

A Cross Cultural Study on Aggression in a Group of college students: Implications for College InstructorsBilal Ahmad Lone¹, Sadhan Dasgupta²

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Abstract: Cross culture is an important factor that plays a role in aggression. Aggression is a form of social behaviour. It is also distinguished on the parameter of antisocial and prosocial aggression. Unprovoked criminal acts are antisocial aggression. For example, assault and battery, raging and gang beating clearly violate social norms in the colleges. But aggressive acts dictated by social norms are called prosocial aggression. For example, acts of college law enforcement, appropriate parental discipline or obeying the orders of teachers in wartime are regarded as necessary and may be classified as prosocial aggression. Socio-cultural factors such as changes in class roles, academic pressure, course work, child abuse, student discrimination, diverse category students, unemployed parents, and community racial tension are often regarded as contributing factors to personal violence in the schools and colleges. Adolescence can be a stressful period, and is the most common age when serious mental health conditions like Aggression, anxiety, and depression typically begin. Upon entering a post-secondary institute, students may face intense academic pressures along with for the first time being separated from family, friends and getting classmates from different cultures. Since stress and lack of belonging are risk factors in the development of mental health problems among college students, it is necessary that college instructors attempt to offer acknowledge the importance of student mental health self-care, and to create caring learning communities. College student services can also offer information regarding mental health services and resources that may be helpful for students at risk.

Key Words: *Aggression, Anxiety, Stress, Academic Adversity.*

EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students often anticipate the college experience with enthusiasm and high expectations. But for some, college can be highly stressful and these years can present a Challenge to maintain equilibrium in both physical and mental health. Initial impressions of these students are often based on external factors such as different physical characteristics and language use. Teachers are sometimes not aware of how one's culture, including their styles of communication and interactions, can impact the learning process. There are sometimes misconceptions about language and behaviour patterns of minority students. These misconceptions can arise due to a lack of understanding of the cultural intricacies of different racial and ethnic groups.

A U .K based study conducted to mental health higher Education institution (HEI) in 2003 found that 25 percent students suffer from mental health problems (Times Online, Jan. 23, 2008). Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) reported, universities and colleges have seen an increase in students seeking services for anxiety disorders, with up to 53 percent of students reporting depression since the beginning of their college, and 40 percent feeling overwhelmed or stressed in the past year (Sax et al., 2002).

Even based on clinical diagnosis, depression in college students is more prevalent than the general

population – by some estimates about 11.8 per cent (14.3 percent for females and 7.3 percent for males), compared to about 5.2 percent in the general population (American College Health Association, 2002).

Risk factors

Single risk factors seldom account for the development of aggression and depression. Studies indicate that monozygotic twins are four to five times more likely than dizygotic twins to share a diagnosis of a depression disorder. On the other hand, the lack of perfect concordance suggests additional factors are important in the development of aggression, depression (Robinson, 2002). In addition to genetic influences, such things as family dysfunction and attributional style may contribute to the development of youth aggression, depression and the maintenance of risks throughout adulthood. The significant factors in the development of aggression and depression are numerous and complex, resulting from various combinations of genetic factors, biological dysregulation, individual predispositions and the application of coping strategies, as well as environmental events, developmental changes, and situational stresses (Robinson, 2002). Below we elaborate on several factors associated with mental health, including stress, life style, sexuality, and social bonding.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a subjective state of internal discomfort. Dread, and foreboding, which manifests itself in cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms. It is a normal emotion with adaptive value, in that it acts as a warning system to alert a person to impending danger. Anxiety often occurs without conscious or apparent stimulus, which distinguishes it from fear (Gurian & Miner, 1991). Cognitive symptoms of anxiety include worrying, impaired attention, poor concentration, and memory problems. Physiological symptoms such as hyperventilation, sweating, diarrhoea, trembling, and restlessness also occur. Anxiety may be focused on a specific object, situation, or activity (a phobia) or may be unfocused and expressed as a more general dread. The five major types being: Panic Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Phobias (Anxiety Disorders of America, 2005).

Anxiety is considered as the major cause of impaired academic performance. It is a fear experience in response to an anticipated threat of self-esteem. Freud, Neo-Freudians and other learning theorists considered anxiety as a conditioned fear and as an inevitable partner of development. It results from many factors like difficult family situation, restricted school environment, occupational and financial difficulties which in turn affects the performance of the students in the school. The residential type of school system tends to improve students' academic performance. Residential school system prepares students academically, physically and mentally to develop the good qualities of mind, body and character by using high discipline. Complex curriculum, heavy loads of restricted movements in the campus and compulsory participation in extracurricular activities sometimes creates high pressure and anxiety in some students which may in turn affect their academic performance. Some of the researchers reported that gender also contributes significantly to the performance of the students in the school. Dwyer and Johnson (1997), and Kimball (1989) in their studies reported that girls were superior to boys in their academic performance are less prone to the development of anxiety.

Stress

College is inevitably a time of significant transition where students wrestle with many stressors. This is the time when students are often first separated from family and friends, and face intense academic, developmental and financial pressures. They are at a stage where they are learning to balance life responsibilities. While facing increased competitiveness and academic pressures, at the same time they may be reveling in a novel lack of adult supervision, neglecting to continue established regimens of self-care like diet, exercise, sleep,

medication, moderation and generally not taking time to become stabilized in their new life situation (Arehart-Treichel, 2002). Attendance at college represents a significant transition where changes in lifestyle are often significant. The developmental shift from dependent adolescent to mature adult is neither swift nor easily accomplished.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS

The increased need for self-responsibility may lag behind established patterns for maintaining physical and mental health. Lack of sleep and resulting fatigue is a common concern amongst college students, whether due to a newly unbridled social life, or during scheduled final exams. Insomnia and other sleep disorders can be associated with depression and can lead to sleep problems, digestive or eating disorders, or frequent colds and headaches in a spiralling cycle of deteriorating health (Hojat et al, 2003). Such impaired levels of physical and mental health have been associated with lower grade point average; low levels of ability to concentrate, and missed class time along with interpersonal problems at school (Herman, 1996).

