

Identifying Potential Stressors of University Students and Ways to Enhance University Climate: The case of the University of Balamand

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Abstract

Current research indicates that the prevalence of stress is increasing among college students and impacts student achievement and student retention, both issues integral to the mission of any university. Consequently, identifying potential stressors that may interfere directly or indirectly with learning, achievement, and the well-being of students becomes of major importance to the university. This paper presents the results of a case study conducted during the academic year 2007 - 2008 on a representative sample of University of Balamand (UOB) students (N = 584) living on the UOB campus. It analyzes the stressors as perceived and lived by the students in relation to their gender and age. Methodologically, a new way to identify potential stressors is proposed which is in concordance with a theoretical approach that considers the person from a holistic point of view. A blend of qualitative and quantitative techniques is used.

Results of the study indicate that the main source of stress is related to personal issues and considered highly stressful. The two most stressful events identified by students were Lebanon's political instability and the level of superficiality in the culture. Males were significantly more stressed than females, and older than younger. Suggestions for developing appropriate programs to help students cope effectively will be addressed.

I. Introduction

Attending a university can be a stressful experience for many college students, impacting their sense of well-being. Stress related researches have not viewed the general student body as a priority population as most researches have focused on specific occupational fields such as law and medicine (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Robotham & Julian, 2006; Smith & Renk, 2007). Current researches indicate that the prevalence of stress is increasing among college students and impacts student achievement and student retention, both issues integral to the mission of any university. If university administrators want to effectively support students,

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they need to know the types of stress students experience and how it impacts their sense of well-being and academic performance. The identification and evaluation of stressors affecting students is important for developing appropriate programs to help students cope effectively. Stress management programs can teach students techniques to help prevent or reduce the negative effects of stress and contribute to a sense of well-being (Cooper & Dewe, 2004). This study was designed to investigate and identify the most prevalent stressors experienced by students at a private university in northern Lebanon and to make recommendations to the administration regarding intervention strategies that could be implemented to support students in reducing stress and fulfilling their educational goals more effectively.

II. Theoretical Framework

1. Definition of stress

Defining stress is a crucial matter when one tries to identify what a subject is going through when encountering difficult situations. What, when, and for whom an event can be called a stress? Researchers have approached these questions in different ways. For some, stress was defined as the stimulus that produces uncomfortable reactions (Chambel & Curral, 2005; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Shannon, 1999). For others, these responses can be physiological (Selye, 1956); emotional (Dantzer, 1989) or socio-cultural, and are called stress and reflect the perturbation of the adaptation state of the person (Chrousos & Gold, 1992). The stimuli inducing these stressful responses are called stressors. These two approaches view the relationship of the person to the stress from a stimulus-response perspective ignoring the role of the person as an agent in defining what is stressful for him.

A third approach (Dantzer, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is transactional; it considers stress as a “dynamic, mutually reciprocal, bidirectional relationship” between the person and the environment mediated by the “cognitive appraisal” and coping. These latter processes allow the person to evaluate if a particular encounter is exceeding his own resources and endangering his well-being. In concordance with this last approach, a huge focus was put on the study of the cognitive processes of the person-environment transaction, called by Lazarus (1966) the primary and secondary appraisals of events (Devonport & Lane, 2006; Folkman, Lazarus, Delongis, & Gruen, 1986; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, Delongis, & Gruen, 1986; Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998; Robotham & Julian, 2006; Towbes, 1995). Although these approaches insisted on the construction of the meaning of the event by the person, the emotional processes were mostly considered as responses showing the discomfort induced by the stimuli, or as aspects of the coping processes. The social processes were mainly viewed as stress-inducing events or coping resources.

In our approach we focus on the person, considered in his integrity as the central agent of the stress system. We consider that for an event to be a potential stressor it has to be perceived as a source of stress by the person who is experiencing it. This perception is not purely cognitive but holistic. The person who is “living” a specific event gives it a special meaning. This meaning is a personal construction induced by the somatic, cognitive, and emotional responses of the moment, the all being anchored in the socio-cultural representation of the event and in the developmental history of the person. Therefore, the activation of the stress response is not induced only by a cognitive appraisal of the event, but by the “organismic experience” resulting from the process of living the event. This “organismic experience”, in its Rogerian connotation (Rogers, 1995), involves the person in his integrity and implies physical, emotional, cognitive,

and social manifestations or feelings. It can sometimes induce a stressful response even before the person becomes conscious or aware of it, depending on the person's "openness to his own experience".

