

Transition of Students from school to college

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Abstract

The transition from high school to university is a significant milestone in one's life. This transition period enables oneself to encounter various changes; physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually; all by oneself. Away from the comfort of his/her home and loved ones, the student faces major challenges and opportunities all by himself/herself. This transition is a very crucial time in one's life as the individual undergoes multiple changes, transforming oneself into a responsible young adult. Although numerous researches on the same have been done previously, very few studies have focused on the impact of this transition on the overall mental and emotional well being of the child. This study highlights major psychological aspects students experience as they move from a structured and supportive high school environment to a more independent and diverse college setting.

Keywords: College, Overwhelming, Stress, Academic Pressure, Emotional Well being

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I. Introduction

Transition has been defined as 'the capability to define change' (Gale & Parker, 2014), recognising that transition as both the process of change over time and the resources required to engage with that change. One instance in early adulthood whereby transition might first be experienced is beginning university. Much research on university transition has been focused on the first year (Chow & Healey, 2008; Ferguson et al., 2016; Pokorny, Holley, & Kane, 2017; Stirling, 2016; Thomas, Briggs, Hart, & Kerrigan, 2017). Here the scale of change is greatest and spans many aspects of the individual's life.

Successful transition into university is crucial for wellbeing. When students move to university, they are not only separated from close relationships, but also from established social networks and support systems (Rokach, 1989). Oswald and Clark (2003) estimate that approximately 41% of school friendships become more distant during the first semester of university life. Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, and Rogers (2013) found that a key challenge in the transition to university for students was the formation of new peer groups, with this social positioning being a key factor in how they establish their identity in an unfamiliar context.

With these various changes also comes the unexpected heavy academic burden on the students. They have to not only manage academics, but also co-curriculars and build a place for themselves in the professional world. It becomes quite overwhelming for them to manage multiple things at once. This might adversely affect their emotional wellbeing. Several studies have shown that college students present poorer mental health compared to their peers in the general population (Kang et al., 2021; Lovell et al., 2015)

This study focuses on 5 major psychological aspects which every student experiences during this transition period: (i) Socialising (ii) Lifestyle and Sleep Cycle (iii) Academic Pressure (iv) Time Management (v) Stress and Anxiety. 45 different students across 14 different universities world wide were surveyed in order to gain a deeper insight on the psychological changes during this transition period.

Objectives

1. To research significant changes in students' lives as they transition from highschool to college
2. To study the impact of the changes on students mental and emotional well being

Problems of the Study

1. Primary data collected is from a small sample size of 45 students
2. Most of the study is done from students' point of view

Importance

The research is important for deeply understanding the mental state of the student during transition and in initial months of college. Present day study helps the universities in understanding briefly each and every mental aspect of a student's life deeply and thoroughly and respectively helps them to act upon it for a positive change. It also provides a way to researchers to do further research on the topic.

Scope

1. It covers all the brief aspects of transition, mainly socialising, lifestyle and sleep cycle, academic pressure, stress and anxiety.
2. The study has been done by collecting primary data from 3 countries; India, The United States of America and Australia and is supported by secondary data.

II. Literature Review

The transition from high school to university is a significant life event that can bring about many challenges and opportunities. This period of transition can impact an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The purpose of this literature review is to examine previous research on the impact of the transition from high school to university on the mental and emotional well-being of students.

Several studies have explored the challenges faced by students during this transition. For example, research has shown that the lack of structure and support in the university environment can be a significant source of stress for students (Bland, Melton, & Bigham, 2015). Additionally, students may struggle with the increased workload and academic demands of university life (Kilinc & Bayram, 2019). These challenges can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Gallagher & Smith, 2013).

One significant factor that can impact the transition experience is the student's social support network. Research has shown that students who have strong social support from friends, family, and peers tend to experience fewer negative psychological outcomes during the transition (Sallee & Scribner, 2016). Conversely, students who lack social support may experience greater levels of stress and anxiety (Iannone & Hill, 2017).

In addition to social support, research has also explored the role of resilience in the transition from high school to university. Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt and cope with stressors and challenges (Masten, 2014). Studies have found that students who exhibit higher levels of resilience tend to experience fewer negative psychological outcomes during the transition (Hartley et al., 2019).

Overall, while numerous studies have explored the transition from high school to university, there is still a need for more research that specifically examines the impact on mental and emotional well-being. Understanding the psychological factors that contribute to a successful transition can help educators and mental health professionals better support students during this critical period of their lives.

III. Research Methodology

This study is based on findings of both, primary data and secondary data. 12-13 studies pertaining to the chosen topic were studied thoroughly and few have been stated in this study. A Google Form was circulated amongst youngsters aged 17-22 where majority were aged 18 (44.4%) (refer Fig.1). 45 students from across 14 universities situated in India, USA and Australia (refer Fig.2) participated in the survey. All our respondents have completed a minimum of 6 months of college. Basic questions like the participant's name, age, contact number and university were asked. Majority of the participants; 39 out of 45 possess Indian nationality, 3 are NRIs and the remaining 3 have a foreign nationality.

