

Adjustment and Emotional Maturity Among First Year College Students

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The present study compared college adjustment processes and emotional maturity between first and final year female students enrolled in different undergraduate courses offered by colleges affiliated with University of Rajasthan in Jaipur city. They were assessed on Adjustment Inventory for College Students (Sinha and Singh, 1995) and Emotional Maturity Scale (Bhargava and Singh, 1991). Results indicated that the first year undergraduate students were less emotionally mature, and had difficulty in adjusting emotionally and socially to the changing demands of the environment and faced more academic difficulty as compared to final year students. The final year students were more socially adjusted and more integrated into the social fabric of the college. Based on the research implication for further counseling interventions are discussed.

Keywords: first year undergraduates, emotional maturity, adjustment, female student

Transition from school to college is a complex process for almost all students. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) describe this transition as a "culture shock involving significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs, new freedoms and opportunities, and new academic, personal and social demands" (pp. 58- 59)

Adjusting to college life immediately after school becomes a difficult transition for many students. The decision to go to college depends on many reasons. It can be for higher education, earning a degree, increasing knowledge or personal growth. Going to college gives a chance to the students to learn new things, meet new people, to deal effectively with new experiences and challenges which eventually help them in their personal growth and development. According to Arkoff (1968), the definition of college adjustment reflects on how much an individual achieves through it and its effect on his personal growth. In terms of how adjusted he is also depends on his capability of getting grades and eventually achieving the degree. Tinto (1993) has proposed three stages that students move through from school to college i.e. separation, transition and incorporation. According to Astin's (1999) theory of involvement, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Adjustment difficulties arise from the differences between the expectations of the students and realities of college life. The nature of students' expectations about university, and their relation with adjustment in university, were examined in a longitudinal investigation by (Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000). Students whose expectations were fearful reported more stress, depression, and poorer university adjustment than students with other types of expectations, particularly prepared. Also Mohan (1992) asserts that

adjustment improves with age.

Adjustment to college involves a variety of demands differing in kind and degree and requiring lot of coping responses or adjustments. It's not only academics with which the students are concerned; they are equally affected by the social and emotional changes. The first year students have an increased personal freedom where they have to make their own decisions and take the responsibility to maintain balance between various newfound demands. In college they are required to adjust to the new environment and to work out their concerns directly with the teachers. As far as the academic adjustment is concerned, students are expected to be independent learners in college where they need to adjust with the new academic demands. It is different from what they experienced in school because here they have to face more competition, deal with more academic load and to maintain pace with other students in the class they need to follow the different teaching styles. However, Sood (1992) found no significant relationship between achievement and adjustment. Students' academic achievement throughout a period of one semester found to be significantly predicted by college overall adjustment, academic adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment (Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin & Uli 2009).

For new students it is again important to adjust themselves with the social climate of the college. A major task for them is to learn to manage their feelings and to express them appropriately. According to Geredes and Mallinckrodt (1994) who studied 155 freshmen, and found that personal adjustment and integration into the social fabric of campus life play a role at least as important as academic factors in student retention. Mishra and Singh (1998) concluded that the students belonging to low and high socioeconomic status significantly differ in social adjustment. According to Upcraft and Gardener (1989) the experiences and opportunities during college students' freshmen years play an important role in its successful completion. Results of the study by Dyson and Renk (2006) on the relationship among the gender role, level of depressive symptomatology, and level of stress exhibited by college freshmen showed that all these factors are considered as important in facilitating their transition to university life. Masculinity significantly predicted problem-focused coping, and femininity significantly predicted emotion-focused coping. Tiwari and

Pooranchand (1994) founded a significant difference between high and low achieving students in familial, social and emotional areas of adjustment. Enochs and Roland (2006) examined the relationship between living environment, gender, overall adjustment to college and social adjustment in freshmen's academic and overall adjustments. The study found that boys had significantly higher overall adjustment levels than girls regardless of living environment.

There is a paucity of research on assessing the adjustment processes of students in colleges in India. Not much work done on student adjustment and related interventions. Deducing from above studies it has found that entering to college is considered as a time full of stress and strain many emotional and psychological issues are raised as a result. Since pursuing college degree students put their major time, energy and money into it, it is crucial to give proper attention to the problems related to adjustment among freshmen students. A major adjustment difficulty could mean an inability to graduate which in turn can affect their future.

