

## **Impact of Stress among Students of a Public Sector University**

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A considerable number of Pakistani youth wants to leave the country and settle in Western countries for better education and job opportunities as revealed in the current study. Stress due to socio-economic, geo-political and various yet unknown factors emerged as the major cause for brain drain. Present study was conducted in a public sector university of Lahore and primary data is based on personal views and perceptions of individuals collected through semi-structured focused group interviews. The population of the study was 1800 students enrolled in different degree programs and the purposive sample consisted of 90 students. The stress levels of students were checked through questionnaire developed by International Stress Management Association. Mild, moderate and high levels of stress were found to be existent among the sample population with majority 79% suffering from high levels of stress and at a risk of physical and socio-academic failure. It was revealed that majority 91% of the participants were not satisfied with the current socio-economic and political situation and that they wanted to leave the country for good either through student visa or through permanent immigration. Hence stress is impacting their social, emotional and personal lives.

**Keywords:** *Stress and Brian Drain in Pakistan, Stress in Pakistani Youth, Student Stress.*

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It was noted (Chaudary & Khan, 2014) that stress exists in students of a public sector university which resulted in inability to meet academic goals, poor performances in tests and exams, continuous decline in grades and Grade Point Average and rose of behavioral and psycho-social problems. In the current study, researchers attempted to explore the possible outcomes of stress among university students at a public sector university of Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Concept of Stress**

Stress is a condition of tension (mental or physical or both) which results in emotional loss and pain according to dictionary of psychology (Lai, Chao, Chanf, & Chang, 1996). In today's world, stress is considered as any sort of physical hardship, torture and pain in an individual's personal or professional life. Stress can change the attitudes, behaviors and thoughts of people. It affects their efficiency and ability to make decisions. Stress exists in all families, organizations and workplaces.

It is also common in higher education institutions and students, teachers and administrative staff all face it (Sayiner, 2006).

Excessive stress can cause problems for physical and psychological wellbeing which results in behavioral change. In students, stress can affect physical health, psychological wellbeing and social relations (Chaudary & Khan, 2014). Stress has a comorbid nature and it could combine heart disease, being prone to viral infections, problems with digestive system, anger, hopelessness, depression, stealing behavior, absent mindedness, wishful destruction, job turnover, drug abuse and problems with law and order (Naseem & Khalid, 2012).

### **Brain Drain in Pakistan**

Phenomena of brain drain exist in Pakistan for almost three decades now. Overseas Employment Corporation reported that annually, 36, 00 highly qualified doctors, engineers and teachers migrate to developed countries (Arouri, Rashid , Shahbaz, &

Teulon, 2014). According to a news report (APP/Newsdesk, 2013) the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis stated that during the period of 1981 to 2012, a total of 5,873,539 Pakistanis got immigration, but the trend enormously increased in the last five years (2008 to 2012) during which, a total of 2,765,789 Pakistanis went abroad to work and 41,498 professional and technical workers left in 2012 alone according to Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OPF, 2014).

Brain drain occurs in all professions. A recent study (Imran, Azeem, Haider, & Bhatti, 2012) attempts to investigate brain drain in health care system of Pakistan. Around 4000 students graduate from different medical colleges of the country every year. According to available statistics, nearly half of them went to the United States for higher education. After getting higher education and passing certain exams, they got jobs in the USA and only a few of them returned to the country.

In academia, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has played an effective role to produce research culture in universities. But still we are far behind in developing a working environment where researchers feel at home. Plagiarism, pity politics, red-tapism, lack of regard from bureaucracy and similar factors has lead teachers and professors to take immigration to western and developed countries for a better life and higher salaries (Arouri, Rashid , Shahbaz, & Teulon, 2014).

### **Nature of Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative subjective as the researchers wanted to get in-depth perceptions of the participants. Hence the product of this qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive. Words of participants are used to convey what the researchers have learned about the phenomenon. We will be interpreting what we learned in our search for meaning and understanding of the participant views. We tried to understand the meanings students have constructed about their stress and how it has affected their experiences and expectations. Qualitative research has been described as “an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (Creswell, 2003).