2. Measuring Stress

In concordance with the different approaches of stress different types of scales were developed. One category inquires about life events that are considered as stressful a priori. Scales in this category ask the subject if they have been through certain events (called hassles, stressors, etc.) or not, without examining if these events were perceived as stressful or if the subject was actually stressed or not after being exposed to these events. One of the most known scale in this category is the Social Readjustment Rating Scale or SRRS (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

Another category uses a symptomatic approach. It assesses stress through its presupposed psychosomatic, emotional, and behavioral symptoms. Scales in this category aim to inquire about the reaction to stress, they ask the subject to designate one stressful situation and then they inquire about the reaction to it. They also sometimes evaluate one group of subjects considered to be under stress and measure their actual level of stress. Example of these scales is the TSS (Toulousian Scale of Stress) (Nahas, 2001).

The last category assesses the perception of stress, it inquires about negative emotions resulting from a general feeling of lacking control over one's life, time, and resources. These kinds of scales do not relate the perception of stress to specific life events but tries to discover a general state of perceived stress in a population under a potentially stressful situation. In this category we also include scales about the appraisal of stress. One of the most frequently used scales in this category is the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen & Williamson, 1983).

In our case and in concordance with our theoretical approach, we developed a new way to identify potential stressors. Difficult events are not considered stressful a priori. And, the evaluation of the event as stressful is not based on its cognitive appraisal but on the "organismic experience" resulting from "living" the event. In fact our scale presents the subject with a number of events or situations formulated more or less in a neutral way. For each event that the subject encountered he reported on a Likert scale his "organismic experience" related to the event in terms of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social manifestations. Therefore, for an encountered event to be considered as a stressor for a subject it must induce, to a certain degree, at least one of the organismic experiences, otherwise even when difficult and frequently encountered, the event remains normal or neutral for this specific subject. The more aversive organismic experiences it induces, and with a higher degree it does for each one, the more an event is considered as potentially stressful. In this scale the subject is faced with his memory of what he has been through when encountering specific events.

III. Stress at University

1. Stressors for University Students

Research has documented that college students typically face a unique set of stressors. The environment of college life can be quite different and difficult from the types of stress experienced by non-students. For example, there is a constant pressure to perform and achieve good grades which is monitored by continuous evaluations such as exams, papers, or projects. There may be communication problems with faculty regarding expectations for classroom participation, assignments, and evaluation or grading criteria. Students must make adjustments to having more

independence and less supervision which requires new levels of initiative and self-monitoring. University often brings new living arrangements, eating and sleeping habits, and the need to establish a new support network. Researchers have identified areas of typical stress for students which includes: economic well-being, social relationships (peer, family & romantic), academic adjustment, time management, career goals, and physical appearance and health (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Lowe & Gayle, 2007; Magaya, Asner-Self, & Schreiber, 2005; Murff, 2005; Pope & Simon, 2005; Robotham & Julian, 2006; Simmons, Aysan, Thompson, Hamarat, Steele, 2002; Towbes & Cohen, 1996).

An important factor to consider is not only the source of stress but to distinguish between stress that may be considered positive from that which is experienced negatively. The demands of university life are not inherently negative or positive. A certain level of tension can be seen as helpful and beneficial (eustress) and may provide the needed motivation to accomplish goals. Negative stress (distress), on the other hand, is detrimental in that it impairs working memory and can affect health and academic performance. Negative stress has been defined to occur when the situation is appraised as threatening or otherwise demanding and insufficient resources are available to cope with the situation. Academic stress combined with low control and low support can lead to psychological strain, anxiety, and poor physical health and is also associated with a variety of negative health outcomes, including depression, social dysfunction, and physical illness (MacGeorge, Samter, Gillihan, 2005; Morrison & O'Connor, 2005; Nonis et al., 1998). Stress can lead to undesirable coping strategies such as drinking alcohol, smoking and using illicit drugs, social withdrawal, and excessive eating or sleeping (Oliver, Reed, Katz & Haugh, 1999; Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Such a decline in general well-being often results in poor academic performance. (Chambel & Curral, 2005; Iglesias et al., 2005; Misra et al., 2000; Moore et al., 1992; Zakowski et al., 1992).

Thus, it is when the demands of the university are no more considered as challenges but lead to real physical, emotional, intellectual and social impairments that they become potential stressors.

