Stress

“Stress and Academic Life”
An examination of the effects of stressors on the lives of students

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Abstract

This study is investigating stress in an academic context, its causes and effects. The participants to this study are students in Social care practice year 4.

The main findings of this study were that stress in the academic life of a student is quite prevalent, the nature of being in their final year at college made respondents to the questionnaire feel quite stressed due to the workload as well as the additional stress in completing a research project whilst still juggling other assignments and negotiating due dates and all of this around revision. Students felt that the fact that they were in fourth year meant that they had to work harder than before as they were hoping to secure good results in their examinations as well as securing employment after completing their course at college.

The main conclusions drawn from the data obtained from the questionnaire were that although participants did feel the stress from their academic workload proved to be very trying, they did state that they felt that they were in a more focused position with regards to their need to do well in their examinations and that the stress from and being in fourth year meant they were striving for better results than previous years, therein lies the conundrum, although too much stress has very negative consequences on a persons overall health and wellbeing, small amounts may encourage and even enhance academic performance.
Declaration

I declare that this dissertation, in whole or in part, has not been submitted to any other University, Institute or College as an exercise for a degree or any other qualification. I further declare that, where reference is not given in the text, that it is entirely my own work.

Signed: _________________________                           Date: _________________________

Peigi Nic Dhonncha.                                                      25th November 2009.
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There are many people whom have contributed in some way to the completion of this dissertation, hence listing them all would take too long. Therefore I would like to give an enormous thank you to all the people who have supported and encouraged me throughout the completion of this project.

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INTRODUCTION

“The components of anxiety, STRESS, fear, and anger do not exist independently of you in the world. They simply do not exist in the physical world, even though we talk about them as if they do.”

Wayne Dyer, 1940-, American Psychotherapist, Author, Lecturer

This research project is to look at the ways in which stress from both inside and outside affect a student’s ability to perform academically. The first area the research project focused on was the affect stress had on academic performance, the author hoped to find data that would support the author’s theory that stress can have a negative effect on a student’s academic performance and attendance if that student is under stress from different areas of their lives. The second area was the contributing factors that lead to stress in the academic setting, in this area the author was hoping to take a broad look at the factors that can contribute to stress in the academic setting, including examinations, assignments, the research project and the overall workload, the author was also interested in finding out if being in fourth year had an affect on a student’s academic performance and if that effect could be positive as well as negative.

The research method the author chose was quantitative, the author chose to use was questionnaires as questionnaires are easily distributed and are an easy way of gathering a lot of information quickly, this, to the author proved to be the best possible option to obtain the data required as the study was looking to obtain a lot of information within a small time-frame.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on and discuss stress, what stress is and how it impacts on a person’s life, also discussing factors that contribute to a stressful academic life, as well as the impact stress can have on a student's academic life and discussing the causes and symptoms of stress.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), (1946) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or injury”

According to the healthguide.org most people associate stress with negative descriptors, such as too much work, not enough time or sleep and poor health. Some stress, according to Edworthy, can be a good motivator, she states that it can help us to excel or even survive in life or death situations, most people however found it to be synonymous with worry that is worry over work, relationships and health amongst other things.

McGrath (1974) (cited in Fisher) defined stress in “terms of tolerance, stressful environments were considered to be those outside the normal tolerance limits of daily function at extreme levels, stimulation may be perceived as pain. High temperatures, fatigue, sleep loss or hunger may at intense levels constitute stress.” For the purpose of this project I have defined stress as the inability to maintain the expected degree of academic performance and attendance in Athlone Institute of Technology, due to external and internal factors.

The stress of separation:
According to Fisher, separation and loss may be felt by students making the transition from home to university and this can lead to stress.

Early infant studies by Bowlby (1973) found that “separation of an infant from its mother produced anxious searching accompanied with anger and distress.” Weiss (1973) discussed that separation can have a similar effect on adult life, that is that similar patterns of attachment may be present in adults.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (www.who.com) Intensive and prolonged stress can lead to a variety of short and long term negative health effects. Stress in early childhood, sometimes due to abuse, (physical, emotional etc., or bearing witness to domestic violence), can lead to a dependence on alcohol and drugs, and can lead to eating disorders, heart disease, cancer and other chronic illnesses. These will be described in further detail later on in this chapter.

