



Stress Management Among Students: Conventional and Islamic Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Scholars, counsellors and medical practitioners have agreed on the notion that stress emanates from any type of adversity, sickness and other life trials. In other words, stress is a reality of life that humans have to deal with; it could be mild and it could be severe; it could be detected or otherwise. There are natural, spiritual and medical ways to reduce it; or deal with it. And these mechanisms differ from one individual to the other. Natural ways to treat or minimize constitute; meditation, exercise, massage, organize one's life, eating healthy ways, limiting the time spent on the internet and mobile-phone usage as well as avoiding caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine. Being religious or spiritual helps reducing the pain of adversities; strengthens the inner entities, enhances positivity and increases the purity of soul, body and mind. All religions regardless of their identity, history and geographical location preach calm mind, healthy consciousness, and positive thought; these properties assist patients of stress regardless of their religious belief system. The believe that there is an ultimate power (Allah, God) also contributes to the wellbeing and the defence mechanism of the patient. In fact, religious individuals benefit from their faith and prayers in diverse ways and levels as they maintain strong sense of tranquillity, peace, and confidence; as well as strong inner capabilities to cope with stress. It was early 1950s when scholars have started to focus on stress related studies. Stress is a mental or physical phenomenon; it is also a state of physical or mental tension that causes emotional distress; a complex phenomenon which actually depends on the dispositions, environmental conditions, experiences and situations within which the individual lives. Stress nonetheless, stems from stressor. The later could be anything that challenges an individual's adaptability on the environment he or she lives in or it could be a psychological or biological factor as well as social factors. Students are one of the first and weakest victims of stress as they face immense stressors during their studies; they must deal with financial, relationship and academic difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

Students get stressed during their studies as they face time management problems, financial conditions, homesick, depression, health issues, social situations and relationship predicaments. The process of education has never been an easy journey. Education, regardless of its levels, is paramount of importance, more vital is the construction and building a worldview suitable for the industry and the environment of this competitive and information driven age. As the world becomes complex entity the educational process also becomes multifaceted and compound. The role of the counsellors, the teachers/lecturers, parents and the government become momentous in the process of education. Above all, nonetheless, the environment of the academic institutions such as the university play a major role in the life of the students. In the ladders of education levels, the students develop stress related issues and face significant amount of challenges. This paper focuses on stress management among students. The pressure and the tension exerted on the mind and on the body is what normally has been referred to as stress, it can have various aspects and different symptoms, it is a state of mental and emotional strain and it results from hostile and severely challenging circumstances related to the life of the individual. The paper also studies stress from an Islamic perspective. Islam, being a comprehensive religion acknowledges stress and provides solutions and remedies to deal with stress; it employs spiritual forces, which intern impact both mental and physical wellness. The paper answers two basic questions, namely, how to manage stress in conventional and Islamic terms? and how to help students cope with stress conditions? The objective is to simplify stress remedies and highlight its effect on students. The study is a theoretical and conceptual one; and intends to contribute to the bridge of knowledge in this field of study.

1. THE NATURE OF STRESS

Stress is a pressure and tension experienced by the patients; it is a state of mental and emotional strain which mainly results from a demanding circumstance (The Max Weber Dictionary). In various situations stress may vary from individual to another point of view, stress is our body's physical, mental and chemical reactions to circumstances that frighten, confuse, endanger or irritate us. In medical terms stress is the body's general response to environmental situations (American Psychological Association).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), there are three types of stress; namely: acute stress, episodic acute stress, and chronic stress. The nature and characteristics as well as symptoms and durations are diverse and treatment approaches will therefore be accordingly (American Psychological Association). As far as stress and gender are concerned researchers have reported that pressure, back pain, neck pain, anxiety, appetite and skin rashes were observed among female sufferers. While heart diseases, depressions, hair falls, poor sleeping patterns and erratic moods were on the male side.

the most common form of stress is the acute stress. It is mainly related or rather it emanates from the pressures and demands of the given environment in which the individual at risk operates. According to researcher's acute stress symptoms are easy to recognize. Students only need to remember what went wrong in their lives for past weeks or months; failed in a midterm, rejected by a boy or girl, lost close friend in other words It is just a list of things that has gone wrong in their lives. In fact, this type of stress will not extensively damage life it nonetheless gives the students adequate emotional disorder, anxiety and sometimes minor depression. Physically, the patient may also experience some sort of back pain and headache.