2. At-Risk Populations

Freshmen are especially at risk and susceptible to stress as they make the dramatic transition from high school and must adjust to being away from home (perhaps for the first time), and they must make adjustments to a new social and academic environment (Chickering & Havighurst, 1988; D'Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991; Towbes & Cohen, 1996). International students, in particular, face unique challenges which include cultural adjustment issues, language barriers, and social isolation (Olivas & Li, 2006). Gender issues also exist with females generally reporting higher levels of stress, concerns with weight and physical appearance, and greater need for social support. Females are more likely than males to seek help, but all students were more likely to share their worries with informal sources of assistance (i.e., family or friends). Those students who did seek formal assistance most commonly make initial contact with campus medical services. (Baker, 2003; Magaya et al., 2005; Meijer, 2007; Oliver et al., 1999; Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006). Student support strategies therefore, need to be differentiated and tailored to specific student needs

IV. Methodology

1. The Interviews

Methodologically, a new way to identify potential stressors is proposed and it is in concordance

with a theoretical approach that considers the person from a holistic point of view. A blend between qualitative and quantitative techniques is used. In the first phase, researchers conducted 18 individual interviews with faculty and professional staff involved in the daily lives of students on and off campus. This included two representatives (one male and one female when possible) from each of the five major academic divisions on campus. The academic division included faculty from: Arts and Social Sciences, Engineering, Science, Business, and Fine Arts. Staff from the Infirmary, Office of Student Affairs, and the Library was also interviewed.

In the second phase, we interviewed students and asked them to identify stressors from their perspective. Student interviews were held to ensure that no areas of concern were left unidentified before surveying the student body at large. Both sets of interviews were conducted in a qualitative, open-ended question format. Faculty and staff were asked, "What stressors have you observed in students? What stressors have been directly reported to you by students?" Students were asked, "What do you find stressful in your life as a student?" Interviews were conducted by both primary researchers, each recording the material independently. Each researcher coded their notes and later compared them to establish an inter-rater reliability of the information obtained. Trends and patterns were then systematically assessed to identify the major themes and patterns of student stressors identified by faculty, staff, and students.

2. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by incorporating specific topics from the two major areas identified: academics (56 items) and personal issues (28 items). Academic issues were then further coded into the specific categories of skills (AS 7 items), requirements (AR 6 items), exams (AE 10 items), student and faculty relations (SF 7 items), campus time (CT 5 items), campus space (CS 13 items), peer relationships (PR 3 items) and personal consideration (PC 5 items). Personal issues were coded into the specific categories of skills (PS 4 items), future (PF 1 item), personal peer relations (PRP 4 items), family issues (FI 8 items), cultural issues (CI 3 items), and finances (M 8 items).

The different topics were then expressed in 84 simple, clear statements reported in two languages (English and Arabic). Each statement was then associated to a possible uncomfortable "organismic experience" in terms of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social manifestations. The indicators considered for the physical manifestations are feelings of, exhaustion and depression. The indicators considered for the cognitive manifestations are feelings of distraction and powerlessness. The indicators considered for the emotional manifestations are feelings of being pressured by time and preoccupied. And the indicators considered for the social manifestations are feelings of irritation, offense and annoyance. Students were requested to mark the statements that apply to them on the questionnaire as never, sometimes, and frequently, and then to identify how they experienced this encounter negatively, if they did, by marking for each of the four possible manifestations (physical, cognitive, emotional/affective or social) if it applies to them from 0 (it does not apply at all) to 5 (it applies a lot). The alpha of Cronbach calculated on the 84 items of the questionnaire returned a value of 0.89 which reveals that the questionnaire has good internal consistency reliability.

The demographic information collected included: age, gender, socio-economic status, year of study, place of residence, religious affiliation, and cumulative grade point average.

3. Sample

The target population was the undergraduate student body of the university's main campus,

approximately 2,000 students. Seven hundred and ninety-two questionnaires were administered during required Cultural Studies and English Language courses. These courses being required for all the university of Balamand students, they allowed us to gather randomly a representative sample of our population. Completion time was approximately 60 minutes. Five hundred and eighty-four usable questionnaires were received. See Appendix for the demographic characteristics of the participants.

4. Procedure

In order to know how stressful the encountered events were for those who lived them, we calculated a stress score for each event by adding the scores on the four categories of feelings associated with the event. The level of stress for each event for each subject could therefore vary between 0 and 16. An event scoring a level of stress between zero and 3.99 was considered as not stressful. An event scoring between 4 and 7.99 was considered low stress. An event scoring between 8 and 11.99 was considered highly stressful and an event scoring between 12 and 16 was considered extremely stressful. The comparison of the means of the stress score for events allows us to understand which events were the most stressful for our population. For this paper, we will identify the students' level of stress on each event, the circumstances of that stress (i.e., university or personal stress), and how experiencing stress relates to age and gender. The plethora of additional variables available in our data will be evaluated in future manuscripts.

