

Title:

Stress Effect: The Impact of Stress on Medical Students' Ability to Focus, Perceived Academic Achievement, & GPA

Authors:

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Introduction:

Stress is commonly perceived as a hinderance to high academic performance, especially in complex fields. There is a general concordance of opinion amongst scientists on the matter; stress negatively impacts focus and academic performance. But what if medical students do not play by the rules?

Objective:

To identify the relationship amongst an individual's perceived level of stress and their focus, academic achievement, and GPA. This relationship was examined among first and second year preclinical medical school students.

Methods:

A voluntary, confidential survey was used to harvest information on the perceived levels of stress, focus, academic achievement, and GPA of first and second year medical students. Participants indicated their perceived stress level (1-5), focus level (1-5), academic achievement (1-5), and recorded their I.D. number. Precise GPAs were gathered using each student's I.D. number.

Results:

121 surveys met the inclusion criteria. The results are divided based on a low stress level group (N=50) (stress level 1-3) and a high stress level group (stress level 4-5) (N=71). The average perceived level of focus was 3.46 in the low stress group and 3.07 in the high stress group ($p=0.016$). The average perceived level of academic achievement was 3.70 in the low stress group and 3.35 in the high stress group ($p=0.030$). The average GPA was 3.23 in the low stress group and 3.24 in the high stress group ($p=0.871$).

Conclusions:

Students in the low stress level group had a significantly higher level of focus than students in the high stress level group; stress level and level of focus are negatively correlated. It is quite remarkable that there is no significant difference in GPA between students in the low stress category vs the high stress category. This suggests that no matter how stressed a student may be, it will not have any effect on GPA. Interestingly, although students of both low and high stress levels performed equally well, their perceived level of academic achievement is negatively correlated with their level of stress. This may be because a high stress level negatively impacts a student's positive self-regard and feelings of accomplishment.

Future Research:

Future research could include investigation into the specific stress factors of medical students. It can also explore the causative factors in the disparity between perceived and actual academic achievement. Variability in the levels of stress, focus, academic achievement, and GPA can also be compared between first and second year medical students to explore whether there is a difference due to class year. Finally, we would like to explore medical students' strategies on coping with stress.