Adjustment, perceived safety and mental wellbeing among professional college students

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Abstract

Introduction: Adjustment is an essential element for each individual to lead life well. It is the way in which a person adapts with his or her environment. The college atmosphere plays an important role in developing psychosocial wellbeing and helping in promoting mental health of the students. **Objectives:** The study is aimed at assessing correlation on adjustment, perceived safety, and mental wellbeing among professional college students. **Materials and Methods:** The study was conducted in different professional colleges of Manipal University, using descriptive correlative study design. Cluster sampling was adopted for selecting the professional colleges and the further batches. Thus, 339 students were included in the present study. The instruments used for data collection were, socio demographic proforma, student adjustment scale, student perceived safety scale, and Warwick Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale. **Results:** Findings revealed that among 339 students, 335 (99%) had moderate adjustment and none of them had poor adjustment. Majority of the students had moderate perceived safety 229 (68%), whereas 110 (32%) had high perceived safety. Majority of the students had moderate high mental wellbeing 192 (56.64%), most of them had moderate mental wellbeing 137 (40.42%), and 10 (2.94%) had low mental wellbeing. A significant relationship was found between adjustment and perceived safety (r= .492, p= .01), adjustment and mental wellbeing (r= .608, p= .001) and perceived safety and mental wellbeing (r=.429, p= .01). **Conclusion**: Adolescents are at a sensitive period of their life, and hence it is important that they are in a safe environment that enhance their adjustment and mental wellbeing. The findings have an implication for parents and other significant professionals, who need to help students to adapt well to their academic environment.

Key words: Adjustment, perceived safety, mental wellbeing, professional college students

Introduction

Sudden shift to new environment demands lots of adjustment from any individual. Adjustment is a way in which people adapt to the new environment, by applying various coping methods. The entry to a professional college is an exciting turning point for most of the adolescents, though it depends upon multiple factors. The novice professionals are in the adolescent age group, which is considered as 'stage of stress and storm'. Most of the adolescents are facing the challenges of adjusting to various demands, since they are out of their comfort zones for the first time and away from their parents. They find difficulties in adjusting to their college life and it has gained extensive concern in recent years. Adverse events in their life and emotional capital have known to be related with adjustment to the school.

A cross sectional study was conducted in Shandong of China among 643 high school nursing students of

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vocational training. The study findings revealed that there was an association between adverse life events and various dimensions of adaptations to school adjustment, such as personal and social relationship, learning, life in the campus, career profession, psychological, personal, and the way of satisfaction in the life. However, there was a positive association with psychological capital and school adjustment dimensions, and negative life events are negatively associated with psychological capital. (Liu, Zhao, Tian, Zou & Li, 2015)

Hafiz conducted a comparative study to identify the differences between adjustment level among college students, with regard to gender and residential area, both in urban and rural area of Jammu district. There was a substantial difference found in adjustment of males and females (t=0.88, p= .01) and in relation to area of living-urban and rural (t=0.86, p= .01). Author concluded that the environment in which college students live, have a direct impact on the individuals' character development. It was also found that males, as well as students from urban background adjust better to new environment than their counterparts. (Hafiz, 2016)

A longitudinal study was conducted to assess the adjustment among 242 fresh undergraduate students at the commencement and completion of their college life. Study participants were interviewed regarding their physical health, habits of smoking, and alcohol intake, stress level, perfectionism, self-esteem, coping strategies, optimism, sociability or extroversion, and emotional adjustment to their college. The study revealed that negative coping tactics and perfectionism were the determinants for poor physical health, whereas optimism and self-esteem were the predictors for good physical and mental health outcomes. **(**Pritchard, Wilson & Yamnitz, 2007)

A study conducted at Assela College of Teacher Education, Ethiopia, to assess the adjustment problems, help seeking behaviour, and coping of 599 first year students revealed that, students' primary help sources are non-professional sources, such as their friends and senior students, instead of college counselor, or even their academic advisors. On the other hand, analysis of the qualitative data revealed that, male and female students differ significantly in adjustment problems (t=5.025, p=.008) and dysfunctional coping strategies (t=2.715, p=.007). (Ayele, 2011)

Insecure surroundings can affect students' health negatively. Students in unsafe school environment are at risk of getting into fights, suffer injury, and to experience emotional disturbance (Marin & Brown, 2008). The safe college initiative aims to create healthy environment and promote the academic, social, emotional, and intellectual growth of students. The overall concept of a healthy and safe school environment asserts that if children feel safe and happy, they are more likely to reach their academic potential. Similarly, it is commonly believed that schools are a major contributing factor to positive adjustment and growth of children, yet only when the environment is psychologically healthy. Unhealthy school atmospheres can involve violence, such as unacceptable social behaviour, aggression, bullying, harassment, intimidation, and other acts that harm others. (Pipe, 2014)

