

Research Note

Stress Levels between Sex and Sex-Roles

ROSNIAH MUSTAFFA

INTRODUCTION

Stress is something that all human beings have at one time or another. A husband and wife may 'fight' over issues which rock their marriage, for example infidelity. A businessman may worry about a business deal which does not turn out the way he expected it to be. Students are always in fear when it comes to examination time because they are afraid that they might fail a certain course. As we can see, stress is a common disease and almost everyone is affected by its presence. However, we must bear in mind that stress does not have the same effect on all human beings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stress is an emotional state which is marked by increased excitation. It is during this period that there will be great amount of palpation, increase perspiration or paleness which are caused by the stepped-up activity of the hormones producing glands (Kurzweil in Broadbert, B.B 1971). Such conditions are prominent when a student struggles on a computer terminal, a leader awaits elections outcomes, or a President faces a hostage crisis.

Siva and Schork (in Selye, H. 1976) found out that the stress level between males and females varies significantly. A study on various types of stress indicates a vast significant difference between males and females. Females tend to get into violent acts and put their lives at stake whenever faced with crisis. Death stress is viewed lower among males than females but when occupational stress is compared, males and females seem to have the same level of stress. The reason for the low score of death stress in females is that they are viewed to be more feminine, passive and emphatic when dealing with death stress. Males on the other hand are said to be more masculine, assertive and more pragmatic and therefore deals with stress better than females.

A consistent finding emerging from studies of psychopathology in the general population is that women report more symptoms of depression than men (Newman, in Steers, R.M. 1977), Newman also states that some

people propose that the females excess in levels of stress is largely a by product of socialization experience that render women less equipped than men to cope with adversity, resulting in a greater vulnerability to stress in the face of similar circumstances. However, males also suffered different stressful events which could lead to indifference between sex-roles, such as occupational stress or being a single parent.

A great deal of attention and study had been given to the effect of stress on males and females. Aldwin (in French, J.R.P. 1977) did a study to explore the relationship between values, daily stressful experience, positive experience and coping strategies. The results showed that values had situation and sex specific relationships to hassles, uplift and coping. Valuing affiliation is strongly related to family uplifts for men, while valuing success is mildly related to work uplifts for women. The relationship between values and coping was more complex and unlike uplifts, was stronger for women than men.

Maurer (in French J.R.P. 1977) found out that college seniors constitute a pretransitional population that may be struggling with issues of adapting to anticipate change while preparing to leave the college environment. To assess the relationship between the gender of these students and their views of the roles of women to the stresses arising from the transition anticipated at college graduation, one hundred and fourteen male and female university students completed the *Money Problem Checklist*. Women were reported to have more problems than men. Both men and women expressed concern about social skills and friendship. For males, adjusting to college work was the most frequently reported problem area, while gender and academic pressure were the most influential variables.

Resse (in McGrath, J.E. 1976) did a study which include the administration of the *Mosher-Hostility Guilt Scale* and the *Fear of Success Scale* to 175 men and women, to compare the results of performance comparison of subjects high and low fear of success to those high and low Aggression Anxiety and Stress. The findings were as follows:

1. Women have a significantly higher level of aggression anxiety and stress.
2. Women perform at a significantly higher level than men only in the Alone-non competitive condition.
3. There is a small but significant correlation of Aggression Anxiety and Fear of Success.
4. High Aggression and Anxiety and Stress subjects perform better alone than in Opposite Sex Competition.
5. High Aggression and Anxiety and Stress men perform better Alone than in Opposite Sex Competition while Low Aggression Anxiety and Stress men perform in the opposite fashion.

6. Women tend to have higher performance levels across all treatment condition than do men.
7. Women tend to attribute more importance to the Alone-non competitive and to the same sex competitive condition than do men.
8. Subjects low in Aggression Anxiety and Stress tend to place more importance on the opposite sex competition than the Alone condition.
9. High Aggression Anxiety and Stress is present in 31% of the males and 12% of the females.
10. Dividing subjects by high and low fear of success accounted for no performance differences in the peripheral investigation.

