Research on College Students' Stresses and Coping Strategies

Hong Ji

School of Management, Jilin University, Changchun 130012, China

&

Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun 130022, China E-mail: jihong725@163.com

Lei Zhang

Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun 130022, China

Received: July 2, 2011 Accepted: July 26, 2011 Published: October 1, 2011 doi:10.5539/ass.v7n10p30 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n10p30

Abstract

The mental stresses of college students gain wide attentions from the society currently. In this paper, authors investigate the mental stresses of college students and argue that there are four sources of stresses, namely employment situations, study conditions, personal factors, and economic conditions. It shows a significant positive correlation between employment situations and mental stresses of college students, and a positive correlation between study conditions and mental stresses. Although there is a postive correlation between economic conditions, personal factors and mental stresses respectively, the differences are very prominent for individuals.

Keywords: College students, Mental stress, Stress source

1. Introduction

In recent years, it happens sometimes that college students suffer from physical or mental illness, which even leads to temporary absence from school or even a suicidal. In 2008, a report on changes of numbers of college students, from the Ministry of Education of China, points out: a sample survey based on more than 10 million college students in China shows that 20.23% of college students face mental disorders due to mental stresses, and 54.4% of drop-out college students are caused by mental stresses. The mental stress stystem is extremely complicated. To study the relationship of mental stress sources and mental stresses of college students systematically and find effective ways for reducing stresses can not only help to prevent and correct the mental disorders of college students, but also turn to be a useful complement for theories of stresses.

2. Mental stresses of college students and stress sources

Stress could be defind in two fields, namely mental stress and physical stress. In this paper, the stress only means mental stress. From a psychological point of view, stress is a recognitive and behavoiral experience process constituted by mental stress sources and mental stress reactions together. Stress sources refer to factors causing stress reactions, including biological stress sources, spiritual stress sources, and social and environmental stress sources. Stress sources that cause mental disorders are mostly comprehensive. Behind biological or social stress sources, usually there are deep spiritual stress sources.

Chinese and foreign scholars' researches on mental stresses of college students generally include the following aspects: the contents of stress sources, comparative studies of stress sources on genders, comparative studies of stress sources on grades.

Rawson and other scholars agree that mental stress sources of college students mainly include study factors, social factors, life and economic factors, and career factors (Rawson, Harve E, Bloomer, Kimberly, Kendall, Amanda, 1994). Heins' studies show that there are two types of stress sources among college students. One type is about academic expectation and achievements, and the other is about social factors, such as maintaining and developing social connections, etc. Lin Zhang and Wenbo Che (Lin Zhang, Wenbo Che & Bing Li, 2003) design

the "scale for mental stresses of college students" and make a survey of 2007 college students from 7 colleges. Studies show that the mental stresses of college students come from two aspects: one is the personal stress, including stress from family, stress from adapability, stress from health, stress from relationship, stress from low self- esteem, and stress from frustration. The other is the social environmental stress, including stress from interpersonal communication, stress from occupation choice, emotional stress, stress from college environment, and stress from study (Lin Zhang, Wenbo Che & Bing Li. 2003).

Furong Wang and Huixiang Gong make a comparative study of mental stresses of different types of college students and conclude that the mental stresses of boys are bigger, longer, and stonger than that of girls. The mental stresses grow along with grades, reach the maximum at the junior year, and slighly decrease at the senior year (Furong Wang & Huixiang Gong, 2001).

3. Build the theoretical framework

From the analyses above, we know that the mental stresses of college students come from four aspects: study conditions, employment situations, economic conditions, and personal factors. And the fourth aspect includes three parts: interpersonal communication, self-care ability, and family condition.

Study conditions include study tasks, contents, methods, standards, etc. Too heavy study tasks, difficult courses, unreasonable learning methods, and two high standards could bring about stresses for college students (Ping Qi & Jinchang Wu, 2004).

The annually increased enrollment leads to a rise of number of college students, and the emergence of financial crisis makes employment situation worse. Some college students feel pessimistic about their professional future. Moreover, some students even point out that although they have learned many courses, they do not know what they are good at or what kind of jobs are the right choices for them. Whether college students can find a satisfying job usually brings about heavy stresses on them.

Bad econoimic conditions will produce heavy stresses on college students. Some students complain that they have no appropriate chance of earning money for various reasons and the tuition is too high. Poor family conditions and huge monthly expenses could bring about more stresses (Yanxia Mao, 2005, p136-139).

