

Assessing the Current Situation and Proposing Some Measures to Improve the Coping-Skills with Stress of the First and Second-Year Students at Medical Universities in Hanoi

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Abstract: Stress is a mental health issue that affects the quality of life of humans, including university students. In Vietnam, stress is gaining significant attention from researchers due to its impact on students. Stress poses significant risks to students, particularly medical students, impacting both their learning processes and psychological development in their future careers. Applying and understanding effective stress-coping skills will enable medical students to easily adapt to a highly demanding learning environment, thereby improving the quality of learning and ensuring physical and mental health. Therefore, assessing the current situation and proposing measures to enhance stress-coping skills of medical students is a critical issue that requires appropriate investigation.

Keywords: Stress, Stress-Coping Skills, Medical Students

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background and Objectives of the Research

Stress is a concept widely recognized in modern society. It is considered a mental health issue that affects individuals regardless of age, economic status, racial factors, gender, etc. Positive stress motivates individuals, enhancing their enthusiasm and drive in learning, work, and creativity. However, negative stress has a detrimental and prolonged effect on both mental and physical health. In Vietnam, the issue of stress is being studied by many researchers due to its impacts on students, especially medical students, such as being under pressure, depression, exhibiting harmful behaviors, or even suicide. Stress poses significant risks to students, impacting both their learning process and psychological development. Applying and understanding of appropriate stress-coping skills will enable students to easily adapt to the challenges of life, thereby enhancing their quality of life and ensuring physical and mental health.

From the above issue, our research was carried out with two objectives: *First*, to assess the current situation of stress among first- and second-year medical students at universities in Hanoi; *Second*, to propose and experiment with some

stress-coping strategies among first- and second-year medical students at universities in Hanoi.

II. SUBJECTS AND METHODS OF THE RESEARCH

➤ Subjects of the Research

The research subjects are the stress-coping skills of first- and second-year students at medical universities in Hanoi. The surveys assessing the current situation were conducted on 668 students at 4 medical universities in Hanoi (Hanoi Medical University; Hanoi University of Pharmacy; Le Huu Trac University of Medicine and Pharmacy; Vietnam University of Traditional Medicine), and the proposed methods were experimented on 60 students at Le Huu Trac University of Medicine and Pharmacy.

➤ Methods of the Research

• Situational Research Method

The survey questionnaire was designed based on questions about unwanted symptoms due to stress, with responses rated as follows: almost always (3 points); often (2 points); sometimes (1 point); never (0 points).

The actual stress status score is the average score of 14 questions. The level of stress is assessed according to the raw score of DASS as follows: Normal (0 to 14); mild stress (14 to 28); moderate stress (19 to 25); severe stress (26 to 33); very severe stress (above 34).

• Experimental Research Methods

After obtaining the results of the situational research, we proposed 4 stress-coping measures and randomly invited 60 first- and second-year students at Le Huu Trac University of Medicine and Pharmacy to participate in the experiment. We compared the average score (mean) of students' stress-coping skills before and after the experiment using the Paired-Samples T-test to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed methods. At the end of the experiment, we conducted a reassessment of the changes in stress levels before and after the experiment through a survey combined with interviews

and observations to demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed methods.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

➤ Results of the Current Situation of the Impact of Stress on First- and Second-Year Medical Students at Universities in Hanoi

Surveying the current situation of stress among first- and second-year medical students at universities in Hanoi is the initial task, providing a foundation for discussing their stress-coping skills. To assess stress levels, we used the DASS 42 scale. The results obtained are as follows:

Table 1 Results of Current Stress Status of Students by Gender

	Stress level	Male		Female	
		Quantity	Proportion	Quantity	Proportion
1	Normal	493	77.9%	16	45.8%
2	Mild stress	80	12.6%	13	37.1%
3	Moderate stress	54	8.5%	5	14.3%
4	Heavy stress	5	0.8%	1	2.8%
5	Severe stress	1	0.2%	0	0%
	Total	633	100%	35	100%

The results in Table 1 show that approximately 23.8% (159/668) of potentially become factors that lead to stress. On the contrary, many experts encourage students were assessed as being in a state of stress. Among them, the rate of stress among females is 54.2%, accounting for more than half of the female students and significantly higher than the stress rate among males (22.1%). This result is quite similar to many studies on stress levels and depression worldwide. A study in Ukraine by Tintle et al. (2011) found that over 14.4% of females suffered from stress and depression, while males only accounted for 7.1%.