V. Results

1. Stress Levels

The first question to address is the students' level of stress in relationship to the encountered events. Eighty-two events were encountered by at least 11 % of the population with only 2 encountered at 5 and 4%. In our perspective, the mere encounter with the event is not sufficient evidence of it being stressful. This is why we examined the stress score for each event to determine which events were lived as stressful by our population. In fact, in our data, the level of stress for each event varies between low stress (score between 4 and 7.99) and high stress (score between 8 and 12). No events scored a no stress level or an extremely high level of stress. All events showed a certain level of stress, which confirms the reliability of the interviews. Twenty-eight events were experienced as highly stressful (score between 9 and 12). Fifty-six events were lived as low stress (score between 4 and 8). We can note that among these 28 events reported as the most stressful, more than half (15) were not related to university issues either in terms of academic issues or in terms of management issues. In fact only 13 out of 56 events (22%) were related to the university issues and were considered stressful, while 15 out of 28 personal issues (54%) were scored as highly stressful (level of stress higher than 8). On the other hand, among the 23 academic issues (skills, requirements and exams) only 3 were recorded as highly stressful while the other 20 scored low on stress. This means that the source of stress for our population is more personal than academic and it is mainly a developmental issue.

a. University Issues

Among the 13 events related to university issues, eight events were related to campus management in terms of space, time and bureaucracy. Three of these events were related to the living conditions in the dorms (items 32, 40 and 41). Another three address issues such as noise in exam rooms (item 48), bureaucratic hassles (item 54), and having personal property stolen (item 42). The remaining 2 events concerning the space are very specific to the university

of Balamand situation being isolated on a hill (items 39 and 34). Being stressed by these events reveals the lack of adaptation skills in our population who find it hard to cope with such logistic problems. Is it a developmental issue, a socio-cultural issue or an economical issue? Further studies need to explore this matter.

Three events were related to academic issues; specifically, exams (too many exams scheduled at the same time (item 19) or too much material covered (item 14)) and a preoccupation about failing were prevalent (item 17).

The last 2 events were related to personal conflicts: discrimination on campus (21.7 %) (item 55) and personal conflicts with professors (21.8%) (item 28). This also directs us toward looking in the developmental arena. Trainings in social skills and conflict resolution would be advised for those who encounter such stress. It is interesting to note that among the 23 purely academic issues; only three were reported as highly stressful, while the other 20 scored as low stress.

b. Personal Issues

Among the 15 personal issues:

Seven out of eight events were related to financial issues and scored highly stressful. This means that almost all the financial issues were rated as highly stressful by all the population, no matter the age, gender, religion, faculty, or year of study. Only students with low socio-economic status reported extreme level of stress (mean =12.2) on the item of paying tuition. These findings are in concordance with the previous studies on student stress levels (Gadzella, 1991; Kohn & Frazer, 1986)

Five of the 15 events were related to family issues. Conflicts over spending money (item 70) or over love relationships (item 67) were the most frequently encountered. This may indicate that young adults still seek parental approval on issues of love and money. Or, perhaps parents in our middle class society seek to control their offspring through money and love. Is it a question of dependence or support? This question needs to be examined in future studies.

Pressure in choosing a major (item 73) was not encountered as much as expected (11.4%), but it is still, as expected, considered highly stressful. Parents' marital problems (item 68) (15.8%) or family violence (item 72) (5.3%) were not commonly reported but for those living it, it was experienced as highly stressful. Living away from home and high family expectations scored low on the stress scale, contrary to what one might expect. Is it a process of self affirmation by denying the negative (Nahas, 2001) that push the late adolescent young adult to deny the stress of being away from home and the expectation of the family when expressed explicitly?

Two items were related specifically to Lebanon. One is the political instability which was reported by 66.1 % of the population. The other, a cultural manifestation, is the issue of "being judged based on superficialities" (item 75) which was encountered by 84.4 % of the population. It is to be noted that these two encounters scored the highest level of stress among all of the events. The high stress level on this event reveals that our young students feel somehow trapped by their own attitudes. A sense of loss of authenticity is suspected and need to be explored. Is it due to socio-cultural issues showing the impact of a chaotic globalization and influencing the image of the self? One event was related to personal skills, specifically time management and was encountered by almost half of the population.