Newman employed the LISREL model to a sample of 1026 men and women to assess sources of measurement error that may bias estimates of sex differences in stress done by Resse. He finds that the major sources of sex differences in stress levels based on conventional measurement procedures is due to a female excess in reports of relatively mild symptoms of stress tapping mood variation rather than to a more severe array of symptoms suggestive of a clinical disorder. He then investigated the impact of four types of enduring life difficulties on stress levels for men and women. This included the absence of a spouse, social isolation, financial problems, and chronic health problems. The study finds no evidence that such circumstances have a significantly different impact on depression levels for men and women.

Sievert (1982) did a survey research to determine differences between male and female elementary principals in their perceptions of occupational stress by using the Administrative stress Index. Data were treated with the T test for independent samples and relationship between overall stress and years of experience in the principalship were measured by calculating a person product-moment correlation coefficient. No relationship was found between numbers of years of experience in the principalship and overall stress. Female principals reported no significantly higher levels of stress than male principals, even though the mean numbers of years in the principalship for females was only six, compared with a mean of fourteen years for males.

I have made a research study to investigate the relationship between sex role orientation and stress levels between male and female.

METHODOLOGY

SUBJECTS

The research population for this study was the 1985 junior class of Northern Arizona University at Flagstaff, Arizona. The entire population of

1985 juniors at this university was 5000. Most of these students were Americans (73%) with a few native Indians (20%), Arabians (4%), Chinese (2%) and other international students (1%). From this population, 56% were females and 44% were males.

For the sample, four hundred juniors were randomly selected from the entire population. Out of this, 220 were females and 180 were males. The correction factors for the sample was .95 and the confidence level was + 4.65%.

INSTRUMENTS

Two measuring instruments were used in this study. 1) The Short-form of Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (TMAS) (Hicks, Ostle and Pellegrini 1980) and 2) The Short-form of personal Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ) (Spence, Helmreich and Stapp 1974).

The short-form of TMAS consists of 20 true-false questions that has been shown to have high test-retest reliability ($r = 0.88$) (Hick et al. 1980). The higher the score (Maximum = 20 for TMAS), the higher is the stress level.

The PAQ is a 16-items inquiry about what one thinks of himself or herself. Each item consists of a pair of characteristics with letters A to E in between. The responses scored are compared with respective minimal value for each category. That is, a score of 21 and above is masculine, 23 and above is feminine. For those who scored low in both categories, they would be termed as undifferentiated, and those who score high in both would be termed as androgyneous. The PAQ has been shown to be a highly reliable test in the field of femininity, masculinity and androgyny ($r = 0.88$).

Both the short-form of TMAS and PAQ were used because these instruments have been widely used by many researchers ever since they were published in the fields of anxiety (TMAS) and femininity and masculinity (PAQ). By using these instruments, the time required for each sample to complete was not long.

The design used in this study involved one group of male and female students as the independent variable and the short-form of Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale Scores and the short-form of Personal Attribute Questionnaire scores as the dependent variable.

PROCEDURES

Four hundred juniors were randomly selected in January 1985, out of which 220 were females and 180 were males. Permission and cooperation from the dean of eleven colleges within the university was secured. When these randomly selected juniors came for registration at the university, they were given the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (TMAS) as one of the requirements. The tests were to be self administered and other than the

instructions about the distribution and the collection of the test booklets, no explicit instructions were given by my assistant, the secretary for the dean of the eleven colleges. An amount of US\$3 was paid to each of the subjects for their cooperations. The whole process of testing the subjects lasted until April 1985. Because both the TMAS and PAQ have been shown to have a high test - retest reliability no pre-test and post-test were needed.

RESULTS

The study was conducted to determine if there were differences of stress levels between males and females. The design for this study called for scores of TMAS and PAQ to be computed for the group samples to determine if there is a significant difference of stress levels between the two sexes. In the TMAS 20 item questionnaire, the females plotted a similar frequency polygon curve as the males and scored an average mean of 132 and 108 students respectively for maximum cutoff points. This suggests that there is no difference in the stress level among males and females (Figures 1 and 2).

The PAQ graphs suggest that both males and females exhibited an androgynous characteristics. Therefore these graphs state the indifference of stress levels between males and females (Figures 3 and 4).

