

# A Study of the Relationships Between Daily Life Stress, Self-efficacy and University Student Life Adjustment

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**Purpose.** This correlation study was undertaken to examine the relationships between daily life stress, self-efficacy and university student life adjustment and to analyze the self-efficacy affecting that university student life adjustment.

**Methods.** 265 university students were recruited from several participating required undergraduate classes. They were surveyed as the subject of this study. Data collection was conducted through the use of questionnaires.

**Results.** The university life adjustment level showed a maximum score of 9 with the mean score 5.22. A negative correlation was found between daily life stress and university life adjustment. Also, there was positively correlation between self-efficacy and university life adjustment. Self-efficacy and daily life stress accounted for 23% of the variance in university student life adjustment.

**Conclusion.** According to the results, self-efficacy is a useful concept in helping overall university life adjustment. Therefore, university student consultation office or nurse should consider the program based on self-efficacy in order to help university students to better adapt to university life.

**Key Words :** Daily life stress, Self-efficacy, adjustment

## INTRODUCTION

Studying in university is a very important stage in the development of self-identity for young adults. They have to make their own decisions for their actions, and as they have more freedom in choosing which action to take, their responsibility is greater compared to pre-university life. This experience may cause some students stress and frustration (Choi, Kim, Chung, Yeoum, Kwon, & Chung, 1998; Kim, Chung, & Kim, 2000). In particular, those students, preparing to get a job after graduation, stress and frustration may be even greater due to pressure from concerning their career and adjustment into society.

If one absorbed this stress, he/she could develop negative effects on behavior. Park et al (2002) reported that when students did not adapt to their university lives well, they were likely to have an unhealthy life, marked by behavior such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and developing eating disorder. Therefore it is necessary to research how to promote techniques for individuals to deal with their stress appropriately.

Much of the current stress and adaptation researches were carried out without consideration of individuals' subjective perception or evaluation. That is, those studies defined stress as an objective stimulus and they were only focused on special life events excluding their past experiences (Hwang, 1995). As a result, nursing field conducted the researches about stress based on stressful

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life event (Oh & Han, 1990; Choi et al, 1998; Park et al, 2002; Hong, Eum, & Bae, 2003). Human constantly interacts with different environments. These environments and past experiences have an affect on his/her thoughts and actions. Also, the level of stress may be differ depending on individuals' past experience, socio-economical background, personal relationship, and expectation from society etc. (Song, 1999). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasized that if stress is accumulated from daily life, it will threaten the one's health. Hence, recent researches were carried out focusing on daily life stress that includes these interactions described above (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999; Yang, 2002).

The concept of self-efficacy came from Bandura's social learning theory and it was defined as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy also affects people's choices of behavioral settings, the amount of effort they will expend on a task, and the length of time they will persist in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1977; Woodruff & Cashman, 1993). According to these attributes, one's level of self-efficacy will contribute to an individuals' adjustment level when they are under stressful situation.

Although there were many studies about self-efficacy, most of them were focused on health behavior (Lee, 1997; Huh, Chung, & Yeoum, 1998; Kim & Kim, 1998; Kim, Chung, & Kim, 2000) and it was hard to find the effects of self-efficacy related to adaptation level. Therefore, this research was undertaken to examine the relationships between daily life stress, self-efficacy and university life adjustment as well as the effects of self-efficacy on university life adjustment.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to provide the information to help students to adapt the university life adjustment.

Specific research purposes were;

- 1) To examine the level of university life adjustment, daily life stress and self-efficacy.
- 2) To examine the differences of university life adjustment according to the general characteristics.
- 3) To examine the relationships between daily life stress, self-efficacy and university life adjustment
- 4) To examine the impact of self-efficacy to university life adjustment

## **METHODS**

### **Research design**

This study employed a descriptive correlation and cross-sectional survey design.

### **Subjects & Sampling**

The study was conducted using a convenient sampling method from one of the university in Inchon. The subjects were voluntarily recruited from several required undergraduate classes. These classes were targeted in order to attain a varied distribution of students. Questionnaires were distributed in one class then returned during a subsequent class. Total sample of 300 students was obtained for the study, of which 265 students completed the questionnaires used for the analysis. Data were collected from the 2nd of October, 2003 to the 31st of October, 2003.

### **Instruments**

Data were collected through self-reported questionnaires that were included daily life stress scale, adjustment of university life scale and self-efficacy scale.

