Sources of stress and effective stress management among community college students in southern California

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Contents

[Abstract 1](#_Toc444670275)

[Introduction 2](#_Toc444670276)

[Literature Survey 2](#_Toc444670277)

[Design of experiments 3](#_Toc444670278)

[Summary of data 4](#_Toc444670279)

[Analysis 5](#_Toc444670280)

[Conclusion 6](#_Toc444670281)

[Bibliography 7](#_Toc444670282)

# Abstract

# Introduction

# Literature Survey

Within the most cited articles on stress research, gender plays a strong role in classifying students and their stress management. Time management and talk therapy also play strong roles.

Major sources of stress include interpersonal, intrapersonal, change in sleep, vacations. (Ross, 1999) Gender is a factor in research; Male stress is reduced better via leisure, females possess better time management, but possess higher anxiety. Older students felt less impact from stress. Stress is predictable via time management, anxiety and leisure satisfaction. Anxiety reduction and time management may be an effective cocktail to reduce overall stress. (Misra R. &., 2000) Time management is major solution for stress reduction, offered multiple factors in effective time management. (Macan, 1990)

Faculty believe students are more stressed than the classroom than students report. Mismatch between how we perceive student stress and how they experience it. (Misra R. M., 2000) In the American immigrant experience, those least acculturated to American culture felt the most stress and benefited the most from coping strategies that included discussion and processing their experiences via discussion. (Mena, 1987)

Brougham’s work is instructive in the formation of questionnaires posed to students. She correlated stressor to stress coping strategies in a useful way that sheds light on how playbooks for stress reduction are formed. In her work we see very valuable routes for studying high performance individuals, and how they solve stress-inducing problems with specific strategies. (Brougham, 2009)

To recap her work, she compares stressor to coping strategy in the following way:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Stressor* | *Coping method:* |
| Academic | Self – help |
| Family | Approach |
| Work | Accommodation |
| Social | Avoidance |
| Daily hassles | Self-punishment |

Misra also elucidates five key types of stress: frustration, conflict, change, pressure, self-imposed. This research effort also studies the reactions to these stressors, including: physiological, emotional, behavioral, cognitive. (Misra R. &., 2004) Thus, the body of prior research on stress for college enrollees has a cause and effect basis, what the student experiences and what he/she does in response. The outstanding value of these two papers is that chart a path for studying the most effective means for counteracting and managing stress, by supplying ways that students respond to them. Thus, a certain playbook for stress management emerges, when coupling various stressors with an accompanying response. When considering the life challenges of community college students in southern California, with its associated macroeconomic conditions, advantages, and challenges, students face more stressors than mere academics; they manage family, work lives in addition to the hassles of commuting in between. Their experience is exceptional and deserves special note, especially when it pertains to how they mitigate stressful experiences. We are thus interested in their playbook, and they counter their challenges with various tools and techniques.

However, given the breadth and depth of their challenges and stressors, it benefits us to construct a more formal and rational means to study this so-called playbook .

# Design of experiments

Given Misra’s five stressors, we decided to recognize five common stressors, inclusive of all potential life experiences present within the community student’s day (family, work, academics, commute, hassles, etc). We decided that five major stressors help classify all possible experiences of stress:

1. Change
2. Pressure
3. Conflict
4. Self-imposed stress
5. Frustration

We also recognize three types of stress reduction:

1. Intellectual, done in the moment, while experiencing the challenge
2. Emotional, representing actions taken after stress, to recover or cope
3. Behavioral, acting the moment from habit, training, without thinking

Given these variations, we asked a pool of 300 community college students in Riverside, California, all of whom commute to school, many of whom are employed. We asked them to relate multiple stressful experiences and required them to classify their stressor and resolution or reduction technique, from the lists above.

Our strategy is to compile a kind of playbook for stress reduction, as employed by high-functioning, multi-tasking students who engage in work-life and academic pursuits concurrently. We aim to compile a series of techniques favored by this high-functioning group. Our ideal outputs include a form of if-this-then-that semantics, wherein a stressor is resolved, and we aim to capture the most efficient, high-output forms of stress reduction.

Thus, in order to express the most effective stress-reducing techniques, we quantify the stress level before the technique was used (a start stress), then quantify the end-stress-level (end stress). Given a time component, we deliver an efficiency quotient, and rank the most effective techniques, per stressor. We used an online questionnaire to help scale the experiment and avail respondents of multiple passes at the questionnaire.

# Summary of data

# Analysis

# Conclusion

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