

Impact of Academic Stress on College Student Anxiety Levels

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Abstract. Students generally face greater academic stress and college students are no exception. Academic stress among college students has long been of concern to various scholars. In particular, studies in recent years have increasingly indicated that academic stress among college students leads to higher levels of anxiety. Therefore, it is necessary to study the relationship between academic stress and anxiety level of university students. This study focuses on the influence of college students' academic anxiety on their academic achievement. Through this study, we understand the degree of college students' learning anxiety, the factors affecting college students' learning anxiety and the influence of the degree of learning anxiety on college students' academic achievement. And through the analysis of the survey results, we propose some suggestions to alleviate and reduce college students' learning anxiety. Through this study, it can be found that college students of different genders and grades face different AS, among which female college students face more AS, and senior college students are under greater pressure. AS far as the influencing factors are concerned, the external factors mainly include expectation, fierce competition, heavy learning tasks, lack of learning resources, inadequate teachers and facilities, etc. The personal factors of college students mainly include lack of learning motivation and poor academic performance. AS can have a serious impact on the mental health of college students, including anxiety, depression, lower confidence and self-esteem.

Keywords: College students; academic stress; anxiety.

1. Introduction

With the increasing pressure of education and social competition, the college student population is facing unprecedented academic stress (AS). Under such circumstances, anxiety problems of college students have gradually come to the fore. Specifically, excessive AS may lead to negative emotions such as self-doubt, mood swings, and worry among college students, which in turn leads to elevated anxiety levels [1]. The presence of anxiety among college students is very common in universities. Therefore, understanding the relationship between AS and anxiety among college students not only helps to better focus on their mental health but also provides a much-needed basis for developing effective psychological intervention and support strategies. In order to alleviate the anxiety levels of college students, it is necessary to clarify the intrinsic relationship between college students' AS and anxiety levels. This was also the original purpose of this study.

A review of the literature reveals that previous scholars have conducted more comprehensive studies on AS in college students, including the influencing factors of AS [2, 3], the link between AS and mental health problems [4, 5]. This helps this study to have a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation and possible consequences of AS in college students. However, few studies have centered on the underlying mechanisms between AS and anxiety levels in college students, which leaves a certain gap. This study hopes to fill this gap through research as it can be beneficial in alleviating college students' anxiety levels.

The main purpose of this study was to conduct a literature review, which was conducted on AS and academic anxiety among college students. The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the underlying mechanisms between AS and anxiety levels among college students in order to promote a deeper understanding of mental health issues among college students.

In the next part of this study, the current situation of college students' AS, the influencing factors, and the impact on mental health will be discussed. And this essay will also analyze the relationship between AS and anxiety among college students. Finally, the study will propose some strategies to help reduce college students' anxiety.

2. Current Situation of AS among College Students

2.1. Overview of AS among College Students

The main pressure faced by students during their college years is AS. In the process of study, college students will feel the pressure from the tasks of various courses, have to constantly regulate various influences from the main and objective factors, and control their personal behaviors within the limits required by higher education [3]. According to the relevant data, 30% of freshmen and 38% of college women are consistently under stress, and the data suggests that the stress level of freshmen has been increasing annually over a period of several years [6]. Senior students have more AS compared to other grades. Science college students have more AS compared to liberal arts college students. Also, female students have more AS compared to male students [4]. This is because females take on the role of family janitor while recognizing they are successful students. And they usually have higher levels of self-imposed stress than males [7].

AS can have both positive and negative effects on college students. AS may have a positive effect on college students, turning pressure into motivation and promoting active learning, and if AS is not handled well, then it may have negative effects, such as academic burnout.

