

Perceived Stress in First-Year Students and the Role of Influential Factors

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Abstract

Introduction: Stress is the inability to cope with a perceived threat (real or imagined) to one's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being that results in a series of physiological responses and adaptations. It is a situation in which individuals suffer from physical and psychological tension, as a result of factors that cannot be handled and exceed the human capacity to cope (Hussien & Hussien, 2006).

Methodology: This study was conducted with the aim of determining the perceived stress of students during the academic process, taking into account the unexpected situations that arise, including social-emotional factors, the new conditions in which they find themselves, during academic studies. This study included 100 students of the Faculty of Nursing, who reported on the situations and factors that cause them stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) Cohen, S., & Williamson, G. (1988). was used to collect data, adding data about social situations, reported by the students.

Results: Based on the data presented by the measurements carried out for the presence of perceived stress in students, it results that students have experienced stressful situations as follows: 40% of students sometimes, 30% often, 20% have experienced stressful situations very often. 44% of students experience emotional distress due to separation from their family. 20% manage the stress they experience on their own not at all, 30% a little, 50% sufficiently, 40% of them express that they have a sufficient need for psychological treatment.

Conclusions: Students experience stress due to unexpected situations related to difficulties that arise in the academic process, or other difficulties related to social-emotional factors. Students express that social factors influence the experience of stress. They express that they have difficulty adapting to the new society in the university auditoriums. They often feel unable to perform assigned tasks, or to complete them in a timely manner. Students express that they do not have full skills to manage stress on their own, they think that they need the presence of a psychologist to manage stress.

Keywords: Influential Factors, Perceived Stress, Students

Introduction

Stress knows no demographic boundaries. It affects everyone and is often called the "equal opportunity destroyer" as it is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension and also a series of normal body reactions (mental, emotional, and physiological) designed to Stress affects individuals' emotions, mood,



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and physiological responses and can affect their cognitive processing resources, influencing their decision-making strategies (Lupien et al., 2007). This may be particularly important in situations that offer high behavioral flexibility, for example, in constantly changing environments. Stress is also an important factor in the onset and maintenance of psychiatric conditions (McEwen, 2004) and strongly influences health-related behavior in general (Cohen et al., 2016). Consequently, if students view academic challenges as opportunities and make efforts to cope with the challenges, academic stress can result in a positive impact (Sang et al., 2018). The focus of any educational institution represents a commitment to students. It is a long-term investment when people work not only for their well-being in their academic achievements, but also as unique beings (Tahir, 2016). Therefore, it is a very important issue to study the effect of stress on students' academic achievements. Academic stress has led a number of university students to depression and hopelessness and in extreme cases, also to suicide attempts. Students in their lives include various commitments towards success, uncertainty about the future and related difficulties that put pressure on students (Lotz and Sparfeldt, 2017). Students due to stress ultimately do not carry out their plans as they are. Human beings are significantly affected by various psychological and physiological factors that they experience in their daily lives. Moreover, when it comes to academic stresses, in particular, Yang, Viladrich and Cruz (2022) have found that stress is closely related to students' academic achievements. Although an optimal level of stress can increase learning ability (Kaplan, 2000), Excessive stress can cause physical and mental health problems (lower self-esteem (Bressler & Bressler, 2007) and can affect students' academic achievement. Positive stress called "eustress" (also called good stress) is when someone perceives a stressful situation as an opportunity that will lead to a good outcome or a person finds it motivating or inspiring. Stress can lead you to achieve goals and allow you to be successful. Usually, situations that are considered eustress are pleasant and, therefore, are not classified in a threatening category. Although an optimal level of stress can increase learning ability (Kaplan, 2000), excessive stress can cause physical and mental health problems, lower self-esteem (Bressler & Bressler, 2007) and can affect students' academic achievement. Negative stress called "worry" has been associated with many of the negative effects on physiological processes, cognitive, psychosocial and emotional aspects of the human body. Negative consequences of stress have been identified that may provide links to health, such as increased smoking, substance use, sleep problems, and eating disorders. Stress that exceeds optimal levels can interfere with the healthy functioning of the mind and body. Poor health outcomes are diverse and include alcoholism, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, cancer, obesity, increased suicide attempts, heart disease, and a host of other disease processes (Benjet, Borges, Medina-Mora, & Mendez, 2013). Students due to stress ultimately do not carry out their plans as intended (Park et al, 2020). Human beings are significantly affected by various psychological and physiological factors that they experience in their daily lives Chua, et al(2018). Furthermore, when it comes to academic stressors, in particular, Yang, Viladrich, and Cruz (2022) have found that stress is closely related to students' academic achievement. Academic stress includes fatigue, depersonalization, cynicism, and inefficiency or reduced achievement (Walburg, 2014). It is strongly associated with decreased academic motivation of students (Liu, 2015; Liu & Lu, 2017; Shinto, 2018) and academic disengagement. The relationship between academic stress, motivation, and academic dropout does not seem to be similar in a number of specific international studies. Walburg, 2014). Academic stress can also lead to the development of non-communicable diseases, including metabolic syndrome, obesity, and reduced insulin sensitivity, as a result of unhealthy lifestyle habits and dysregulation of the academic stress system (Pervanidou & Chrousos, 2021).