These authors explained that females are more susceptible to stress and depression than males due to their higher sensitivity, inward orientation, emotional nature, and difficulty remaining calm in unstable situations; thus, when coping with stress, they tend to focus on emotional coping and avoid difficulties. In the long term, these coping strategies do not completely resolve the stress problem, leading to an increase in stress levels. In addition, neurophysiological research has confirmed that women are generally more sensitive to certain stress hormones and less adaptable to increased hormone levels than men; thus, they are more prone to stress, depression, and other psychological traumas.

Table 2 Stress Levels Among Students Based on Preferences

	Stress level	Group like sports and arts	Group like to play video games	Group like reading books
		Quantity (Proportion)	Quantity (Proportion)	Quantity (Proportion)
1	Normal	197 (76.9%)	155 (61.6%)	151 (77%)
2	Mild stress	32 (14.5%)	50 (19.8%)	29 (14.8%)
3	Moderate stress	18 (8.2%)	36 (14.3%)	13 (6.6%)
4	Heavy stress	1 (0.4%)	10 (3.9%)	3 (1.6%)
5	Severe stress	0 (0%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)
	Total	220 (100%)	252 (100%)	196 (100%)

From the results in Table 2, it can be seen that the rate of students with stress in the group of students who like to play video games is the highest (38.4%), while that in the two remained groups is much lower (23.1% and 23.0%, respectively). Many studies have shown that excessive video game playing can also be a cause of stress. It can lead players to withdraw from social relationships, disrupt their daily routines, skip meals, and lose sleep, resulting in various

negative health effects that significantly impact their quality of life; these consequences playing sports as a way to reduce stress in daily life, as it promotes relaxation and enhances both physical and mental well-being.

From the results in the two tables above, it is important to note that there are 15 students who are assessed as having severe and very severe stress. These students even have to be

treated as inpatients or outpatients at the hospital. This is one of the reasons that motivated us to carry out the topic.

➤ *General Assessment of Stress-Coping Skills Among First- and Second-Year Students at Medical Universities in Hanoi Through the Questionnaire*

Chart 1 shows that a large number of students self-assess their skill level at good (49.5%) and average level (41.2%).

At these levels, students do not fully understand the causes and symptoms of stress; they attempt to identify and implement stress-coping strategies to a certain extent, but these strategies are not entirely appropriate for different situations, lack stability and sustainability, and still have shortcomings.

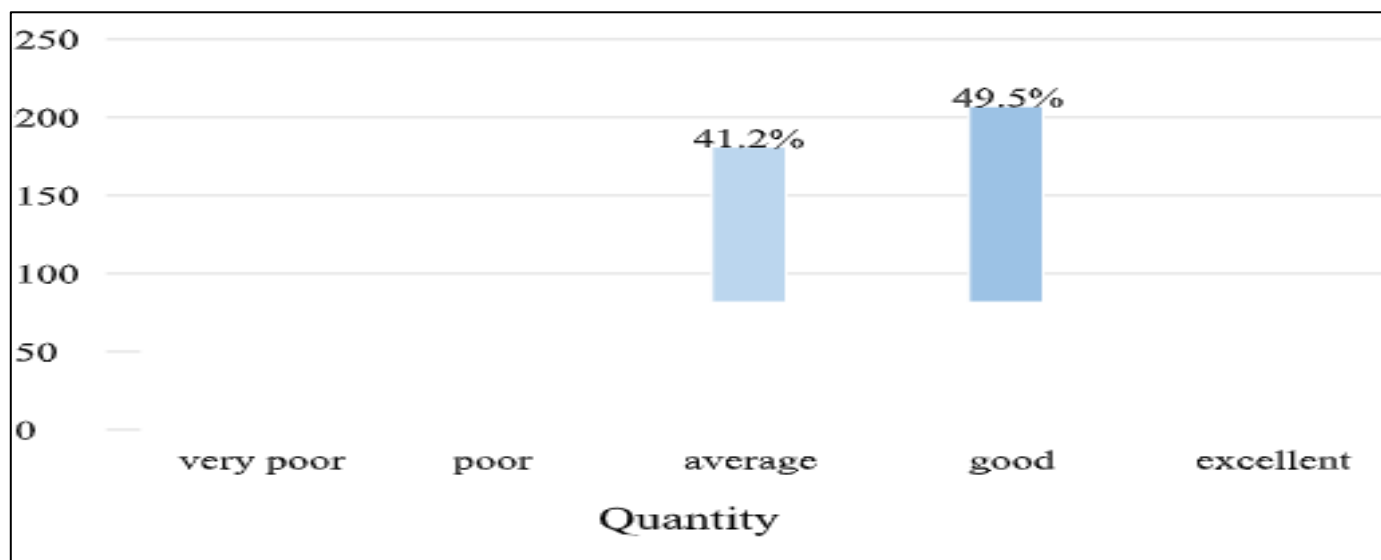


Fig 1 The Rate of Coping Skills with Stress of First and Second-Year Students in Medical Universities.

