

appears when an individual tries to change his situation for better through changing either his own actions or his environment or its elements that utter a threat against him.

The other component of dealing with stress is expressed in using one's reactions so that they do not disturb mental immunity or the efficiency of an individual's social functioning. In practice it may manifest itself in improving one's own frame of mind in a situation of difficulties or danger by means of the following methods: denial, rationalisation, avoiding painful thoughts, drinking alcohol or taking tranquillizers. Owing to the use of these methods an individual may feel better although they do not change the current relation between the subject and the environment; they do not change real problems (1).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research in the form of an auditorial questionnaire included 202 fourth-year students of the Faculty of Medicine at Medical University in Lublin. The survey was performed in 1997. The questionnaire has been worked out with regard to the analysis of the way the examined students answered an opened question: "How do you deal with stress and how do you estimate the efficiency of the methods you use?"

The average age of the students was 22 years and six months. Women constituted 55% of the group. 83.7% were permanent town residents, 16.3% – the residents of the country. The structure of social background among the subjects showed that 78.2% of them came from white-collar families, 11.3% from the working class families and 5.4% were of peasant origin. During the university studies 32.7% of the examined students lived in their family home, 35.1% – in student hostels and 32.2% in lodgings or their own home.

MATERIAL AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Figure 1 presents the subjects' answers to the question: "Do you feel that stress is present in your life?" 97% of the subjects answered "yes" (sometimes, often, constantly) of which 11.4% live in

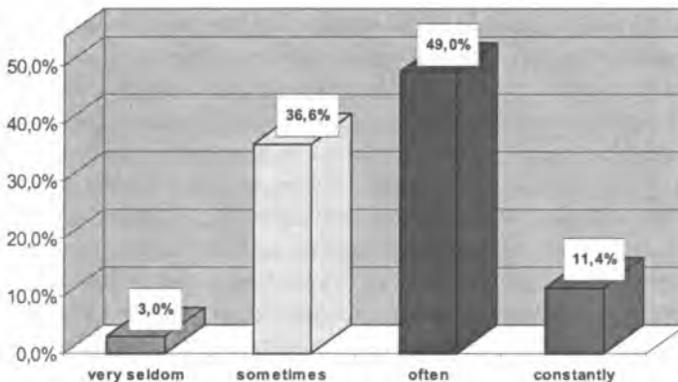


Fig. 1. Frequency of feeling stress by the subjects

a long-continued stress. Similar results were obtained by Piątkowski (3) – in his research study 96.1% of the second and fourth year students of the Medical Academy admitted to being under stress during the studies.

In Figure 2 reasons for stress felt by the subjects that are connected with the studies have been presented. It was a multiple-choice question. Two most popular reasons given by them were: being overloaded with studying, too much knowledge to acquire in too short a period of time (68.3% of the subjects) and the system of evaluation—exams, grades and credits, questioning during classes (63.9%). 51% of the surveyed group indicated stress-triggering behaviour of lecturers and other university workers as the source of the pressure. This number is twice as high as the one in the study by Piątkowski (3). The above difference may result from the fact that the two questionnaires have been worked out in different ways. Analysing answers to the question with regard to the sex of the subjects we discover that women more frequently perceive such factors as stiff competition, rivalry between students (16.2 % of women compared to 5.5% of men) and conflicts in student group (Women – 10.8%, men – 5.5%).

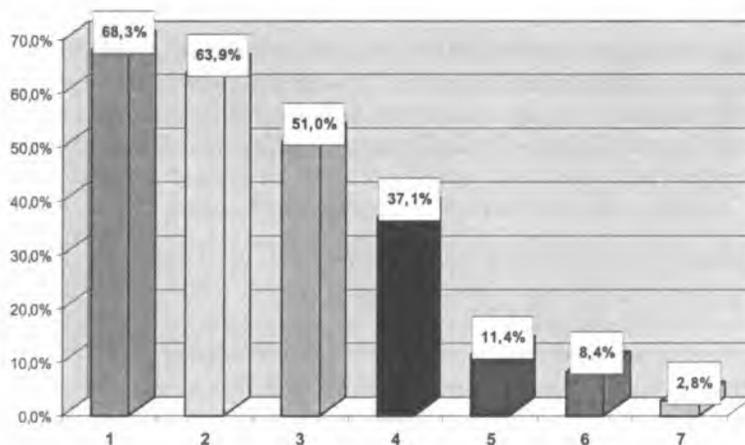


Fig. 2. Reasons for stress connected with studies; 1) being overloaded with studying, 2) system of evaluation, 3) relations with lecturers and other university workers, 4) too many compulsory classes, 5) competition among students, 6) conflicts in students group, 7) inappropriate programme of studies

Another figure illustrates reasons for stress related to different life situations. For the subject they are much rarer sources of stress than the studies themselves. The most important reasons for stress among them are family conflicts – mentioned by 39.1% of the subjects. This reason is much more frequent among persons living in their family homes than among those who live in student hostels or their own residence. Permanent residents of the country and the students of peasant origin more often perceive difficult financial situation, inability to deal with their own life and lack of friends as the sources of mental tensions.

