

**ADJUSTMENT TO HOSTEL – HEALTH ISSUES  
ENCOUNTERED BY A NEW BOARDER**

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**Abstract**

This paper focuses on the issues encountered by a student when he moves to a new environment for higher studies. The purpose of this research paper is to show the effects of various parameters on a student's life after he/she shifts to a new environment. For this, we carried out a primary research in which we formed a questionnaire and the response of the students was taken in 2 consecutive months. The responses were analysed and change in patterns of the various factors were studied. From the analysis, we concluded that majority of the factors showed a positive change while a few of them showed negative changes. Adding to this, majority of the students adjusted well within one month of moving to the new surroundings.

**Keywords:** Adjustment to new environment, Adjustment to new surroundings, Hostel life, First few months at hostel

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## Introduction

Systematic emergence of the concept of "Adjustment" started with Darwin's theory of evolution in the middle of nineteenth century. The concept then had purely a biological connotation as adaptation. Man, who is a social animal adapts to physical demands and adjusts to social pressures. So, the adjustment means reaction to the demands and pressures of social environment. Adjustment is thus an unending process of adapting to the environment that accompanies human beings at every stage of their life. In the course some problems arise that need to be solved so that further progress and development is attained.

Everyone needs to travel or shift to new places in search of jobs or education. Shifting to a new location is an inevitable part of a person's life. There are hardly a few people in the world who live at the very same place throughout their life where they were born. A manager in a company has to shift to a new location if he gets a promotion; a doctor has to shift to a new place if s/he doesn't get enough patients in at a location. Likewise, a student has to shift to a new place for higher education.

For a student, an adjustment has educational, emotional, health and social aspects as s/he completes the graduation and seeks admission to a postgraduate (PG) program. More so, when s/he is a boarder expected to stay on a hostel, rather than a day-scholar who might stay away from the campus. The objective of this research was to examine students' adjustment to hostel environment with specific reference to the health aspects. A questionnaire-based survey was carried out for the students immediately on their admission, i.e. in the first week itself and the same process was repeated after a month. Results were compared for ascertaining the degree of adjustment in one month period across the four factors viz. appetite & food intake, sleep patterns,

energy levels and overall perception about health. Apart from plotting the trends of these factors, the exercise also helped to mark those students who need an external help to get accustomed to this environment.

### Need for this Research

Lot of students face several problems when they move to a new environment. A significant number of students face the problem of depression which leads has consequences on studies, health amongst others. In India, this problem is faced by mainly by the medical and engineering college students [22]. There are many news where students leave the course they are studying or end up failing in the exams due to these problems. For example, in a medical college in India, a survey was carried out. In all, 336 students participated and gave a response rate of 88%. Out of these, 49.1% students reported depressive symptoms [24].

So taking into account the statistics and everyday news, it was decided to find out the reason behind these problems [23]. So, the need for this research was found to be apt. A lot many factors were taken into consideration and finally 9 factors which were most crucial which affected a student's life were chosen and research was carried out.

### Reasons for choosing the 4 factors:

**1) Appetite & Intake:** This factor was chosen because this is the most important need among the 3 basic need of a human being. Many physical and mental aspects can be related to what a person eats [7]. This aspect plays an important role in student's life as this will decide a student's overall well-being.

2) **Sleep patterns:** A person who eats well, if doesn't get a sound sleep is bound to suffer from health issues. Also due to this highly competitive life of students and workload, getting a good sleep is not possible always. So this factor was chosen.

3) **Energy levels:** Dictionary defines energy as 'the stimulating factor behind all motions and activities.' A student low on energy will not do anything productive. S/he will just be lethargic towards every job/responsibility given to them. So measuring energy levels was found to be crucial.

4) **Health Perception:** To keep the body in good health is a duty; else we will not be able to keep our mind strong and clear-Buddha. As rightly stated, a healthy body leads to a healthy mind and this is of utmost importance for students. Hence, this factor was chosen.