2.2. Factors Affecting AS among College Students

Factors affecting college students' AS come from various aspects, mainly including external factors and college students' personal factors. From the viewpoint of external factors, family expectations and teachers' expectations are the main causes of college students' AS. The increase of expectations is one of the factors that lead to the increase of stress level. Stress is what parents and teachers expect from their children, which in turn becomes a greater burden that these students can no longer bear [8]. According to relevant studies, among all ASors, family expectations and teacher expectations contribute the most to causing high stress among college students, accounting for about 53% and 32%, respectively [9]. For example, some parents are constantly concerned about their children, fearing that if they are not careful their children will go off the path. Therefore, parents often use their own experience and intuitive feelings to evaluate and judge their children, make certain plans for their children's future, and even impose their own wishes on their children, which will lead to children feeling strong parental pressure.

Secondly, the fierce competition will stimulate college students to think about their own future. Competitive pressure comes not only from the requirements of the state and society, but also from the comparison between individuals. Students with various different professional backgrounds enter various majors in universities, and the competition among peers becomes more intense [8]. As a result, fierce competition will invariably increase the AS of college students. In addition, excessive study tasks, lack of study resources, faculty strength and teaching facilities all have an impact on college students' AS [1]. There are more tasks in the university period, and the burden of coursework is also heavier and the workload is also higher. And the lack of resources, faculty, and facilities all contribute to the AS of college students, which leads to an increase in the level of stress that students endure.

From the perspective of the students' own factors, lack of motivation to study is one of the causes of AS among college students [3]. Some students are confused about their future academic direction as well as their careers after entering the university period, and they do not have clear learning goals and motivation, which can weaken their motivation to study, thus further increasing their AS. In addition, poor academic performance is also a personal factor that leads to AS among college students. Studies

have shown that nearly 70% of university students believe that poor student performance causes them AS [10].

2.3. The Impact of AS on the Mental Health of College Students

Mental health is an integral part of overall health. The college student population is at a high risk for mental health problems. Some studies have shown that more than one-third of college students suffer from mental health problems [11]. There are a variety of factors that contribute to these problems, with AS being one of the major factors [12].

AS has a greater impact on the mental health of college students. Appropriate stress motivates college students to learn and helps to stir up their inner potential. However overloaded AS can be detrimental to mental health. AS is a hindrance to the development of an individual's mental health. If there is too much stress, it will have different negative impacts on different individuals, and emotional disorders will occur, which will seriously affect the mental state, and the mental health of students will decline. AS can cause negative emotions such as self-doubt, which may lead to depression, and then affect the physical condition [2]. Students with depression have low academic achievement and poorer interpersonal relationships. Relevant data show that the prevalence of depression among college students is between 7% and 9% [13]. In addition, greater AS can lead to anxiety as a psychological problem among college students. Anxiety is the most prevalent mental problem among college students, with approximately nearly 12% of college students suffering from an anxiety disorder [13].

AS besides leading to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety also leads to lower self-esteem and self-confidence among college students. In the face of AS, college students may experience low self-esteem and self-confidence due to poor grades or competition with peers. This psychological state negatively affects the development and achievement of college students and prevents them from facing difficulties and challenges positively.

All of the above suggests that AS has a high positive correlation with the mental health of college students, and if the stress level cannot be effectively controlled, it will inevitably lead to a series of mental health problems.

3. The Relationship between AS and Anxiety in College Students

3.1. Common Causes of Anxiety in College Students

Anxiety is a condition that makes an individual feel nervous, fearful and worried and is accompanied by an activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system. In other words, anxiety is a tense and negative emotion as well as a certain physiological response that occurs when an individual anticipates that a certain factor is threatening or unfavorable to his or her self.

Academic anxiety is a particular form of manifestation of an adverse academic mood. The causes of academic anxiety in college students include several aspects. Individual personality and psychological factors have an impact on anxiety [14]. In interpersonal interaction, whether there is a correct understanding of oneself and others, whether there are bad psychological states such as jealousy, suspicion, arrogance, stubbornness, whether there is disrespect for others, demanding behavior, especially whether there is no hypocrisy, and whether there is appropriate emotional expression, also has a great impact on the interpersonal interaction of college students. Secondly, exams can also cause anxiety. Exam anxiety is a worrying and tense psychological state due to the fear of failing an exam or the desire to get a good score, which is more common among college students [6]. This kind of students due to the anxiety is serious, often affects its pro-examination state, the examination results instead of bad; and bad results and make its fear of failure, the pursuit of good results of the psychological aggravation, making in the next examination, anxiety aggravation, into a vicious circle.