2. The Age Factor

The second question considered was if these levels of stress varied with age? A t-test was used to compare mean levels of stress according to age. The number of students for the ages 25 and over being very small, this category was eliminated in the comparison. Our study revealed that students 22-24 years of age were clearly more stressed and highly stressed than those aged 16-

18 and 19 - 21 by the following events: finding classes boring, feeling professors concentrated the students' worth in a grade, and smoking in public areas. The relatively older students (aged 22 - 24) are also the most stressed by having to switch among professors and teaching styles, and by experiencing conflicts with professors, and experiencing discrimination. It is interesting to see that 4 events out of the 7 events related to teacher student relationship are affected by the age with the older students being highly and more stressed than the younger students who showed only low stress levels on these items See Appendix for results according to age.

3. The Gender Factor

The third question asked was if there was a difference in stressful events or levels of stress related to gender. ANOVA was used to compare levels of stress among the two groups on each item. Our results demonstrated that whenever the differences in means were significant, males overall reported more stress than females. In some cases, an event would be rated as highly stressful by the men when it was only reported as low by females. In fact, among the 28 events identified as highly stressful, 10 showed a significant difference in the level of stress between males and females. Among these 10, only two events (paying tuition and too many exams scheduled at the same time) were experienced as highly stressful by females while the other eight were considered as low in stress. Moreover, males identified another nine events as highly stressful not identified by women. All in all, males identified 37 events as highly stressful whereas females identified only 20.

It is interesting to note that the differences in the way males and females experienced an event was particularly pronounced when the events involved social issues implying acceptance, like choosing a major (item 73), experiencing discrimination (item 55), personal conflicts with professor (item 28), appreciation by professors (item 26), being part of a group (item 50), participating in social activities (item 38), experiencing disrespect (item 53), or being judged by a professor (item 29). Another interesting note is that events related to assuming responsibilities showed a significant difference in the appreciation of stress between males and females. Males found it more stressful to be responsible for themselves (item 60) and to be living away from home and the family (item 66) than do females. In addition, males found it more stressful to assume responsibility for managing time and space in order to get to the university (item 34), find technological resources (item 37), reach the cafeteria (item 44), or locate vending machines (item 43). See Appendix for results related to stress and gender.

V. Discussion

A review of the literature revealed a wide variety of studies on gender differences related to the experience of stress but there was no consensus. Research conducted by Kudielka, Buske-Kirschbaum, Hellhammer, & Kirschbaum, (2004) demonstrated that females had higher levels of stress response than males, age notwithstanding. In contrast, findings by Deane, Chummun and Prashad, (2002) demonstrated that young or pre-menopausal women had lower levels of stress response, which they suggested might be due to a benefit of the hormone estrogen. College-aged specific trials demonstrated females generally reporting higher levels of stress (Baker, 2003; Magaya et al., 2005; Meijer, 2007; Oliver et al., 1999; Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006).

A study on subjective well-being among college students in Lebanon showed that males scored higher on positive affects than females (Ayyash-Abdo & Alamuddin, 2007), while our study revealed that males were more stressed than females which leads us to consider two possible hypotheses:

The first one is in relationship to the education of males and females in our society. The model of learning through guided participation in the socio-cultural environment developed by Rogoff (1991) suggested that the structured activities that children participate to influence their development. When we look to our results from this perspective, and since females in Lebanon are educated to be the primary caretaker, they may think that they are better prepared than males to take care of themselves and to manage the different tasks of day to day life, while men are more accustomed to having someone take care of them. Therefore, it may be less stressful for females to handle the responsibilities of young adulthood and the demands of university life than it is for males.

On the other hand, we may also hypothesize that due to the same societal pressures or expectations, male students feel more under pressure to succeed (i.e., become the breadwinner) than female students (Faour, 1998) so they are more concerned and therefore, stressed about their education and future. According to our research, male students seem more concerned about making mistakes than female students (item 71), and they are also more stressed than females by issues of grading (items 16 and 15) and studying (items 4, 9 and 10). Financial issues were also more stressful for male students such as the cost of the materials (item 84), need to work while studying (item 78), and family responsibilities beside work (item 71).

As for the age variable, the result of a review of the literature was very mixed with some studies reporting younger, others reporting older, and still others reporting middle-aged adults experienced more anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress (Kudielka et al., 2004; Mazure & Maciejewski, 2003; Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz & Kaniasty, 2002a; Suar, Mishra, & Khuntia, 2007). Other researchers found no difference between younger and older people (Livingston, Livingston, Brooks, McKinlay, 1992; Geonjian, Najarian, Pynoos, 1994) in response to stress.