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Similarly, academic stress has been shown to be associated with increased appetite (Dallman et al., 2022) and higher body weight (Stephens et al., 2017). Therefore, academic stress may contribute to the development of health issues, including chronic noncommunicable diseases due to decreased physical activity and increased unhealthy lifestyle habits that will result in risky behaviors. Stress has long been a major research concept in health science as it is linked to various health outcomes and diseases, including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and rheumatoid arthritis (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007; Johnson, Perry, & Rozensky, 2002). The ways in which the concept of stress has been assessed in research can be broadly classified into three perspectives: (a) environmental (focusing on stressors or life events); (b) psychological (assessing subjective appraisal of stress and affective reactions); and biological (assessment of the activation of physiological systems involved in the stress response) (Cohen & Kessler, 1997). Young people undergo rapid physiological changes accompanied by psychological changes. Such changes often have dramatic effects, and furthermore they tend to experience social, emotional, and behavioral problems that can interfere with their well-being in a high-pressure society (Blakemore, Berenbaum, & Liben, 2009; Divall, & Radovick, 2008; Susman & Dorn, 2009; Giedd, 2008,4). Stress and strain have become an integral part of life. It continues to affect both young people and adults. Circumstances that cause stress are known as stressors. According to Center (2010), stress is not just negative things that happen, positive things also cause stress. A recent review of the literature highlights how academic stress can also affect academic achievements, increasing the risk of dropping out of school. Individuals with lower levels of education report poorer mental health and more illness than those with higher levels of education (Turrell, Stanley, de Looper, & Oldenburg, 2016). Early school leaving has also been reported to contribute to intergenerational issues, including unemployment, poverty, and lower academic achievement (Black, 2017; Lamb & Huo, 2017; Muir, Family, Maguire, Slack-Smith, & Murray, 2013). Physical and psychological stressors that disrupt the body's normal balance result in a stress response. Stress can manifest as emotional, cognitive, behavioral, or physical symptoms, regardless of the stressor. Although acute and chronic stressors can be devastating, chronic stress is generally more damaging. Early life stressors are major risk factors for comorbidities during development, as well as later in life. The body's response to stress is mediated by two systems: the nervous (sympathetic) system and the endocrine system. The sympathetic nervous system produces a rapid and short-lived reaction, triggering the fight-or-flight response by releasing two chemical neurotransmitters: adrenaline and noradrenaline. In contrast, the endocrine system responds more slowly, but the response lasts longer and is mediated by the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (Mcewen, 2017 Wong (2006) also claimed that students experience a variety of physical and psychological reactions when faced with a high level of stress, such as lack of energy, loss of appetite, headaches, or stomach problems. Stress can be defined in a variety of ways, but what most researchers agree on is that it affects almost every system of the body, starting from perceptual, interpretive, and other psychological processes mediated by brain activity (Ang & Huan, 2006). In a behavioral study using computational modeling, participants under recent and acute stress exhibited suboptimal eating behaviors with a tendency to overconsume their current options. Increased persistence was also observed in a task that discriminates between habitual and directed behavior. by purpose (Raio et al., 2020). To date, heterogeneous subfields in the operationalization of decision-making and methodological differences regarding the type of stressor have complicated the picture (Porcelli & Delgado, 2017). Most previous studies on the effects of stress on decision-making have used between-subject designs-but subjects vary dramatically in both individual stress responses, choice behavior, and how stress affects



performance. In previously used between-subject designs, it remains unclear how much of the stressrelated changes in neural correlates of probabilistic reversal learning can be attributed to the stressor and how much can be related to interindividual differences in stress reactivity. Stress reactivity can also vary, depending on long-term exposure to or cognitive (Otto et al., 2013). Similarly, Trockel et al. (2000) support these results by also noting that students with perceptions of Higher stress levels are more likely to perceive more external than internal control and to engage in high-risk health behaviors.

