



Coursework stress among the public sector university students

Fauzia Khurshid, Zainab Bibi and Nimra Khurshid
National University of Modern Languages.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to extend the existing body of knowledge on course stress related with university students. A conceptual framework which illustrates four dimensions of coursework stress including coursework worries, lack of skills to perform coursework, dis-likeliness towards coursework and attitudinal problems in performing coursework was developed. The present research was a descriptive study which used an indigenous research instruments to measure the coursework stress in the context of university students. The study was carried out on a sample of 100 university students which explored the impact of demographic variables including gender, age, and discipline, employment of the students and level of education on determining the level of coursework stress. Result of the study revealed that the phenomenon of coursework stress does exist among the university students. Female students and younger students experience higher coursework stress, as compared to male and older students. The findings also indicated that different demographic variables contribute significantly in determining the level of coursework stress among M. Phil and PhD. students.

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Introduction

By definition, coursework is the name for work carried out by students at any level of education (university or college/high school) that contributes towards their overall evaluation which is assessed separately from their final exams. Coursework can also take form of experimental or research work in the field of education and research. It can be comprised of assignments, presentations or research projects, students may have a number of days or weeks to complete these assignments, and often are allowed to use text books, notes, and the internet as a resource.

Generally in universities, coursework include as one of many different methods of assessment. Here students are required to do coursework in order to broaden their knowledge and research skills, during course work students are required to work in a group, so that they can learn to interact in a group and have opportunity to learn from group member experiences. Generally in universities whatever the method is used as course work students it involves written assignments, quizzes, test. Students are required to complete them within a given time, moreover during planning time teachers may not provide feedback to any work produced or students may not draft their work, only notes and research can be carried out.

Different theorists have used the word stress in different ways. Literature acknowledges the difficulty in pinpointing a single definition of the term stress. Word stress is derived from a Latin word "Stringer" meaning to draw tight. In the beginning of twentieth century, the concept of stress became more scientifically formalized. Cannon first time used the term great emotional stress to describe a powerful psycho physiological response process that appeared to influence emotions in animals. He also documented the importance of neuroendocrine system responses in the stress response (Cannon, 1929). Selye (1974) defined stress, as a nonspecific result of any demand upon the body, be the effects mental or somatic. It is based on objective

indicators such as bodily and chemical changes that appear after any demand. People face different problems in some respect but their bodies respond in stereotyped patterns where biochemical changes enable them to cope with any increased demand on vital activity. The term has been further defined by Gold and Roth (1993) as "a condition of disequilibrium within the intellectual, emotional and physical state of the individual. It is generated by one's perception of a situation which results in physical and emotional reactions. It can be either positive or negative depending upon one's interpretations. Ivancevich & Matteson (1980) described that, for a common person stress can be seen as a feeling nervousness, apprehensiveness and vexed, scientifically these feelings are the manifestations of stress.

According to Goldberger & Breznitz (1993) effects of stress can be categorized as the effects of anxiety and conflict. However, where expressions of emotion, performance deterioration and symptom manifestations are concerned, stress is interchangeable used with these concepts. In short, it can say that stress is construct that inferred in order to account for a certain observable behaviour such as health or illness differences between individuals. It involves complex biochemical, physiological, behavioural and psychological dimensions. Stress is not simply an environmental stimulus or a response to environmental demands, but a dynamic relational concept. There is a constant interplay between person and environment that is mediated by a complex set of ongoing cognitive processes.