Hence this research has the following objectives

1. To find out the differences in the levels of adjustments amongst first year and final year undergraduates.
2. To find out the differences in emotional maturity levels in both the groups.

Hypotheses

1. Final year students would be better adjusted as compared to first year students.
2. Final year students would be more emotionally mature than the first year students

Method

Sample

The locale of the present study was confined to the girl's colleges of Jaipur city. A sample comprising of 50 first year and 50 final year students was selected from various faculties (B.A/B.Com/B.Sc). A total of 100 girls age range between 17 to 22 years. Data was mainly collected from educational institutions and two months after new admissions were taken. The institutes were selected conveniently while the students in these institutes were selected randomly from the predefined lists in all the faculties.

Instruments

1) *Adjustment Inventory for college students (AICS; Sinha & Singh, 1995)*. The inventory is designed to discriminate normal from poorly adjusted college students. The scale has total 102 items which measure adjustment of the college student in five areas i.e., a) Home (16 items), b) Health (15 items), c) Social (19 items), d) Emotional (31 items), and e) Educational (21 items). Each item has two options Yes or No. Co-efficient of reliability of the test was determined by the authors by split-half method for a).87, b).83, c).96, d).95, e).97 and total .94, by test-retest method for a).85, b).82, c).95, d).94, e).96 and total .93, by Hoyt's method for a).86, b).85, c).95, d).95, e).94 and total .94, by K-R formula 20 for a).84, b).82, c).92, d).94, e).93 and total .92. In the beginning a list of 201 items was prepared. The list was presented to a group of 5 judges and only those items were retained, about which the judges were unanimous for their retention. This led to elimination of 35

items out of 20. The remaining 166 items were subjected to item analysis. In item analysis validity coefficients were determined for each item by bi-serial correlation method and only such items were retained which yielded biserial-correlation with both the criteria 1) total score 2) area score, significant at .001 level. This led to the exclusion of 64 items out of 166 and therefore 102 items were retained after item analysis. The responses were scored as per the manual. Students scoring high in Home area tend to be unsatisfactorily adjusted towards their home surroundings. High scores in health area reflects unsatisfactory adjustment. Students scoring low in social adjustment are submissive and retiring while high scores indicate aggressive behavior. In emotional adjustment area high scores indicate unstable emotion. Students with low scores tend to be emotionally stable. In educational adjustment area students scoring high are poorly adjusted towards their curricular and co-curricular programmes, Students with low scores are interested in educational activities. For computational efficacy, the excellent and good adjustment levels were summated as High adjustment while unsatisfactory and very unsatisfactory as low adjustment. The average levels were considered as moderate.

2) *Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS; Singh and Bhargava, 1991)*. This scale measures a list of five broad factors of Emotional Immaturity-Emotional Unstability, Emotional regression, social maladjustment, personality disintegration, lack of independence. It is a self reporting five point scale. Items of the scale are in question form demanding information for each in either of the 5 options: Always, Mostly, Uncertain, Usually, Never. The items were scored as 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. Therefore, the higher the score on the scale, greater the degree of the emotional immaturity and vice versa. The scale has total 48 items. There are 10 items per factor except the fifth factor which has 8 items. The highest possible score for the first 4 areas are 50 and the lowest is 10 while for the fifth factor the highest score is 40 and lowest is 8. (For all the first 4 factors the extremely unstable range from 10-20 (for 5th factor 8-16), moderately unstable from 21-30 (17-24), unstable from 31-40 (25-32), stable from 41-50 (33-40)). Reliability of the scale was determined by test retest reliability which was 0.75 and internal consistency for various factors ranged from .42-.86. The scale was validated against external criteria, i.e., the (d) area of the adjustment inventory for college students by Sinha and Singh (1995). The inventory has 'd' area measuring emotional adjustment of college students. The no of items of this area is twenty one. Product moment correlation obtained between total scores on all twenty one (d) items and total scores on EMS was .64 (N=46). Scoring was done as per the manual. The five factors: Emotional unsatability represents syndrome of lack of capacity to dispose off problems, irritability, needs constant help for ones day to day work, vulnerability, stubbornness and temper tantrums. Emotional regression represents such syndromes as feelings of inferiority, restlessness, hostility, aggressiveness and self centeredness. Social maladjustment shows person lacks social adaptability. Personality disintegration where person suffers from inferiorities and hence reacts to environment through aggressiveness, destruction and has distorted sense of reality. Lack of independence shows persons parasitic dependence on others, lack of objective interests in people and think of him as an unreliable person.

