A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF STRESS AND LONELINESS ON SELF-ESTEEM DUE TO ONLINE CLASSES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract : Stress and loneliness are mental health problems that have a serious impact on people's mental and physical health and also longevity of life. Stress and loneliness cause a major effect on undergraduates' self–esteem due to COVID – 19 which altered their learning process online. Self-esteem is quite simply one's attitude toward oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). He described it as a "favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self". Loneliness came into effect since their academic knowledge gain is made online which also demands their adaptation to it which creates stress. Loneliness is described as a sense of being alone despite the need a human interaction. Stress and loneliness due to online classes affect the strength of self-esteem in undergraduate pursuing students. This study solely concentrates on the influence of stress and loneliness on self–esteem. Therefore, this study is aimed to find out the effect of stress and loneliness on self-esteem mainly focusing on undergraduate students. This research is a Qualitative research and the research design used is by interview method. The sample size is 25 undergraduate students. This study helps us to gain a clear view of stress experienced by undergraduates in college which demands various resources for online learning like stable networks, good devices to attend classes, other E-Resources, etc., The study also aims in explaining self-esteem which is an important aspect in Maslow's hierarchy of needs for an individual to be self – actualized. And also, the connection of stress with loneliness (loneliness, distressing experience that occurs when a person's social relationships are perceived by that person to be less in quantity, and especially in quality, than desired, (Louise Hawkley,2018)) which started to emerge out due to online classes. Interventions are drawn that helps in giving suggestions to avoid stress, spend more time in the outside world which in turn avoid loneliness and manage one's self-esteem. However, early detection helps them stay in reality, not fall out in various turmoil like depression, addiction problems, sleep problems suicidal ideation and other invisible problems and improve their quality of life.

Index Terms - **Stress, loneliness, self-esteem, interview method, undergraduate students..**

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent individuals are known to seek socialization with their community of preference. But when the mode of education was switched to online, the students were deprived of the interaction between their peers and fellow students which would have caused loneliness which might be accompanied by stress. Stress is a feeling of physical or emotional tension or even our body's response to pressure which is caused by not having any control over the outcome of a situation. Loneliness is the state of being alone and feeling unhappy about it. Both Stress and loneliness creates a great negative impact on one self specifically it will damage a person's self-esteem. This study concentrates the effects of stress and loneliness on self-esteem due to online classes among undergraduate students from any field. The data provided was collected from undergraduate interview method.

1.1 Stress

It is a feeling of emotional strain and pressure. Stress is our body's response to pressure. Many different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or that threatens our sense of self, or when we feel we have little control over a situation. We all deal with stress differently. Psychological stress is defined as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well- being" given by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984.The physiological or psychological response to internal or external stressors. Stress involves changes affecting nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave. Stress is categorized into two: Eustress and Distress

Eustress: Eustress is stress that has a positive influence on a person. Eustress is what energizes us and motivates us to make a change.

Distress: Distress is stress that negatively affects you. It may be emotional, social, spiritual, or physical pain or suffering that may cause a person to feel sad, afraid, depressed, anxious, or lonely. People in distress may also feel that they are not able to manage or cope with changes caused by normal life activities.

1.2. Loneliness

Loneliness is a strong feeling about getting isolated which cannot be solved easily. Now, in this era it has become so common and particularly among the youngsters. Specifically it has reached its peak among the school and college students during the online classes. Loneliness is the state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one's desires for social connection and actual experiences of it. Feeling lonely can also have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if these feelings have lasted a long time. Some research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems and increased stress. Loneliness is a distressing experience that occurs when a person's social relationships are perceived by that person to be less in quantity, and especially in quality, than desired. The experience of loneliness is highly subjective; an individual can be alone without feeling lonely and can feel lonely even when with other people. Psychologists generally consider loneliness to be a stable trait, meaning that individuals have different set-points for feeling loneliness, and they fluctuate around these set-points depending on the circumstances in their lives. Loneliness is sometimes caused due to rejection by people, and being isolated by family members, friends, and others. It causes a person to separate from the rest of the world and live in a different place mentally.

1.3. Self-esteem

The term self-esteem is used to describe a person's overall subjective sense of personal worth or value. In other words, self-esteem may be defined as how much one appreciates and like his own self, regardless of the circumstances. Self-esteem can be defined by many factors and one of them is Self-confidence. The original definition was given by William James in 1890. He sees self-esteem as a ratio of successes compared to failures in areas of life that are important to a given individual, or that individual's "success to pretensions" ratio Rosenberg defined Self-esteem as the following in 1965, self-esteem is one's positive or negative attitude toward oneself and one's evaluation of one's thoughts and feelings overall in relation to oneself. Self-esteem is the feeling that one possess towards them. The evaluation or the capability they know of themselves. Carl Rogers defined Self-esteem as, it comprises what we think about ourselves. He believed that feelings of self-worth is developed in early childhood and were formed from the interaction of the child with his own parents and the society. In this study the relation between stress, loneliness and self-esteem is studied based on how stress due to loneliness impacts the self-esteem of undergraduates.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Review of literature for stress

Leonard et al (1981) studied how life events, chronic life strains, self-concepts, coping, and social supports play a role in the formation of stress for a person. They used longitudinal data to observe the results from people. In their study depression became a special interest added to their analysis. This was studied on graduates and every single employee. Stress was divided into three major conceptual domains. They are the sources of stress, the mediators of stress, and the manifestations of stress.