The undergraduate students (N=564), of a large southeastern university expressed use of inhibited behaviour in order to limit the risk of victimization. The survey highlighted the prevalence of personal, property, and sexual rights violations. The results of the study highlighted a significant difference of gender in fear perception, safety issues, perceived risk, and also self-reported sexual assault and victimization of property. (Jennings, Gover & Pudrzynska, 2007)

The factors affecting school environment, i.e., school safety, social relationships, and school connectedness was conducted among students aged 11 to 12 years, who were in their last and first years of primary and secondary schooling respectively. The study reported the following strongest protective factors for their psychological wellbeing, i.e., feeling secure at school and support by the peer, in first and second year respectively. Whereas, feeling connectedness to school and peer support were considered the determinants of psychological wellbeing. (Lester & Cross, 2015)

Pathak carried out a survey on mental health and social adjustment among 90 college students from Junagadh city (Gujarat). The findings showed a high positive

correlation between mental health and social adjustment (r= .69). Mental health and social adjustment of girls and boys had no significant difference. (Pathak, 2014)

The new entrants of a campus have to make enormous levels of adaptation, ranging from sharing room with an unknown companion to learning new language and learning new subjects in the college. The investigators are eager to check, whether the students succeed in making an easy adjustment and feel safer and emotionally stable as compared to others.

Methods and Materials

The study was conducted through a quantitative approach with descriptive correlative survey design. The study populations were students, studying in different professional colleges of Manipal University. A total of 339 first year students were selected from three professional colleges using cluster random sampling method from 12 institutions under Manipal University such as, Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, Allied health, Engineering, Information Science, Communication, Management, Jewelry Management, Hotel Management, and Life Sciences under Manipal University.

The tools used for data collection were demographic proforma, student adjustment scale, student perceived safety scale, and Warwick Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale. The tools were validated for their content by five experts from mental health field. Demographic proforma consists of 14 items such as age, gender, course of study, nationality, area of residence, current stay, previous experience of hostel stay, parents' education and occupation, birth order, family size, and income.

Student adjustment scale was prepared by the investigators after reviewing the literature. It had 45 items, measuring three major areas of adjustment, such as academic adjustment, [motivation (9 items), performance (5 items), and academic environment (3 items)]; social adjustment [general (8 items), nostalgia (2 items), and social environment (4 items)]; and personal and emotional adjustment [psychological (9 items) and general (5 items)]. The adjustment scores ranged from 0 to 153 and was arbitrarily classified into good

(91 to 135), moderate (46 to 90) and poor adjustment (0 to 45). The tool was tested for reliability among 20 first year students of nursing college using Cronbach's alpha, and the correlation coefficient obtained was .828.

The student perceived safety scale was also prepared by the investigators and consisted of 31 items, from the areas of hostel safety (9 items), class room safety (4 items), travel safety (3 items), campus safety (11 items), and safety measures (4 items). It has both positive and negative statements as items. The total scores ranged from 31 to 155. The perceived safety score was arbitrarily classified into high perceived safety (115 to 155), moderate perceived safety (73 to 144), and low perceived safety (31 to 72). The tool was tested for reliability among 20 first year students of nursing college using Cronbach's alpha, and the correlation coefficient obtained was .75.

Warwick Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale was used to assess the mental wellbeing of the participants, which is a standardized scale with 14 items. The scale showed good content validity and found to be highly reliable. The obtained reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha was .89 and .91 respectively among student and population sample. (Tennant, et al. 2007)

Prior to start of the study, clearance from ethical committee was obtained from Institutional ethics committee. Permission from the respective heads of the institution was taken. Informed written consent was obtained from the participants of the study after providing clear instructions and the objectives of the study.

Results

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.