Four types of stress are frustration, conflict, change and pressure. Frustration occurs in any situation in which the pursuit of some goal is thwarted. Some frustration can be source of significant stress. Failures and loss are two common kinds of frustration that are often highly stressful. Conflict occurs when two or more incompatible motivation or behaviour impulses compete for expression. Internal conflict generates considerable psychological distress. King and Emmons (1991) measured this

link in a study; they used an elaborate questionnaire to assess the overall amount of internal conflict experienced by the subjects. They found that higher level of conflict was associated with higher level of anxiety, depression and physical symptoms. Pressure involves expectation or demand to behave in a certain way. Professors at research institutions are often under pressure to publish their research work in prestigious journals. Pressures to conform to others expectation are also common in our lives. Weiten (1988) has devised a scale to measure pressure as a form of life stress. He assesses self-imposed pressure, pressure from work, from school, from family relation, peer relation and pressure from intimate relation. He found a strong relationship between pressure, psychological symptom and problems.

Every day we encounter with stress and most of the stress comes and goes without leaving any enduring imprints because stress and anxiety add both challenge and opportunity by serving a motivation for preparation often times. There is an optimal level of stress, and too much has a negative impact. Each person has a different "optimal" level of stress, and individual ways of coping with stress. But when stress is severe and pile up the demands then one's psychological functioning may affected. Effects of stress can include hard concentrating, difficulty in decision-making, being short tempered, feeling tired most of the time, sleeping badly, use of drugs, feeling stretched beyond the limits and feeling that one achieved nothing at the end of the day. If stress is prolonged, it can lead to poor mental health, heart diseases, high blood pressure, back pain, gastrointestinal problem and various minor illnesses (French & Caplan, 1982).

Although stress is harmful but it is around our life we cannot eliminate it even from students' life, because for students at university level academic life is very challenging and stressful. They have to achieve and have to do a lot of things within a very limited time. Some students take this pressure works as a positive motivational force to do work and for some students it becomes negative stress. Many students feel as though they have the weight of the world on their shoulders. This comes as no surprise, because so many aspects in their lives are changing all at once. The university education can be overwhelming at first, but once students settle into a routine and develop a schedule, things start to calm down.

Students at university level can also experience stress due to many reason, family can greatly influence a student's actions and can create stress because many students feel obligated to please their family members. Some might choose to major in a field that they aren't interested in just because that's what their parents want them to do. Others might get stressed out when their grades aren't up to mark because they know their parents will be disappointed. Parents may be a bit overprotective at first, because it's the student's first time away from home. All of this added pressure can put a great weight on the student's shoulders. Students often find themselves worrying about financial matters. For many students, it is their first time out in the "real world" and they don't exactly have the money-managing skills of their parents. Now they have to finance (or help finance) room and board, find money for tuition and pay their bills on time.

Peer pressure is not something that only happens in school or college; university students are facing plenty of peer pressure while striving for their higher education. Parties, drugs and smoking are just a few things that students can be pressured into. If they fall into the trap of too much indulgence, they may jeopardize their academic progress and destroy their future. Simultaneously students struggle between doing what's right and trying to fit in with the crowd which can be a potential cause of stress.

Along with students are uncertain about career and prospects for the future, many of them wonder if they chose the right discipline, if there will be jobs available when they graduate and if they will made enough money to live a comfortable life. They also realize that university isn't easy, so making sure that they're majoring in the right field is important. When semester is at end some students have lot of pending work and if there is no extension in the date of submission then students get more stressed. Course work demands and responsibilities play important role in creating stress among the students. University education is much harder than previous levels of education. Here Professors have no problem failing students who don't demonstrate responsibility in their class. Now the surge of new responsibility weighs heavily on the shoulders of students. These responsibilities can act like a stressor for student's in can further includes academic demands, teachers expectations, limited time to complete tasks and projects, grades, examinations, competition, study material, lectures problem, Library, demand of university environment, Seniors' behavior and personal goals and expectations, which consequently create stress in students.

Stress is harmful because in stress, autonomic arousal plays a key role in the development of psychosomatic diseases; these are physical ailments with genuine organic basis that are caused by psychological factors. Very stressful events have been associated with a dramatically increased risk of a heart attack. Chronic and ongoing stress even when it is not so dramatic can affect one's health in very significant way. A stressful life might lead to cigarette smoking, obesity and lack of exercise, all of which increase one's risk for heart attack. In addition, stress itself directly leads to an increased risk. Stress has been associated with the risk of many other diseases, ranging from the common cold to chronic pain of some type of cancer (Friedman & Rosenman 1974).

