



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>Journal DOI: [10.21474/IJAR01](https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON EATING HABITS AND CONSEQUENCE HEALTH PROBLEMS
AMONG INDIVIDUALS OF SAVEETHA DENTAL COLLEGE- A QUESTIONNAIRE BASED STUDY.**

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Manuscript Info**Manuscript History:**

Received: 15 March 2016
Final Accepted: 12 May 2016
Published Online: May 2016

Key words:***Corresponding Author**

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Abstract

'1/4th of what we eat keeps us healthy, 3/4th of what we eat keeps the doctor wealthy'. Stress is a condition where people feel under pressure and burdened that leads to many of the psychosocial, psychological problems in today's society. Obesity can be a lot related to stress and other health issues. This study shows interest upon the types of stress, its relation to eating habits and the outcome effects upon individual health. It will create an awareness among individuals to balance their stress and eating habits, thus helping them to stay healthy. The objective is to study the effects of stress on eating habits among individuals of Saveetha Dental College through a prepared questionnaire in evaluating their stress and body health

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Introduction:-

Stress is a condition or feeling of being burdened or overloaded, tense, worried and anxiety. People most probably experience stress in everyday life. Stress both give advantages and disadvantages. In certain situation, it helps to motivate an individual to finish up assignments and task within given time, or perform well. However, it can be worst if individuals cannot cope their stress well leading to over-stressed and thus affecting the ability to carry out a normal life for a long period (1).

Stress is said can affect an individual's eating habits. The majority of people prefer snacking behavior which is increase during this condition. This is regardless of sex or their dieting manner. During this period, people having stress is evident to take less meal-type foods such as fruit and vegetables, meat and fish. Besides, there is also decrease in overall amount eaten during stressful periods (2).

Even though stress can affect body in different ways, yet acute stress responses could be good for a person. Based on recent studies, it has proven that stress aid in improving body's immune system. This is based on the production of two hormones, adrenaline and cortisol during acute stress. The benefits of adrenaline are it helps in increasing breathing in addition to pulse rates, and serve the body in a ready state for any emergencies. This occurs in an individual that capable to manage stress which results in a healthy physical response (3).

However, in the individuals who are not able to cope their stress, they may undergo increase in the cortisol level leading to vicious cycle. Extremely high level of cortisol causes the body to be more reactive towards stress. This condition is associated with increase in both blood pressure and pulse rate (3).

Stress can affect body in various ways. It could be beneficial if it is in small quantities but too much stress can be harmful. People perceive stress differently and how people react to it determine how stress affect people's health. Stress can be due to many reasons. Studies, family problems, relationship and work could be the commonest factors that create stress. However, it is actually people's thought about a situation where an individual involved is the critical factor (4).

Individual undergoing stress will face these symptoms; headaches, sleep disturbances, insomnia, indigestion, diarrhea, anxiety, anger, irritability, depression, fatigue, feeling moody and etc. (1). Individuals see situations in different ways and everyone tend to have different coping skills on how to manage stress. Thus, it is possible that people give responds in various manners on a particular situation and there are no two individuals that react to stress in the same manner (4).

Materials and methods:-

100 dental students of Saveetha Dental College, both male and female were given a questionnaire regarding the effects of stress on their eating habits and consequence health problems. The age of students are in range between 18-21 years old.

The questionnaire comprises of Section A and Section B. Section A consists of multiple choices questions whereas Section B consists of score based questions. In this section, the students answered the questionnaire according to score; 1(almost never), 2(never), 3(seldom), 4(often), and 5(almost always). The total score obtained from Section B can determine the potential level of stress of students participated in this study. If the score is in range 20 or below, the potential level of stress is low, score range of 30 or below, the stress level is moderate, score range of 40 or below, the stress level is high and if the score range of 40 and above, the potential level of stress is very high.