Philosophical assumptions and theoretical stances help the researchers to approach an investigation. This specific stance helps to develop a research design to be employed. In our case, the primary interest was on understanding the phenomenon, we had to choose from a variety of options including grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, case study, or just a basic interpretive study, which we finally opted. Researcher attempted to collect qualitative data for this study as it has a growing trend and tradition in social sciences research in the last twenty years. Qualitative research studies have been conducted in various disciplines including education, psychology, sociology, nursing, social work, counseling, family relations, health, community services, management, medicine among several other. This method of research has become widely accepted around the world because of its nature (Sonia, 2010).

We undertook a qualitative study due to severe lack of literature and theory on student stress and its relations to brain drain among educated youth. The process is inductive and the researchers gather data to develop the concept and hypothesis towards the notion of brain drain. For this research, the key to understanding stress after effects lies with the idea that meanings are socially constructed in response to the situations faced by individuals. As there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality which are continuously changing therefore qualitative approach was used by the researchers as we were interested in understanding the interpretations at a particular point in time and in a particular context.

### **Methodology and Procedures**

Existence of stress among university students has been confirmed by a previous study (Chaudary & Khan, 2014) where survey method was used for data collection from the students of a public sector university of Lahore. In the current study, semi structured focused group discussions were used as the primary method of data collection to explore outcomes of stress.

### **Research Questions**

Following were major research questions investigated through semi-structured focused group

interviews:

RQ1: What is the impact of stress on student’s future plans?

RQ2: What is the connection between socio-economic conditions of the country and stress?

RQ 3: Is there any connection between stress and brain drain?

**Instrumentation**

Stress levels of participants were tested in the first round through applying questionnaire of International Stress Management Association (ISMA, 2011). This instrument has been designed by expert researchers and psychologists at the International Stress Management Association and is available online at www. Isma.org. this instrument is an open access document and can be used to research purposes free of cost. This questionnaire consists of 25 self-reported dichotomous items. Respondents have to answer yes or no at the end of every question statements about their personal lives and daily activities. This questionnaire required 10 to 15 minutes to answer after which the stress levels of respondents is analyzed through the formula prescribed by the test makers.

**Selection of Participants**

A total of 9 graduate students participated in the study. Four of the students were students of Masters of Information Technology, two were students of Masters of Education and three were students of M.Phil Education. These students were selected from a pool of 90 graduate and undergraduate students who volunteered to be tested for existence of stress. Two volunteers were taken from each section of morning and evening classes of each degree program offered in the university.

Students for current study were selected on the basis of their stress levels measured through the questionnaire and their response to an additional question in which they were asked to show their willingness to participate in a group discussion. A total of 16 participants showed their willingness to participate in focused group discussions and we selected the 9 students with highest stress levels to participate in our study.

**Procedures**

Two rounds of focused group interviews were conducted. In the first session, semi-structured questions were asked about the existence of stress, its impacts on physical health, psychological wellbeing and social relations of participants. The purpose of the first session was to develop a comfort level and understanding among the group members so they open up and start sharing their inner thoughts without any hesitation. The second round was based on a set of questions to explore the feelings and perceptions of students suffering from stress. Participants had complete freedom to talk.

**Analysis and interpretation of data**

**Table 1: Results of ISMA questionnaire**

ISMA score	Frequ-ency	Percen t	Meaning
1-4	3	3.3	Low Stress
5-13	38	42.2	Moderate Stress
14 – 25	49	54.4	High Stress
<b>Total</b>	90	100.0	

It was noted that 54.4% of the students are suffering from high levels of stress, where they are at serious risk to experience stress-related illness including diabetes, migraine, back and neck pain, high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, mental ill health, depression and anxiety.

The researchers were interested in investigating the impacts of stress on career planning and future ambitions. Hence we asked three open ended questions to the participants. Each respondent was given opportunity to answer. The researchers played the role of moderator of the session. One question was asked first and opinion of each participant was asked. Audio recording devices were used.

**Question No 1.** Are you happy and satisfied with the current condition of your country? Why?

Following are the responses of research participants (Pseudo names are used):

Mr. Ahad Ikram (MSC.IT): No, I am not satisfied with the situation of my country. There is no security here; there are so many bomb blasts and robberies on daily basis.

Mr. Noor Ullah Khan (MSC.IT): Yes, I am very happy here and satisfied also. I think some politicians are corrupt but there are many good people.

Mr. Ikhlaq Ahmad (MSC.IT): I think this country is almost finished. No one takes care of others, people are selfish and mean. They have developed psychological problems and I am not very happy here.