What is interesting in our findings is that we expected students to gain in their ability to adapt with age but our results reveal a certain rigidity and dependence of students on the professors' judgment. Upper classmen ranked the following as stressful: difficulties in switching among professors and teaching styles, conflicts with professors, experiencing discrimination, finding classes boring, stressed over writing essays. Is this because they are upper classmen and about to graduate, or because they feel they cannot change the system? Curiously, younger students appear to be more empowered, or are they more indulged?

VI. Implications and Recommendations

Levels of stress exhibited by students, especially the younger students, may be important in facilitating their transition, adjustment, and retention at the university. In general, we can say that the students in our sample were more affected by personal, maturational, economical and socio-cultural issues than by issues specific to academic policies or procedures. Prior research has identified specific areas that improve levels of stress which include: social support, time management, goal setting, academic advising, stress monitoring, relaxation techniques, and integration into the academic community (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007; Iglesias et al., 2005; Nonis et al., 1998; Pope & Simon, 2005; Rayle, & Chung, 2008; Sellars-Mulhern, 2000; Thompson, Orr, Thompson & Grover, 2007). Informational and emotional supports have been identified as effective preventative resources for stress (Lambert, McCarthy, Gilber, Seabee, Steinley-Bumgarner, 2006; MacGeorge et al., 2005; Pritchard, Wilson & Yamnitz, 2007). Teaching simple stress-reducing strategies can positively influence students' sense of well-being, improve academic performance, and reduce dropout rates.

Sellars-Mulhern (2000) identified “four R’s” to help teach students to cope with stress and improve academic achievement. The “four R’s” describe a program of cognitive restructuring helping students to reevaluate their perceptions and responses to stress. College personnel need to consider developing such stress management training in orientation activities, especially for new students and incoming freshmen (Brown & Ralph, 1999; Nonis et al., 1998; Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999).

To review, the top academic concerns for students in our sample were: too many exams at the same time, too much material covered, and a preoccupation about failing. University issues included: campus management in terms of space, time and bureaucracy, and conditions of living in the dorms. Students reported discrimination on campus and experienced personal conflicts with professors. Personal issues double students stress, these issues are mostly related to financial issues, to family issues and to socio-cultural issues (political and being judged based on superficialities). The students clearly experience stress and could benefit from strategies to reduce it.

The following recommendations are for campus administrators as they develop systems of psychological support for students.

- 1) Create awareness about the role of professional counseling in university settings. Almost half (49.3 %) of the student body recognized the need for professional counseling services. In fact counseling may still be considered as a taboo in Arab societies although with modernization its need is becoming more urgent, which makes it a delicate task for professional of mental health to adapt their practices to the mentalities of the environment they are serving.
- 2) Expand counseling programs to include regular, long term, didactic support groups for students to share the impact of stress and explore and practice coping methods. There could be mixed or single-gender groups depending on the topic. Male students appear to be in the greatest need of support and direction.
- 3) Create an open forum in times of crisis where young people can express their concerns and worries.
- 4) Develop more availability of groups on specific topics as financial aid, career development and choice of major, and time and money management.
- 5) Develop workshops to explore and remedy the “culture of superficiality” that many young people feel trapped in and that may be the result of a chaotic globalization impacting the image of the self.
- 6) The male population is of specific concern and will benefit from tailored outreach efforts.
- 7) Reevaluate the organization, scheduling, and timing of exams. Consider replacing some formal exams with other methods of evaluating students’ achievements (i.e., portfolios, projects, presentations).
- 8) Streamline the financial aid system to minimize the stress resulting from financial concerns.
- 9) Develop research based on narrative methods to explore the sources of stress among students in greater depth. And in more general terms, develop longitudinal studies to explore the adaptation and the development of the autonomy of the person in Arab societies from a psycho-socio-cultural perspective.
- 10) Develop comparative studies amongst Arab universities exploring stress for a better understanding of risk factors and resilience and for a better enhancing of university climate.

Universities have a history of dedication to academic excellence, but institutions of high learning must also provide the student body with effective psychological support. The academic and personal topics that create stress as identified by students are best mitigated in a supportive and educational manner. To reiterate a quote from earlier, to reduce stress we need to provide students with a feeling of control over their education by providing them with information, support, and feedback. Providing students with quality education and counseling services will go a long way in developing well-grounded and productive students.

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