Eliad et al (2011) studied the stress and academic performance of undergraduate students. 376 students participated in this research. The College undergraduate stress scale (CUSS) was used to identify or evaluate the stress in the students. The study showed that there is a direct relationship between the student's stress level and their academic performance.

Agolla et al (2009) the research was based on the answers and responses they got from undergraduate students. They specifically concentrated on the causes symptoms and effects of stress. Totally 320 students took part in this research. The data or responses were collected through the self-administered questionnaires by giving them to the subjects who participated. Their responses proved that stress is one of the factors that lead to low self-esteem, low self- motivation, and poor performance in academics.

Zaid (2003) surveyed the university students about stress. 232 subjects participated in this research. The data were collected by giving the self-administered questionnaires distributed to the students. The responses received were evaluated through, descriptive statistics, correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). This result showed the fear of exams, inadequate time to study, high expectations from family due to the stress among students. It is also said that fear of failure is the most common thing among undergraduate students.

Ngozi et al (2019) the main focus was to look over the levels of perceived academic stress on undergraduate students. 427 undergraduate students from a university were used in this research. The tool used to collect the data from the students was the Perceived Academic Stress Scale (PASS). Data gathered from the subjects were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. This study also said that the stress level of male undergraduate students was higher than that of female undergraduate students.

Jabeen et al (2013) studied the effect of stress on students' academic performance. A total of 150 students from different universities took part in this research. 75 male subjects and 75 female subjects participated. The survey was collected using Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The result showed not a big difference between male and female students' academics.

2.2 Review of literature for loneliness

Wisemen et al (2006) this research studied the relationship between the parents and students who are doing their undergraduate. 146 undergraduate students participated in this research. In which 69 of them were males and 77 of them were females. The tools used in this research were the Parental Bonding Instrument, an attachment styles questionnaire, the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. The results they received showed that the separation from their parents wasn't a reason for loneliness. It was also shown that self-criticism and ambivalence were some of the reasons that caused loneliness.

Deniz et al (2005) they studied the student's social skills and loneliness levels. To collect data the tools used were the Social Skills Inventory, UCLA Loneliness Scale, and Relationships Scale Questionnaire. The responses collected were analysed by t-test, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. In this research, the emotional expressive levels, emotional sensitivity levels, social control levels, and total social skills levels were higher in female students than it was in male students. But also emotional control levels were higher in male students. This research also said that the students in a relationship with the opposite gender had average loneliness points higher than others.

Stoliker, Lanfreniere (2015) The sole objective of this study was to evaluate the feelings of stress, loneliness, and learning in students. This survey was conducted online with 150 students as their subjects. Both male and female students shared an equal amount of loneliness and academic stress. There was no gender difference. In this research, they found that loneliness and learning burnout did not affect students' academic performance.

Reis et al (2021) studied the mental health of young adults during COVID-19. The study focused on the effects of resilience and loneliness on the mental health of young adults between the age of 18 to 25 in Belgium and Italy. They did two-phase research during lockdown and post lockdown using The UCLA loneliness scale (Russell 1996) and the Resilience scale for adults (Wagnild and Young 1993). The results showed that the pandemic's isolation measures impacted the mental health of the youth negatively. They also found that the mean scores for loneliness had to be reduced during the second phase of research (post lockdown).

Lee et al (2020) examined the rise of loneliness and its relation with depression and anxiety due to pandemics in university students. Altogether her two samples of data were collected from 564 individuals between the ages of 18-23, before (Jan 2020) and during the pandemic (April/May 2020). The results show that the levels of loneliness had increased from January to April and females had expressed increased loneliness. There was also an increase in the levels of depression.

Richardson et al (2017) Study the relationship between loneliness and mental health in students. They conducted a study on 454 British students pursuing their undergraduate degrees. They concluded that higher levels of loneliness could lead to an elevation in stress, anxiety, and depression levels. The results never indicated that the increase of loneliness could lead to mental health problems.

2.3 Review of literature for self-esteem

Abouserie (1994) investigated the levels and sources of stress and its relationship with self-esteem and locus of control among university students. The sample comprised 675 undergraduate students (473 females and 202 males) of the second year. The Adolescent Stress Questionnaire ASQ (Byrne et al 2002) and the Learning Styles Questionnaire LSQ (Honey and Mumford 1989), The Rosenberg scale (Rosenberg 1965) and The Multidimensional Multi-attribution locus of control causality scale MMLS

Lefcourt et al (1979) were used to analyze stress, self-esteem and locus of control respectively. Students who had higher self-esteem reported lower stress than those with lowest self-esteem and females reported higher life stress than males.

