

Academic Stress Levels Among Undergraduate Students of Universities in Pune City

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Abstract:

This study explores the common challenges faced by undergraduate students in their academic and personal lives. The findings show that many students struggle mainly with academic pressure, especially due to deadlines, a heavy syllabus, and difficulty keeping up with their work. At the same time, concerns about the future and problems with concentration reflect the mental stress students experience. While factors like parental pressure and lifestyle habits such as rest and physical activity vary among individuals, a noticeable number of students also feel a lack of emotional support. Overall, the study highlights that academic demands and future uncertainty are key issues, suggesting the need for better support systems to improve students' well-being.

Keywords: Academic stress, undergraduate students, psychological well-being, coping mechanisms, stress management.

Introduction:

The role of the Indian education system in the development of the intellectual and professional growth of students is of great significance. In the Indian context, the education system is considered one of the primary routes to success in one's career and social mobility, and thus there is great emphasis on academic success. The Indian higher education system provides students with the opportunity to pursue various undergraduate courses in different subjects like science, commerce, arts, humanities, and so on, according to their interests and goals. This includes academic aspects like lectures, assignments, projects, examinations, and so on. The Indian education system is considered to be highly competitive and performance-oriented, and students are often under pressure to achieve good grades and succeed in their academic and social lives.

The term "stress" has been used to explain the physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral reactions to events that are considered challenging or threatening. This is a common phenomenon in our day-to-day life, and stress can be caused by different factors, including our personal responsibilities, the environment, and our expectations of ourselves and others. Even though stress in the right measure helps individuals perform better, too much stress can affect the mental and emotional state of the individuals adversely. Academic stress is the stress that students experience due to academic pressures and expectations. Undergraduate students, belonging to the age group of 18-24 years, experience academic task pressure, examination pressure, and other expectations about the future. Academic pressure sometimes results in anxiety, overwhelmed emotions, and difficulties in handling academic tasks in the competitive academic environment of India.

Statement of the Problem:

This study aims to examine the level of academic stress experienced by undergraduate college students in

Pune City.

Review of Literature:

Academic stress is widely recognized in the literature as a significant psychological concern among students, arising from the pressures and demands associated with academic life. It is generally defined as a state of mental distress, which is caused by factors like examinations, high workloads, performance expectations, and fear of failure, among others. Research has continually shown that the core of the matter is not the level of the demands, but the interplay between the level of the demands and the individual's capacity to cope with those demands. For example, according to Khadka (2024), academic stress is described as "a complex interplay of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological reactions to academic demands," and it is further noted that "different students react to similar academic experiences in very different ways." A study done by Iqra. (2024) on academic stress as a major problem among students identified that academic pressure, family pressures, and career uncertainty were some of the major causes of academic stress among students. It also identified that high levels of stress negatively impact mental and physical health, leading to anxiety and burnout, but at the same time, it emphasized the need for the adoption of stress management skills like mindfulness and relaxation. In a study by Goldman, C. S., & Wong, E. H. (1997), it has been highlighted that the main causes of academic stress experienced by students are pressure, self-imposed demands, and competition. This study highlights that students are likely to exhibit emotional and cognitive responses to academic stress, like anxiety, fear, and worry. This study also highlights that there are differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of stress. In this study, teachers are found to overestimate students' stress levels. This study also highlights the importance of communication to assist the students in managing academic stress. In the study by Varma (2023), the causes of stress faced by college students and its impact on academic success were investigated. In this study, the descriptive survey method was used. This study has shown that the students are facing moderate levels of stress. The causes of stress faced by the students are academic-related factors like examinations and work. This study has also shown that stress has a negative impact on the physical and mental health of the students. It affects their health in terms of anxiety, sleep, and concentration. A study by Zhang et al. (2022) and colleagues investigated the relationship between academic pressure and depression in college students. In this study, it was emphasized that anxiety and hopelessness are the key determinants that mediate the relationship between academic pressure and depression. According to the results obtained in this study, academic stress is positively correlated with increased levels of anxiety, hopelessness, and depression. In other words, it can be said that the relationship between academic stress and depression in college students is mediated by anxiety and hopelessness. The research by Baiju and Rajalakshmi (2021) points to the relationship between academic stress and the psychological well-being of college students. It finds a significant relationship between academic stress and psychological well-being, indicating that stress impacts students' mental health. The study also reports that female students experience higher academic stress than male students. However, no significant gender difference was found in psychological well-being among students. Daniel, F. (2012) examines major stressors among college students through a qualitative review. They identify stressors such as academics, relationships, financial issues, and environmental factors. The study highlights that relationship-related stress (family, peers, faculty) is among the most common. Overall, it concludes that student stress is multidimensional and influenced by personal, social, and institutional factors. The study Saleh, D., Camart, N., & Romo, L. (2017) examines the key predictors of stress among college students. It reports that a large proportion of