Description of sample characteristics

Table 1:
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Sample Characteristics
N=339

Sample characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age in years		
17	13	3.8
18	223	65.6

Sample characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
19	86	25.3
20 & above	17	5.01
Gender		
Male	241	70.9
Female	98	28.8
Current stay		
Hostel	294	86.5
Home	43	12.6
Others	2	0.6
Home location		
Urban	273	80.3
Semi-urban	48	14.1
Rural	18	5.3
Nationality		
Indian	330	97.1
Others	9	2.6
Experience with previous hostel stay		
Yes	95	27.9
No	244	71.8
Father's education		
Primary education	5	1.5
High school	8	2.4
Pre-degree	22	6.5
Diploma/Degree	134	39.5
Post- Graduation	170	50.1
Mother's education		
Primary education	4	1.2
High school	21	6.2
Pre-degree	31	9.1
Diploma/Degree	133	39.2
Post-graduation	149	44.0
No formal education	2	0.3

Sample characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Father's occupation		
Farmer/driver/coolie work	6	1.8
Business	97	28.6
Non-professional	44	13.0
Professional	192	56.6
Mother's occupation		
Housewife	201	59.3
Business	21	6.2
Non-professional	45	13.3
Professional	72	21.2
Birth order		
Single child	65	19.2
First	122	36.0
Second	118	34.8
Third	32	9.4
More than three	2	0.6
Number of family members		
2-4	252	74.12
5 or more	87	36.25
Family monthly income (in Rupees)		
5,000-9,999	3	0.9
10,000-15,999	23	6.8
16,000-20,999	33	9.7
Above 21,000	280	82.6

Table 1 describes the sample characteristics. Majority of the professional college students belonged to the age group of 18 years (65.6%) were males (70.9%), staying in hostel (86.5%), hailed from urban area (80.3%), and were Indians (97.1%). Majority of them were staying in the hostel for the first time (71.8%). Most of their fathers (50.5%) as well as mothers (44%) were post graduates. With regard to the parents' occupation, most of the fathers were professionals (56.6%) and mothers were housewives (59.3%), and had family monthly income above Rs 21,000 (82.6%). Most of them were first born (36%) and had two to four members in their family (74.12%).
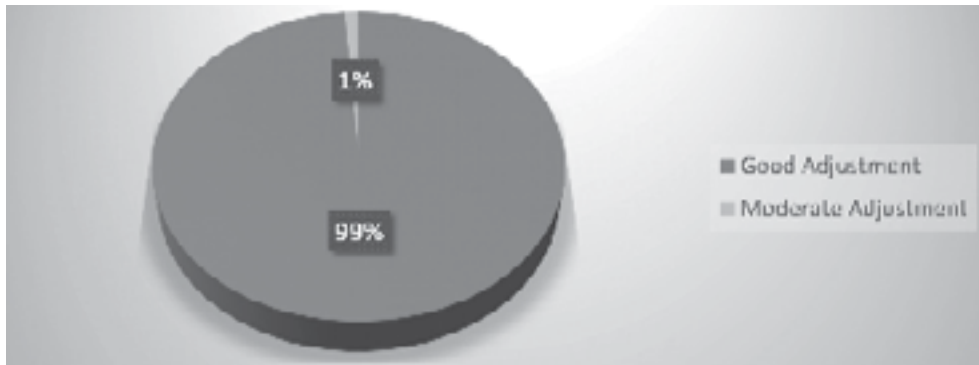
Description of student adjustment

Figure 1: Pie graph showing Adjustment among Professional College Students

The findings presented in the Figure 1 reveals that, majority of the professional college students had good adjustment to their academic, social, personal, and emotional aspects i.e. 335 (99%) and none of them had poor adjustment.

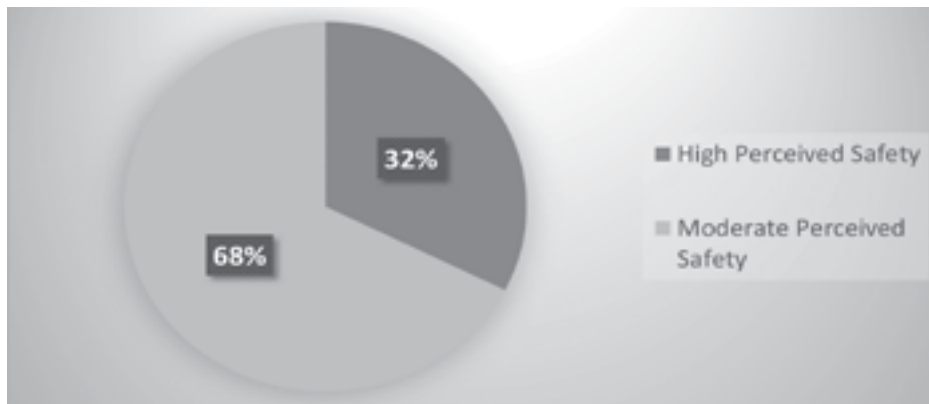## Description of student perceived safety

Figure 2: Pie graph showing the Perceived Safety among Professional College Students