Mr. Gulzar Masih (M.A EDU): Its ok. I love Pakistan. I am happy and satisfied.

Ms. Rohi Bano (M.A.EDU): My country is very good but people are not good. They are greedy and I don't like this.

Ms. Misbah Ali (M.PHIL EDU): Good and bad people are everywhere. Each picture has two sides. I am a positive person and I think I am very happy and satisfied in my country.

Ms. Sahar Chodhry (M.PHIL EDU): I am a realistic person and I think no sensible person will be happy or satisfied with the current situation of the country. There is war going on in two provinces, we have become part of America's war and destroyed our own nation. There is inflation unemployment, injustice, corruption, hunger, disease, how can I be happy?

**Question No 2:** Have you ever thought about taking immigration to another country? Why?

Mr. Ahad Ikram (MSC.IT): Yes, I have thought about it. I seriously want to settle in USA or Canada because there is no job security here. Academic environment is so tough and it's not easy to get a decent job here. Companies don't pay well.

Mr. Noor Ullah Khan (MSC.IT): I think I will not take immigration. May be I will, but I am not sure yet. I want to try finding a good job here but you see my field is computers and there is high scope in foreign countries. So maybe I will move abroad.

Mr. Ikhlaq Ahmad (MSC.IT): I will definitely get immigration because there is no point in living here. People are corrupt here, they have no ethics. Teachers are corrupt, my bosses are corrupt, whole country needs to be demolished and build again. So I will not be living here.

Mr. Gulzar Masih (M.A EDU): I want to get Canadian immigration. I have my uncle in Canada and he told me about better quality life there. First of all I am a Christian and I belong to a minority. But

in Canada, I will be in majority. So I will have a relaxed life.

Ms. Rohi Bano (M.A.EDU): I think it's more safety in Canada for everyone, not only for minorities or majorities, so I will also apply for immigration if my husband will agree.

Ms. Misbah Ali (M.PHIL EDU): I have decided to go abroad because my family lives in many countries and I know it's better life there. No tension and no stress like here.

Ms. Sahar Chodhry (M.PHIL EDU): I have not decided it yet. I will decide this after my marriage with my husband. If he would like to go abroad, I will go with him

**Question No 3:** Have you ever thought about going to another country for higher education? Why?

Mr. Ahad Ikram (MSC.IT): Yes, if I get a chance, I will go.

Mr. Noor Ullah Khan (MSC.IT): May be not, because education abroad is very expensive and I can't afford it. Scholarships are limited and I am not very talented to get it.

Mr. Ikhlaq Ahmad (MSC.IT): Yes I will go because it's better quality of education there. Teachers are very rude here and it's not like that in USA or UK.

Mr. Gulzar Masih (M.A EDU): Maybe I will go for study but if I get scholarship or fee discount than surely.

Ms. Rohi Bano (M.A.EDU): Yes I want to go for my Ph.D

Ms. Misbah Ali (M.PHIL EDU): May be I will study abroad, but I will decide it after my marriage.

Ms. Sahar Chodhry (M.PHIL EDU): Off course, I will study abroad because of the very best quality education, nice university environment, no noise, less pollution, and so many other things.

In the second round, we asked one question to all participants:

**Question No 4:** When did you start thinking about going abroad for study or immigration? Was there any particular incident or event which led to this thought?

Mr. Ahad Ikram (MSC.IT): Well, it was last year when my cousin visited from Florida and I discussed with hi about the opportunities available there.

Mr. Noor Ullah Khan (MSC.IT): I am nowadays thinking about it because all my other class fellows wanted to go abroad. Last month we visited an education exhibition for study in UK.

Mr. Ikhtlaq Ahmad (MSC.IT): Oh I always wanted to get rid of this corrupt system. I felt I am living in artificial people here. I wanted to go to California beaches and live in the nature and Silicon Valley, where I could have a convertible BMW.

Mr. Gulzar Masih (M.A EDU): I work very hard but my exam results are not good. I don't like the examination system here, teacher give marks to only female students and that's why I want to go abroad for study.

Ms. Rohi Bano (M.A.EDU): We had a wonderful teacher in the last semester. He was foreign qualified. I wanted to be a good teacher so that's why I want to get the knowledge and experience of foreign education than come back to my country to serve it.