According to Solomon (1969), (cited in Hayes), stress may factor differently to different people and that there were “considerable variables” between people in what amounts to stress. This leads to the “Personal vulnerability factors” described by Fisher, she found that students who may not be hugely enthusiastic at the prospect of going to college, and whom are “passive and mildly depressed” preceding the move from home to college showed raised levels of homesickness in stark contrast to those who were active and found enjoyment in their environment. These students were found to be better able to navigate and plan their new environment. A study by Fisher et al. (1991) (A study of a school in the Australian outback. (1991) was the only study found to establish a gender difference finding that females were more likely to be homesick than males. The study also identified a number of contributing factors to the homesickness, among them the study found that those who had to move a great distance from home to college were more likely to be affected.

**Stress in the academic setting:**

This brings us to the effects stress has on performance in examination situations. Fisher et al. stated that “all students have to face the demands of attaining academic standards” and that “all students seemed to be more emotionally vulnerable at examination time.” Mechanic (1962), (cited in Carson & Butler.) found that students experienced some anxiety during the three months prior to their examinations, but demonstrated “intense anxiety” when their
examinations were nearly upon them. “Stress increases as the need to deal with the demand approaches.” Mechanic (1966) (cited in Fisher.) conducted a study within the American post graduate system and found that examinations had an intense negative effect on not only the candidates but also on their families.

Fisher discussed how distraction is possible within lectures, perhaps in the form of the possibility of poor facilities and late attendance to classes. In a study conducted Fisher documented eight to fifty periods of self reported blocking in a one hour lecture. She stated that there were “two identifiable characteristics in stress” one is concentration, (“The ability to sustain attention across a period of time.”), and the other is focus, (“of attention or selection across the range of possible stimuli.”) She stated that on the assumption that “academic endeavour is largely about the creation, transfer and manipulation of knowledge……what is never noticed cannot be remembered.” Although this chapters focuses of academic stress is in the third level setting, a study carried out on behalf of the Kerry Mental Health Association, (Hill Anne Dr., O Donnchadha Gearoid Fr., O’ Connor Dan.), found some high and some very high levels of stress amongst the 1422 leaving certificate students surveyed, The Kerry Mental Health Association conducted a further study in 2003. This study focused on two issues; the first was the level of stress felt by students, from 18 different situations ranging from exams, schoolwork, relationships with peers, family and teachers to drug and alcohol use. The second was the coping strategies that students used from a range of 15, (coping strategies), based on the work of Frydenberg and Lewis. (1993.) The study was conducted on 992 first year students from 13 (different types of) schools in the county. The study found that 3.1% (30) students were “extremely stressed and unable to cope.” According to the study, this, if all first year students in County Kerry were accounted for in the study, meant that of the 1889 students, fifty nine were in serious need of help. The study summarized that although most students have manageable levels of stress and have strategies for coping, that a minority were in need of help, and that this study should concern those with responsibility for young adolescents.

According to the helpguide.org as discussed briefly stress is not always bad. It can help motivate a person to do their best as well as help a person to perform under pressure, it is when stress becomes so common that it is a way of life that it becomes a problem as it affects both mind and body. Chronic stress can be harmful to a person’s relationships, productivity and can affect a person’s mood and overall health. Stress can raise a person’s blood pressure
and suppress the immune system. “Long term stress can even rewir the brain, leaving you more vulnerable to anxiety and depression.”

For the purpose of this project, “stress” was defined in terms of academic achievements in the form of good grades and attendance. The sources referenced in this text have pointed to academics and the academic environment as being sources of stress.

**Sources of stress:**

Sources or causes of stress can vary from one person to another according to the helpguide.org. The list of causes of stress is exhaustible, some of the more obvious causes are the death of a loved one, marital breakdown and/or divorce, injury, illness or retirement, amongst others. It should however be noted that not all stress comes from external sources. Stress can also be in some cases self-generated, self-generated stress can include having unrealistic expectations, and being a perfectionist amongst others. Generally anything that puts high demand on a person or anything that forces them to adjust can cause stress. However it should also be noted that Solomon (1969), (cited in Hayes) did indicate that there are “variables” in what amounts to stress in different people.