#### **Daily life stress scale**

Daily life stress level was measured using the scale originally developed by Delongis, Folkman and Lazarus (1988), which is translated into Korean by Kim (1995). This scale was composed of 36 items and each items score ranges were 1 to 4, 4point Likert scale. Higher score of this scale means the higher level of stress. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .92 in this research.

#### **University life adjustment scale**

University life adjustment scale was developed by Barker and Siryk (1984), the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire: SACQ, which is translated into Korean by Hyun (1992).

It was composed of 67 items and 4 kinds of subscales. i.e., the 24 items concerning study adjustment, 20 items concerning social adjustment, 15 items concerning personal-emotional adjustment and 15 items concerning university environmental adjustment. The each item score range was 1 to 9, 9 points Likert scale. The level of total university adjustment was calculated by the sum of the 67 items and the level of sub areas was calculated by sum of each corresponding items. The higher the calcu-

lated score of each subscale, the better the students adapted to university life. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for translated scale was .92 and subscales' Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed from .73 to .83. In this research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of scale was .89, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of study adjustment, social adjustment, personal emotional adjustment and university environment adjustment were .85, .84, .79 and .80 respectively.

### Self-efficacy

For measuring self-efficacy, General Self-Efficacy Scale, which is one of Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Sherer et al (1982) was used, which was translated into Korean by Oh (1993). It is 5 point Likert type scale, with 17 questions. Higher the score means greater the self-efficacy. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for translated scale was 0.80, and 0.88 in this research.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS program. The general characteristics, the level of daily life stress, self-efficacy and university life adjustment were analyzed using descriptive statistics. T-test and ANOVA analyzed the difference of university life adjustment according to general characteristics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analyzed the relationships between daily life stress, self-efficacy and university life adjustment. The linear relationship between university life adjustment and these related factors were examined using Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for instrument's reliability.

## RESULTS

### General Characteristics in Subjects

Ages of subject ranged from 18 to 30 and the mean age of the subject was 22.35 years. For gender of sub-

ject, there were more male students, that is 61.1% of subjects were male, compare to 38.9% who were female students. Also, as grade is concern, there was more 4th year student (32.1%) than any other year student. Fifty one percent of this sample has natural science based major. Question concerning whether students live together with their family or living in dormitory, home-stay, relatives' house, showed that 63.8% of students were living with their family. The majority of this sample (83.4%) came from homes that had mid level of houses' economic status.

### The level of university life adjustment, daily life stress, and self-efficacy in subjects

The result of university life adjustment level showed that maximum score of 9 with mean score 5.22 which means a 58% adjustment level. The result of sub areas in particular showed that university environmental adjustment was the highest score as 5.68 and the mean score of study adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and social adjustment were 5.08, 5.00 and 4.98 respectively. From the result of daily life stress level, students scored 2.09 out of maximum score of 4 and this indicates that students are experiencing mid-level of stress. For self-efficacy, students scored 3.51 out of 5, indicating that students have about 70% of self-efficacy level (Table 1).

### The difference of university life adjustment according to general characteristics

Table 2 shows the difference of university life adjustment according to general characteristics. According to the analysis, there was a significant difference between male and female subjects, for personal-emotional adjustment ( $t=3.233$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and university environmental adjustment ( $t=1.948$ ,  $p=.050$ ). There was a significant difference for social adjustment ( $t=2.110$ ,  $p=.036$ ) and university environmental adjustment ( $t=2.065$ ,  $p=.040$ )

**Table 1.** The Level of University Adjustment, Daily Life Stress and Self-efficacy

(N = 265)

Variables	Total Mean (SD)	Total Mean/Items	Maximum	Minimum
University life adjustment	349.61 (49.54)	5.22	166	436
Study	121.89 (22.35)	5.08	37	185
Social	99.69 (20.35)	4.98	37	157
Personal-emotional	74.97 (16.49)	5.00	26	126
University environmental	85.26 (17.22)	5.68	26	135
Daily life stress	75.27 (16.51)	2.09	36	120
Self-efficacy	59.61 (9.81)	3.51	28	85