When one has a lot of nervous energy that situation is called episodic acute stress. It may not differ so much from acute stress but these group of people see frequent chaos, crisis and not able to organize their activities in life; they become short-tempered, easily irritable, anxious, all the time, as well as tense. They could also be in a hurry, abrupt and tend to inflict on themselves

unnecessary demands and pressures. The patient may also find to have excessive competitive drive, be impatient and unnecessarily aggressive. Persistent tension, headaches, migraines, hypertension as well as heart diseases are the main symptoms of episodic acute stress. It must be said that the sufferers of episodic acute stress resistant changes in life and sometimes become highly opinionated. The most devastating stress is called chronic stress. This level or type of stress kills. It can take life, family and future away. In other words, it destroys minds, bodies and lives. The sufferer sees no way out of a miserable and devastating situation. It may have emanated from traumatic experiences in the history of the sufferer's life. It affects all aspects of life.

2. CONVENTIONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT

Counsellors, medical practitioners and social workers agree that managing stress may differ from person to person. Nonetheless, there are conventionally some agreed area of comfort. The sufferer may want to take time out, this means to relax completely or partially. This relaxation process helps the patient or the sufferer to have a break from her or his stressors or the factors which are causing the stress. Some experts contend that:

“when you give yourself permission to step away from it, you let yourself have time to do something else, which can help you have a new perspective or practice techniques to feel less overwhelmed. It's important to not avoid your stress (those bills have to be paid sometime), but even just 20-minutes to take care of yourself is helpful” (Feng, G. F., 1992).

Meditation is another technic to manage stress conventionally. In this paper I use the word in its educational and spiritual sense. As word is sometimes used slackly and imprecisely in our modern societies; creating unnecessary misperceptions on how to meditate. On the other hand, there are those who use the word meditate in place of contemplating and thinking. In that sense meditation is mainly related to spirituality; it in fact. uplifts the meditator spiritually as well as

hoists him or her to connect to the higher consciousness. It is important to note that spiritual meditation is a commanding procedure and recommended for stress sufferers. Some of the types of meditations are: body scan, mindfulness breath awareness and transcendental. In whichever suits the sufferer, these technics are helpful in diverse ways. Experts maintain that:

“...mindful prayer helps the mind and body to relax and focus. Mindfulness can help people see new perspectives, develop self-compassion and forgiveness. When practicing a form of mindfulness, people can release emotions that may have been causing the body physical stress. Much like exercise, research has shown that even meditating briefly can reap immediate benefits...” Cold, F., et all., 2019).

Another equally vital technic to manage stress is exercise. This refers to any activity involving physical effort, carried out to sustain or improve health and fitness. Exercise also means mental or/and bodily exertion for the purpose of elevating quality of health through training. There are main several types of physical activities namely muscle-strengthening, bone-strengthening and Aerobic activity. All these are beneficial for recovery and health life. Experts contend that:

“...exercise benefits your mind just as well as your body. We keep hearing about the long-term benefits of a regular exercise routine. But even a 20-minute walk, run, swim or dance session in the midst of a stressful time can give an immediate effect that can last for several hours...” (Cold F., 2019).

In other words, the exercise need not to be an exhausting session; all you need is to get your heart dashing, for instance by taking a lively walk or a bicycle ride. Glyn Williams contends that “exercise can be tremendously advantageous for the brain just as the body” (Glyn Williams) Medical specialists opine that “ordinary exercise discharges endorphins that is feel-great hormones that can lessen pressure and enable the psyche to concentrate on an option that is other

than stresses and concerns” (Cold F., 2019).