Manifestation of students stress can also include snap at friends/family, overeat, self-isolate and/or avoid others, smoke too much, oversleep, procrastinate, poor judgment, get sick/catch a cold, feeling tired and drained, with no energy, frequent headaches, back pain, body aches, feelings of failure and self-doubt, loss of motivation, use of substances to cope, anger and/or irritation with others and difficulty concentrating. In the context of course work stress a study was carried out on 81 Glasgow Caledonian University students. The aim of the study was to investigate students. Perceived university coursework stress and whether the use of wishful thinking or problem-focused coping was related to anxiety and depression levels. The method of investigation was a four-part questionnaire. There were two hypotheses: 1) Problem solving cooperators will score lower on the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale. 2) Those high in perceived coursework stress and who reveal wishful thinking strategies will have higher anxiety and depression scores. A multiple regression revealed partial support for both Hypotheses. Problem strategies had no relationship to coursework stress but wishful thinking and anxiety were both positive predictors of stress; however, contrary to hypothesis 2 depression revealed a strong negative association with stress. The conclusion from this study is that wishful thinkers are also more likely to be anxious; problem focused cooperators are not anxious, depressed or stressed; stressed students do not suffer from depression. The last finding is possibly because coursework stress is a transient stressor not severe enough to trigger depression.

Academic environment and students' worries, lack of skills, personal likeness and behavior problems can create serious emotional and physical challenges for students, therefore present

study is intended to measure the phenomena of course work stress in relation with above mention factors.

Method

Statement Of The Problem

The problem to be investigated was to measure the causes of course work stress, it further aim to explore the effect of demographic variations such as students’ employment, gender, level of education and type of departments in determining the level of stress among the university students.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify different aspects of stress among students related with the course – work.
2. To Determine the causes of course work stress (Course work Worries, Dis-likeness towards course work, lack of skills to perform work, Students’ attitudinal problems).
3. To determine the effect of demographic variation in determining the level of coursework stress.

Research Questions

1. What are the most common causes of coursework stress among the university students?
2. How students’ age contribute in determining the level of coursework stress?
3. What is the difference between course work stress level of employed and unemployed students?
4. How does coursework stress level of female and male university students are different from each other?
5. What is the difference between coursework stress level of M. Phil and PhD level students?
6. How does departmental variation effects on level of coursework stress experienced by students?

Design

This investigation was a survey design. The participants ask was to respond to 4 sections of a self-administered research questionnaire, they were ask to identify all factors (about coursework) which are causing stress to them while completing coursework assignments.

Population

Population of the study was consisted of the students of , M. Phil and PhD level students of public sector universities.

Sample

A random sample of 100 university students, comprising of 50 male and 50 female was collected from 2 leading universities (National university of Modern Languages & International Islamic University Islamabad) of Islamabad. Students’ ages ranged from 25 to 35 years.

Procedure

Data was collected through personal visits to the sample university. Participants completed the questionnaire in their own time after reassuring them on the anonymity and confidentiality of information. The provision of blank self-sealing envelopes ensured confidentiality. The information from participants was converted into numbers and statistically analyzed by using SPSS.

Results

Table 1
Dimensions of Coursework Stress among the University Students

Dimensions of Coursework Stress			
Coursework Stress Variables	Mean	SD	
Course work Worries	14.1	2.8	
Lack of skills to perform Course work	15.2	4.3	
Dis-likeness towards Course work	12.0	3.5	
Attitudinal Problems	16.7	4.3	
Total	58	14.9	

Table 1 provide us the details about the scores of university students on various dimensions of coursework stress experience by university students from this table it can be inferred that students experience stress due to their attitudinal problems more, they need to learn the skills to perform course work, coursework worries also leads them towards stress and finally all these negatives leads towards dislikes of coursework tasks.

