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*Stress and methods of dealing with it among students
of Arts Departments at the UMCS*

Stres i metody radzenia sobie z nim wśród studentów
kierunków humanistycznych UMCS

The aim of the paper was to determine the level of stress-perception for the students under examination, to recognise its main causes as well as to determine what methods are used by students in order to help them overcome stress. The analysis of these behaviours was carried out according to sex, social background and temporary or permanent residence of the subjects. The research results were confronted with similar survey carried out among students of the Faculty of Medicine at Medical University.

INTRODUCTION

Mental stress, sometimes also called psychological stress, is understood as the state of intensive emotional pressure. Stressor, stressing situation and difficult situation are interchangeable expressions to denote factors causing stress. A characteristic feature for many difficult situations is the fact that they utter a threat to an individual e.g. his or her life, health, good reputation or social position; so the threat may be of different types and intensity. It is typical of the whole, broad group of difficult situations that they disturb or even preclude an individual from completing activities aiming at reaching a goal, which may be satisfying one's need or solving one's problem. Difficult situations may result in depriving an individual of the values that he or she thinks highly of such as: love, care or possession of something precious. Difficult situation releases the state of intensive activation. If the state is moderate it may be conducive to the efficiency of an action, but excessive emotional incitement makes it impossible to perform any organised action and is a manifestation of an overloaded behaviour regulation system (1).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research in the form of auditorial questionnaire included 201 third and fourth year UMCS students of the Faculty of Arts (78.6% of the group) and the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology (21.4% of the group). The Faculty of Arts was represented by students of the following departments: history; archeology; English, German, Polish, Russian and White Russian Philologies. The survey was carried out in April 1998. In the research the questionnaire that had previously been used in the survey among the students of medicine (4) was used with only slight alterations.

The average age of the examined students was 22.5. Women constituted 72.6% of the group. 75.6% of the subjects were permanent town residents; 27.4% were the country residents. The structure of social background among the subjects showed that 56.7% of them came from white-collar working families; 34.3% – from working class families and 9% of them were of peasant origin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 illustrates the subjects' answers to the question: "Do you feel that stress is present in your life?". 7% of the students defined themselves as living in permanent stress. The percentage is lower than among the students of Medical Academy; among whose 11.4% of the students gave the same answer (4). The faculty of the studies makes a significant difference if we analyse the students' answers to this question. 8.2% of the students of the Faculty of Arts describe themselves as living in long-lasting stress, but only 2.3% of the Faculty of Sociology and Philosophy students answered in this way. The difference is illustrated in Figure 2.

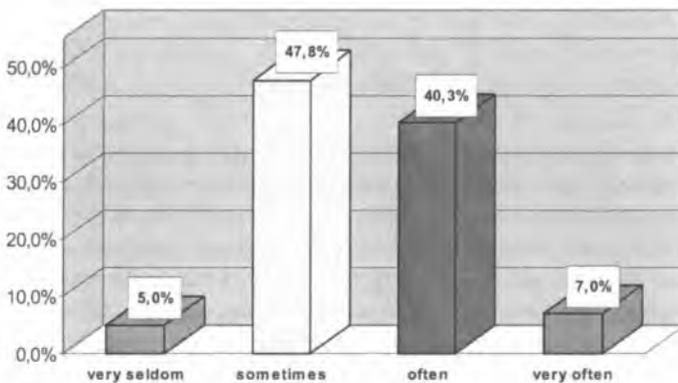


Fig. 1. Frequency of feeling stress by the subjects

Figure 3 presents the reasons for stress that were connected with the studies. It was a multiple choice question. The students most frequently indicated stressing system of evaluation including exams, grades, questioning during classes. 63.2% of the subjects gave this reason. Being overloaded with learning was mentioned by 44.3% of the students, which constitutes a lower percentage than in