Khatib (2012) studied the relationship between loneliness, self-esteem, self-efficacy and gender among college students of the United Arab Emirates. A count of 495 college students responded where 59 % were females and 49% were males who ranged between the ages 18 –36. Loneliness was measured by the revised UCLA loneliness scale(Russell 1996), Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965) measured self-esteem and self-efficacy was measured by the General self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem 1995). The results showed that self-esteem mainly predicted loneliness and lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy showed higher levels of loneliness.

Dixon and Kurpius (2008) Investigated interrelationships between depression, stress, self-esteem and mattering. The sample was comprised of college students between 18-23 years. The result showed the increased capability of stress to speculate depression. Women reported greater stress, depression and mattering than men.

Vanhalst et al (2013) studied how low self-esteem makes adolescents vulnerable to loneliness. They conducted a 5-wave study in Dutch adolescents and a 3-wave study in Belgium adolescents. The results exhibited that loneliness and self-esteem had a reciprocal manner of influence on each other. The self-esteem and loneliness factors were influenced more by the perceived social acceptance rather than the actual social acceptance.

Freiedlander et al (2007) studied the combined impacts of self-esteem stress and social support on adjustment to university among first-year university students. The results showed that students with lesser levels of stress expressed a higher amount of social adjustment and students possessing higher self-esteem show increased social adjustment and lower levels of depression.

Shrestha et al (2021) aimed to study the effects of various forms of life stress on the self-esteem of undergraduate medical students in Nepal. The sample consisted of 190 medical college students from 1st year to 5th year. The results revealed that 3rd-year students expressed lower self-esteem while the remaining 74% of the participants showed normal self-esteem. The males showed higher self-esteem than females.

III. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Research design:

The research design applied here is qualitative. Qualitative Research involves the research in which the participants are interviewed and questioned about their opinions based on the context. In this type of research, the participants are observed through their narrative responses which describe their view in regard to their experience.

3.2 Sample design:

The sample comprises of 35 undergraduate students of ages between (17- 20).

3.3 Variables:

The three variables used are stress, loneliness and self-esteem.

**Stress**: It can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional and psychological strain.

**Loneliness:** It is the subjective feeling of being alone.

IV. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

**Stress**: According to Cohen et al (1983) Perceived stress is the feeling or thoughts that an individual has about how much stress they are under at a given point in time or over a given time.

**Loneliness**: Russell, Peplaua & Ferguson (1978) define loneliness through common themes, which characterize the phenomenon of feeling lonely-as a specific experience of an unpleasant nature, the cause of which lies in quantitative or qualitative impoverishment of individual's social relations; they also understand the feeling of loneliness as a discrepancy between desired and actual social relations.

**Self-esteem:** According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is one's positive or negative attitude toward oneself and one's evaluation of one's own thoughts and feelings overall in a relation to oneself.

V. DISCUSSION

The students reported that the transition to online classes was quite pleasant initially but later the routine had created monotonicity as they felt distanced from their peers. A minimal 35% reported stress whereas the remaining 75% never experienced any form of stress. The students conveyed that the cause of stress was the uncertainty that had been created due to the poor quality of education which had thereby reduced their confidence in theoretical concepts. The self-esteem of the students had been barely affected yet 20% of the participants reported a decrease in their confidence levels and lacked confidence as they were aware that they were deprived of the required skills. A major sum of the students reported loneliness as they were deprived of social interaction with their classmates and friends. Physical symptoms such as headache, brain fog and blurry eyes were profoundly experienced. Many have feared that they might be underestimated due to a lack of adequate skills in their workplace interviews for being a graduate of the pandemic era. Some even reported that they could concentrate on other skills and courses for their self-development. The students' decrease in their self-esteem was barely reported. To sum up, each highlighted that the offline mode of learning was much superior and essential in all angles than the online mode of learning. Only a high amount of loneliness has been reported, other than that stress and self-esteem only have minimal influence on the person.

VI. CONCLUSION

As a result, the majority of students expressed a preference for offline learning, citing its superiority in various aspects, while loneliness emerged as a prominent challenge in the online learning environment. The students' feedback on the transition to online classes reveals a mixed experience, with initial positivity giving way to monotony and a sense of distance from peers. Moreover, a significant 35% reported stress, primarily attributed to the uncertainty stemming from poor educational quality, impacting their confidence in theoretical concepts. Loneliness emerged as a major concern, affecting many students' social interactions and contributing to physical symptoms.

VI. LIMITATION

One major limitation is that the students were observed and interviewed during their regular offline classes during which there was not any feeling of stress or other negative feelings in them. Another limitation is that their routine had come to normal as the interview took place after a long time since the termination of online classes.

Systematic risk is the only independent variable for the CAPM and inflation, interest rate, oil prices and exchange rate are the independent variables for APT model.

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