The google form comprised 25 questions in totality, being divided in 6 different sections: (i) Personal Details (ii) Socialising (iii) Lifestyle and Sleep Cycle (iv) Academic Pressure (v) Time Management (vi) Stress and Anxiety.

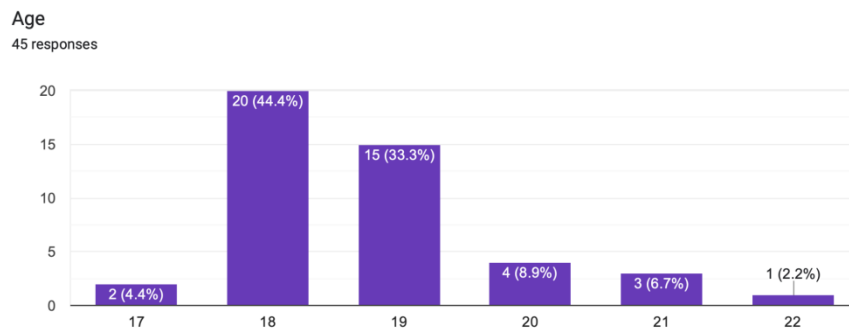


Fig. 1: Age of Participants

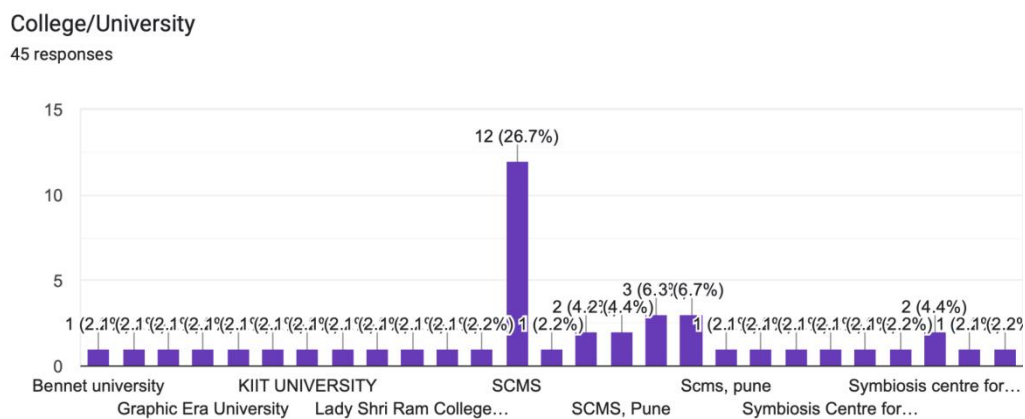


Fig. 2: College/University of Participants

Socialising

It is critical for students to make a name for themselves in the professional world and to establish as many contacts and networks as possible to aid in their professional development, and hence it is very important for students to socialise and network in the college environment. For university students, the college campus, social media, university events, clubs and formal & informal parties are the primary source for socialising. Effects of socialising are very subjective, it may benefit some but maybe a bane for others. The American Psychological Association in 2018 found that 45% of teens reported feeling stressed by their social lives. Socialising can be very tiring irrespective of the social personality one has. Initial months of college are very overwhelming due to drastic changes in one’s life, and managing the sudden academic burden creates a lot of anxiety and stress. Fig.3 illustrates how socialising impacted the respondent’s mental and emotional well being. For the majority(46.7%), socialising has had a positive impact. This may be due to meeting like minded people of the same age group and sharing ideas and experiences together. 37.8% of people have adversely been affected by the same. Unable to manage academics, giving in a lot of time and energy in order to socialise, not being able to open up, etc. might be a few reasons for the same. 15.6% of participants have had no effect of socialising.

How did socialising impact your mental and emotional well being?