**Table 2.** The Difference of University Life Adjustment According to the General Characteristics in Subjects (N=265)

Variables	Classification	Frequency (%)	University life adjustment	Study	Social	Personal-Emotional	University Environmental
			Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Age	Mean:22.35		r = .02 (p = .600)	r = .08 (p = .223)	r = -.06 (p = .375)	r = -.50 (p = .421)	r = .10 (p = .120)
Sex	Male	162 (61.1)	356.44 (50.49)	122.25 (22.97)	100.77 (20.05)	77.53 (15.47)	86.90 (17.45)
	Female	103 (38.9)	337.30 (46.48)	121.32 (21.44)	97.99 (20.79)	70.93 (17.29)	82.69 (16.62)
	t (p value)		1.398 (.168)	.331 (.741)	1.085 (.279)	3.233 (.001)	1.948 (.050)
Grade	Freshmen	79 (29.8)	357.06 (46.43)	121.66 (22.97)	102.70 (21.39)	75.63 (17.04)	85.70 (18.29)
	Sophomore	50 (18.9)	328.85 (60.25)	120.62 (23.42)	97.48 (20.78)	78.12 (16.41)	82.18 (18.41)
	Junior	51 (19.2)	351.75 (42.99)	120.24 (23.27)	95.55 (18.66)	74.53 (17.35)	83.75 (15.33)
	Senior	85 (32.1)	358.08 (47.29)	123.84 (20.77)	100.68 (19.85)	72.75 (15.38)	87.58 (16.47)
	F (p value)		1.033 (.386)	.364 (.779)	1.553 (.201)	1.178 (.319)	1.197 (.311)
Major	Natural Sciences	136 (51.3)	348.03 (52.07)	123.37 (24.02)	102.24 (19.54)	75.24 (16.22)	87.38 (17.35)
	Humanities	129 (48.7)	351.30 (47.60)	120.33 (20.43)	97.00 (20.91)	74.67 (16.82)	83.03 (16.87)
	t (p value)		-.244 (.808)	1.105 (.270)	2.110 (.036)	.280 (.780)	2.065 (.040)
Accommodation Status	Living with family	169 (63.8)	329.00 (27.80)	122.40 (22.33)	97.66 (19.11)	75.57 (16.98)	82.78 (16.90)
	Living without family	96 (36.2)	352.08 (51.16)	120.99 (22.49)	103.26 (22.00)	73.90 (15.60)	89.63 (16.98)
	t (p value)		-1.080 (.285)	.494 (.622)	-2.168 (.031)	.796 (.427)	-3.162 (.002)
Economic Status	High	6 (2.3)	351.00 (1.41)	125.83 (13.20)	103.17 (13.09)	68.67 (14.45)	83.67 (16.61)
	Middle	221 (83.4)	347.33 (51.66)	121.62 (23.19)	98.76 (19.97)	75.74 (15.77)	85.12 (16.39)
	Low	38 (14.3)	360.67 (45.03)	122.87 (18.46)	104.58 (22.99)	71.47 (20.23)	86.32 (21.91)
	F (p value)		.265 (.768)	.145 (.865)	1.422 (.243)	1.539 (.217)	.103 (.902)

**Table 3.** The Correlations between Daily Life Stress, Self-efficacy and University Life Adjustment (N=265)

Variables	Daily Life Stress	Self-Efficacy
University Life Adjustment	r = -.426 (p = .001)	r = .454 (p = .000)
Study Adjustment	r = -.226 (p = .000)	r = .457 (p = .000)
Social Adjustment	r = -.140 (p = .023)	r = .285 (p = .000)
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	r = -.376 (p = .000)	r = .312 (p = .000)
University Environmental Adjustment	r = -.171 (p = .005)	r = .318 (p = .000)

based upon major. Also, there was a significant difference for social adjustment (t=-2.168, p=.031) and university environmental adjustment (t=-3.162, p=.002) in regards to accommodation status.

**The correlations between daily life stress, self-efficacy and university life adjustment**

In Pearson correlation (Table 3), university life adjustment was negatively correlated with daily life stress (r=-.426, p=.001). In sub areas, personal-emotional adjustment (r=-.376, p=.000) was the most negatively correlated with university daily life adjustment. Also, university

life adjustment was positively correlated with self-efficacy (r=.454, p=.000). In sub areas, study adjustment (r=.457, p=.000) was the most positively correlated with university life adjustment.