5) **Agitation:** In medical terms, it is a state of chronic restlessness along with increase in psychomotor activity which is observed as an expression of emotional tension and characterized by purposeless, restless activity [18]. Students who are agitated generally have lower levels of Outputs for any activity they do. They are generally under emotional tension. This leads to decreased efficiency of students. So this factor plays an important factor.

6) **Crying:** Tears are words the heart can't express- Alfred Austin. As correctly stated, human beings cry when they can't express their sorrows. Students face problem when they come to new environment [6]. They feel homesick or just don't like the new surroundings or the food. This leads to worries and they cry. No matter boys or girls, students cry a lot of times. So this factor is vital.

7) **Optimism:** It is defined as a feeling or belief that good things will happen in the future, a feeling or belief that what you hope for will happen [19]. Optimist students tend to hope better

and hence whatever they do, the result will be better for those who are more optimistic. This is deciding factor between success and failure. So this factor was selected.

**8) Pleasure:** It is a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment [20]. A student who is adjusted to new environment will be happily satisfied, enjoying himself and enthusiastic, which are essential qualities required in students. So researching on this parameter was of necessary.

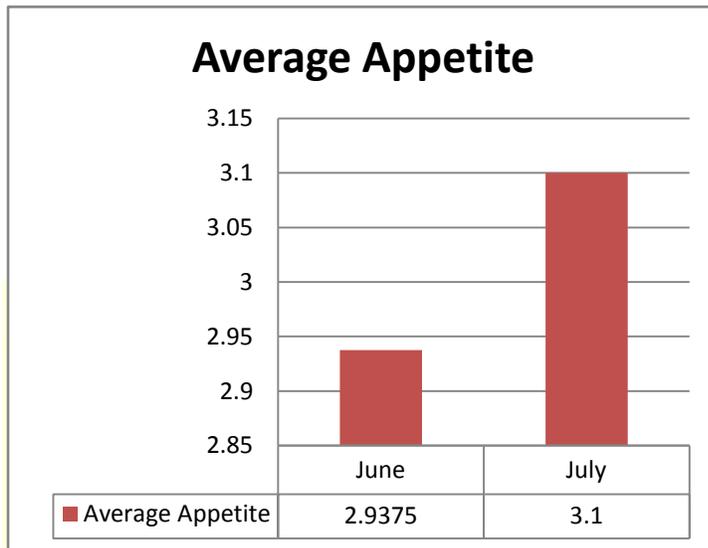
**9) Decisiveness:** It is defined as, 'Having or showing the ability to make decisions quickly and effectively' [21]. Decision making form an important part for students living away from the shadow of their parents. However small, students have to take smart decisions almost every day. So it is important to conduct research on this parameter and hence this parameter was included.

**A) Appetite & Intake:**

In a large nation like India exhibiting wide cultural diversity, the food habits are way different across various regions. It embraces several factors like the nutritional miscellany, form, contents, quality, quantity, timings & intervals as well as social surroundings of the place where the food is consumed [5]. As all these factors reflect on the appetite of a new student, his/ her reading was sought on one of the following responses:

- 1 My appetite has gone up substantially in the last week.
- 2 My appetite has improved marginally in the last week.
- 3 I feel just normal about my appetite.
- 4 My appetite is not as good as it used to be a week before.
- 5 My appetite is much worse now.

Responses were analysed as under:



**Figure 1: Average Appetite**

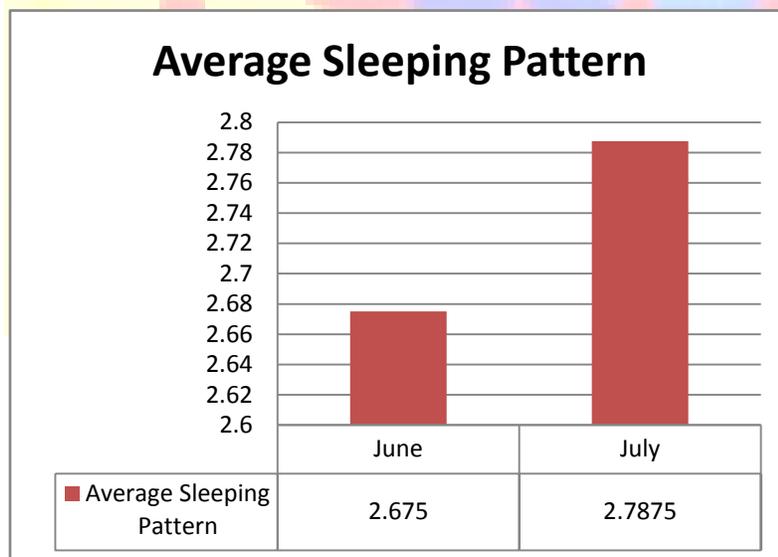
From the survey conducted among 140 students it was seen that appetite of the students underwent an undesired change. There was an increase from June to July with an average from 2.9375 to 3.1. Reasons ascribed by students include new environment reducing the appetite, apprehension about the food, the body taking time to adapt itself to a new place, unfamiliar preparation of food making students feel homesick, sudden addition of workload reducing the appetite and latency to develop a taste for the food in different region. About 28.75 % of the students showed positive change in appetite that means they found it easy to adjust. While 53.75% showed no deviation and 17.5% showed negative change that means they found it difficult to adapt themselves in the new environment.

***B) Sleep Pattern:***

With the total change of the surrounding ecosystem – not just food, but location, room and furniture, bed & linen, lighting & ambience, etc. – a new boarder on a hostel experiences a sort of uneasiness still s/he gets accustomed to that environment. The sleep as an important aspect of overall health provides the rest and recuperation that rejuvenates a person for the next day [8]. So, a lack of sound sleep or inadequacy of sleep, if persisted for a few days, may reflect on the daily routine. With this line of thinking, each of the new students was requested to pick up one of the following:

- 1 I had a very sound and deep sleep last week.
- 2 I had my sleep a little better than before.
- 3 I can sleep as well as it has been in the past.
- 4 I didn't sleep as I used to a week before.
- 5 I had a very much disturbed sleep last week.

Responses were analysed as under:



**Figure 2: Average sleeping pattern**

The average change in sleeping pattern was 0.1125 points or 4.21%. 19 students showed negative signs of sleeping pattern which means they have not been able to adjust to the new environment. Also such a negative change is not good as sleeping pattern change affects the overall well-being of students. The reasons for this negative change should be found out as sleep affects studies also. 32 didn't show any changes which means they are comfortable in the new environment. 28 students or about 35% of the students showed a positive change in sleeping pattern which shows they have adjusted well to the new environment. These are the ones who perform well in their careers as they can adapt themselves to new environments.

### *C) Energy Level:*

With the age factor in his/ her favour, student community is generally vibrant with energy. However, it was surmised that in the initial period at the hostel, they may not be feeling the normalcy and hence may experience somewhat run down lacking stamina for the hectic and demanding daily chore of a postgraduate program [10]. In view of this possibility, students were presented with following choices to express the views on their own energy levels:

- 1 I am not at all tired after the daily work during the past week.
- 2 I am still energetic after the daily work in the past week.
- 3 I feel just normal.
- 4 I get tired after doing almost anything.
- 5 I am too tired to do anything.

The energy levels of the students over the period from June to July didn't change much. The % change was only 2.09%. It means that the students were equally energetic as earlier. This is a positive sign as decrease in energy levels in generally not appreciated. The change in energy was

negative for 17 students out of the 80 students which account for about 21% of the total. Negative energy means the students are not active enough and they could find the new environment boring and hence their energy levels are low. 43 of the students didn't show change in energy levels at all while 20 students showed an increase in the energy levels. So in all 63 out of 80 students didn't show negative signs in energy change which is a sign that the students are enthusiastic and have adapted to the new environment.

#### ***D) Health Perception:***

Finally it was thought that a student's own impression about his/ her overall health should be sought so that the overall impact of above three factors and also other factors of educational, emotional, and social nature, if any, could be gauged [14]. This was ascertained with a set of preferences put in front of them:

- 1 I feel hale and hearty; fit as a fiddle.
- 2 I feel a bit healthier since the past week.
- 3 I feel just normal.
- 4 I am worried about my aches, pains or upset stomach.
- 5 I am very worried about physical problems and it's hard to think of more than.