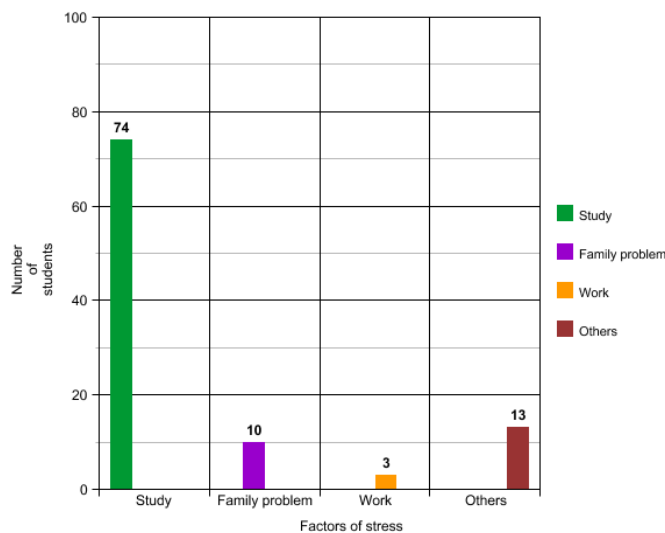
Score	Description
1	Low
2	Moderate
3	High
4	Very high

Observation and results:-

In this study, most of the students including male and female mostly answered the score 4 and 5 which mean high level of stress as the higher the score the more it reflects toward high level of stress. Only small percentage of students who chose to answer score 3 and below. Therefore, more than half of the students significantly scored high stress potential level.

Table 2:- Questionnaire analysis.

Questions	Number of students (N=100)
SECTION A	
1. What is the major factor of your stress?	
a) Study	74
b) Family problem	10
c) Work	3
d) Others	13
2. What will you do to reduce the stress?	
a) Exercise	13
b) Eat a lot	71
c) Sleep	6
d) Others	10
3. How often do you take meals when you are stress?	
a) none	32
b) once per day	49
c) three times per day	15
d) five times per day	4
4. What are the symptoms do you experience during depression?	
a) Headache	45
b) Excessive fatigue	12
c) Chest pain	3
d) Restlessness	40
5. What kind of food do you prefer when you feel stress?	
a) Chocolate	22
b) Snacks	49
c) Instant food (e.g.: pizza)	27
d) Vegetables	2

**Figure 1:** What is the major factor of your stress?

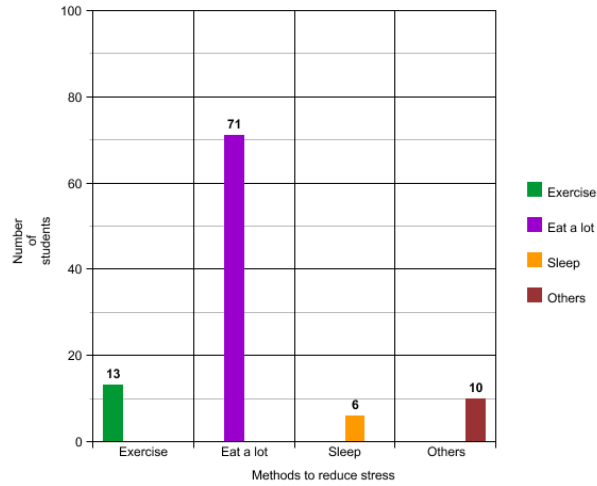


Figure 2: What will you do to reduce stress?

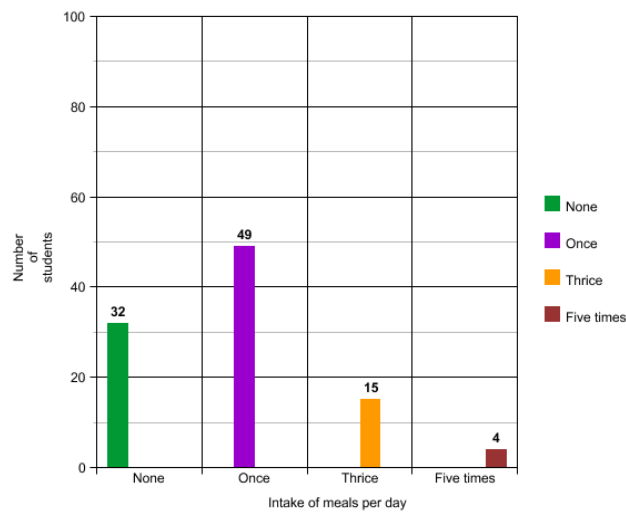


Figure 3: How often do you take meals when you are stress?