**Predicting factors of university life adjustment**

Table 4 revealed the result of stepwise multiple regression analysis to identify the predicting variables to university life adjustment. The dependent variable was university life adjustment and independent variables included daily life stress, self-efficacy, sex, type of major and accommodation status. The result showed that the most powerful predictor was self-efficacy. Self-efficacy and daily life stress accounted for 23.3% of the variance in university students' life adjustment.

In sub areas, self-efficacy accounted for 21% of the variance of study adjustment. The variance of social adjustment was accounted by self-efficacy and accommodation status for 10% and, the variance of personal-emotional adjustment was accounted by self-efficacy and sex for 21%. Finally, the variance of university environmental adjustment was accounted by self-efficacy, accommodation status and daily life stress for 15%.

**Table 4.** The Influencing Factors of University Life Adjustment

(N = 265)

Independent variables	$\beta$	R2	F	p
University life adjustment				
	Constant: 255.14			
Self-efficacy	2.266	.206	40.895	.000
Daily life stress	-.604	.233		.000
Study adjustment				
	Constant: 59.757			
Self-efficacy	1.043	.209	68.884	.000
Social adjustment				
	Constant: 55.695			
Self-efficacy	.290	.078	23.248	.000
Accommodation status	.142	.095	14.753	.000
Personal-Emotional adjustment				
	Constant: 84.848			
Daily life stress	-.312	.136	42.393	.000
Self-efficacy	.213	.181	30.017	.000
Sex	-.167	.206	23.696	.000
University Environmental adjustment				
	Constant: 53.408			
Self-efficacy	.292	.098	29.429	.000
Accommodation status	.221	.137	21.719	.000
Daily life stress	-.121	.147	16.024	.000

## DISCUSSION

Stress can be a serious threatening factor for individuals, but if one adapts well through active interaction in his/her environment, it may help him to become a more mature person emotionally and physically (Choi, 1999; Shin, 2000). In previous researches, academic adjustment was the only variable that was investigated to identify university environmental adjustment. However, as now it is clear that not only academic adjustment, but also social, emotional, and university environmental adjustment are the vital factors that determine university life adjustment, research has been carried out to investigate these other factors (Choi, 2001). Hence, this research has used Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker, & Siryk 1984), which includes all four categories (academic, social, emotional and university environmental adjustment) to determine university life adjustment level.

After the investigation of university life adjustment, it was noticed that there was a significant difference between male and female for personal-emotional adjustment and university environmental adjustment. Male

students showed better levels for both criteria than female students. In the case of result for personal-emotional adjustment, the reason that the most female students scored less was not only because of their concern about their menstrual cycles, but also for concerns about depression, tiredness, and emotional control. Park et al. (2002) also mentioned that the more female students experience stressful life events than the male students. Also, although in modern Korea a 'male-centered society' may not be true anymore, its cultural effect may still occur to influence female students may be less active than male students. Hence this may be the reason why female student scored less on the university environmental adjustment scale. This result also agrees with research carried out by Jung (2002), who indicated that female students were less capable of dealing with stress than male students. Therefore, when counselors implement the program related to stress management, they should pay more attention to the female students who are experienced the stress more easily.

There was significant difference of social adjustment and university environmental adjustment level according to accommodation status. Those students living apart from their family have shown better level of social and

university environmental adjustment than those living with their family. Family is the primary social support resource and much researches indicated that if this social support exist for a person, that person has better adaptability to stress and leading to positive behavioral change (Park et al, 2002; Park, 2002; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Cobb, 1976). However, if students live away from parents, they may seek social support from making personal relationship with their colleagues or tutors. By doing this, they may learn how to create and maintain good personal relationship with others. In addition, by living away from home, they may work harder to adapt to environmental factors, to be independent of livings. Hence these may be the reasons that those students living away from family have shown better score than those living with parents, in regards to the social and university environmental adjustment scale. This result also agreed with research result from Yang (2002).

To find out university life adjustment level, the result showed that maximum score of 9 with mean score 5.22 meant a 58% of adjustment level. This result was similar to those research results from Yang (2002), which also was the maximum score of 9, with mean score of 5.22, but had a 60% of adjustment level. Hence, these results may indicate that university life adjustment levels of Korean students are in mid the level and it is necessary to develop the programs to increase this adjustment level.