3. **STRESS AMONG STUDENTS**

Unfortunately, student’s stress and related phenomena are here to stay. It affects all levels of students regardless of their origin, place of study and course studied. Stress related issues are also faced by ages from primary to postgraduate students. Nonetheless, it true that the older the student; say postgraduate are more targeted by stress. The factors or the sources could be diverse in nature and it may emanate from mental, relationship, physical, family and job. Academic related matters such as examinations and psychological issues like low self-esteem are also part of the sources. Declan Aherne in his work “understanding student stress: A qualitative approach” found that:

“... the analysis of data reveals a number of patterns of stress, ... of academic over-identification, parental conflict and social inadequacy particularly noteworthy...that students are under stress is reflected in their levels of physical and psychological 'illness', cognitive skills deficits, examination anxiety and attrition rates. Typically, and consistently, students' academic stressors have included examinations, time demands, competition and class environment while the most common personal stressors have been intimate relationships, finance and parental conflicts...” (Declan Aherne,2001).

Besides, researchers have studied several factors as the principal causes of stress. The of these factors is the situation whereby student leaves home to live away from home. School or university can make you to live far from home or been far from the family for any noteworthy timeframe. In that given situation the student goes into new domain that everything becomes extraordinary, testing situations and awful circumstance; and this can be difficult to acclimate to, particularly, amid those initial couple of months (Cambell, 1983).

Academic related causes are other factors which immensely contributes to student’s stress. For secondary and even university level this is relevant; in fact, studies show that even postgraduates

suffer from this. Examinations can be a traumatizing factor as the most educational institutions focus examinations and rank students based on this for achievements and various rewards. Study conducted by Deepti Bhargava found that academic related problems can cause serious health issues such as insomnia, anxiety, and loss of appetite and these problems originate from the exams, assignments and study habits.

“...the worry about academic performance can cause stress symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia or changes in your appetite and overall mood... students have poor study habits and cram last minute studying in the night before exams. The fear of exams and workload create stress among students. The first cause of stress among university students is a lot of assignments” (Deepti Bhargava, 2018).

Inadequate funds, lack of financial assistance and other monetary problems could cause stress to students. People of this age view money as an important vehicle to everything; better dress, attracting beautiful girl, having unique pen and bag. All these could be obtained with money. They therefore, get stressed without it; and with this imaginary life style of having the best car, mobile or bike will only create stressful demands; as they do not work or have no time to work. Stuart Heckman and Hanna Lim have elucidated this factor, asserting that financial worries, and debts contribute to stress among students.

“...Concerns that debt loads and other financial worries negatively affect student wellness are a top priority for many university administrators. Factors related to financial stress among college students were explored using the Roy Adaptation Model...the results show that financial stress is widespread among students...two of the most important financial stressors were not having enough money to participate in the same activities as peers and expecting to have higher amounts of student loan debt at graduation. The results also indicate that students with higher financial self-efficacy and greater financial optimism about the future are significantly less likely to report financial stress. Implications for student life administrators, policymakers, financial counsellors, and financial therapists are discussed” (Stuart Heckman, et al., 2014).

Lack of decent and sustainable friendship or relationship can also cause stress. To avoid stress students, need friends be it mere acquaintances or close friends. Note that friend here means

someone to talk to; the minimum, or depend upon the maximum. We should also be aware that friendships made in college are far crucial and significant; as there is great possibility that this friendship may stay throughout our life. In the beginning it may be grim or easy to find depending on the student's personality; nonetheless the process of finding comfortable one might be rougher than we think and this course of development could cause stress. On the contrary and on similar note deceitful friends and relationships may even cause more stress than finding one. Additionally, the maintenance of it could also be stressing.

4. ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON MANAGING STRESS

Islam, provided that it is understood and practiced correctly, gives man peace of mind, soul and heart, as well as it bestows man contentedness with oneself. Silm which is the literal meaning root of Islam is the feeling of endless security and complete immunity from the numerous complications of life. Captivatingly, the Islamic solution to stress is permanent, genuine and everlasting. That means it gives you the medications before getting the disease and the power or the ammunition before the war. In other words, it teaches us what to evade so that impairment will not reach us. The Qur'an reads: "and do not throw yourselves; with your own hands, into destruction; and do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good" (2:195).

In general Islam has system of medication and healing within its fundamental framework and through its teachings. That is to say Islam integrates methods of spiritual, psychological, and material aspects of providing comprehensive healing. These approaches can be explicitly found in the Qur'an as well as in the hadith of the prophet. The Qur'an reads: "We send down (stage by stage) of the Qur'an that which is a healing and mercy to those who believe" (17:82). In another verse Allah says: "And when I am ill, it is He who cures me" (26:80). In these two verses we understand several issues related to how we seek treatment in Islam. Firstly, trust in Allah, as he is the lone who could bestow health; it is He also who gives ailment and it is He who can cure. Similarly, the Qur'an is a book of healing; meaning read it when stressed, read it when sad, and read it when you are stricken by anxieties. This is because Allah says in the Qur'an: "Surely in Allah's remembrance do the hearts find peace" (13:28). In a way, these are prerequisites for

getting treatment from Allah.

Put differently, the Qurán explains that no sickness can be cured without the benevolence and approval of the Almighty. We must nonetheless, seek proper treatment for the ultimate cure to come and that is His approval. In Islam seeking treatment is the means that will lead to the appropriate outcome with the authorization of Allah.

In line with the above Prophet Muhammad has mentioned in an authentic hadith that the Almighty Allah did not sent down any illness without its cure. The Prophet says: “Allah created disease and treatment, and He made for each disease a treatment. So seek treatment” (Sunan Abi Dawud). Based on this hadith getting treatment is assured in Islam; simply because Allah is just; if He gives illness, He will provide the medicine, it is only up to human to discover it now or later.

In his life time the prophet has prescribed diverse forms and products of medicine such as honey, black seed, moderation in diet and having a good sleep. Medically, black seed contains antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and analgesic properties; hence, it is a cure for ailments affecting human. Modern scientific research also finds that it helps digestion, and it should be consumed to treat respiratory ailments, digestive related problems as well as to boost the immune system.

Likewise, the Qur’an described honey as a source of curative. Allah says: “And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: 'Take your habitations in the mountains and in the trees and in what they erect. Then, eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy (for you).' There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colour wherein is healing for men. Verily, in this is indeed a sign for people who think” (16:69). In another verse the Qurán tells us that the honey is one of the foods of the Jannah; an indicative of its values and quality in the hierarchy of food. The Qur’an reads about the food consumed and available in the Jannah: “...and rivers of clarified honey, clear and pure... (47:15). One finds comfort and ease to consume a medication prescribed

by Allah in the Qur'an for various ailments including those related to stress. Other civilizations such as Greeks, Chinese, Romans Egyptian and Assyrian have employed honey to treat diverse diseases.

In the hadith of the prophet Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, related that: "A man came to the prophet and said: my brother has some abdominal trouble; the prophet said to him, let him drink honey, the man returned to the prophet and said: O Messenger of Allah! I let him drink honey, but it caused him more pain, the prophet, said to him: go and let him drink honey!, the man went and let his brother drink honey then returned back and said: O Messenger of Allah, it did not cause him except more pains; the prophet, then said: Allah has said the truth, but your brother's abdomen has told a lie; let him drink honey, so he made him drink honey and he was cured" (Bukhari and Muslim). In other hadith the prophet says: "Make use of the two remedies: honey and the Qur'an" (At-Tirmidhi).