This study has revealed that the Health factor among the students increased from June to July with an average from 2.375 to 2.7125. It is the state of wellbeing of mind, body and soul. Staying in a new environment reduces the appetite. The reason appears to be suspicion of the food to be unhygienic, the body taking time to adapt itself in new places, feeling of homesickness, lot of workload and sometimes health issues due to change in water or food. The survey was conducted in June and the same students were surveyed in July. A pattern was inferred. About 40 % of the

students showed positive change in health that means they found it easy to adjust. While 45% showed no deviation and 15% showed negative change that means they found it difficult to adapt themselves in the new environment.

#### **E)Agitation:**

The objectives were determining the effects of examination stress measured by a questionnaire, correlation of examination stress with biochemical parameter and autonomic function tests and impact of examination stress on studies [1]. Three parameters were used to measure the level of stress; Spielberger State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) self-evaluation questionnaire, serum cortisol and autonomic function tests [2]. The study revealed that, the students with elevated anxiety was associated with increase in serum cortisol levels and increase in abnormal functions from baseline to examinations. Anxiety levels decreased after the exams. In contrast abnormal autonomic functions did not decrease during post- examination period. All the three parameters were correlated linearly from baseline to examination. In male and female students, anxiety increased during exam time and decreased in post-examination. Compared to male students, female students showed increased reactivity of cortisol during examination, which supported the evidence of increased stress response in females. Examination performance is being affected by increase in stress level as measured by the parameters. The results of this study helped in understanding the pattern of response to the stress in exam and helpin developing strategies that will help the students to cope up with the anxiety and handle stress in an effective manner.Social and cultural adjustments are similar to physiological adjustments. People strive to be comfortable in their surroundings and psychological needs met through the social networks they inhabit. When needs arise in new or changed surroundings, they impel interpersonal activity which are meant to satisfy the needs. Hence, people increase their familiarity and comfort with the

environment they live in, and they expect that their needs will be met through their social networks in the future. On-going difficulties in social and cultural adjustment result in anxiety or depression [16].

When our emotions are too intense and too easily aroused, they can easily get us into trouble and make us as miserable as if we were sick with fever. As the severity of life-crisis increases from mild to severe, susceptibility to illness rises progressively [3].

We all experience stress while getting ready for examinations, completing a research paper, or preparing for an interview where it provides the means to use energy to express talents and pursue happiness.

Hamza M Abdulghani , Abdul Aziz A of King Saud university Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – College of medicine in 2008 - - in 2007-2008 academic year suggested the level of stress was higher in the female students as compared to the male students. Physical problems were associated with high stress level.

As compared to males, females showed increased stress response in examination. Physical problems were associated with high stress level like examination, interview. Disturbances of appetite, sleep and sexual libido increases stress, anxiety and hence the agitation. Cultural differences bring along language, food etc differences which lead to higher levels of stress and agitation among a few students [4].

**F) *Crying:***

Life transitions like moving to a new location can be stressful, particularly if an individual faces difficulties in the new environment. This study focuses on the role of self-compassion in analysing students reactions to social and academic difficulties in the transition to college [12]. Before college started, 119 students completed a measure of self-compassion, the level to which people treat themselves properly during distressing situations. As the semester one ended, students answered some questions about their social and academic difficulties and measures of homesickness, depression which results in crying and satisfaction with their decision to attend college. Students who scored higher in self-compassion reduced their difficulties well, reported less homesickness and depression, and effectively faced challenges. When "the blues" last for weeks and interfere with academic or social life, it can lead to clinical depression. Clinical depression is a common, frequently unrecognized illness that can be treated [9].

