



# CHAPTER I

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The word “Stress” is sometimes used to describe anything that upsets us: a report card, a fight with a friend, a loud noise. Stress, however, is actually our reaction to these things. The situations or objects causing stress are “stressors.” Some might call them “hassles,” but the two are not completely synonymous. Generally, we try to avoid hassles, but we can't - and don't completely want to - avoid stressors. If life has no stress, there wouldn't be any challenges.

Stress in itself is not bad. We can take energy that stress creates and use as an advantage. However, when stress builds up and there is no outlet, health problems occur because the body strives to maintain stable psychological state. Generally, our body knows how to handle the ups and downs of stress. Nevertheless, the minute a stressor approaches, the body reacts.

Hans Selye explains this process.(1)The first stage is alarm. Basically, this is the same thing as the fight-or-flight response. In which the stressor signals the brain and all the physical changes take place. Stage two is resistance, when the body begins to return to its normal state. It demands a great deal of energy, but the stress symptoms diminish and disappear. The first two stages are to be expected in most stressful situations. The third

stage, exhaustion, occurs when stress does not diminish or disappear.

When exhaustion sets in, the body tires to resisting stress and runs out of energy. At this point, even small amount of additional stress can cause big problems.(2) That means not only that the resistance to the external stress is lowered but also that the body begins to show physiological damages such as well-enlarged adrenal gland, ulcers. Stress also has negative effects on the heart and the immune system.(3) Fatigue, tension dizziness, sleeplessness, tachycardia and gastrointestinal symptom distress could be the somatic effects of stress.(4) Usually our bodies are extremely well adapted for dealing with occasional stress but are poorly adapted for dealing with constant stress. Some people will respond more negatively to stress than do others.(3)

The practice of dentistry has been associated with many stressors (5) and high level of stress.(6) The stressors particularly noted includes running behind schedule, causing pain or anxiety to the patients, cancelled or late appointments, lack of co-operation from patients (7) and time management.(8) Most dentists experienced at least temporary psychological fatigue as a result of their work.(9) Stress in the dental profession is not just confined to general dental practice but is experienced by dental students within the academic environment.(10-12)

As the perception of stress is frequently influenced by one's personal system of beliefs and attitudes, the socio-cultural background of the students will undoubtedly have a strong influence on how one can cope with, or can be motivated by stress. The social support, such as care, love, self-esteem, values and participation in the of social networks of communication and

mutual obligation, can not only reduce some of the consequence of stress, but may also work by providing a buffer to protect people from the adverse effects of stress.(3)

However, identification of the potential perceived stress throughout the curriculum allows students, faculties, and administrators an opportunity to be preventive in their approach to student stress. Faculties and administrators may then address potential stressors for students in orientation, conferences, classrooms, and stress management programs. Also, knowledge of potential stressors can be useful to students as they monitor their own reactions during the educational process and, hopefully, attempt to develop a less stressful lifestyle. Of course, not all students who experience stressful events necessarily develop stress symptoms, since the stressors may trigger a stress relief mechanism within the student.

In the faculty of dentistry, Chulalongkorn University, there are many dental students could not get through the difficult curriculum for many reasons. There is a report that Chulalongkorn University dental students show high stress index.(13) The identification of the potential stressors may be helpful for both students and administrators in releasing the stressful curriculum.

This thesis aims to identify the potential stressors in Chulalongkorn University dental students and the potential stressors for Chulalongkorn University dental students in each year. The results from this study will be the identification of the potential stressors, which may be helpful for both students in developing a less stressful lifestyle and administrators in releasing the stressful curriculum.