3.2. The Influence of AS on Anxiety of College Students

AS is a major cause of academic anxiety in college students. AS can cause students to experience anxiety as a mental health problem. Many studies had shown that there was a close relationship between AS and anxiety [15]. AS may trigger anxiety in college students, especially when coping with exams, essay writing and academic competition. A significant positive correlation between AS and anxiety, indicating that the greater the individual's AS, the higher the level of anxiety. Anxiety is a normal bodily reaction when an individual is faced with AS, and appropriate AS also improves an individual's ability to deal with things, but if an individual is consistently in an academically stressful environment and feels that he or she is unable to deal with events that may occur in the future, his or her anxiety level is likely to rise. It can even trigger anxiety disorders. The results of regression analyses of AS on anxiety showed that AS has a significant positive predictive effect on anxiety, which also indicates that individuals with high AS have high levels of anxiety [16]. Appropriate stress maintains students' arousal, increases their enthusiasm for learning and self-awareness, and improves their concentration, reaction speed, and so on. Therefore, it is positive to maintain appropriate stress during the study period, but if students have too much study anxiety, it will bring some negative effects on learning.

3.3. The relationship between AS and anxiety in college students

The above suggests that there is a strong relationship between AS and anxiety, and that increased AS often leads to increased anxiety. That being said, stress levels have a positive effect on anxiety, and if stress levels are higher, then anxiety will be worse. Understanding this relationship can help develop effective interventions and supports to help college students cope with AS and anxiety.

4. Suggestions to Alleviate the AS of College Students

4.1. Institutional Support Measures

In order to alleviate college students' anxiety, this research will make suggestions in terms of institutional support measures. First of all, schools can establish specialized psychological counseling institutions. The establishment of a special counselling agency in the college or collaboration with a counselling centre can help to provide a comfortable and relaxed environment for college students. This is an environment where students can talk to each other about their AS, both in counselling sessions and in their course work. This environment will help to alleviate the AS of college students and inspire them to face their challenges in a positive way [4]. And the school as a professional institution should select standardised psychological scales suitable for college students for screening psychological abnormalities and professional counselling to prevent the occurrence of serious psychological problems. Based on scientific indicators and signals, college students with serious psychological problems and psychological crisis should be referred and treated.

Secondly, schools should establish a sound student management system, especially in the area of time management. In terms of time management, schools should consider providing services such as time management to help students manage their time wisely. This is because it helps them balance their family and academic life. Effective time management seems to reduce AS among students [10]. And the reduction of AS can reduce anxiety among college students to some extent.

In addition, schools should reform the assessment system. Schools should promote multiple assessment methods. Avoid over-reliance on high-pressure test-taking assessment, and encourage the use of diversified assessment methods, such as project work, group discussion, open-ended questions, etc., to alleviate students' anxiety about a single test score. And schools should establish reasonable assessment standards. Reasonable assessment standards should be established in the assessment system to ensure that the assessment process is fair and transparent, and to avoid giving students too much pressure and anxiety.

4.2. Role of Teachers and Parents

The role of teachers and parents in the academic achievement and mental health of college students cannot be ignored. This study will present some suggestions to alleviate college students' anxiety from the perspective of teachers and parents.

From the teachers' point of view, first of all, teachers should provide positive emotional support for college students. Teachers should establish a close, trusting relationship with students, encourage them to share distress, and provide necessary support and guidance. The teachers' emotional support can reduce college students' emotional reactions to AS and reduce academic burnout [17]. Secondly, instead of wasting time, teachers should create a comfortable and calm examination situation and suggest to students that they can skip a question if they get stuck on it, go on to learn something else and return to it later. This is because exams are supposed to gauge what students have acquired and should not frustrate them to the extent that they are unable to display their new acquired knowledge [18]. In addition, teachers should divide learning tasks into smaller and easier to complete chunks. Large and difficult tasks are a significant source of AS for students, and this stress can further cause anxiety. Whereas, smaller and easier to complete tasks allow students to have more opportunities for success, which promotes motivation and encouragement [18].