**Symptoms of stress:**

Symptoms of stress can vary greatly and have a great range, according to the helguide.org, ranging from depression or general unhappiness to poor judgement to physical symptoms such as aches and pains and therefore can be difficult to identify. According to Edworthy peptic ulcers are found to occur twice as likely in persons who have high levels of stress. “Stress is mostly an experience we create for ourselves. Therefore, only we can manage it.”

**Dangers of too much stress:**

Hans Selye, (cited in Wade and Tavris.) argued that environmental stressors such as heat, pain and danger produced in a person “a general adaption syndrome” that is that the body responds in three stages “alarm resistance and exhaustion” and that if the stressors were to persist, could result in fatigue and illness. The “Stress vulnerability model” by Zubin and spring (1977), (cited in Thompson and Mathias.), suggests that a person may be predisposed
to developing an illness such as Schizophrenia ("most likely biochemical which when triggered by a stressful life event will result in an acute episode.") Clark and Fawcett (1992) (cited in Thompson and Mathias.) stated that “the prevalence rates for those with personality disorders are much higher in those who engage in deliberate self harm and for whom living conditions, social circumstances and acute life upsets are more significant.” Maier and Seligman (1976) found that when a person is depressed they tend to feel they have no control over their lives, their stress levels increase and in turn their depression is maintained. Carson and Butler state that the nature of stressors depends on its importance, duration and cumulative effect amongst others, that is that the death of a spouse is an obvious stressor but when coupled with other stressors may be difficult to overcome. According to the helpguide.org “the most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you.” It begins to feel normal even as it is having a damaging effect on the health of the person.

**Managing Stress:**

“Locus of control” according to Hayes may play a part in stress reduction, which is how one perceives themselves as either; being actively in control of their lives or as “victims of circumstance.” Hayes discussed that those who viewed themselves as having control over their lives were less likely to experience stress than their more negative counterparts. According to the Health Centre at Trinity College Dublin, The goal of stress management is the effective use of energy, this involves learning to recognize and control the symptoms of stress, and then “practising and using these skills.” The Health Centre also included strategies to help a person to manage their stress, these included active living; to generate the endorphin hormone which reduces stress, eating regular small meals rich in carbohydrates for a “steady stream of energy” and regulating caffeine and alcohol intake as they can affect the nervous system and leave a person feeling on edge. The article also states “time” as a big factor in stress management, this includes taking time out for you, and for hobbies as well as controlling negative thoughts and distractions and time management by way of prioritising and goal setting and sticking to the plan to avoid “overloading at the last minute.”
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[www.who.com](http://www.who.com)

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METHODOLOGY

Introduction:
This chapter hopes to identify stressors and their effect on Social Care Practice Year 4 in Athlone Institute of Technology. This chapter will discuss the objectives of the study and will be divided under four headings: 1. Research Methods, 2. Participants, 3. Procedure, 4. Method of Analysis. The main aim and objectives of this study are as follows:

Aim:

To examine the effect of stressors both inside and outside the college, and to examine their effect on college performance.

Objectives:
1.) To examine if stress has an effect on academic performance.
2.) To identify the contributing factors that lead to stress in the academic setting.

3.0 Research Methods:
The research method the author chose to use for this project was quantitative research as it was felt that this was the appropriate method for gathering the data that was required for this project. The subject matter was “stress” and therefore the author thought the best way to retrieve the answers was to use questionnaires as questionnaires are generally the most fitting to obtain answers as it uses a lot of (sometimes) varied questions and can have a broad range of questions that are likely to be answered as they normally take only a few minutes to answer and do not require too much effort on the part of the participants. This was also
inexpensive and easily distributed method of obtaining data. The questionnaires contained 15 questions all variations of the author’s objectives and were relatively simply put, and to the point as to not put the participant off answering.