Depressive illnesses can have different forms. The following three types are most prevalent, though for every individual, the number or severity or duration will vary. Major depression is manifested by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy the activities of life. These episodes can occur multiple times in a lifetime. Symptoms are:

- Sadness, anxiety, or "empty" feelings
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities and reduction in willingness to attend the college.
- Appetite and weight changes (loss or gain)
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, oversleeping)

- Feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide and suicide attempts
- Problems in concentrating, making decisions, remembering things.
- Irritability leading to crying

Depression causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. College depression doesn't have a clinical diagnosis. Instead, it is a depression that begins in college.

College students face many challenges, pressures and anxieties [13]. They might be living on their own for the first time and thus feel homesick. They also have to adapt to a new schedule and workload, adjusting with roommates. Money and intimate relationships is also a reason of stress. Dealing with these changes during the transition from adolescence to adulthood can lead to depression in some young adults [11].

Many college students occasionally feel sad or anxious, but these emotions last only a few days. Depression persists and interferes with day-to-day activities.

Signs and symptoms that a student might be in depression during college are:

- Feelings of sadness or unhappiness
- Crying spells for no apparent reason
- Chronic aches/pain not explained by other physical condition
- Frequent thoughts of death, dying or suicide

### **G)Optimism:**

Optimism is the tendency of a person to expect the best, that only good will happen. This is very important as it shows a student's mental thinking. A more optimistic is generally accepted more

than ones who are not. Students who are more optimistic are happier than others [17]. So, optimism is directly related to pleasure. Optimism can be about anything, getting good marks to being in a good health condition. Optimism reflects how a person thinks. So higher the degree of optimism amongst the students, the better it is. Optimism is difficult to find these days. This is mainly due to the reason that many students do not get what they wish for. For example, a student expecting some kind of job profile or a dream company may not get it and hence the optimism levels decrease.

This is exactly what we got in our findings. We saw that optimism was not increasing for many students. So it is not a good sign. So we can infer from this that the students have not adjusted well to the hostel life with respect to the factor of optimism.

#### **H)Pleasure:**

Pleasure is something that makes a person happy. It could be due to be some person or a thing. Pleasure can be hampered if a student is not able to adjust well to the hostel life. Sometimes, student is not able to mix well with the roommates or the other students residing in the hostel. So the level of pleasure goes down. Another reason of pleasure being hampered is the burden of studies which causes stress in students. However, as per our findings, pleasure was not affected much of the students. From this we can infer that the students have adjusted well to the new environment.

It can also be said that the students have got a good group of friends and love the new environment. Other factors which affect pleasure like food, surroundings, studies have not affected the students which are a positive sign. Being happy is very important as this keeps the

mind healthy and helps the students focus well on studies. Also if the students are happy, their parents won't be worried much about them.

### **I) *Decisiveness:***

Decisiveness is the ability to make decisions. When students start living in hostels, they have a lot of responsibilities on them. So they have to make their decisions all by themselves. Decisions during health issues, studies, spending money, hanging out with friends have to be made by themselves. This is all along with the fact that a lot of expectations is riding on them from their family and friends.

Making decisions can get difficult at times because the students are always under the threat of taking a wrong decision. Decisiveness also gets affected by peer group pressure, family pressure, etc. so taking a decision for the same thing may be difficult at a hostel than at home. But in our Indian system, students generally go to stay in hostels after the age of 18. So by then, they become mature enough to make some of their decisions [15]. So generally this factor is not affected to a large extent. Even in the survey done, not many students were affected by this factor. Only a few students who depend on their parents for their decisions find it difficult to make their own decisions when they come to hostelenvironment. This is the reason that students should be allowed to take small decisions much earlier in their life so that they do not have to suffer when they move away from their parents.