From a parental perspective, first and foremost, parents should also provide positive emotional support. Because parental encouragement and support can make college students feel that their efforts are valuable. And they can help college students to dispel their negative emotions and keep them in a positive frame of mind. Also, they provide students with necessary psychological counselling to help them solve the psychological problems arising from AS [1]. Secondly, parents should give more psychological care to college students by paying attention to their mental health and lowering academic expectations. Entering college does not mean that parents have lower expectations of their children. As their children become college students, parents look forward to a bright future for them, and these expectations translate into AS for college students, which may even lead to anxiety and thus affect their mental health [19]. Higher expectations are one of the factors that contribute to AS among college students. Lowering expectations can help reduce stress and make students less anxious. In addition, parents should maintain communication with the school. Parents should contact the school on a regular basis in order to discuss the student's situation so that a timely program can be initiated to help the student. Communication between school life and family life has been critical and is an excellent method of ensuring that the health of students can be monitored as closely as possible. This is because families and schools working together are a great support system [18].

4.3. Individual Coping Strategies

Personal factors are the subjective dimension of the problem of AS among college students, i.e., the subjective consciousness and behaviour that lead to the emergence of the problem [4]. There are also strategies that individual college students can use to alleviate their own anxiety.

First, college students should engage in stress management, and then know themselves and change themselves. AS among college students does not always result in negative outcomes, meaning that stress is not always negative. When college students are able to manage and use stress effectively it can help them achieve personal accomplishments more efficiently [20].

Secondly, college students should master the skills of emotional balance. In the face of AS, college students should learn to control their anxiety, burnout and other undesirable emotions, and take the right time, place and appropriate way to vent, which is very important for maintaining psychological health and balance as well as maintaining good academic ability.

In addition, college students should learn to make a reasonable study plan. A reasonable study plan can help college students to study in a planned and purposeful manner, and effectively relieve stress and tension [3]. Specifically, college students need to divide tasks and time. According to the difficulty and importance of the study content, the tasks are divided reasonably in order to rationally

arrange the study time every day to avoid procrastination and vicious circle. And college students need to make a schedule. By making a weekly plan or a monthly plan, the daily study tasks and time schedule are clear. This can help college students utilize their time more efficiently and reduce anxiety caused by poor time management.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the current situation of college students' AS shows that college students face greater AS. Different genders and grades of college students face different AS, among which, female college students face greater AS, and the pressure of senior college students is also greater. In terms of the influencing factors of AS, external factors mainly include expectations, fierce competition, heavy learning tasks, lack of learning resources, insufficient teachers and facilities, etc. Personal factors of college students mainly include lack of motivation to study and poor academic performance. AS can have serious effects on college students' mental health, including anxiety, depression, lowered self-confidence and self-esteem. The analysis of the relationship between AS and anxiety among college students shows that there is a strong relationship between AS and anxiety, and it is a positive correlation. As for the suggestions to alleviate college students' anxiety, firstly, schools should provide institutional support for college students by establishing specialized psychological counseling institutions, perfect student management system and assessment system. Secondly, teachers and parents should make certain measures. Teachers should provide emotional support, create a favorable examination environment and rationally divide study tasks to help students reduce anxiety. Parents should provide positive emotional support, lower academic expectations, and strengthen ties with the school to help reduce anxiety. In addition, students should manage their stress, acquire emotional balancing skills, and make reasonable study plans to help reduce anxiety. In terms of the research results of this paper, there are still great shortcomings. In the future research process, questionnaire survey will be adopted to collect as much original data as possible, and specific analysis methods will be adopted to sort out the existing data, so as to better improve the scientific nature of this paper.

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