28.7% of the subjects claim that their personality predisposes them to feeling stress. This view is more often represented by women (34.2%) than men (22%) and by permanent residents of the country (42%) compared to 26% of town residents.

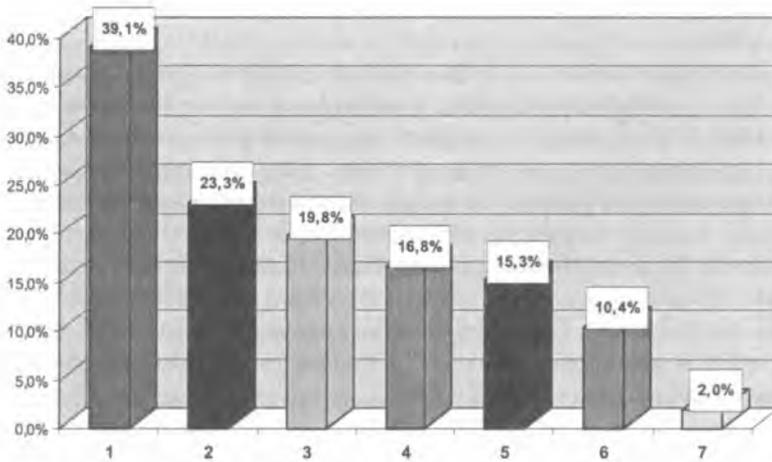


Fig. 3. Reasons for stress connected with other life situations; 1) family clashes (conflicts), 2) difficult financial situation, 3) inability to get on with one's own life, 4) difficulties with finding a partner, 5) loneliness, lack of friends, 6) bad health conditions, 7) serious illness of a family member

Figures 4 and 5 present ten most willingly used methods of dealing with stress. Lighter columns in diagrams indicate the percentage of the students using the given method (including: seldom, sometimes, often, very often); darker columns illustrate the percentage of the subjects using the method often and very often. Listening to the music (loud or quiet) is definitely placed first. 94.1% of the surveyed students relieve tensions this way and 67.8% do it often or very often. Next places are occupied by: walking, movement in open air and social meetings with friends.

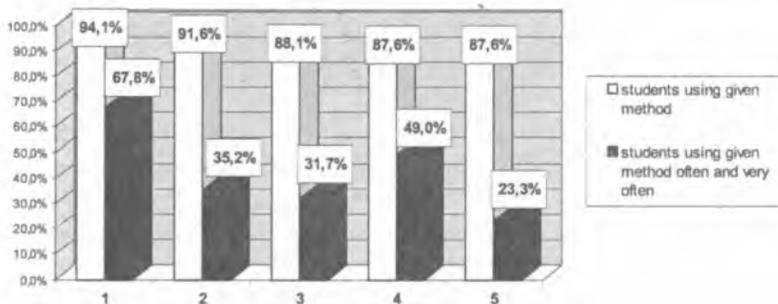


Fig. 4. Most popular methods of dealing with stress; 1) listening to music, 2) walking, movement in open air, 3) social meetings with friends, 4) heart to heart conversation about one's problems, 5) going to cinema, theatre, concert, sporting events

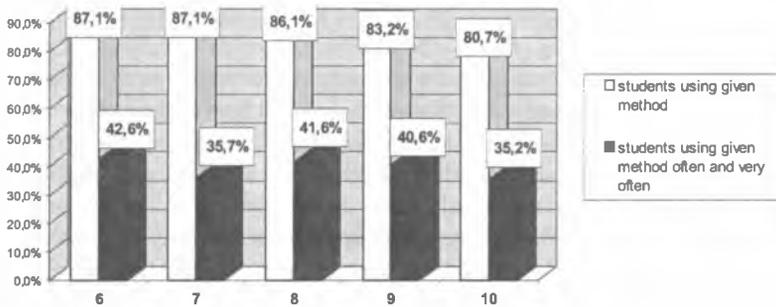


Fig. 5. Subsequent methods of dealing with stress; 6) practising various sport disciplines, 7) reading interesting books or magazines, 8) positive thinking; trying to find positive aspects of one's situation, 9) laughter, jokes about the situation, 10) long-lasting sleep

Figure 6 shows bionegative ways of dealing with stress. It seems alarming that as many as 27.7% of the surveyed students often or very often try to deal with states of pressure by means of eating sweets. Sugar does not provide indispensable nutrients and being a rich source of energy it forces products containing such components out of the nourishment. Excessive consumption of sweets may lead to obesity, diabetes and caries – the fact of which four year students of the Faculty of Medicine are surely aware. Another alarming fact is that about 13% of the subject often and very often relieve stress by means of drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes despite negative effects of such behaviour. The percentage of students taking synthetic drugs is very low (often and very often – 1.5%). It probably results from the fact that the surveyed students are well acquainted with the subject of pharmacology (the danger of addiction and drug abuse).