3.1 Participants:

The participants required for this project were Social Care students in Year 4 and therefore I had to use “purposeful sampling” this meant that questionnaire could be handed out exclusively to this sample group only, as the aim of this project was to examine stressors and their effect on final year students in social care. It was also aimed to look at how participants, educated in the same manner for four years together, reacted in a variety of stressful situations and to look at coping skills of the participants. The researcher did not have a specific gender or age in mind and therefore an approximate 50-55 surveys were be handed out, of which 20 where randomly selected for usage in the project.

3.2 Procedure:

Once a test survey was completed, it was given a trial run by five fellow social care students as to ascertain their views and to amend the questionnaire if and where necessary also it was presented to the supervisor who also gave additional direction. The questionnaire was made up of 15 questions with the main topic of “stress” in mind. The subject group required were Social Care students (Year 4) therefore the author decided to hand out the questionnaires during a class that was felt would have a sufficient number of attendees and therefore the questionnaire’s were completed over two days of lectures, the author decided to dispense the questionnaires during class time as they was to be submitted to a sample group that would be difficult to locate as a group outside of class hours. Distribution of questionnaires was always done with the express permission of the lecturer of the class and distributed in an efficiently swift manner as to not disrupt the lecture too much.
3.3 Method of Analysis:

The main strengths of the study were:

✔ The study was different to other studies on the subject of “stress” as it was trying to gain an insight into the different experiences of stress on an academic and a personal level and individual differences to what amounts to stress and looking at different coping skills.

✔ The questionnaire was laid out in a time effective manner. (Using questions of a scaling and “tick the box” manner whilst still leaving space for more in depth answers.)

✔ The questionnaires were distributed in the lecture room setting; this meant that the questionnaires had a great response rate.

✔ It was an efficient way of obtaining results.

The main weaknesses of the study were:

✗ It was sampled on a small group in the same year which may not have been representative of the student body as a whole.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study included that in order to complete the research project I had to distribute it to the Social Care Practice Year 4 class during a class which meant they may not have sufficient time to complete the questionnaire and have time to reflect on their answers, this was not completely possible as the author had to distribute the questionnaires in a lecture setting, as it proved too difficult to locate class members outside of lecture hours, and this meant that participants had a relatively short period of time in which to complete their questionnaires.
3.6 ETHICAL LIMITATIONS

The main ethical limitation was due to serious nature of stress, the author had to word the questions in a way as to not offend participants as well as ensuring that participants were fully aware of the nature of the questionnaire before they commenced. The author prepared a cover letter which was attached to each questionnaire, ensuring anonymity as well as stating that participation was completely voluntary and that there was no need to answer each question.
RESULTS

This chapter will look at the data obtained from the questionnaire completed by participants in Social Care practice Year 4. Questions 3, 4 8, 9, 10 focus on Objective 1, *(To examine if stress has an effect on academic performance.)* while objective 2 *(To identify the contributing factors that lead to stress in the academic setting.)* is investigated in questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15.

Q.1 Social care practice year four is dominated by female students with only a handful of males. Nineteen of the participants were female only one was male. Although the author did attempt to provide the opportunity for male students to participate in the study by handing out questionnaire’s to all class goers, only one male questionnaire was included in this study after randomly sampling twenty questionnaire’s.

Q.2 Most of the participants to the questionnaire were between the ages of twenty and twenty two. 45% of participants were aged 21, 25% were aged 22, 20% were aged 20. The much smaller minority group were the mature students in the class with only two participants aged twenty six (5%) and twenty eight (5%).

Q.3 As illustrated in the following chart, academic workload and exams were the main perceived causes of stress with 90% of participants citing them as being stressful.
Q.4 When questioned if stress from the above listed affected college performance, 35% (7) specified that it did affect their college performance, 55% (11) participant stated that it had an effect on their college performance only sometimes, only one participant (5%) said it had no effect on their college performance. Participants specified varied answers as to why they had an effect on their college performance with most participants emphasising that the academic workload, where time constraints were an issue such as there being assignments due around the same time or nearing to examination time. Others specified that if they had issues from relationships with partners or family on their mind that they found it hard to concentrate on their college performance.