45 responses

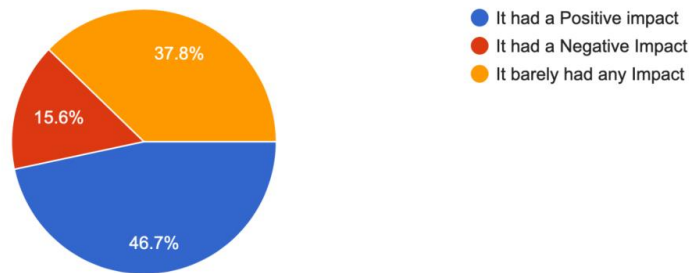


Fig.3: Impact of Socialising on Participants’ Mental and Emotional Well Being

Lifestyle and Sleep Cycle

Lifestyle of students entering college is affected by various factors including alcohol consumption, caffeine consumption, psychostimulant use, dietary habits, class schedules, and physical activity (Nathalie Campsen, Walter C Buboltz). Immediate changes in schedules and the intense socialising during the initial weeks can be overwhelming, leading to exhaustion and stress amongst students. Sleep cycle of many students is adversely affected due to these sudden shifts and demanding schedules. Additionally, engaging in extracurricular activities and participating in on-campus interactions alter students' lifestyles, often resulting in heightened stress and anxiety, further disrupting their sleep patterns. Furthermore, the transition from being dependent on their parents to becoming independent individuals has a profound impact on students' mental state and subsequently influences their overall lifestyle. These changes collectively contribute to the challenging and stressful experiences faced by students in their university journey. Fig.4 illustrates how the changing environment in one’s life affects one’s lifestyle and sleep schedule. Majority of our respondents (75.6%) claim that college life has affected their lifestyle and sleep schedule in a negative way. Students rarely feel well rested due to their hectic irregular schedules and academic pressure. 22.2% of the participants feel no change in their lifestyle and sleep cycle, while only 2.2% think that college has positively impacted them.

Have you noticed any changes in your lifestyle or sleep cycle since the beginning of college?

45 responses

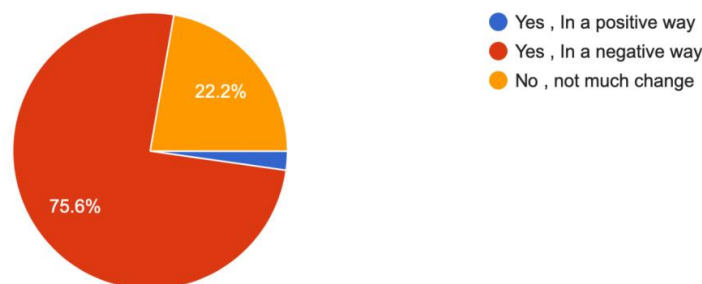


Fig.4: Changes in Participants’ Lifestyle and Sleep Cycle

Academic Pressure

Stress experienced by college students is multifactorial and can be attributed to a variety of contributing factors (Reddy et al., 2018; Karyotaki et al., 2020). Adapting to changes in subject material and teaching methods can be a daunting task for students. Many students even change their streams due to difficulty in fitting in with the new academic requirements. The vastness of the subjects and inadequate study material provided by universities makes it challenging for students to research perfectly on certain subjects. A growing body of evidence suggests that academic-related stress plays a significant role in college (Misra and McKean, 2000; Dusselier et al., 2005; Elias et al., 2011; Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015; Hj Ramli et al., 2018; Reddy et al., 2018; Pascoe et al., 2020). To add to this, irregular class schedules and sleep patterns can cause additional stress

and adversely affect academic performance. As a result, many students tend to skip classes, leading to a prolonged academic burden and college hours. This study has shown that over 66% of students feel burdened by academic workload, competition, test anxiety, and theoretical learning (refer Fig.5). It is essential for educational institutions to provide adequate resources and support to help students navigate these challenges and succeed in their academic pursuits.

How did academic pressure affect your mental health/performance?

45 responses

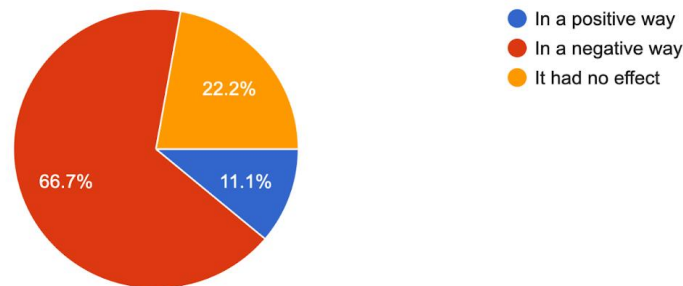


Fig.5: Effect of Academic Pressure on Participants' Mental Health/Performance

Time Management

Time management is the art of arranging, organising, scheduling and budgeting one's time for generating more effectiveness in work and productivity (Najnin Khanam). Time management is a constant challenge for college students, who find themselves juggling numerous responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom. In addition to attending lectures and completing assignments, students allocate significant time for extracurricular activities, such as participating in cultural clubs, college societies, and sports. This demanding and irregular schedule often prevents students from studying on a daily basis, leading to inefficiency and reduced focus when attempting to accomplish tasks. Consequently, many students are forced to prioritise either their academic pursuits or their involvement in various activities, leaving little room for effectively managing their time. As a result, students often resort to skipping classes, resulting in inadequate attendance and heightened stress during exams. Unfortunately, their motivation in the final days of the semester primarily revolves around meeting minimum attendance requirements rather than acquiring knowledge. Alarming, nearly 85% of students are unable to dedicate more than four hours to personal time outside of their college commitments (refer Fig.6)

How much time are you able to take out for yourself apart from studies?