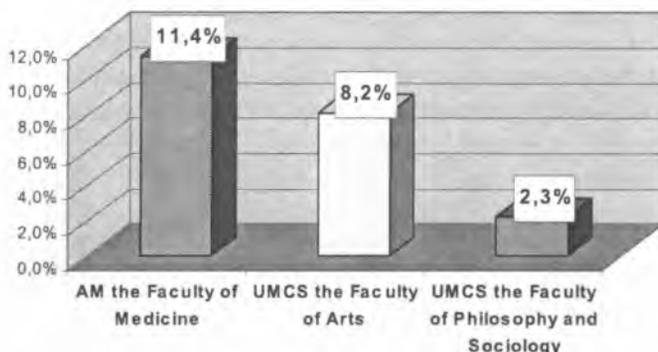


Fig. 2. Students living in a long-continued stress according to the faculty of studies

the case of medicine students where this opinion was supported by 68.3% of the students. Another reason for stress connected with the studies were relations with lecturers and other university workers – 35.3% of the examined group in comparison with 51% of the medicine students (4). Women, more often than men, see the source of stress in incorrect and stressogenic behaviours of the university teachers as well as in competition among students. Students of arts are stressed more by the system of evaluation and rivalry and conflicts among students; on the other hand students of sociology and philosophy complain about inappropriate programme of studies. Among other reasons for stress three persons (1.5% of the examined group) mentioned wrong design of a plan of classes; too long block of classes; lack of breaks between classes.

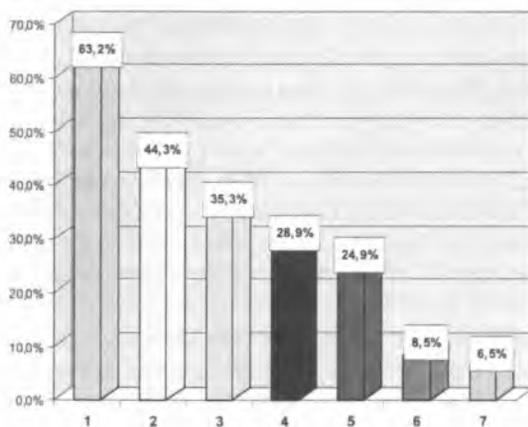


Fig. 3. Reasons for stress connected with studies; 1) system of evaluation, 2) being overloaded with studying, 3) relations with lecturers and other university workers, 4) too many compulsory classes, 5) inappropriate programme of studies, 6) rivalry among students, 7) conflicts in students group

Different life situations are much rarer sources of stress than studies themselves (Fig. 4). The most frequent among them are family conflicts (48.3% of the subjects) and financial difficulties (35.3%). Women more often than men indicated difficulties in finding a partner for life and bad state of one's health as stressing factors. Among other reasons that were not included in the questionnaire the most frequently mentioned were: fear of one's future and one's professional career facing the unstable job market as well as excessive duties and responsibilities, constant hurry, lack of time to rest and relax.

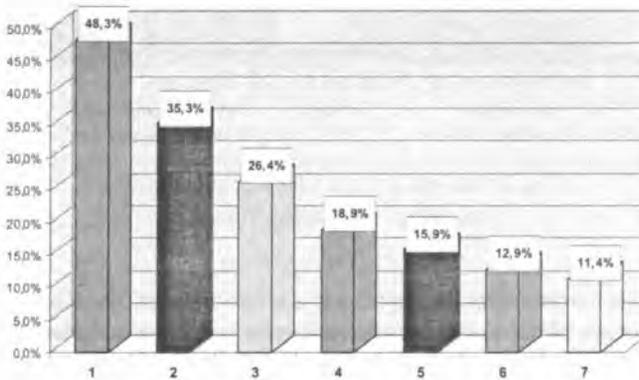


Fig. 4. Reasons for stress connected with other life situations; 1) family clashes (conflicts), 2) difficult financial situation, 3) inability to get on with one's own life, 4) difficulties with finding a partner, 5) serious illness of a family member, 6) bad health conditions, 7) loneliness, lack of friends

36.8% of the subjects claim that their personality predispose them to feeling stress. This view is more often represented by women than by men.

Figure 5 and 6 present most willingly used methods of dealing with stress. Lighter coloured columns in diagrams indicate the percentage of students who use a given method (including: seldom, sometimes, often and very often), darker columns illustrate the percentage of the subjects who often and very often use the method. As in the case of the Faculty of Medicine students, the most frequently used method of coping with stress was listening to music (loud or quiet). 93% of the subjects relieve tensions this way and 62.1% do it often and very often. Other popular methods are: heart to heart conversation about one's problems with a close friend and walking, movement in open air.

As negative ways of coping with stress we can classify: eating sweets (76.1% of the examined group), manifesting aggression towards others (57.7%), drinking alcohol (55.2%), smoking cigarettes (26.9%).

Women much more frequently than men try to overcome stress by means of doing housework requiring physical effort, eating sweets, shopping for pleasure and, what seems to oppose customary belief, they more often manifest aggression towards others. Typically male methods of dealing with stress are: devoting to one's hobby, drinking alcohol, smoking and playing computer games.