Q.5 When asked if the afore mentioned affected their attendance at college 20% (4) of participants stated that it did affect their attendance at college. 60% (12) stated that it affected their attendance at college some of the time, with one participant (5%) stating that it did not affect their attendance at college.
Q.6

During which of the following times do you feel most stressed?

- Before Assignments are Due: 19%
- During Exams: 19%
- At college: 0%
- Before Exams: 62%

Q.7 When asked if participants felt increased stress in fourth year in comparison to previous years: 80% (16) of respondents stated that they did feel increased pressure in fourth year, while 20% (4) said that they did not feel increased pressure in fourth year. When asked to elaborate on this most participants cited “Increased workload” and the fact that participants had to prepare a research project also weighed heavily on their minds. Also one participant stated worry about “Future employment.”

Q.8 This question was an open question which meant that the participants could express their views on the effect that being in fourth year had on their academic performance and attendance; Most participants expressed that they felt that their final year was the most important and that they felt pressure to do their best, and that there was also an increased pressure to attend, as it was felt that if they missed classes that they missed a lot of the subject material, this coincided with an increased attendance by students who participated in the study. The workload in fourth year also proved to be a cause of stress to participants as it was felt that they had too much of a workload with assignments and a thesis to complete within a short time-frame, and participants reported intervals of tiredness. On a more positive note however some participants did note that they did feel more inclined to prioritise their time and felt more motivated to do well.
Q.9

**Do you experience any of the following during stressful times?**

- Lack of sleep: 23%
- Feeling too much pressure: 16%
- Butterflies: 16%
- Loss of appetite: 10%
- Stomach Pains: 8%
- Constant Worry: 27%

Q.10 When asked if participants had a high rate of non-attendance during stressful times, 20% (4) of participants stated that it did indeed affect their attendance at college. 70% (14) participants said that it did not have an affect on their attendance, while 10% (2) stated that it did affect their attendance some of the time.

Q.11 For this question participants were asked to rate the following in order of stressfulness:

- “Death of a loved one”
- “Exams”
- “Breakdown of a Relationship”
- “Injury”
- “Disagreements with Family”
- “Disagreements with Friends.”

Most respondents (65%) rated “Death of a loved one” as being the most stressful.

The second most stressful thing according to eight (40%) respondents was “Exams.”

“Breakdown of relationship” was rated largely as being the third most stressful on the list.

“Disagreements with Family” came on average as the fourth most stressful on the list.

“Disagreements with friends” came in as the fifth most stress on the list.

“Injury” was rated the least stressful overall.
Q.12 When questioned which of the following, (“Speak to friends”, “Speak to family”, “Take a walk”, “Listen to music”, “Playing Sports”, “Other”), participants would do in order to alleviate their stress; Most respondents (80%) (16) reported that they would “Speak to friends”. 30% (6) respondents said that they would “Speak to family”, 30% (6) said that they would “Take a walk”, 40% (8) respondents said that they would “Listen to music”, while 10% (2) respondents said that “Playing sports” alleviated their stress. More specific, “Other”, answers included: “Going out with friends/boyfriend”, “Playing with my dog”, “Going to the gym/exercise”, and “Forgetting about it.”

Q.13 Participants were asked if their stress levels were high, would they: “Speak to Someone” or “Deal with it on your own”? 60% of participants said that they would “Speak to someone.”

35% of participants said that they would “Deal with it on my own.”

5% (1) participant did not tick a particular box but stated that it depended on the situation. But that generally they would speak to someone.

Q.14 Participants were asked if they would know where to seek help for their stress: 60% (12) said “YES” while 40% (8) said “NO”. The second part of the question was: If so where? Most participants suggested a “Counsellor”, their “G.P” and support services such as “The Samaritans and Drink Aware”, some suggested the “College counsellor and Fr. Shay (The College Chaplin)”, and others suggested “Student Supports”

Q15. When questioned whether participants knew where to seek help: “Within the College” and “Outside the College”

Within the College: 50% (10) said YES. 45% said NO. 5% said I DON’T KNOW.