Majority of the students had moderate perceived safety i.e. 229 (68%), whereas 110 (32%) had high perceived safety.
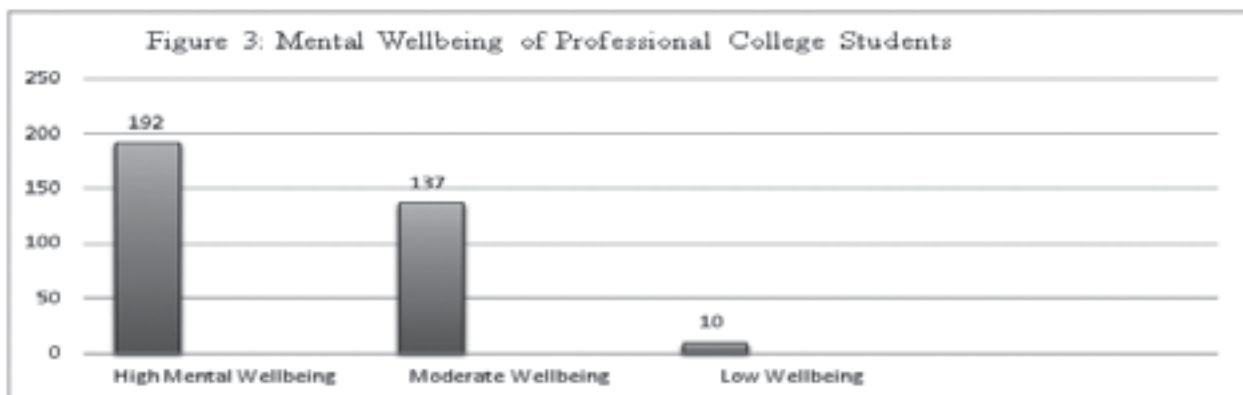
Description of mental wellbeing

Figure 3: Graph showing Mental Wellbeing of Professional College Students

Majority of the students had moderate high mental wellbeing i.e. 192 (56.64%), most of them had moderate mental wellbeing i.e. 137 (40.42%), and 10 (2.94%) had low mental wellbeing.

Correlation between adjustment, perceived safety and mental wellbeing

The relationship between adjustment, perceived safety, and mental wellbeing was tested at .05 levels of significance. The data presented in table 2, 3, and 4 shows a significant relationship between adjustment and perceived safety (r=.492, p=.01), adjustment and mental wellbeing (r=.608, p=.001), and perceived safety and mental wellbeing. (r=.429, p=.01).

Table 2:
Correlation between Adjustment and Perceived Safety

N=339

Variables	r	p
Adjustment	.492	.001
Perceived safety		

Significant at .05 level

Table 3:
Correlation between Adjustment and Mental Wellbeing

N=339

Variables	r	p
Adjustment	.608	.001
Mental wellbeing		

Significant at .05 level

Table 4:
Correlation between Perceived Safety and Mental Wellbeing

N=339

Variables	r	p
Perceived safety		.001
Mental wellbeing	.429	

Significant at .05 level

Discussion

Present study findings showed that among 339 students, 229 (68%) perceived moderate safety in their college campus, which contradicts the high prevalence reported by other studies; 22.6% and 10% of school students felt that they were not safe at their school. (Nijs, 2014). In another report from US, 5.5% students of higher secondary school reported of not going to school last one month, because of feeling insecure at school environment or on the way to school (Eaton, et al., 2008).

There was a positive correlation found between perceived safety and mental wellbeing (r=.429, p=.01) in the present study. This finding is in harmony with the finding of a study conducted among undergraduate students of Australian University, that University setting substantially contributes to the students' welfare by providing them a value based social role, externally created objectives, and variety (ΔF (1, 159)=17.24, p < .001) (Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2015). This is also in par with the finding of Lester and Cross who reported that, linking to the school was the important supportive aspect of reducing depressive symptoms ($\beta = -2.28$), whereas peer support was the greatest important indicator to curb anxiety ($\beta = -1.56$) and stress ($\beta = -2.97$). (Lester & Cross, 2015)

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that the professional colleges of Manipal University are safe places to pursue education and first year students adapt well to their academic, social, personal, and emotional demands and are happy. Further, it can be understood that the professional college students perceived safety, adjustment, and mental wellbeing as inter related.

Professional colleges are important avenues for the overall development of their students, who are the significant future citizens of the country. It is the responsibility of the parents, administrators, faculty, and entire country to offer the best support and resources to ensure safety of the students, which will enhance their adaptation thereby overall mental wellbeing.

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