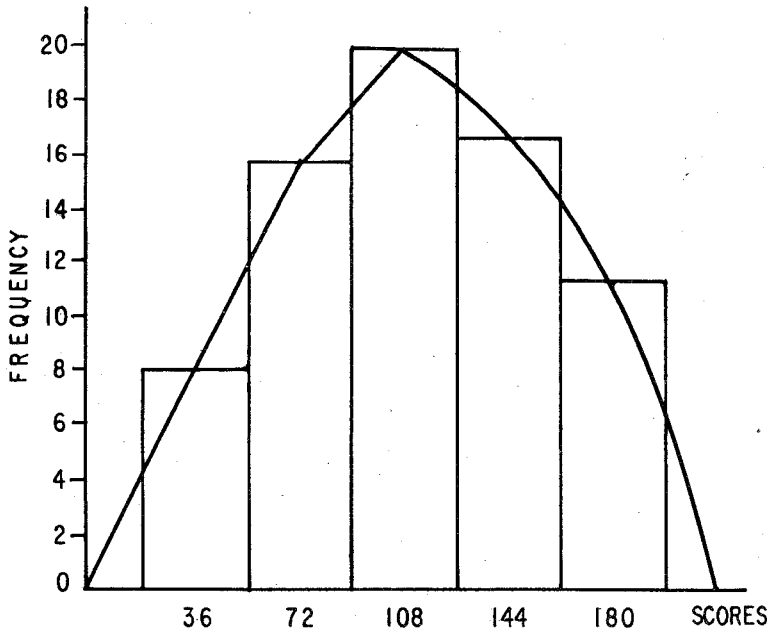


FIGURE 1. Frequency polygon of the TMAS for males.

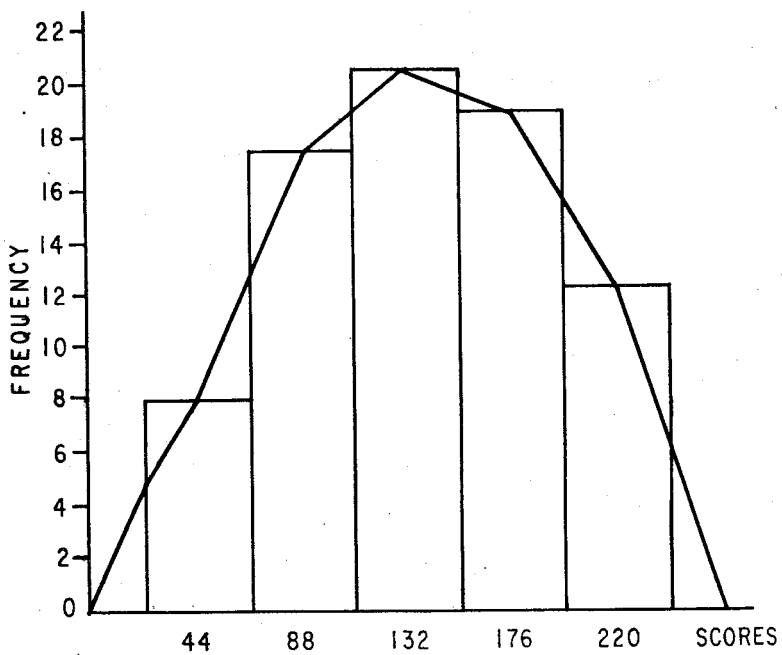


FIGURE 2. Frequency polygon of the TMAS for females.