3) *Interview Schedule*-An unstructured interview was conducted as per the requirement of the objectives to get the detailed information about the college experiences of both the set of respondents. Since there are individual differences. Some students

took the study in a serious manner and tried to provide extensive and elaborate information. Since it was an unstructured interview they could elaborate on what they were saying and related to it questions were asked to clarify their point of view while on the other hand there were some students who only gave information even after probing and that too limited one. Therefore they were asked specific questions. Length of the interview varied between 15 to 30 minutes. It has 2 key divisions. One dealt with preliminary issues. These issues dealt with basically their general experience in college, the kind of facilities provided to them, what they actually miss from the school etc. It was basically done to establish rapport and which also helped them to confide in us and to take the questionnaires in the right earnest. The second dealt with the main study questions. Some of the questions asked were--how difficult/easy for them to deal with the changed environment in college, increase/decrease in capacity to deal with the problems, any change in emotional expression, their relationship with their peers, do they feel increase in academic pressures, change in dealing with parents, their views on newfound freedom, effect of changed conditions on their overall personality.

Procedure

The administration of the respective institutes were informed and verbal consent to conduct the study was taken. Consent was also taken from the respondents after explaining to them the purpose of the research as well as the academic use of the data later on. Both the measures were given individually to the subjects. Before administering the tests a short intake interview was taken where their doubts related to the tests were dealt with. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that it was purely for educational research purpose. Instructions were read aloud by the investigator and simple clarifications of word meanings were given on request without influencing subjects responses. Scoring was done as per given in the manual. After administration of the tests, a small unstructured interview was also done with each of the students to know more about their experiences in college.

Results

Table 1 summarized the first year and final year student's level of adjustment in five separate areas. Findings showed that majority of first year students were in the moderate category where home and health areas are concerned. However, 72% of the respondents were found to be at the low level for the educational area which suggests that students faced more difficulties in adjusting academically. While at the same time low scores in social (56%) and emotional (52%) areas show that they experience problems in these areas in college campus. The adjustment levels of final year undergraduates again reflected that majority of the respondents lie in the moderate level. The results suggested that final year respondents showed

moderate level of adjustment in almost all the areas of adjustment. The scores in social area were found to be at the high level which indicated their better adjustment in the social fabric of the college. The first year undergraduates overall adjustment to college is unsatisfactory (58%) while the third year student's adjustment is at an average (39%) level.

Table 2 showed the comparison between first year and final year student's adjustment in all the five areas of adjustment. Results revealed that there was significant difference between first year and final year students in Social area $t(98) = 6.29, p < .01$, Emotional area $t(98) = 3.88, p < .01$, and Educational area $t(98) = 4.03, p < .01$. Results indicated that there was significant difference in overall adjustment scores for first year ($M=43.7, SD=4.66$) and final year students ($M=33.68, SD=5.34$), $t(98)=7.00, p < .01$. The means of both the students suggested that the overall adjustment of the final year students was better as compared to the first year students.

Table 3 showed the difference between first year and final year students on emotional maturity. Results suggested that first year students are more emotionally immature on all the variables of emotional maturity. The mean differences were found to be significant in both the groups on all the variables i.e. emotional instability $t(98) = 2.57, p < .01$, emotional regression $t(98) = 2.79, p < .01$, social maladjustment $t(98) = 3.59, p < .01$, personality disintegration $t(98) = 3.18, p < .01$ and lack of independence $t(98) =$

Table 2
Intergroup comparison for Sub-Scales of Adjustment between first and third Year Students (N=100)

Area	First Year students		Third Year students		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Home	5.06	1.76	4.52	2.08	.99
Health	5.3	1.87	5.02	1.99	.51
Social	9.82	1.73	6.48	1.97	6.29*
Emotional	13.64	3.37	10.22	2.76	3.88*
Educational	9.88	2.17	7.44	2.06	4.03*
Overall	43.7	4.66	33.68	5.34	7.00*

df = 98. **p* < .01.