Outside the College: 55% (11) said YES. 40% said NO. 5% said I DON’T KNOW.
Discussion

In this chapter, the author will evaluate the results obtained from the questionnaire and will draw on previously written literature, from authors who have studied the topic of “stress” more thoroughly. The Author will be looking at the results under two main objectives with the main aim of the study in mind:

**Aim:**

To examine the effect of stressors both inside and outside the college, and to examine their effect on college performance.

**Objectives:**

1.) To examine if stress has an effect on academic performance.

2.) To identify the contributing factors that lead to stress in the academic setting.

The questionnaire sought to find out if stress had an effect on academic attendance and overall performance. The majority of respondents were female with only one male participant. With this ratio in mind the author looked at previous literature (A study by Fisher et al. (A study of a school in the Australian outback.) (1991) which showed that females were more likely to experience stress. This could be explained as the notion or general idea that women in society are perceived as being more vulnerable to their feelings. When asked if stress from a list provided affected college attendance 20% stated that it did. Fisher et al stated that “…what is never noticed cannot be remembered” Therefore poor attendance would suggest a lack of ability to perform at examination times.

5.1 When asked if respondents had symptoms (both physical and non physical) associated with their stress levels, all respondents stated that they had at least one symptom. However as stated by Edworthy some stress can be good, helping people to excel by a rush of adrenaline, This was comparable to the results obtained by the author from the questionnaire which found that participants did feel pressure to do well, they felt that the stress of being in fourth
year and the research project made them work harder in order to obtain the best possible results.

Fisher et al stated that interruptions in the form of poor facilities, late attendance/poor attendance (etc.) can result in lack of attendance or stress. Although the author did not look directly at poor attendance as the scale of the research project did not allow such an in-depth look. Participants did however state that they had an excessive workload and that this effected their attendance at college as they were busy completing projects.

Hayes (cited in Solomon, 1969) found that there were “considerable variables” in what amounted to stress in different people, this was correlated in the results which found that a proportion of participants (20%) did state, that from a list provided, that it did effect their attendance at college, while from the same list, the majority of participants (70%) however, stated that it did not have any effect their attendance. Therefore a situation that seems stressful to one person and affect their attendance has little or no effect on a member of their peers.

Although different from stress, Maier and Seligman (1976) found that persons who suffer from depression tend to feel that they have no control over their lives, their stress levels increase and their depression is maintained. Stress can develop into depression if not controlled, or alleviated John von Radowitz (18 April 2006). This information was relevant to the current study as the author was trying to ascertain whether participants had knowledge of the help available to them. Most participants had a relatively good idea of where to seek help within the college, they stated the college counsellor and the college Chaplin as well as the college Health Centre. Outside the college was however a different story as most participants did not know where to seek help for their stress levels. Hayes cited that Behaviour therapy involves helping individuals/clients to develop “coping strategies” in order to help them deal with stress in their lives. Strategies obtained in the questionnaire included “Speaking with friends and “playing with my dog”.

Hans Selye (Cited in Wade) stated that environmental stressors ..... produced a general adaption syndrome in which the body reacts in three stages: 1.) Alarm, 2.) Resistance, and 3.) Exhaustion. This could be explained as the reason for absenteeism as according to Selye if the stressors were to persist they could overwhelm the body and affect its ability to cope which can result in fatigue and illness. In the case of the current research project the
“persistent stressors” would be the assignments, the research project and the overall workload of students who completed the questionnaire.

Trinity College Dublin has a health centre which promotes strategies to help alleviate or combat stress. The information found on this website was very important as the study was to do with students and therefore very relevant to the research project. This included active living as a way of alleviating or combating stress, this was included, by the author in the questionnaire as to ascertain whether physical activity was expressed by students as a means of alleviating or combating stress, or indeed to ascertain whether students were aware of its usefulness or properties as an aid to stress relief. This was found to be the case for many students who “ticked the box” of “playing sports” and “taking a walk” also on the “please specify” part of the same question, participants also stated “going to the gym” as a way of relieving stress. Other examples by the Trinity Health Centre included take “time” for you and for hobbies (etc).

Question eight on the questionnaire was looking at ways participants dealt with stress in their lives this question was left reasonably broad and in the “other” “please specify” category participants included “going out”, “going out on a date”, and even “playing with my dog” were included. This in the author’s opinion was surprising as the author did not realise the effectiveness of such simple measures as playing with the dog in relieving stress levels.