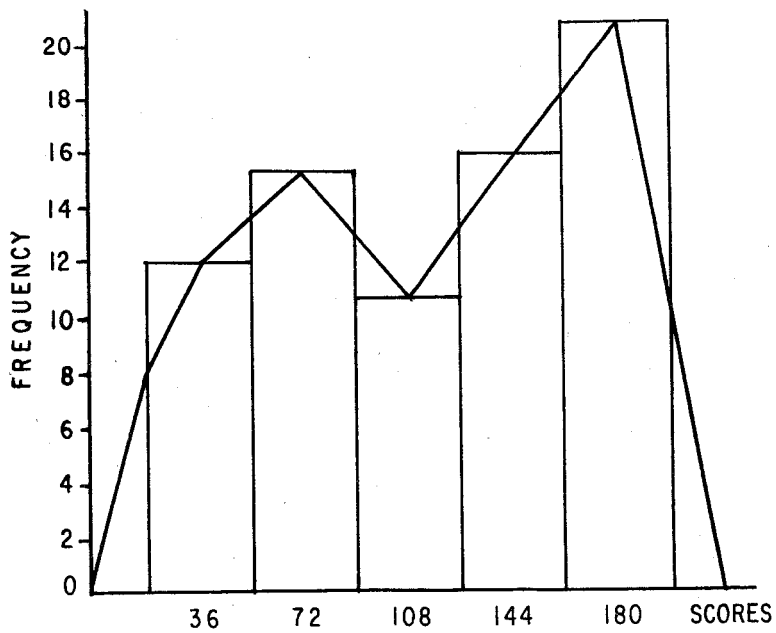


FIGURE 3. Frequency polygon of the PAQ for males.

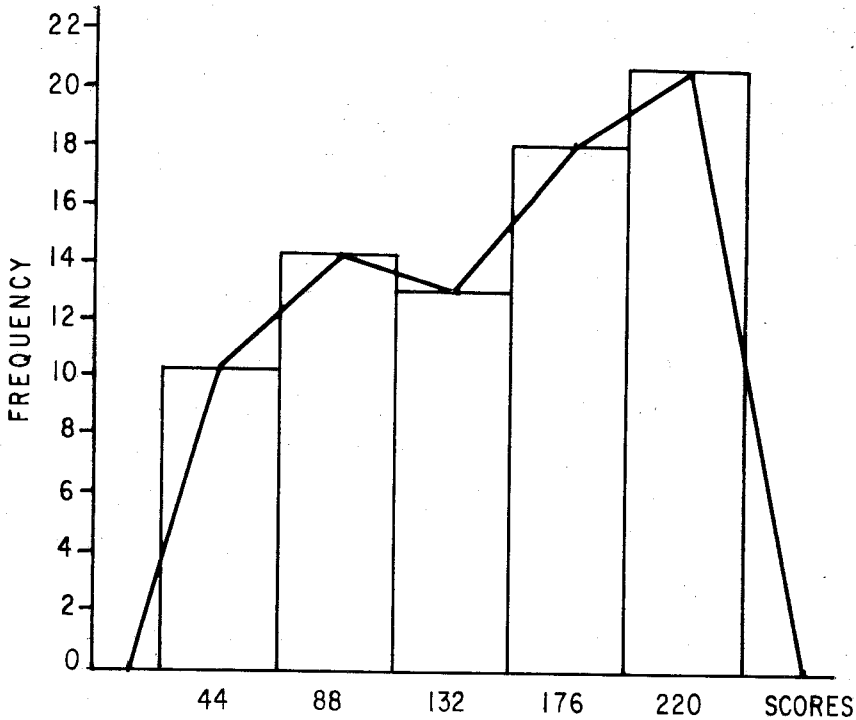


FIGURE 4. Frequency polygon of the PAQ for females.

CONCLUSION

The tests used to measure stress appeared to be stable and not altered by the sex of an individual. Stress levels exist in both sexes accordingly in ratio and hence produced a similar polygon curves in graphs 2 and 3. Indifferences between sexes is emphasized more in graphs 4 and 5 which indicate both sexes being androgynous.

It appeared in the review of literature that a great deal of research has been done in the area of stress levels accounted for males and females, but very few experimentally-designed research. It is suggested that this study and ones of similar design be replicated in order to increase the generalizability of its findings.

REFERENCE

- Broadbent, B.B. 1971. *Decision and Stress*. London: Academic.
- French, J.R.P. 1977. Adjustment as a person environment fit. In *Coping and Adaptation: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. New York.
- McGrath, J.E. 1976. Stress and Behavior and Organisation. In *Handbook of In-*

- dustrial and Organisational Psychology*, M.D. Dunette ed. Chicago: Rand McNally
- Selye, H. 1976. *The Stress of Life*. New York: McGraw Hill Publications.
- Steers, R.M. Group Behavioral Stress Level. 1977. *A Behavioral View*. Goodyear: Santa Monica, California.

Pusat Bahasa
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600 UKM Bangi,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.