Stresses caused by personal factors are from defects of personal psychology, behavior, and family conditions. These factors include interpersonal communication, self-care ability, and family conditions. Most students agree that bad relationship with classmates, roomates, and friends of opposite sex will produce stresses. Meanwhile, the generation of only-child has not received good training for self-care ability. They may face difficulties in adapting to college life. Therefore, the self-care ability can give studetns great stresses. Besides, family conditions, such as parents divorce, and family expectations, could bring about severe stresses for college studetns. To sum up, a theoretical framework for the study is in Figure 1.

4. Hypothesis for the study

Researches show that the study conditions may be the main stress source for college students. After passing the entrance examination for college, CET4, CET6, computer grade exams, entrance exam for graduate, entrance exam for Doctor, and run for studying aboard give college students more stresses. Their expectations for study make them more ancious. Long-time and high-intensive study directly affects the quality of sleep and the interests in study, and even harms their physical health. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between study conditions and mental stresses of college students.

Every freshman has to consider the problem of employment at the very beginning. A survey shows that 78.7% of college students agree that the problem of employment is the greatest factor causing mental stresses (Qishan Chen & Zhonglin Wen, 2005). The reform of self-dependent career choice for college students, on one hand, opens a free door for graduates seeking for jobs, expanding their choices in market. On the other hand, it confuses graduates' expectations for employment and increases uncertainties. Employment situations make modern college students worry. Therefore:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between employment situations and mental stresses of college students.

Economic conditions could bring stresses to college students either. Life distress, necessary living expenses, and high tuition are stresses for college students. At present, more than 90% of college students think they have economic stresses. About 93% of college students hope to reduce economic stresses by half-time work. The idea of "playing as much as you like in college" has completely changed. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive correlation between economic conditions and mental stresses of college

students.

College students are at a special stage in life. Their mental development is in the process of maturity but still immature. Their interpersonal communications are complicated, what produces mental stresses. In life, they mostly depend on family, plus most of them are the only child in one family, their self-care abilities are poor, which may produce mental stresses either. In addition, the college students who experienced unhappy family affairs have more anxieties, depressions, and physical diseases than people who did not. Meanwhile, stresses from family conditions may be from parenets' expectations for children (Juru Yang & Lei Zhang, 2005). Apparently, defects of personal psychology, behaviors, abilities, and family conditions can bring mental stresses to college students. Therefore:

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive correlation between personal factors and mental stresses of college students.

5. Research methods

In this paper, we verify the hypotheses by questionnaires. Specifically, we use SPSS to make mean test and variance analysis in order to validate the hypotheses above.

In this research, we perform a servey among 800 college studetns in Chuangchun University of Science and Technology by questionnaires. College 734 valid copies (response rate is 91.75%, in line with the large sample requirements). Specific information is in Table 1.

Make a T critical value analysis of sample information and get the value of K 1.93. It means the confidence level of the sample is 95%.

In this paper, authors design the questionnaire to research on mental stresses of college students. The formal questionnaire comprises 20 questions in four dimensions: study conditions (5 questions), employment situations (6 questions), economic conditions (4 questions), and personal factors (5 questions).

In the questionnaire, every statistical indicator is from Likert's 5-point scale. Here, "1" represents "completely disagree", "5" represents "completely agree". The average of these statistical indicators will form the value of each abstract variable.

6. Research results and analyses

Four variables cause mental stresses of college students, and personal factors include three aspects. The following table (Table 2) lists the average and standard deviation of each variable or aspect. The average value represents the degree of correlation between each variable and stresses of college students. Next, verify the hypotheses according to data in Table 2.

- (1) According to the statistical results of the survey of 734 college students, the mean value of each variable is larger than 3.1, which indicates that the mental stresses of college students have positive correlations with study conditions, employment situations, economic conditions, and personal factors.
- (2) The mean value of the variable of employment situations is 4.33, which proves the positive correlation between employment situations and stresses is more significant. Besides, the lowest standard deviation indicates that college students generally believe that the chief factor causing stresses is current employment situation.
- (3) The mean value of study conditions is the No.2 among all variables, with lowest standard deviation. Study conditions have a positive correlation with metnal stresses of college students. In colleges, along with changes of environment and fierce competitions, study conditions generate significant impacts on mental stresses of college students.
- (4) The economic conditions have a positive correlation with mental stresses of college students. However, statistical data show that the standard deviation of economic conditions is large. This shows that although economic conditions affect mental stresses of college students, the same economic condition may cause various stresses for different persons.
- (5) The three aspects of personal factors have positive correlations with mental stresses of college students. The survey shows that most college students get along well with classmates and roomates, and only few face tension in the relationship with classsmates or roomates. Statistical results show that mental stresses of college students have positive correlations with self-care abilities and family conditions. However, the standard deviations of the three aspects are all large, indicating that although the three variables affect mental stresses of college students, they do not the chief ones.