Table 2: Age Wise Difference of Course Works Stress of University Students

Coursework stress variables	Age (25-30)		Age (31-35)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Course work Worries	13.8	2.9	13.4	3.5
Lack of skills to perform course work	19.0	11.5	14.0	3.5
Dis-likeness towards course work	12.4	2.6	11.9	3.4
Attitudinal Problem	15.9	4.1	16.1	4.1
Total	59.1	21.1	55.4	14.5

Table no 2 describes the mean difference of coursework stress experienced by older and younger university students. From this table it can see that younger students are more stressed (mean value is 59.1) as compared to older ones (55.8). Younger students do not possess required skills to accomplish coursework whereas, older students experienced more attitude problems than the younger ones.

Table 3: Gender Wise Difference of Course Works Stress of University Students

Gender				
Coursework Stress variables	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Course work worries	13.5	3.0	16.1	2.7
lack of skills to do course work	14.2	4.0	14.3	9.2
Dis-likeness towards course work	11.6	2.9	14.2	2.7
Attitudinal Problems	15.6	4.0	15.8	4.0
Total	54.9	13.9	60.4	18.6

Table 3 provides the detail of the gender wise difference of course work stress of university students. Results make it clear that female university students experienced more stress due to coursework when compared with male university students (Male mean,54.9, female mean 60.4). This table also provides dimension wise differences and we can see that female students are more worried about the accomplishment of their coursework and also exhibit dis-likeness towards course work projects and assignments more than male university student

Table 4
Level - wise Difference on Course Works Stress of University Student

Coursework Stress Variables	M		SD	
	M	SD	M	SD
Course work Worries	17.8	2.6	12.4	3.6
Lack of skills to perform course work	14.7	10.6	14.5	4.4
Dis-likeness towards Course work	13.9	3.0	12.4	3.6
Attitudinal Problems	16.6	4.1	14.5	3.8
Total	63	20.3	53.8	15.4

Table no 4 in provides information regarding difference in the stress level of the M. Phil PhD students. From this table it appears that M.Phil. Students are more in distressed due to coursework as compared to the PhD students. Dimension wise analysis revealed that M. Phil students have great worries regarding the completion of their coursework tasks and also experience more attitudinal problems than the PhD students.

Table 5
Coursework Stress of Working and Non-Working University Students

Working			Non-working	
Yes			No	
Course work stress Variables	M	SD	M	SD
Course work worries	13.4	2.9	14.2	2.8
Lack of skills to perform Course Work	13.5	3.9	14.9	9.2

To find out the difference between the stress level of employed and unemployed students mean and standard deviation were calculated. The results portray that overall working students are less stressed with their coursework as compare to non-working students. Working students are more confident on the abilities to accomplished tasks related coursework.

Table 6
Differences in the Coursework Stress Due to Departmental Variation

Departmental Variations										
Education		Mass-com		English		Islamiyat		Managem nt Sciences		
coursewo rk Stress Variables	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Course work worries	14. 1	2.8	12. 8	2.5	16. 6	2.7	13. 6	3.9	12. 6	2.8
Lack of skills to perform course work	15. 2	4.3	12. 3	3.2	15. 4	10. 3	15. 6	3.5es s	14. 0	3.8
Dis- likeness Towards Course work	12. 0	3.5	10. 6	2.5	12. 2	2.4	12. 2	3.6	12. 3	2.6
Attitudin al Problems	16. 7	4.3	14. 5	4.5	16. 0	3.6	13. 3	4.3	16. 5	3.4
Total	58	14. 9	50. 2	12. 7	60. 2	19	54. 7	15.3	55. 4	12. 6

Table 6 provided us the details of the difference of course work stress on the variable departmental variations. It can be seen that overall students of English and education departments are more under stress as compared to the students of Education, Islamiyat , Management sciences and Mass communication department. Students of Mass communication department experienced least stress as compared to the students of rest of the departments.