In the extensive development of the medicine industry "...it has been discovered that honey has antibacterial properties as well as other health benefits...(it)... composed of water, simple and complex sugars, minerals, enzymes, amino acids, and several different vitamins known to be conducive to good health...". The prophet also recommended olive oil as it contains monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids. Modern science has it that it also contains Vitamin E. as well as promotes coronary health and increases softness and elasticity of the skin. The Qur'an reads: "...and a tree (olive) that springs forth from Mount Sinai, that grows oil, and it is a relish for the eaters" (23:20). The prophet also said: "Eat the olive and anoint (yourselves) with it, for indeed it is from a blessed tree" ((At-Tirmidhi).

Appropriate diet is part of Islamic teachings. This includes the choice of food, avoiding the unhealthy and consuming that which is good for health. Allah says in the Qur'an "Eat of the good things which we have provided for you" (Quran 2:172). He also said: "Eat of what is lawful and wholesome on the earth" (Qur'an 2:168)'. The Prophet also says: "the son of Adam never fills a vessel worse than his stomach. The son of Adam only needs a few bites that would sustain

him, but if he insists, one-third should be reserved for his food, another third for his drink, and the last third for his breathing" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Another related healthy practice is having adequate and proper sleep; in fact, the holy Quran describes this: "It is He Who made the night a covering for you, and the sleep a rest, and He made the day to rise up again" (Qur'an 25:47). Hence, a good healthy habit is to sleep early; the hadith on this read: "Offer prayers and also sleep at night, as your body has a right on you". In another hadith the Prophet said: "You should pray as long as you feel active, and when you get tired, sleep" (Mukhari and Muslim).

Another mechanism on managing stress from Islamic perspective is to make and believe constant supplication to the Almighty Allah is also part of the vital mechanisms to fight stress in religious and spiritual terms. Du'a, as it is in Arabic, is a profound mechanism which contains entreaty and appeal to Allah as well as humbling expressions of truth in response to tribulation. Provided that one believes in it; it will bring certainty and confidence; as well as strength. Psychotherapists believe that:

“ (it) represents a medium for individuals to strive against the chaos they find in life, recognizing the truths behind it that bring order. It is a method by which believers find meaning which strengthens their underlying belief structures as a means of coping with the events unfolding in their lives” (Zamirullah Khan).

Nonetheless, faith in Allah is a prerequisite for the du'a to be employed as a mechanisms for coping stress related adversities. With the firm conviction, du'a brings self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. Scholars have agreed:

“Religion provides mechanisms for coping with adversity, and may serve as a source of self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. Such religious attributions create meaning that may preserve or enhance self-esteem by allowing the individuals to perceive God's love and acceptance even under trying circumstances” (Sakinah Salleh et al, 2015).

In general Islam bestows great attention to stress coping mechanisms and its effects on our life. At the same time nonetheless, it recognizes spiritual forces as a dominant instrument which could have strong bearings both on mental and physical wellness of the individual.

“Islam pays a special attention to stress and its effects on one’s life...Islam employs the power of the three Principles; mind, consciousness, and thoughts, through encouraging people to empower their inner strengths to have a comfortable life...Islam also recognizes spiritual forces as an influential tool that can impact both mental and physical wellness” (Abdulraouf Y. Lamoshi, 2015).

Hence, having attachment or some level of connection to the supreme gives security and results in a general wellbeing; it also reduces worries, uncertainty and anxiety; at the same time, it provides mental strength, better coping, and self-esteem. The Qur’an reads: “... And whosoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him...” (65:3). The role of Islam in coping stress therefore remains vital. Subsequently, being religious, trust in God, prayers, forbearance, supplication and recitation of the Qur’an indeed helps a Muslim; regardless of his or her status, to shot the stressors, and serve as an effective coping mechanism. Various conventional researchers have indeed agreed that religious strategies to cope stress are central in the field of medicine and psychology to treat and deal with stressors.

“There is increasing recognition of the role of religious support as an effective coping strategy for well-being. The link between religious group affiliation and greater well-being has been demonstrated in numerous studies across a variety of contexts” (Meguellati Achour, et all. 2015).

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