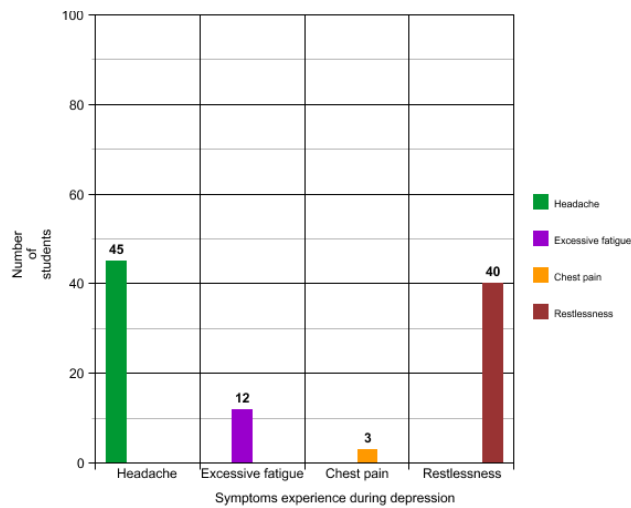


Figure 4: What are the symptoms do you experience during depression?

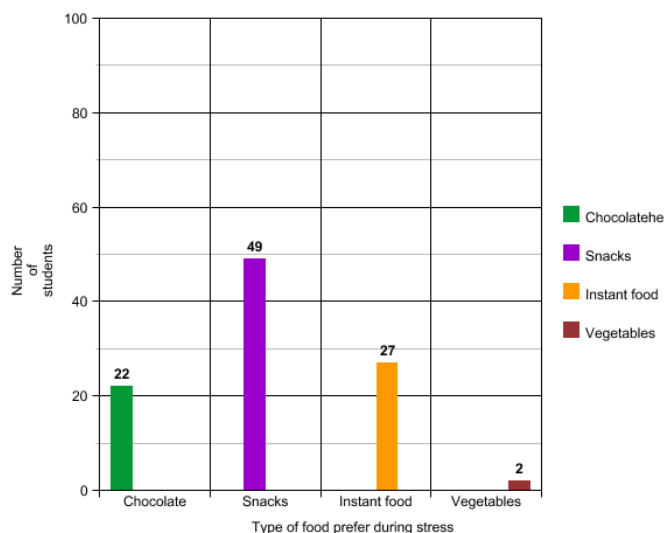


Figure 5: What kind of food do you prefer when you feel stress?

SECTION B	SCORE				
	1	2	3	4	5
6) How frequent do you feel stress in a week?	0	0	5	39	56
7) I prefer to eat junk food whenever I feel stress.	0	1	7	39	53
8) It is difficult for me to choose heavy meals when I feel stress	2	4	18	27	49
9) I gain weight whenever I feel stress	3	5	16	37	39
10) I lose weight whenever I feel stress	4	5	11	42	38
11) I lose or have lost control over how I eat when I am stress	9	10	13	31	37
12) I think stress can affect my body weight.	3	4	22	20	51
13) I find it difficult to cope my stress.	9	11	19	24	37
14) I could not sleep well when I am stress.	13	17	26	24	20
15) My eating habits are affected when I feel too much pressure.	0	1	19	33	47

Table 3:- Potential level of stress

Score	Level of stress
20 or below	Low
30 or below	Moderate
40 or below	High
41 or above	Very high

Table 4:- Total number of students on each potential level of stress.

Score	Number of students(N=100)
20 or below	3
30 or below	11
40 or below	40
41 or above	46

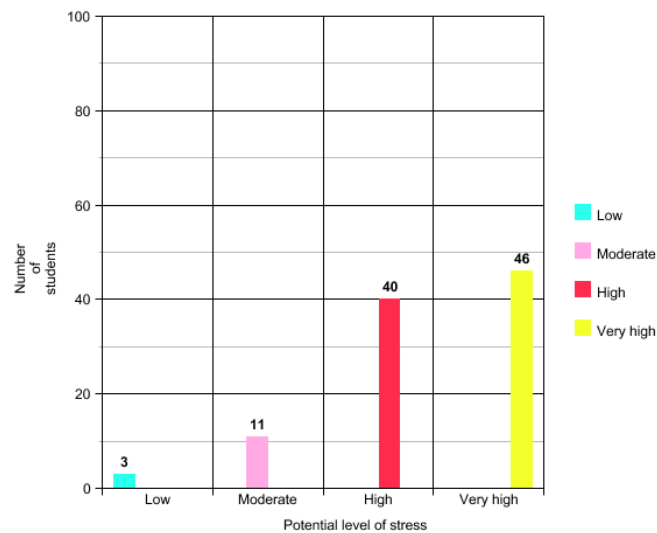


Figure 6: The potential level of stress.