Discussion

The present research investigated the coursework related stress of university students as result of interaction with projects, assignments and research related task assigned by their course instructors. The relationship of gender, age, discipline and level of education was examined in determining the level of stress. The study found that as a whole, University students experience coursework stress due to their attitudinal problems, lack of skills to perform course work, coursework worries. Overall female students experience higher coursework stress. Age was found significantly related to the level of course work stress. The students aged 25-30 years' experience more stress than the students belongs to 31-35 years. Other important variables of the study was departmental variation and level of education, results of the study reveals that departmental variation play a very important role in determining the level of stress as students of English and Education departments are more stressed, moreover students of M.Phil. Are more stressed as compared to the students of PhD level.

Answers to Research Questions

Q1 what are the most common causes of course work stress among the university students.

University students have coursework stress due to their attitudinal problems, they need to learn the skills to perform course work, coursework worries also leads them towards stress and finally all these negatives lead towards dislikes of coursework.

Q2 How students' age contribute in determining the level of coursework stress?

Younger students are more stressed as compared to the older ones.

Q3 What is the difference between course work stress level of employed and unemployed students?

Employed students are less stressed with their coursework requirement as compare to unemployed ones, although students of both groups possess equal skills to perform coursework tasks.

Q4 How does coursework stress level of female and male university students are different from each other?

Female university students are more under coursework stress than the male students of university

Q5 what is the difference between coursework stress level of M. Phil and PhD level students?

M. Phil students are more stressed regarding their course work when compared with to PhD students.

Q6 How does departmental variation effects on coursework stress?

Students of English and Education department are more stressed due to their coursework requirements as compare to the students of other departments. While students of Mass Communication department are least stressed regarding their coursework accomplishment as compare to the students of other departments.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings and conclusion following are some recommendations:

1. Normally students at higher education level taking at least three to five major courses in each semester, teacher of each should assign manageable workload to the students so students can complete them on time.
2. Students dislike their coursework, in order to reduce coursework stress teacher can assign group projects and assignments.
3. Female students experience more course work stress, through guidance and counseling teachers can reduce their stress level or female students can assign group project with male students so they can learn from group intelligence. his
4. Students of English department are more stressed from the students of Education department, mass communication, and management sciences departments, so Teachers of English department need to devise some strategy (improving the skills of the students through extra coaching, counseling and guidance or group work, etc.) for the stress reduction of their students.
5. Social support is very important in dealing with the stress. Teachers should provide their students some relaxation and motivation in the form of social support so that students stress level related to their course work can be reduced.
6. Guidance and counseling services should be provided by the university by hiring counselors which can help students to share their problems and techniques to cope with them.
7. Campus can conduct different workshops and short courses for students and teachers to know the nature of students'

concerns related to their coursework and teach them how to handle coursework requirement by various strategies i.e, self-management, time- management, taking more interest in learning and improving the skill deficiencies.

Applied Significance

For students Stress is harmful for their educational achievements and overall productivity, they have to produce creative and original research work which requires readiness efficiency and alertness throughout the semester and if due to any reasons the stress level of the students is higher; it will definitely reduce their academic competencies. Students those are not able to cop up with coursework demands (stressors) ultimately find relaxation in taking drugs excessively, they may discontinue their education and their class performance badly affected due to stress. If students, teachers and university management is aware of the causes as well as level of the students' coursework stress of most important ingredient of teaching learning process they will take actions to devise some strategies to reduce it. Present study is also significant because it will help students to unravel a major cause of their life stress. Study is significant for the teachers in order to understand students' concerns regarding coursework requirement, teachers may facilitate students to go through in this journey smoothly by providing necessary guidance to perform assignment and project related with students' coursework. Teacher may provide extra time after the class hours to guide students. Results of this study have implications for future research that might add to the existing knowledge.

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