5.2 “Exams” were rated in the main as the second most stressful factor after “death of a loved one.” Which author suspected would be high on the list to rate but did not realise that it would be as high. In an attempt to discover as to why this was so the author looked back on the answers given in the questionnaire where respondents stated that they felt pressure to do well. This was correlated by previous literature by Fisher (chapter 47) who found that “all students have to face the demands of attaining academic standards”. Mechanic (1962) in a study conducted within the post-graduate system found that “examinations had a profound negative effect on candidates and their families.” Mechanic (1962) also found that students experienced some anxiety during the three months prior to tests and that they did demonstrate “intense anxiety” when the examinations were nearly upon them. Mechanic, (Cited in Carson, Robert. C. and Butler, 1992), found that stress increases as the need to deal with demand approaches. Very low on the rating question came in “Disagreements with family” and “Disagreements with friends.” The author found the fact that nearly all participants rated it as a “4” or “5” on the scale of stressfulness surprising. (1= Very stressful, 5=Least stressful.)
The author found this surprising as it was felt that disagreements with friends and family would have weighed heavily on the mind of the participant but failed to find much research in the area to further this information.

Participants were also asked whether they would speak to someone: most said that they would “speak to someone”. Some ticked the “deal with it on my own” box which led the author to previous work which urged people not to “suffer in silence.” (Pleasetalk.ie)

In summary the author found that much of the data collected correlated with literature/research written on the subject of stress. The author however found some surprising elements such as the effectiveness of such things such as physical activity and time spent on personal interests and hobbies in the reduction/prevention of stress. The author also felt that information available on stress; its causes and effects, as well as where to go to seek help, were not very informative as well as there not being too much information readily available. The author felt that researching the data using a questionnaire proved to be very efficient as well as informative. It was quickly distributed and proved to be very useful for a small scale project.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The author felt that more research could be conducted on the topic of stress in order to better inform or educate students and the public alike on the dangers of stress and where to seek help. The following are carefully selected recommendations that the author felt may aid in the future prevention or alleviation of stress levels in students and subsequently the wider population.

- Further research could be done on the effect of stress on first year students to fourth/final year students and the difference in stress levels and how these levels change over the college years. To perhaps better prepare students for the transition into their final year at college.
- Possibly more time to allow one-to-one tutorials with lecturers to decrease stress levels over assignments and projects.
- In future research the idea of simple stress relief (Physical activity, time etc.) should be looked into as an effective way of not only managing stress level but also as a preventive measure.
- The author recommends possible studies as to examine the extent to which stress intrudes on family life and the secondary effect that stress can have on the family as well as the person themselves.

In conclusion the author felt that researching the data using a questionnaire proved to be very efficient as well as informative. It was quickly distributed and proved to be very useful for a small scale project. the author felt that had she been given the opportunity to apply such a study to the wider student population as opposed to a small sample of students that the results would have been very surprising as the another feels that the stress levels of students may be higher than acknowledged and that it may be difficult for students to differentiate between the general levels of “pressure” associated with academic performance and the more serious nature of “Stress.” Much of the data collected correlated with literature on the subject of stress that the author looked at. The more surprising aspects such as the usefulness of simple and straightforward strategies such as physical activity and time spent on personal interests and hobbies in the reduction/prevention of stress. Also the author felt that information
available on stress; its causes and effects, as well as where to go to seek help, were not very informative as well as there not being too much information readily available. However the author was pleasantly surprised at the positive effect that stress can have on a person’s performance and it’s ability to help people excel when they need to the most.
APPENDIX 1:

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q.1 Male □ Female □

Q.2 Age: □

Q.3 Do you feel stress is induced by any of the following?

(Tick all boxes that apply)
Exams □
Academic Workload □
Family □
Relationships □
Other (Please elaborate) _______________________________________________________

Q.4 Does stress from any of the above affect your college performance:

Yes □ No □ Sometimes □

Please Specify_______________________________________________________________
Q.5 Do any of the above listed affect your attendance at college

Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes [ ]

Q.6 During which of the following times do you feel the most stressed

At College [ ]
Before exams [ ]
During Exams [ ]
Before assignments are due [ ]

Q.7 Do you feel more stress in 4th year than previous years?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Don’t Know [ ]

Please elaborate as to why _____________________________

Q.8 Do you feel the workload in 4th year is too much?