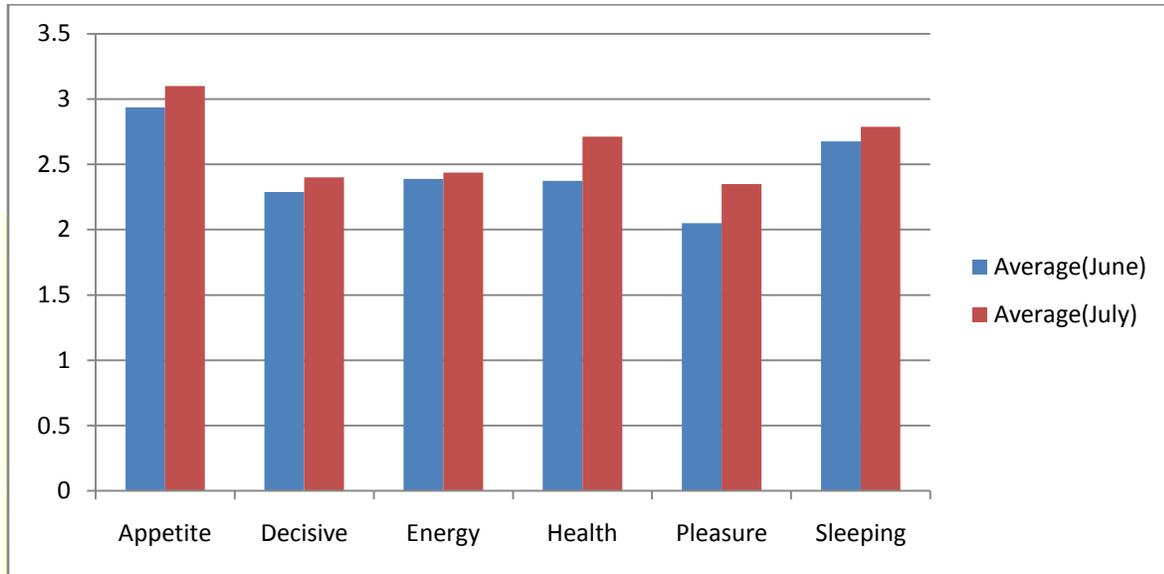
### **Comparison between the various factors:**

Based on the primary research, we have classified our parameters into two types:

1. Positive parameters: Appetite, Decisive, Energy, Health, Pleasure, Sleeping Pattern
2. Negative parameters: Agitation, Crying, Optimism

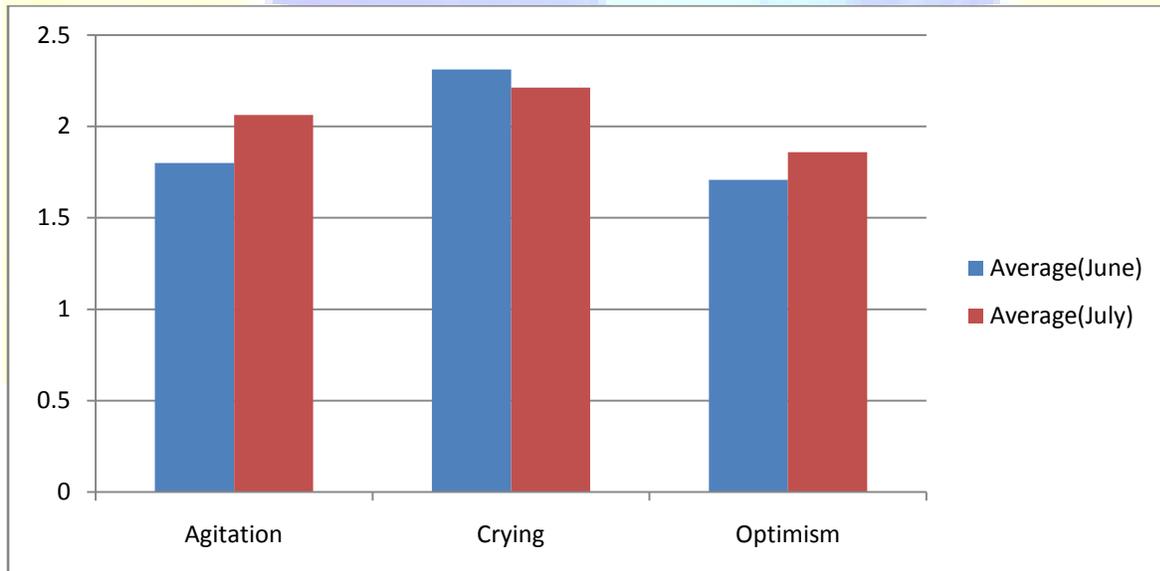
**Average value comparison between the factors for June and July**