Table 3 Average Scores of Stress-Coping Skill Groups of First- and Second-Year Students at Medical Universities in Hanoi

Component skill group	Situational exercises		Questionnaire	
	Average	Skill level	Average	Skill level
Stress recognition skills group	3.07	Medium	2.95	Medium
Skills group determines the action to cope with stress	3.34	Medium	3.41	Rather
Negative action controll skills group	3.16	Medium	3.27	Medium
General average	3.19	Medium	3.21	Medium

The survey results in both the questionnaire and situational exercises have a common conclusion: The overall stress-coping skills of first- and second-year medical students at universities in Hanoi are only at an average level. The above results show that a large number of students do not fully understand stress-coping skills, unable to appropriately identify and implement for different situations, and lack stability and sustainability.

IV. PROPOSED MEASURES

From the results and the issues obtained when researching the actual situation, we propose some basic measures to enhance the stress-coping skills of first- and second-year medical students in Hanoi as follows:

- Measure 1: Assisting students enhance their understanding of stress and stress-coping skills, promoting existing stress-coping skills while simultaneously forming and developing new skills. This measure plays a fundamental and central role and promotes the self-awareness of students. To implement this measure, universities need to strengthen

communication through the school's media channels and activities to educate about stress and stress-coping skills for students.

- Measure 2: Building a positive lifestyle and mindset for students. This helps students to be more optimistic, confident, proud, trustful, and assured when studying and working. The implementation method can be organizing cultural exchange activities, sharing knowledge with other universities, sharing stories, and listening to motivational speeches to help students improve their self-efficacy to think positively and increase confidence.
- Measure 3: Creating additional healthy hobbies and habits for students. This measure helps students stay away from unhealthy activities and social evils such as playing video games, gambling, lottery, betting, etc. It helps break the bad habits of students, especially the hobby of playing video games, which is quite common nowadays. The implementation method includes creating favorable conditions for the development of student clubs in the school, organizing sports competitions, and cultural and artistic exchanges.
- Measure 4: The managers or teachers coordinate with families to understand students' psychology, support

students, creating conditions for students to support each other in studying and training. They need to grasp and accurately assess the actual situation and students' stress-coping skills, thereby showing concern and interacting with students exhibiting stress, possibly coordinating with families regarding students with severe stress and many negative thoughts.

V. RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTING MEASURES

After obtaining the research results on the actual situation, we proposed 4 measures to enhance students' stress-coping skills. However, to implement measures 2, 3, and 4,

there needs to be cooperation from many agencies in universities in Hanoi; regarding the capabilities of our students, we only proceeded to implement measure 1, while the remaining measures are proposed for higher authorities to consider.

During the 2-month period, we organized student seminars, activities to learn about stress, and specialized training sessions on stress with psychological experts. After implementing measure 1, the change in the stress level of 60 first- and second-year medical students participating in the experiment can be seen in the table below:

Table 4 Assessment of Stress Levels Before and After the Experiment Using the DASS 42 Scale.

Level	Before the experiment		After the experiment	
	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
Normal	36	60%	57	88.3%
Mild stress	15	25%	6	10%
Moderate stress	6	10%	1	1.7%
Severe stress	3	5%	0	0%
Very severe stress	0	0%	0	0%
Total	60	100%	60	100%

The results of Table 4 show a very clear difference in the level of stress of students before and after the experiment. Before the experiment, students rated themselves as experiencing severe stress (5%); however, after the experiment, this figure dropped to 0%. Thus, it can be affirmed that the measures to enhance stress-coping skills were effective and yielded a high level of reliability.

VI. CONCLUSION

The research results show that 23.8% of surveyed students experience stress, with a higher percentage observed among those who enjoy playing electronic games. Therefore, to mitigate the impact of stress, alongside raising comprehensive awareness among students about stress, it is necessary to implement a combination of measures to encourage the purposeful use of the Internet for studying and scientific research, regulate time spent online, and foster healthy hobbies, habits, and the physical and mental strength of students.

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