18.4% of the subjects found the methods of stress-reduction used by themselves very efficient, 57.2% – partly efficient; 17.4% – only temporarily efficient and 2% of the students claimed that the methods they use are inefficient – they do not cope with stress (5% – no data). Female students are less efficient in dealing with stress than their male friends.

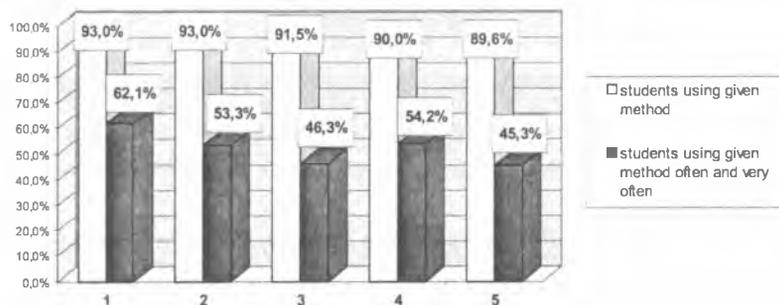


Fig. 5. Most popular methods of dealing with stress; 1) listening to music, 2) heart to heart conversation about one's problems, 3) walking, movement in open air, 4) positive thinking; trying to find positive aspects of one's situation, 5) reading interesting books or magazines

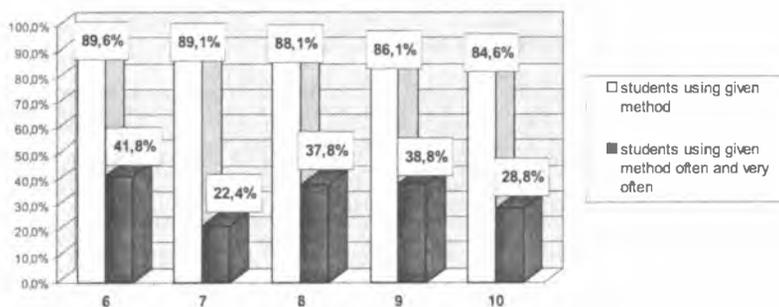


Fig. 6. Subsequent methods of dealing with stress; 6) laughter, jokes about the situation, 7) going to cinema, theatre, concert, sporting event, 8) social meetings with friends, 9) focusing on problem, arranging plan of action, 10) shopping for pleasure

Another question of the survey was which of the stress reduction methods the students found most efficient. Among five most frequently mentioned methods there were: heart-to-heart conversation about one's problems with a close friend (50.7% of the subjects), walking, movement in open air (40.8%), listening to music (37.3%), positive thinking, trying to find positive aspects of one's situation (30.3%) and practising various sport disciplines (29.9%).

74.1% of the students are in favour of introducing practical classes in mental hygiene in the programme of their studies. The aim of such classes would be teaching how to manage in difficult situations. Five students (2.5% of the examined group) added, on their own initiative, that the classes should not be compulsory.

CONCLUSIONS

1. 8.2% of the Faculty of Arts students and 2.3% of the Faculty of Sociology and Philosophy students describe themselves as living in long-lasting stress.

2. Stress among the students more often results from the studies than from different life situations.

3. The subjects most willingly overcome stress by means of listening to music, heart-to-heart conversations with close friends and movement in open air.

4. Practical classes in mental hygiene teaching how to cope with difficult situations should become an integral part of all the faculties' programmes. Almost 3/4 of the examined students opt for this idea.

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STRESZCZENIE

Badaniem w formie ankiety audytoryjnej objęto 201 studentów III i IV roku UMCS, studiujących na Wydziale Humanistycznym oraz na Wydziale Filozofii i Socjologii. Badanie przeprowadzono w kwietniu 1998 roku.

8,2% studentów Wydziału Humanistycznego UMCS i 2,3% Wydziału Filozofii i Socjologii uważa siebie za żyjących w przewlekłym stresie. Przyczyny stresu wynikają częściej ze studiowania niż z innych sytuacji życiowych. Stres badani przezwyciężają najchętniej poprzez słuchanie muzyki, szczere rozmowy z bliskimi osobami na temat swoich problemów i ruch na świeżym powietrzu. Praktyczne zajęcia z higieny psychicznej, uczące, jak radzić sobie w sytuacjach trudnych, powinny stać się integralną częścią programu studiów na wszystkich kierunkach. Opowiada się za tym prawie trzy czwarte badanych studentów.