Much research on student wellbeing and success has concentrated on the student, ignoring the important influence of the instructor, the curriculum, and other components of the social context. But academic success has been shown to be multi-determined (Machoiian et al., 2002). To prevent negative outcomes like student aggression, depression and college drop-outs, along with individual counseling and supports, perhaps we need to consider structural factors of education – a combination of meaningful learning activities, classroom climate that provides emotional support and professional approaches that optimize mentoring and other more supportive approaches to learning.

Classroom Climate: Social-Emotional Factors in Education

Classroom climate represents an important factor influencing academic achievement; with student perceptions of classroom climate appear to be a key mediating determinant of academic emotional and behavioural outcomes (Roeser, & Sameroff, 2000). Besides attending to authentic cooperative learning and assessment practices discussed in the previous section, instructors can enhance the learning in their classroom by focusing on the psychosocial well-being of the student (Robinson & Case, 2002). It is fortunate that colleges have smaller classes compared to the universities, as smaller classes can help maximize the potential for personal attention to students.

Extracurricular activities

- In addition, students who are engaged in extracurricular activities or in their learning or in service to their school or community tend to have lower risk of depression and other psychological problems (Relling, 2002).
- Therefore, encouraging student clubs, peer help groups, tutoring rooms, and service activities related to course material can assist in preventing aggression, depression and other psychological problems.
- Along with experiencing transition stresses, many students also feel intimidated by their professors (Furr et al., 2001). When students feel valued as individuals and comfortable with their instructors, they are less likely to become depressed.

Instructor Professionalism

- The growing emphasis on standardized testing often gives rise to rigid curricular demands that constrain instructors and leave less room for the kinds of activities that facilitate positive student-instructor relationships (Noddings, 1992).
- Academic success is best where students feel visible and accountable. Student instructor ties enhance student attention, participation and satisfaction in the learning process. Relationships with adults are a cornerstone of development – they are responsible for a large proportion of school success (Pianta, 2000).
- Student-instructor partnerships are a significant factor in optimizing academic learning. Too often the role of the context in learning is not considered as educational organizations increasingly focus on such things as scores on standard examinations.
- It becomes an essential professional challenge for an instructor to create a classroom culture that maximizes positive instructor-student relationships, instructor autonomy, while maintaining academic rigor (Rhodes, & Reddy, 2002).
- However, instructors must conscientiously strive to maintain working conditions where their own academic autonomy is supported and appropriately rewarded, since the context in which they work will inevitably affect the learning context that they will be able to establish in their classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS

Considerable public resources are invested in providing post-secondary educational opportunities, and students who drop out of their course of study, or worse, commit suicide due to mental illness represent a tremendous cost to

society. College drop-outs represent life-long losses to society's prosperity vs. unemployment, community optimism vs. discouragement and personal failure vs. success. Are we truly educating our youth, if we don't take into account their psycho-social wellbeing and model academic practices that promote a caring learning community in the college and broader community setting? Clearly it is worth intervening to make our colleges and college classrooms emotionally and intellectually healthy places. The stigma against receiving mental health services, or even worse, being labeled with a mental health diagnosis, deters many suffering individuals from seeking professional help through college student services. It is probably as important for college counseling services to provide public education about mental health as it is for them to run efficient outreach programs to connect with suffering students. But in the absence of such programs, it is perhaps incumbent upon college instructors to initiate a conversation among their students at some time in their course that models an acceptance of the realities of depression, anxiety and other troubling emotional symptoms among the college population.

Achieving this objective requires multidimensional interventions from improvements in classroom instruction and evaluation methods, to instructor autonomy and college mental health programs. More research is needed to increase knowledge of optimal pedagogical approaches, strategies for increasing ethical instructor-student partnerships, and methodologies for public education on mental health issues. But college instructors may be in the best position to identify students who need help, to use teaching methods that enhance belonging and establish safety network of new friends, in making students aware of mental health issues, and in assisting students to find help. Such responsibilities might be considered implicit in ethical practices of college instruction, professional practices like cooperative learning and authentic assessment strategies; establish personal connections with students, and encourage students to refer themselves to counseling centers so that future episodes of depression over their lifetime are prevented.

According to Dr. John Callender, Chair of the Royal College of Psychiatry's review of Mental Health Services in Higher Education Institutions in U.K., "The onset of high-degree mental illnesses like schizophrenia is often in early adult life... In other cases, if problems are dealt with at an early stage, it can put people on a better path for the rest of their lives (Times Online). If preventive efforts are not in place, psychological problems that originate in youth can persist to the point that they become very serious, even life threatening. Regardless of the circumstances that initiate aggression and depression, an individual who suffers from aggression and depression stands at a significantly greater risk for future mental health

concerns, and therefore interventions focused on the prevention of aggression and depression in college students seem well worth the effort.

Recommendation

_ Study habits influence the academic achievement of the students. So introduction of creative work, various mental problems solving games and exercises should be considered on a larger scale and enforced with a spirit of competition. Which improve the study habits skills.

_ Self-concept has direct relation with academic achievement. So schools should make provisions for good training programme for personality development. Individual counseling can serve as an effective intervention to improve their self-concept.

_ High school period is a critical stage where drastic changes may occur in their personality which may or may not improve their study habits. So precautions must be taken to enhance the self-concept and to inculcate better study habits. Group guidance procedures can be used to improve their study habits and self-concept.

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