Methodology

This study was conducted with the aim of determining the perceived stress of students during the academic process, taking into account the unexpected situations that arise, including social-emotional factors, the new conditions in which they find themselves, during academic studies. This study included 100 students of the Faculty of Nursing, who reported on the situations that cause them stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) Cohen, S., & Williamson, G. (1988). was used to collect data, as well as to obtain data about social situations reported by students. After obtaining the data, their calculation was carried out and statistical information was extracted focusing on the objectives of the study, the measurement of stress and the influencing factors. After the calculations, the results were presented as follows.

Results

Perceived stress	Never	Almost	Sometimes	Fairly	Very
		Never		Often	Often
In the past month, how often have you been	40%	20%	10%	15%	15%
upset because of something that happened					
unexpectedly?					
In the past month, how often have you felt	20%	25%	10%	25%	20%
unable to control the important things in your					
life?					
In the past month, how often have you felt	10%	20%	25%	25%	20%
nervous or stressed?					
In the past month, how often have you felt	20%	25%	25%	20%	10%
confident about your ability to handle					
personal problems?					
In the past month, how often have you felt	10%	10%	30%	40%	10%
that things were going your way?					
In the past month, how often have you found	10%	15%	40%	15%	20%
that you could not cope with all the things you					
had to do?					
.In the past month, how often have you been	10%	15%	45%	15%	15%
able to control irritations in your life?					
In the past month, how often have you felt	7%	10%	40%	23%	20%
that you were on top of things?					



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In the past month, how often have you been angry because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	10%	9%	25%	36%	20%
. In the past month, how often have you felt	5%	10%	25%	40%	20%
that difficulties were piling up so high that					
you could not overcome them?					



Graphic- Perceived stress Cohen

Impact of Demographic-social data	None	Little	Sufficiente	More
How connected are you with your family?	0	20	30	50
Has the separation from the family affected	0	22	42	44
you?				
Do you have easily adapted to the new	20	30	40	10
university society				
Have you been concerned by new situations	20	30	40	10
during the academic process?				
Do you feel the need to talk to a psychologist?	10	20	40	30
How much can you manage stress on your	20	30	50	0
own?				



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Graphic of social data

Discussions

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Based on the data presented by the measurements conducted on the presence of perceived stress among students, it results that students have experienced stressful situations as follows: 40% of students have experienced stressful situations sometimes, 30% often, and 20% have experienced stressful situations very often. 5% of students say they have never experienced stressful situations, 5% of them say they have almost never experienced stressful situations. The most detailed answers express that they have been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly 40% never, 20% almost never, 10% quite often, 15% often, 15% very often. To the question how often you have felt able to control the important things in your life, they answer as follows: 20% never, 25% almost never, 10% sometimes, 25% often, 20% very often Have you often felt nervous or stressed during the past month: 10% never, 20% Almost never 25% sometimes 25% often, 20% very often. Express how often you felt confident in your ability to handle personal problems 20% never, 25% almost never 25% sometimes, 20% 10%. Express how often in the past month you felt that things were going the way you wanted 10% never, 10% almost never 30% quite a bit, 40% often 10%. Very often. Express how often you felt that you could not cope with all the things you had to do10% never, 15% almost never, 40% quite 15% often 20% very often. In the past month, how often have you been able to control the irritations in your life, the answers are: 10% never, 15% almost never, 45% quite 15% often 15% very often. Answer how often you felt that you were in charge of things7% never, 10% almost never, 40% quite 23% often 20% very often. Express how often you were angry because of things that happened that were out of your control10% never, 9% almost never, 25% quite 36% often 20% very often. How often have you felt that difficulties were piling up so much that you could not overcome them, the answers are: 5% never, 10% almost never, 25% quite often 40% often 20% very often. Discussions about social and demographic factors: Students say that they maintain close ties with their family 50% of students, very much, 30% sufficiently, 20% a



little, 44% of students experience emotional distress due to separation from their family. Adaptation to the new society of students says that 40% of them have adapted sufficiently, 20% a little, 30% a little. New academic situations have brought a kind of concern to students who say; 30% a little, 40% sufficiently, 10% a lot. Are they able to manage the stress they experience on their own 20% not at all, 30% a little, 50% sufficiently, 40% of them say that they need a psychologist a lot, 40% have highly assessed the need for a psychologist.

Conclusions

Students experience stress due to unexpected situations related to difficulties that arise in the academic process, or other difficulties related to social-emotional factors. Students express that social factors influence the experience of stress. They express that they have difficulty adapting to the new society in the university auditoriums. They often feel unable to perform assigned tasks, or to complete them in a timely manner. Students express that they do not have full skills to manage stress on their own, they think that they need the presence of a psychologist to manage stress.

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