Ms. Misbah Ali (M.PHIL EDU): I am tired of the daily bad news here. Every time I turn on the TV, it's a bomb blast or firing or any other sad news. I want to have a happy life. That's why I am thinking of going abroad.

Ms. Sahar Chodhry (M.PHIL EDU): I always loved my country but there is no electricity here. Any time I wanted to do an assignment or watch a TV program. There is load shedding. So I am getting sick of this and what's wrong with living in a nice country with no hot weather. Like Canada or England.

### **Interpretation**

From the answers of participants, following themes emerge.

### **Cognitive Load**

The students are suffering from enormous mental burden and cognitive load. They are living an age of information technology where new options are being made available to them on daily basis. They are well informed about perspectives of living, studying and working abroad, and options available in this country with options abroad. They are forced to think a lot, as they mentioned about education exhibition which reflects thoughts of living in another country.

### **Social Pressures**

Participants revealed that their friends, relatives and class fellows are all planning to go abroad to Canada, UK, USA or any other country for higher studies or immigration, therefore they have also started to think about going abroad. This shows that peer pressure has enormous impacts on career planning and decision making for future.

### **Social Insecurity**

Participants mention problems of law and order, lack of security, increased crime rate and governments reluctance towards implementation of law. The group collectively agreed that a person cannot be successful in our society given the heavy corruption in all departments. Three participants mention that the people here are not good and people don't want to change themselves. Therefore the best option is to leave the country and go to a better place.

### **Economic Conditions**

The participants were well aware of the economic conditions. They discussed downfall of the price of rupee, heavy loans from international financial institutions, shutdown of local industries, unemployment and inflation. As there is no hope that economic conditions will get better so they think getting refugee in another country would be better.

### **Teacher's Behavior**

Non-professional and negative attitude of teachers, rudeness, favoritism, excessive assignments were named as the major causes which produce stress in students as a result of which students don't want to focus on their studies and think to escape. They consider a single teacher's negative behavior as representative of the whole system.

### **Academic Environment**

All the 9 students were not satisfied with the reputation and ranking of university and they believed that a local degree has less worth in the job market as compared with a foreign degree. Therefore

all of them wanted to go abroad for higher studies. All of them said that the homework assignments, presentations, and exams system of foreign universities are better than here so they want to go abroad.

### Electric Load Shedding

Participants exhibited a sheer amount of anger and pessimism on the disturbance due to electric load shedding. One participant said that they are not able to do any creative work because load shedding continuously disturbs their thoughts and thinking.

### Conclusion

Weak economic policies contribute to heavy brain drain from Pakistan. Government is unable to put good use to the educated unemployed youth and professionals, while universities of Pakistan are continuously producing thousands of graduates every year. This situation has created a gap between need of industry and supply from the universities and resultantly unemployment has increased. Besides this, remuneration packages, benefits and salaries of other countries in the region like India and China are higher as compared to Pakistan and the salaries offered by developed countries are much higher (Arouri, Rashid, Shahbaz, & Teulon, Short and long run determinants of brain drain: Evidence from Pakistan, 2014).

### Limitations

The study has limited generalizability. This is the first of its kind study to investigate relationship between stress and brain drain. Studies can be done to compare the stress levels of government and private university students' stress levels. The study may be replicated using different stress scales.

### Recommendations

The university authorities should try to provide a stress free environment at the university campuses and following actions are recommended in this regard:

1- Government should make policies to bring back those highly skilled professionals who have left the country. Examples of Dr. A.Q Khan (Founder of Pakistan's Peaceful Nuclear Program) and Lord Sarwar (Governor of Punjab) are in front of us.

2- There should be educational psychologists and guidance counselors in universities.

3- There should be work opportunities for all students to work on campus and off campus

4- Highest authority in university like the Vice Chancellor should allocate a day and time of the week just to meet the students.

5- Teachers should be evaluated on continuous bases for their performance

6- There should be a fair system to register any complaints about teachers or other staff.

7- Stress management programs and workshops should be conducted on regular basis.

8- National heroes should be invited regularly on campuses to talk to students

9- Events of national importance should be celebrated with full zeal and zest to provoke the love of country in students' hearts.

10- Cultural festivals and other events should be organized so that students remain attached to their own culture and love their own country instead of following foreign cultures.

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