45 responses

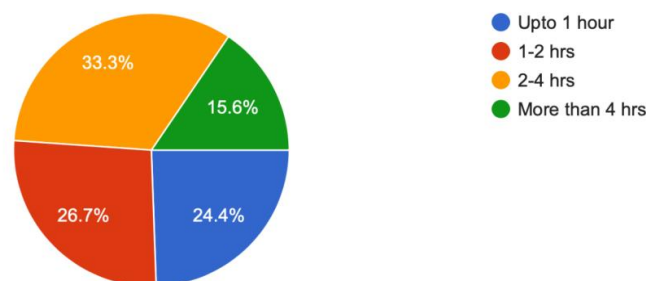


Fig.6: Time in hours that the Participants' are able to make for themselves

Stress and Anxiety

The stress experienced by individuals in universities stems primarily from academic pressure, socialising, time management, and financial factors. It is noteworthy that more than 50% of respondents reported being stressed for over half of the week (refer Fig.7). While stress poses additional challenges for most students, for some, it serves as a motivating factor to enhance their performance. Students employ various

coping mechanisms to manage stress, including engaging in content consumption, music and dance, meditation, outings, and travel. However, it is important to acknowledge that some students resort to unhealthy behaviours such as alcohol and drug consumption as coping mechanisms. It is crucial to recognize that the impact of stress on mental health extends beyond the short term, as numerous studies have demonstrated its association with long-term depression and other mental disorders. According to the American College Health Association Fall 2018 National College Health Assessment, 63% of college students felt overwhelming anxiety in the past year. In the same survey, 23% reported being diagnosed or treated by a mental health professional for anxiety in the past year.

How often do you feel stressed during the week? (1 to 7 being the whole week)
45 responses

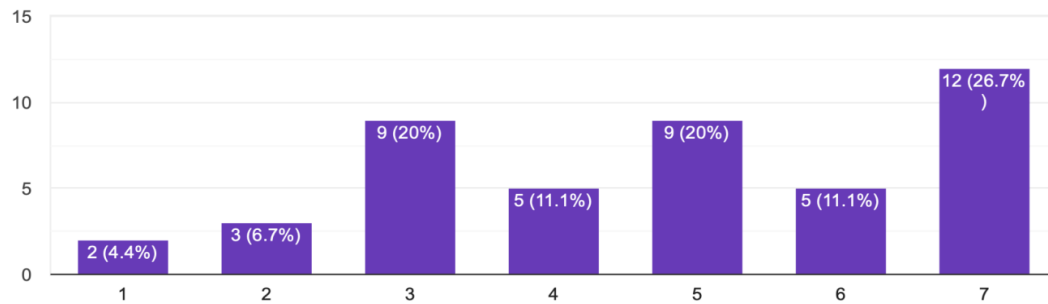


Fig.7: Days per week that the Participants’ feel stressed on

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, socialising and networking play a critical role in a student's journey towards professional development and success. However, the effects of socialising are subjective, with some individuals benefiting from it while others facing challenges. The overwhelming nature of the initial college months, coupled with the sudden academic burden, can lead to anxiety and stress among students. Changes in lifestyle, such as altered sleep patterns, engagement in extracurricular activities, and the transition to independence, further contribute to the challenging experiences faced by students. Academic pressure, inadequate study materials, irregular schedules, and the consequent academic burden also add to the stress levels experienced by students. It is important for educational institutions to provide adequate resources and support to help students manage their stress and succeed in their academic pursuits. Additionally, stress in universities is multifactorial, stemming from academic pressure, socialising, time management, and financial factors. While stress can serve as motivation for some students, it is essential to address the negative impact it can have on mental health in the long term. Students employ various coping mechanisms, both healthy and unhealthy, to manage stress. Recognizing the significance of stress on mental health, it is crucial to prioritise the well-being of students and provide appropriate support systems to ensure their overall success and happiness. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by students during their university journey. It underscores the need for educational institutions to provide adequate resources and support to help students navigate these challenges and succeed in their academic pursuits while maintaining their physical and mental well-being. Further research is needed to better understand the impact of stress on students and the most effective interventions to help them manage stress and improve their academic performance.

Recommendation for Universities:

1. Universities should lower the academic burden and emphasis more on practical learning
2. Universities should provide expert counselling for helping students deal with mental stress
3. Universities should provide regular breaks

Recommendation for Students:

1. Students should make a schedule for effective time management
2. Students should take part in extracurricular activities and sports for physical and mental fitness
3. Students should not indulge in toxication practices in order to lower their academic stress . They should instead consult the faculty of their respective college.

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