7. Strategies for college students coping with stresses

The survey shows that today college students face mental stresses at different levels. Colleges and society should

pay necessary attention to this phenomenon and help college students to cope with various stresses from study, work, and life, by means of education and psycholgoical assistance.

7.1 Adapt to college life as soon as possible and improve the effect of study

Study trouble has become an important stress source for college students. In colleges, theoretical teaching and practical teaching should focus on training college students' ability of learning, and stimulate their motivation for study. In particular, guide freshmen to set up reasonable goals as soon as possible, and help them to master study methods, learn time management, and improve self-monitoring ability. Make sure that college students adapt to college life quickly, which can effectively reduce the stress from study.

7.2 Improve college students' ability of starting a career and establish a correct concept of career

Colleges should design the teaching system and curriculum structure carefully, and try to provide a way and a place for students participating in social practices. Students can improve themselves in the process of analyzing and solving problems. Stimulate students' desire for knowledge innovation and technological innovation and dig their potentials. Enhance the awareness of independent innovation and lay a good foundation for future career.

Social needs are the first premise for everyone thinking about in starting a career. To choose an occupation is not a wishful thing. The "two-way choice" gives one the freedom to make a choice, and gives the right to the other. College students should establish a correct concept of career, adjust the expectation, and adapt to the employment situation actively. Any career has advantages and disadvantages. The first career is not necessary the life-long one. The career is full of changes. Every graduate should prepare himself or herself for choosing a career by knowing the situations, policies, employers, and his or her personalities (Junjie Ma, 2004).

7.3 Guide college students to rational consumption and help students with financial difficulties

College students are a special social group. Most of them are pure consumers. The survey shows that the consumptions of college students are mostly normal. Few students have irrational consumptions, and they even compete with each other mutually. It may trouble themselves and their families. Colleges and teachers should help college studnets to improve the ability of financial management, overcome the desire for consumption competition, and help them to form a reasonable habit of consumption. In addition, colleges should focus on helping students with financial difficulties, support them by awards, assistances, and loans, reduce their economic burden, and ease their stresses.

7.4 Cultivate the interpersonal skills of college students

Colleges should guide students to properly handle the relationships, train them with self-care abilities, and correctly ease their stresses from families (Bin Zuo, 2004). The interpersonal communication of college students is more complicated, more comprehensive, more independent, and more social. Colleges can open courses of "managing communication", "public relations", and the like to help students to master skills of interpersonal communication. Develop some activities, such as "psychological workshop" and "communication" to encourage and support college students to interpersonal communication, and improve the interpersonal skills of college students.

7.5 Ease the mental stresses caused by family conditions in time

Changes of family conditions, such as parent divorce, and too high expectation of the family will cause stresses on college students. If certain student faces stresses from family changes, the college should find the signs as soon as possible and provide psychological conselling. Meanwhile, the college must update the philosophy of education, create a pleasant environment for students' health growth, and provide a variety of extracurricular activities and social community activities, focusing on the cultivation of self-care abilities of college students, and improving their capacity of coping with mental stresses.

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Table 1. Basic conditions of colelge students

	Boys	Girls	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Only-child	Not only-child
Total number	373	361	206	197	234	97	185	549
Rate (%)	50.8	49.2	28.1	26.8	31.9	13.2	25.2	74.8

Table 2. The statistical results of questionnaires for mental stresses of college students

Statistical data											
		Study conditions	Employment situations	Economic conditions	Interpersonal communication	Self-care ability	Family conditions				
N	Valid	734	734	734	734	734	734				
	Invalid	0	0	0	0	0	0				
The mean value		3.8364	4.3289	3.4053	3.3166	3.2650	3.1803				
Standard deviation		.86854	.57885	1.08425	1.27054	1.30261	1.27183				

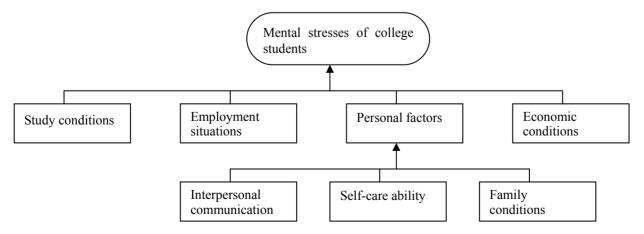


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework of the Study