Table 3
Differences between first year and third Year Students on different Variables of Emotional Maturity (N=100)

Variables	First Year		Third Year		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Emotional Instability	32.18	4.13	29.04	4.41	2.57*
Emotional Regression	35.3	5.01	31.64	4.13	2.79*
Social maladjustment	29.9	4.23	25.86	3.62	3.59*
Personality disintegration	27.68	4.12	24	3.96	3.18*
Lack of independence	20.92	3.78	18.76	3.60	2.04*

df = 98 **p* < .01

Table 1
The Distribution of scores of First Year and Final Year Respondents in different areas of Adjustment

Area	Score	High				Moderate				Low					
		I yr	III yr	I yr	III yr	I yr	III yr	I yr	III yr						
Home	0-3	8	16	17	34	4-5	24	48	18	48	6&above	18	36	15	36
Health	0-2	3	6	4	8	3-6	34	68	38	76	7&above	13	26	8	38
Social	0-6	1	2	25	50	7-9	21	42	21	42	10&above	28	56	4	8
Emotion	0-7	0	0	9	18	8-14	24	48	39	78	15&above	26	52	2	4

Educational	0-4	0	0	6	12	5-8	14	28	27	54	9&above	36	72	17	34
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2.04, $p < .01$.

The major information concluded from the interview schedule suggests that the majority of the first year students faced many adjustment problems whether related with their studies or relating with their classmates. They were more apprehensive about their appearances. They felt difficulty in relating with other students of different backgrounds. Teaching styles of the teachers in college made it difficult for them to grasp the subject matter taught in the class. It all leads to difficulty in concentrating. They were also fearful of the pattern of the exams and also worried about the unexpected problems that might come. They felt that they have made wrong choices in selecting the subjects and therefore thought of leaving the college to join some other course. According to them at times they become lost not knowing whom to trust. They were scared of future. They also believed that their parents have now started giving them independent assignments. Many of them reported of mental tensions and increase in irritability, anger, anxiety, avoidance of social functions, feeling of loneliness, pessimism.

Discussion

This study has revealed the emotional maturity and adjustment levels of first and final year students mainly in five areas of adjustment i.e. Home, Health, Social, Emotional and Educational as well as the overall adjustment scores of both the groups. The study found significant differences in the adjustment processes of first and final year students as far as social, emotional and educational areas are concerned while no significant difference was observed in Home and Health areas. Our study supports the previous studies where no significant relationship was found between college adjustment and satisfaction in familial relationships (Shaver, Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Findings from this study suggest that the first year students experienced the newfound independence for the first time. Developing new and effective relationship represents an important element of social adjustment. Up till now they were in a familiar environment in school where most of their classmates were studied with them for a period of 8 to 10 years and the social environment was more or less fixed as they knew their peers well however when they entered college the whole scenario changed. They didn't see many familiar faces and it was a difficult task for them to start acquiring friends once again and widen their social network. One of the most immediate tasks students encounter on campus is to make new friends and establish themselves socially (Hays & Oxley, 1986). This situation seemed a little easy for the final year students as they had been in the college campus for some time now and had adjusted socially with others. Peers become a source of personal and social support and can empathize effectively with their comrades as they are also undergoing the same kind of experiences. For example, Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, and Madson (1999) found that perceived support from peers and family contributed to the college adjustment process above and beyond academic ability. Research by Rong and Gable (1999) emphasized that living environment, social support and making meaningful relationship have an impact on students' overall adjustment to the college environment. According to Enochs and Roland (2006), students who are able to connect with others in their new environment and find that social support adjust better than those who are not able to build a new support system. McWhiter (1997), in his study of 625 college students, found that female students are more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation than their male peers. This study found that female students had a

more difficult time fitting into the college environment and were less likely to be involved in campus activities and less likely to have leadership positions in campus organizations. Tinto (1993) believed that being able to manage and balance both social and academic life will help with the student adjustment process. According to research how a student adjusts during their first year of college lays the ground work for other events during their college life (Baker & Siryk, 1984). Data from the interview also suggested the same.