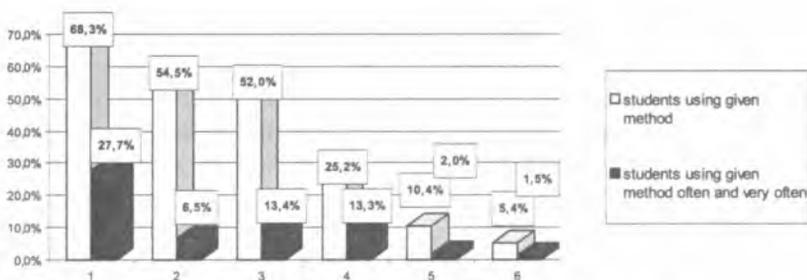


Fig. 6. Negative methods of dealing with stress; 1) eating sweets, 2) aggression towards others, 3) drinking alcohol, 4) smoking cigarettes, 5) smoking marijuana, 6) taking synthetic tranquillizing drugs

An interesting fact is a relatively poor knowledge of relaxation techniques, e.g. Schultz autogenic training (12.9% of the subjects know and use it, including 2% of patients – often and very often). People rarely use professional help. Only 10.3% of the subjects seek help of a psychologist or a psychiatrist when they face stress situation.

Analysing application of the above methods according to the sex of the students it turns out that men more frequently try to overcome stress by means of sex, drinking alcohol and computer games. Women are more prone to relieving stress by means of shopping for pleasure, long, hot bath, seeking, the company of even-tempered persons, housework requiring considerable physical effort and eating sweets. 17.3% of the subjects found methods of stress reduction used by themselves very efficient, 61.4% – partially efficient; 17.8% only temporary efficient and 2.5% claimed that methods they use do not have any effect at all, they are unable to get on with stress. Men have got higher opinion about the efficiency of the methods used by themselves. It is a more optimistic result from the one obtained by Piątkowski (3). In his study 6.3% of the medicine students do not get along with stress at all.

The subjects were also asked to name the methods of stress reduction they find most efficient. Among five most frequently mentioned methods there are: practising various sport disciplines (50%), heart to heart conversation about one's problems with a close friend (47%), listening to the music (41.1%), positive thinking, attempts to find positive aspects of one's situation (34.7%) and walking, moving in open air (29.7%). Women appreciate more such methods of overcoming stress as: confiding in a close friend and social meetings with friends. Men, on the other hand, opt for higher efficiency of practising sports. 69.3% of the subject declare for the introduction of practical classes in mental hygiene at the Medical Academy. The aim of such classes would be teaching how to manage in difficult situation. Seven students (3.5% of the examined group) added, on their own initiative, that these should not be compulsory classes and that they should be introduced in exchange for other subject such as philosophy, bioethics because of the overloaded programme of their studies.

Some of the students' answers to the open question, mentioned above: "How do you deal with stress and how do you judge the efficiency of the methods you use?" seem interesting. Let me quote a few of them:

Stress is, undoubtedly, the major problem that I cope with at the university.

Friday night is the only moment in a whole week when I have got some time-out.

Stress quite often keeps me company, maybe because of the kind of studies I chose.

Sometimes even ordinary classes happen to be stressing – the feeling that you are evaluated, judged, that you may fail.

All my life is stress; it starts when I get up in the morning and ends during sleepless nights.

I am paralysed with fear before each session.

I tremble with fear before each credit or exam even when I am well prepared.

These quotations illustrate the level of stress in the life of the medicine students who as fourth year students, have already gone through the most difficult period of the first years of studies.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Stress is a widespread phenomenon in life of the medicine students. 11.4% of them perceives themselves as living in permanent stress.

2. The reasons for stress result more frequently from the studies than from other life situations.

3. The subject most willingly overcome stress by means of listening to music, walking, moving in open air, social meetings, heart-to-heart conversation about one's problems, attending cultural or sporting events.

4. 69.3% of the subjects suggest introducing practical classes in mental hygiene at the Medical Academy aiming at teaching how to cope with difficult life situations.

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STRESZCZENIE

Celem pracy było określenie poziomu odczuwania stresu przez studentów IV roku Wydziału Lekarskiego AM w Lublinie i poznanie jego głównych przyczyn. Zamierzano także ustalić, jakie sposoby stosują studenci w celu przezwyciężenia stresu i jak oceniają skuteczność tych sposobów. Badanie przeprowadzono w roku 1997. Miało ono formę ankiety audytoryjnej. Ogółem zebrano 202 poprawnie wypełnione ankiety.

Wyniki analizy wskazują na to, że stres jest zjawiskiem powszechnym w życiu studentów medycyny. 11,4% badanych ocenia siebie jako żyjących w przewlekłym stresie. Przyczyny stresu wynikają częściej ze studiowania niż z innych sytuacji życiowych.

Stres badani przezwyciężają najchętniej przez słuchanie muzyki, spacer, ruch na świeżym powietrzu, spotkania towarzyskie z przyjaciółmi, szczerą rozmowę z bliską osobą o swoich problemach i wyjście na imprezę kulturalną lub sportową.

69,3% badanych sugeruje wprowadzenie do programu studiów na Akademii Medycznej praktycznych zajęć z higieny psychicznej, uczących, jak radzić sobie w sytuacjach trudnych.