**Positive Factors:**



**Figure 3: Average value comparison between the factors for June and July**

**Negative Factors:**



**Figure 4: Negative factors**

Comparison according to Count of students:

Positive Factors:

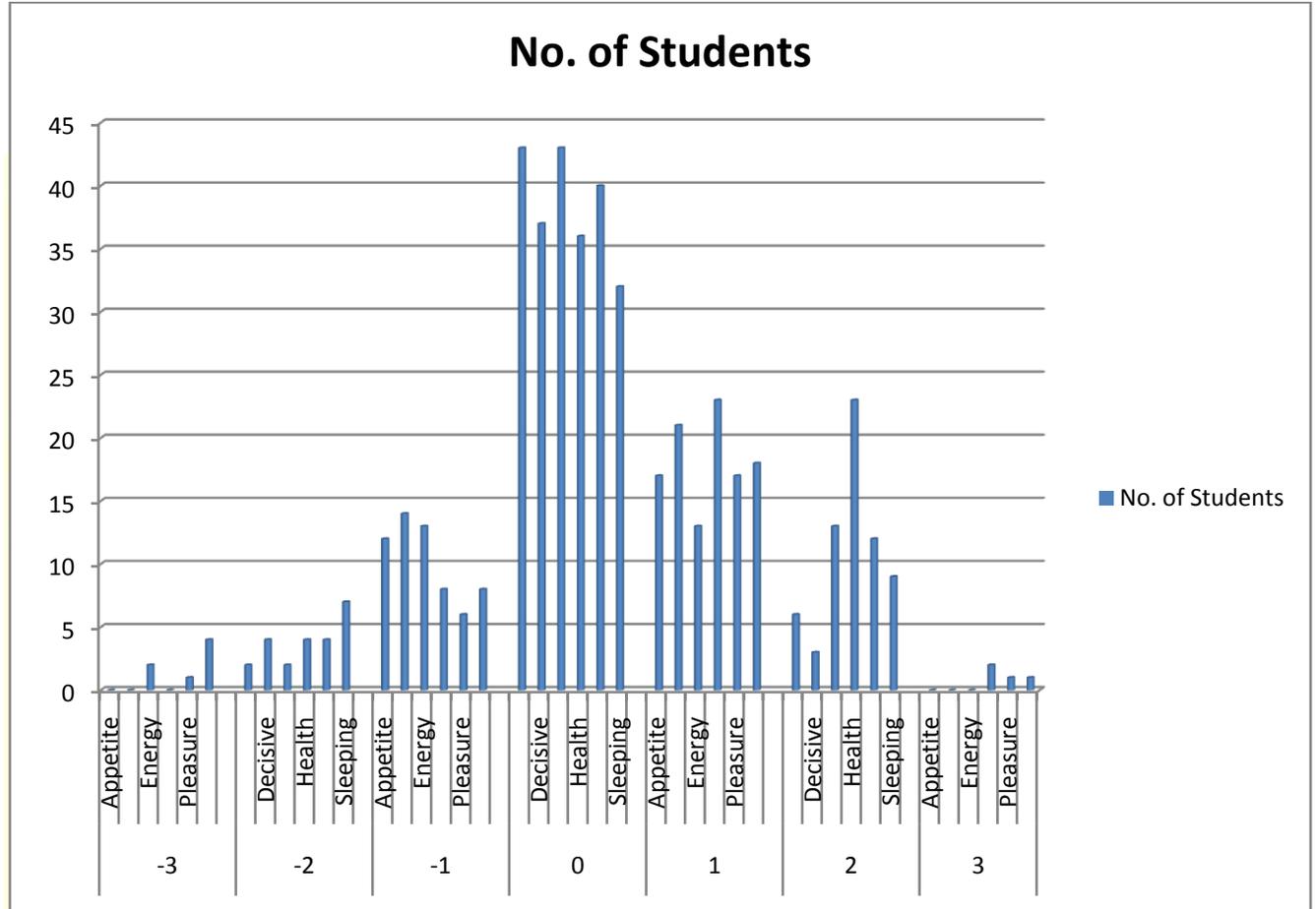
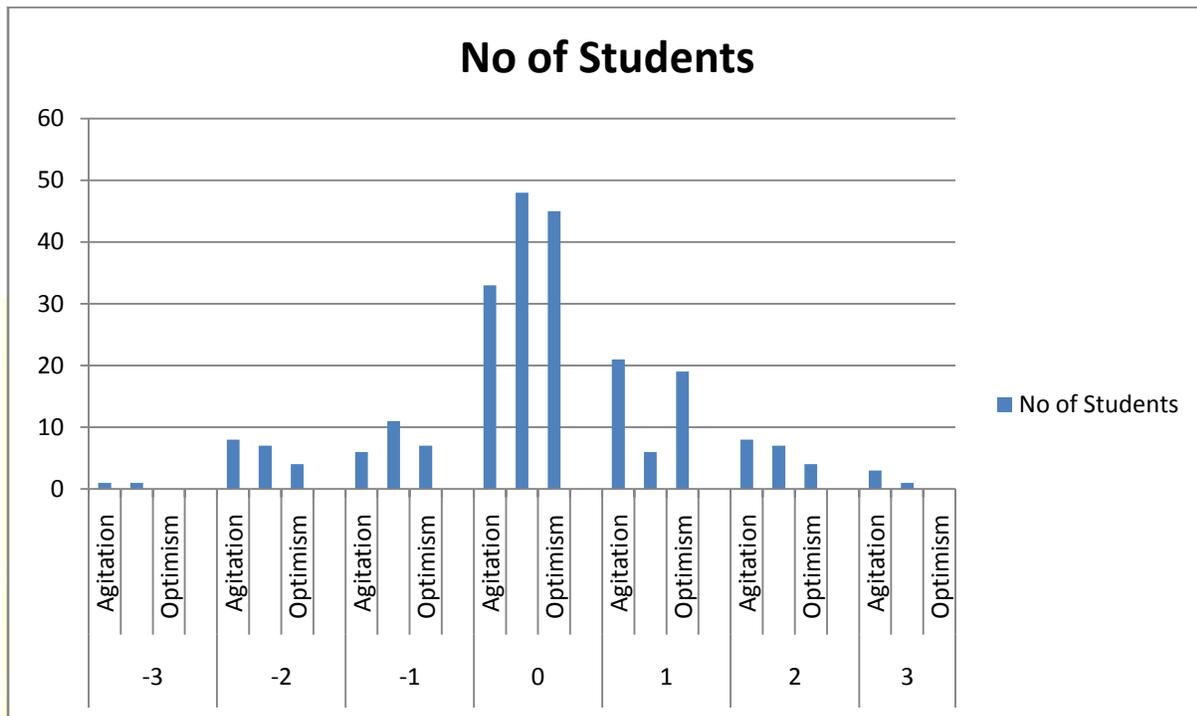


Figure 5: Positive factors

**Negative Factors:**



**Figure 6: Negative factors**

**Conclusion**

When students are admitted to hostel for a postgraduate program, they get sudden initial jerk and jolt due to a drastic change spanning across several factors. . It is however found that after about a month they show trends of progress on multiple parameters of health as stated above. Taking all the parameters into consideration and from our findings, we conclude that most of the students adjust to the new environment within the first few months. The main reason being, they have to head to a better career. So in order to study well and achieve their goals, they ultimately adjust themselves. Sometimes even pressure from parents forces the students to adjust. There are

some exceptions/ outliers who lag behind on the adjustment curve and hence may need special and personal attention which could be a topic of another research.

So, from this research we can see that how important these parameters are for a student. Most of the students tend to ignore these factors. Students as well as parents focus mainly on studies, job, investment, etc. People hardly pay attention to these factors which, if not taken care of, can lead to serious undesired consequences.

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