Discussion:-

In this study, major factor of stress varied among respondents and not everyone was having the same factor. Most of them chose study as their major factor of stress followed by family problem and work. 'Others' scored the second highest as 13 of them have stated others than given factors such as relationship, appearance and eating behavior as their major factor of stress. Majority of the participants chose study as their major factor of stress, 74 in number. Work factor scored the least, only three in number (Table 2, Figure 1).

There were various ways chosen in order to reduce the stress among the participants, and most of them picked eat a lot as the best way they could do to cope the stress. Whereas, others chose exercise and sleep and also 'others' such as dancing, listening to music and talk to a friend as the method used. The commonest method was eating a lot whereas the lowest one is sleeping, and number of participants chose these ways are 71 and six respectively (Table 2, Figure 2).

Stress has shown affecting the eating behavior. From this study, 49 of the students only take one meal per day which reflecting how stress affect so much on their intake of food. On the other hand, only 15 of the students took 3 meals per day, which is a normal eating behavior. In addition, stress has proven to cause an individual having no heavy meals as 32 of the students did not take any meals in a day which scored the second highest among the choices of number of meals intake per day (Table 2, Figure 3).

Stress could give negative effects towards body health. In this study, there were few symptoms recognized to be the most common experienced by stressors. They were headache, excessive fatigue, restlessness and chest pain. However, headache spot for the first place among the other choices, followed by restlessness, excessive fatigue and chest pain. These symptoms are varied depending on how the body react to the stress. The least symptom chosen was chest pain, with only three students experienced this symptom during stress period whereas headache and restlessness scored almost similar, 45 and 40 respectively (Table 2, Figure 4).

Significantly, most people experiencing stress have unhealthy eating behaviors. This is proven in this study. 49 of the participants chose snacks as the main food preferred during stress times. On the other hand, healthy food such as vegetables scored the least, with only two students preferred this when they were stress. The second highest score, 27 and the third highest score, 22 students preferred instant food and chocolate respectively when they feel pressure (Table 2, Figure 5).

Overall, most of the participants involved in this study scored potential level of stress at the level of very high and high level of stress. More than 50% altogether of the participants scored these level. Based on the Figure 6 and Table 4, it shows an ascending pattern from the low to higher potential level of stress. Among these two levels, very high level was the highest, 46 students scored this level. Within the score range of high potential level of stress (41-50), the highest score obtained by three students which is 48/50 whereas the lowest score obtained in this score

range was 41. High potential level of stress scored the second highest, a total number of 40 students potentially in this level. The highest scored within the score range (31-40) of this level was 40 whom scored by eight students and the least scored in this range was 32. The third place of the highest score was moderate level of stress. Only 11 participants potentially in this level with the highest score in score range (21-30) was 30 obtained by four students and the least score was 25 whom obtained by only one student. The minimum score among four potential levels was low, which only three students had low potential level of stress. The maximum score in low score range (0-20) was 19 obtained by a student whereas the lowest score in this range was 18 (Table 4, Figure 6).

Conclusion:-

Overall, this study has shown the correlation between stress and how it affects eating behaviors and following health problems. Students should find the best method in order to overcome their stress to avoid health problems. Even though there were few students scored the lowest potential level of stress, however there are possibility for them to score the next level, which is worst level of stress. Same goes to whom scored the highest for each range of stress potential level as there is possibility for them to score higher stress level.

The students should increase the intake of nutritious foods to avoid consequence health problems. In addition, counselling is suggested as it can help students to cope their stress well. For instance, students which have family problem as their major factor of stress are recommended to meet the counsellor.

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