The emotionality of the first year students also got heightened because of making a transition and adjusting to college life aroused some anxiety and some sense of adventure. Since they had to make adjustments to new patterns of behavior and social expectations they experienced emotional instability. While these emotions were often intense, uncontrolled and seemingly irrational, there was an improvement in emotional behavior as they reached to the final year. Research by (Salovey, Mayor, Goldman, Turvey & Palfai 2002) showed that lower levels of emotional clarity are correlated with higher likelihood of experiencing adjustment related problems. The first year students also explained the kind of emotional problems like anxiety of the new surroundings.

The first year undergraduates faced difficulties related to academics also as suggested by the results. They experienced changing demands and found the situation cumbersome to deal with. As per the responses given by them in the unstructured interview, many of them complained of not understanding the syllabus and selecting the books. They had to worry about making notes and asking their seniors for the same. Having a positive attitude towards academic goal setting and the capability to reach those goals and the effort put in it is defined as academic adjustment (Baker and Siryk, 1984). Tinto (1993) identifies three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Psychological distress has been linked to academic adjustment (Fazio & Palm, 1998; Halamandaris & Power, 1997), making it another important variable to include in college transition studies.

To address the second objective of the study that is to understand and assess the differences between emotional maturity levels of first year and final year undergraduates, the findings of the aforesaid analysis show that the freshman faced psychosocial adjustment problems after entering college as compared to the final year students who had adjusted in the social milieu of college and thus became more emotionally stable. Due to different kinds of unexpected pressures first year students became emotionally regressed where they felt themselves inferior and harbored negative feelings for high achievers. Results also showed social maladjustment in first year students which suggests their lack of social adaptability. Holmbeck and Wandrei (1993) found that student's emotional health depends upon how well he connects with people and maintain relationships with his peers. The relationship between family expressiveness and social adjustment to college varies depending on emerging adults' emotion coping style. Participants from less expressive families who tend to avoid their emotions reported significantly more difficulty adjusting to college than their peers from more expressive family environments. (Johnson et al, 2010). According to the results the first year showed lack of independence which can be attributed to the reason that till now they were in a secured environment where the whole teaching methodology made them dependent on teachers or instructors which

instilled a kind of dependence on others and when unable to give the results they consider them as inferiors. As per their responses given in the interview, the first year students experienced problems in pursuing a demanding class load and faced tough competition from classmates. Another stressful situation involved decision making, they had to make most of the decisions on their own and other stressful situations including relationship problems. These aspects caused stress thus making the individual less emotionally stable to face these challenges while at the same time final year students showed progressive growth through experience and maturity and thus were highly resilient facing challenging environment in a positive manner.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to study the emotional maturity and adjustment levels during the first year of college with specific emphasis on each domain of adjustment to measure the importance of each domain to the student. The first year undergraduate students in this study were found to have low level of adjustment where social, emotional and educational areas are concerned. They are expected to encounter more adjustment related problems especially in the social and emotional context. The first year students are less emotionally mature and thus faced difficulty in adjusting emotionally to the changing demands of the environment than the final year undergraduates. Because of the familiarity with the surroundings, their integration is more into the social fabric of the college.

Suggestions

1. The heterogeneity of the sample can help in studying the behavioral pattern of the boys to arrive at conclusions related to gender.
2. A comprehensive study needs to be conducted on a larger domain of sample to obtain more precise results.
3. Other extended psychological variables can be taken to get a better understanding of the student's behavior.

Appropriate counseling interventions should be designed to help freshmen students to get assimilated with the changed environment which would also help them to handle stress more effectively. Students need encouragement to join various groups and participate in different activities to become a part of the college so orientation programs for fresh students can be arranged to provide the required guidance which in turn enhance students adjustment. Senior students should take on the role of peer tutors to their new mates as they can significantly influence student's social adjustment and attachment (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996).

Limitations

1. Second year undergraduates could have been included in this study to get a gradual change in the pattern of their behavior.
2. The sample could have been drawn from other institutes to generalize the research findings
3. The more psychological instruments would have been used to acquire an in depth knowledge of the respondents behavior. Measures were definitely taken to overcome these limitations to

an extent. Despite the limitations, the study has been able to throw light on a very important and mostly untouched area.

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