According to this research result, the social adjustment area, in particular, appeared lower than other areas. Also, Yang's (2002) research result showed the same drop. The questionnaire used in this research for measuring social adjustment level, asks about the human relationships i.e., friendship, university social activities, relations with professor and participation of extracurricular activities. Kim, Park, & Won (2003) carried out their research using 2662 students as a sample about what are the things that are most important in university students' life. The results showed that students consider having professional knowledge (22.5%) most important and human relationship (22.6%) was the next. However, the result from the questionnaire asking about the problems that the students faced at that moment show that career was the most important issue to be concerned and 12.5% of students considered their human relationships to be next in importance. From these results, one may assume that although the students think that human relationships are an important issue and despite making an

effort to keep good human relations, but they may think that relationships they are having are not fully satisfied.

As a result, the correlation between stress, self-efficacy and university life adjustment showed that more daily life stress can lead to poor university life adjustment. Also, in sub areas, someone who has higher stress level has lower adjustment level. Especially for personal-emotional stress, higher stress level showed lower adjustment level. This result also agrees with research carried out by Yang (2002). For this reason, it is essential to develop more programs to identify what kind of stress that university students experience the most in order to help them to settle down in their university lives.

The higher level of self-efficacy promotes the greater chance to adjust in university life as each of the sub area showed. The result from effects of self-efficacy on university life adjustment showed it was identified as a significant variable that explains not only overall university life adjustment but also each sub area. Therefore, as the main factor determining individuals' self-efficacy is a positive belief toward self, the tutor or counselor should consider helping students, to have a positive belief towards themselves, when they adapt poorly to the university life.

Bandura (1977) mentioned that self-efficacy was increased by 4 intervention resources, i.e., performance accomplishment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal.

Out of 4 intervention resources, performance accomplishment and verbal persuasion are things that can be used to increase self-efficacy during student counseling. Performance accomplishment is based on individuals' experience. If one's action was successful, one has belief that another action will be successful in next time. Also, if one has continuous experience of successful actions, single failure of action may have very little negative effect (Bandura, 1977). To increase performance accomplishment of individual, detailed information about associating problems and approaching from the easy problem to difficult problem is required. These may be considered during student counseling, and with the provision of enough information and recommendation to tackle the easy problem first should be given to students. Verbal persuasion involves suggestion of appropriate action and interpretative treatment (Bnadura, 1977). Hence, students may be given possible solution to their problems associating difficulties in university life during counseling and making sure they have certainty that

they can overcome such problems.

Result for sub areas shown that self-efficacy is important variant that determines study adjustment. This result agrees with Zang & RiCharde(1999) research on causal relationship between study adjustment and self-efficacy. Choi(2001) mentioned that study adjustment is important factor determining university life adjustment, along with interpersonal relationship. Baker & Siryk (1984) have confirmed that study adjustment is significantly correlated with the level of campus activities. Study adjustment, will have an effect on their academic results, which will affect their career in later stage of their life. Also, academic results will have an effect on self-belief and positive self-concept. Hence, university may need to provide chance for students to increase their study adjustment, by increase interest and understanding towards their subject of study.

#### **Limitation of the study**

This study utilized a convenient sampling method and subjects were recruited from only one university from Korea. This factor may have influenced the results so, it limited the ability to generalize the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research was undertaken to examine the relationships between daily life stress, self-efficacy and university student life adjustment and to analyze the self-efficacy affecting that university student life adjustment.

From the study, university life adjustment level was maximum score of 9 with mean score 5.22 and it means 58% of adjustment level and social adjustment area showed lower than other areas. Hence, it is necessary to develop the programs to increase this adjustment level especially focusing on social adjustment.

In the analysis of correlation between stress, self-efficacy and university life, daily life stress was negatively and self-efficacy was positively correlated with university life adjustment. Self-efficacy accounted for 21% of the variance in university students' life adjustment. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and implement the program to increase self-efficacy. Also, it is important to introduce the interventions to freshmen and enrolled students who exposure the critical point to adapt the university life adjustment.

Researchers would like to make a few suggestions on

the basis of the research results.

1. In this study, self-efficacy was identified as a significant variable that explains the university life adjustment. Bandura(1977) mentioned that self-efficacy was increased by 4 intervention resources. Thus, it is necessary to develop the program based on self-efficacy's 4 intervention resources for the university life adjustment.

2. Social adjustment level was the lowest out of all university life adjustment. However, as self-efficacy did not enough account for social adjustment, further research may require identifying factors responsible for social adjustment.

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