Yes [ ] No [ ]
Q.9 What effect does being in fourth year have on your academic performance and attendance?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Q.10 Do you experience any of the following during stressful times?

(Please tick all that apply)

- Stomach Pains
- Butterflies
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of sleep
- Feeling too much pressure on you
- Constant worry

Q.10 Do any of the listed affect your attendance at college?

Yes ☐  No ☐
Q.11 Do you have a high rate of non-attendance during stressful times?

Yes □  No □  Sometimes □

Q.12 Please rate the following in order of stressfulness.

(1 = Very Stressful, 6= Least stressful)

Death of a loved one □
Exams □
Breakdown of relationships □
Injury □
Disagreements with Family □
Disagreements with friends □

Q.12 Do you feel the above the above listed would affect your performance?

Yes □  No □

If yes please elaborate ___________________________________________
_________________________________________
_________________________________________
_________________________________________
Q.13 Which of the following do you do to help alleviate stress:

Speak to Friends ☐
Speak to family ☐
Take a walk ☐
Listening to music ☐
Playing sports ☐

Other Please Specify _________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

Q.14 If your stress levels are high would you speak to someone or try and deal with on your own

Speak to someone ☐
Deal with it on my own ☐

Q.15 Would you know where to seek help for your stress?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If so where? ____________________________________________________________

Q.16 Do you feel there is adequate help available?
Within the college:  Yes ☐  No ☐

Outside the college:  Yes ☐  No ☐

Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX 2:

This questionnaire is being used as part of a research project the author is compiling as part of the BA in Social Care Practice course. (Year 4)

The questionnaire is on the topic of “stress” and hopes to gain further insight into the effects of stress on students in Social Care Practice year 4.

Participation of the questionnaire is completely voluntary and the information gathered will be treated with the strictest confidence. You are not required to include your name in the questionnaire.

No name will appear in any part of the study.

Thank you for your time and your cooperation in completing this questionnaire, it is greatly appreciated.

__________________
Peigi Nic Dhonncha.
QUESTIONNAIRE

Q.1 Male  Female

Q.2 Age:  

Q.3 Do you feel stress is induced by any of the following?

(Tick all boxes that apply)

Exams  
Academic Workload  
Family  
Relationships  
Other (Please elaborate)  

Q.4 Does stress from any of the above affect your college performance:

Yes  No  Sometimes  

Please Specify  

Q.5 Do any of the above listed affect your attendance at college

Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

Q.6 During which of the following times do you feel the most stressed

At College ☐
Before exams ☐
During Exams ☐
Before assignments are due ☐

Q.7 Do you feel more stress in 4th year than previous years?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t Know ☐

Please elaborate as to why ___________________________________________
Q.8 What effect does being in fourth year have on your academic performance and attendance?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Q.9 Do you experience any of the following during stressful times?

(Please tick all that apply)

- Stomach Pains
- Butterflies
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of sleep
- Feeling too much pressure on you
- Constant worry

Q.10 Do you have a high rate of non-attendance during stressful times?

Yes  No  Sometimes  

Q.11 Please rate the following in order of stressfulness.

(1 = Very Stressful, 6= Least stressful)

Death of a loved one

Exams

Breakdown of relationships

Injury

Disagreements with Family

Disagreements with friends

Q.12 Which of the following do you do to help alleviate stress:

Speak to Friends

Speak to family

Take a walk

Listening to music

Playing sports

Other Please Specify _________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________
Q.13 If your stress levels are high would you speak to someone or try and deal with on your own

Speak to someone □
Deal with it on my own □

Q.14 Would you know where to seek help for your stress?

Yes □  No □

If so where? _______________________________________________________________

Q.15 Do you feel there is adequate help available?

Within the college:  Yes □  No □
Outside the college: Yes □  No □

Thank you for your time.
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