs and reaction of parents, worried about future of love, pressure from family to get married, fights with lover, love failure, love affair, confusion about marriage, suicide of lover, problem associated with suicide of lover, compulsion to get married, maintaining love relationship, having no children, alcoholism of husband, lack of job for husbands, issues with wife, being away from partner and child, difficulty in maintaining marital life and studies together.

“I feel as if I am abnormal now. My lover committed suicide after having a fight with me. That guilt still remains in me. I am a psychiatric patient now. I don’t have proper sleep. I take medicine and now altogether I am a different person after his death. His thoughts still haunts me” Says a working unmarried female who is 26 year old.

For unmarried male students the word marriage itself builds tension. According to a participant *“I am 29, but not having a job. When my parents force me to get married I get irritated. Now the word marriage itself drives me crazy”*. Analyzing the reports given by the sample indicates that unmarried youth are more tensed about the word marriage. When they are pressurized from all the sides to get married they feel stressed out. This may be due to the fact that lack of permanent job makes most of youth to hesitate to get married. But discussions indicated that after marriage youth are worried about “maintaining the marital life”. Under intimate relationships majority of the unmarried youth reported “marriage proposals” caused stress to them.

7) Job related Factors

Stress due to various job related factors is another main area of stress. Some may be tensed because of the lack of job, where as a few is worried about next promotion. Some face

negative or bullying behavior of higher authority. Some may not be have attained their deserved career goals; a few might be worried due to office politics. There are individuals who might be stressed about some major change that is taking place in the organization, or, might be under stress because of the prospect of losing your job. Being unhappy with ones work or finding the job too demanding results in chronic stress. Losing job or not being able to find work can also add to stress level.

Factors identified in this category includes work overload, lack of leisure time, lack of permanent job, low output, lack of commitment, perfectionism, time pressure, insecurity, understaffing, conflicts with colleagues, role ambiguity, workaholic and low pay causing stress to the sample population.

Unmarried males who are working reported highest stress due to job related factors, followed by married females who are working and married males who are working. But married female students did not report issues in job as causing stress.

Unmarried and working males reported that work over load, work related issues, thought about job, job stress, lack of punctuality to office, lack of positive output in work done, business related issues, limited leave and lack of permanent job resulted in job stress. Most of them sited that work over load and lack of permanent job caused stress to them. This indicates that males always wish to get settled in life at the most earliest. When they don't have a permanent job and when the work creates pressure and when it is over loaded they feel stressed out.

Married females who are working reported lack of permanent job, tension about husbands business, difficulty in being on time for job, difficulty in managing work and household activities, lack of dedication from co-workers, over-concern about work performance and perfectionism resulted in job stress. Most of them informed that issues related to job cause stress to them.

Married males who are working reported that business issues, work overload, lack of employees, lack of free time and lack of permanent job increased their stress. Irrespective of the groups majority of the participants involved in the study stated that “work pressure” and “work over load” caused stress to them.

While analyzing the groups as a whole it can be found that marriage has influenced both male and female participants. Married female students are not much worried about job when compared to unmarried female students. This may be due to the fact that married females always

feels that they have someone to rely on but unmarried females are worried of being not settled in life yet. But after marriage apart from their job issues females are tensed about the job of their husband too. This shows how different transitions have shifted the focus of each one's life. But when it comes to male youth all are tensed about their job issues. Males wish to have a settled life and job at the most earliest. This may be due to the patriarchal system which runs in our society which demand male to be the bread winner.

8) Financial Factors

Most financing problem includes payments for credit cards, debts are piling up, paying mortgage installment, enhanced cost of living, rising cost of education and health. Factors identified from discussion with young adults include financial difficulties, bank loan, and increase in gold rate, low income and inability to return deb. All the groups reported financial difficulties as causing stress to them. When eight groups under the study were compared, unmarried female students were free to open up about financial issues. This group was followed by unmarried males who are working.

Unmarried female students informed that they are worried about financial difficulties, increasing gold rate and bank loans. A young girl of 22 year old said *“I am tensed with the present gold rate. If this continues it will be very difficult”*. This indicates that unmarried females are more focused on marriage and this builds up tension in them. Unmarried males who are working reported low income, financial problems and debt causing stress to them. This reveals that males always wanted to be independent and wish to be a bread winner. When financial difficulties arise they feel stressed as they have to depend on others to take care of themselves and their family. As a whole it was found that majority of the sample population is stressed due to financial difficulties.

9) Study Related Factors

Factors identified in the discussion with the participants include exam tension, studies related tension, facing interviews, viva and presentations, tensed about completing assignments on time, exam results, worries about studies/ education and stress due to lack of support from family to study. Unmarried female students reported maximum responses in this area. Unmarried male students and married female students reported second in responding to stress related stress. Unmarried females who are working and married females who are not working were found to have least stress in academic factors. Here the student group reported maximum stress in this

area. This may be due to the society's changing views on education. Earlier people didn't give importance to studies and hence education was not a concern for many. But now thinking pattern of people have changed and they realized the importance of studies and hence those who are in the academics sector are worried when they don't cope well in academics.

10) Environmental Factors

This category talks about factors in our surrounding which cause stress to the participants. Factors Identified in this category included noise, traffic jam, untidy surroundings, unhealthy conditions and being in a queue.

CONCLUSIONS

Collection of data and clarification of the present study can be utilized for the preparation of Youth Stress Checklist (YSC). A checklist consisting of 75 items was prepared by the investigators. Ten major areas which cause stress were identified. This include stress on 1) Personal Factors 2) Familial factors 3) Social factors 4) Health Factors 5) Emotional Factors 6) Factors related to Intimate Relationships 7) Job Related Factors 8) Financial Factors 9) Study related Factors and 10) Environmental factors. Under personal factors majority of the participants reported stress due to "concern about future" and for social factors most of the youth were found to be stressed due to "issues related to friends (lack of time to be with friends, lack of close friends and fights with friends)". When it comes to emotional factors as a cause of stress most of them responded that "feeling of inferiority and insecurity" creates issues in their life. Almost all the participants where stressed due to "financial issues". "Lack of permanent job" and "work overload" also acted as a casual factor for stress in most of the individuals life. Under factors related to intimate relationships majority of the unmarried youth reported "marriage proposals" caused stress to them. Married youth are worried about "maintaining the marital life". The rate of stress in study related factors was also found to be high in married participants. This indicates the importance given by the youth which is considered as the basis for their future life.

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