students experience psychological distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, indicating high stress levels. The study identifies factors such as low self-esteem, low optimism, low self-efficacy, and reduced life satisfaction as major predictors of stress. Overall, it concludes that these psychological factors play a significant role in students' vulnerability to stress and should be considered in prevention and intervention programs. Alotaibi, Alosaimi, Alajlan, and Bin Abdulrahman (2020) examine the relationship between sleep quality, stress, and academic performance among medical students. The study finds that poor sleep quality is associated with higher levels of psychological stress. It also shows that both stress and sleep disturbances negatively affect academic performance. Overall, the study highlights the importance of good sleep and stress management for improving students' academic outcomes. Sathya Devi and Mohan (2015) examined the sources and effects of stress among college students. The study identifies academic pressure, family expectations, emotional issues, and financial problems as major stressors. It found that academic stress, especially due to expectations from teachers, parents, and self, is the most significant contributor. Overall, the study concludes that unmanaged stress negatively affects students' academic performance and well-being. Yikealo, Tareke, and Karvinen (2018) examined the level of stress among college students at the Eritrea Institute of Technology. The study found that most students experience a moderate level of stress, with academic and environmental factors being the most significant contributors. It also reported that stress levels were not significantly related to gender or academic performance. Overall, the study highlights the need to improve the learning environment to reduce stress and enhance student well-being.

Objectives of the study:

1. To understand the level of stress among undergraduate students.
2. To identify the major factors contributing to academic stress.
3. To examine gender differences in academic stress among undergraduate students.
4. To study the differences in academic stress across different courses (science, commerce, arts, and humanities).

Scope of the Study:

1. Targeting Undergraduate Students: This particular study targets undergraduate students between 18 and 23 years old, thus providing information on stress faced by young adults enrolled in higher education institutions.
2. Academic Stress Factors: Through this research, one will get knowledge about various factors contributing to stress experienced by undergraduates, including workloads, stress, course content, and fear of failure.
3. Differences Between Academic Programs: This study can help compare stress among various academic disciplines, including science, commerce, arts, and humanities.
4. Gender Differences: In addition, this study can highlight gender-based differences regarding academic stress.
5. Concentration on Coping Strategies: Moreover, the research examines coping techniques like mindfulness, rest, and emotional support that would help create programs to boost student well-being.

Limitations of the study:

- Since the number of respondents used in the study is limited, comprising only 56 individuals, then the results may not accurately represent the entire undergraduate population.

- The study is confined to the geographical region of Pune City and hence cannot be generalized to other geographical areas outside Pune City.
- Data collection involved the use of self-report questionnaires which may suffer from bias arising out of social desirability, personal biases, and faulty self-assessments.
- The results of this study are applicable solely to undergraduate students of a certain age bracket, making generalization impossible.

Research methodology:

Research Design

The design that is used for this study is quantitative in nature and is based on the relationship that exists between academic pressure and psychological well-being. By doing so, we can use a correlational study design to observe and study the relationship that exists between the two variables without actually manipulating them.

Population and Sampling

The study targets college students who encounter various academic pressures and stressors. From this population, individuals within the age range of 18-23 years were chosen. The convenience sampling method was used. People were chosen based on ease of access and relevance to the study. The method is appropriate based on time and resource constraints, even though it may not have wide applicability to the results.

Tools Used

Data was collected by using standardized questionnaires for the study. Academic stress was measured by the Perception of Academic Stress Scale, which focuses on the pressure to perform, the amount of work, and the time constraints. The level of psychological well-being was measured by a standardized well-being scale, which includes mood, anxiety, and mental health indicators.

Procedure

The method of data collection for the research was to distribute the questionnaires to the selected sample of the population. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, and the data was collected while maintaining privacy and anonymity. The data collected was then arranged and analyzed appropriately to understand the relationship between academic stress and psychological well-being.

Data Analysis

The sample consisted of 56 college students, with 30 females, 21 males, and 5 who preferred not to say, from universities of Pune, Maharashtra. Data required for this study was collected by using primary sources, a survey was structured carefully with simple and easy words and circulated among the students. The data so far collected through the questionnaires will be evaluated by using various statistical tools, such as tables and bar charts.

Demographic Details		Frequency
Gender	Female	30 (54%)
	Male	21 (38%)
	Prefer not to say	5 (9%)
Age-Group	18 to 24	56 (100%)
Education	Undergraduate	56 (100%)
Stream	Science	22 (39%)
	Commerce	2 (4%)
	Arts	6 (11%)
	Humanities	7 (13%)
Year of Study	Bachelors 1st year	22 (39%)
	Bechelors 2nd year	25 (45%)
	Beachelors 3rd year	7 (13%)
	Bachelors 4th year	2 (4%)
Type of Residence	Parents/Family	23 (41%)
	Hostel/PG	29 (52%)
	Alone	4 (7%)
Type of Family	Nuclear	46 (82%)
	Joint	10 (18%)
Marital Status	Single	53 (95%)
	Prefer not to say	3 (5%)

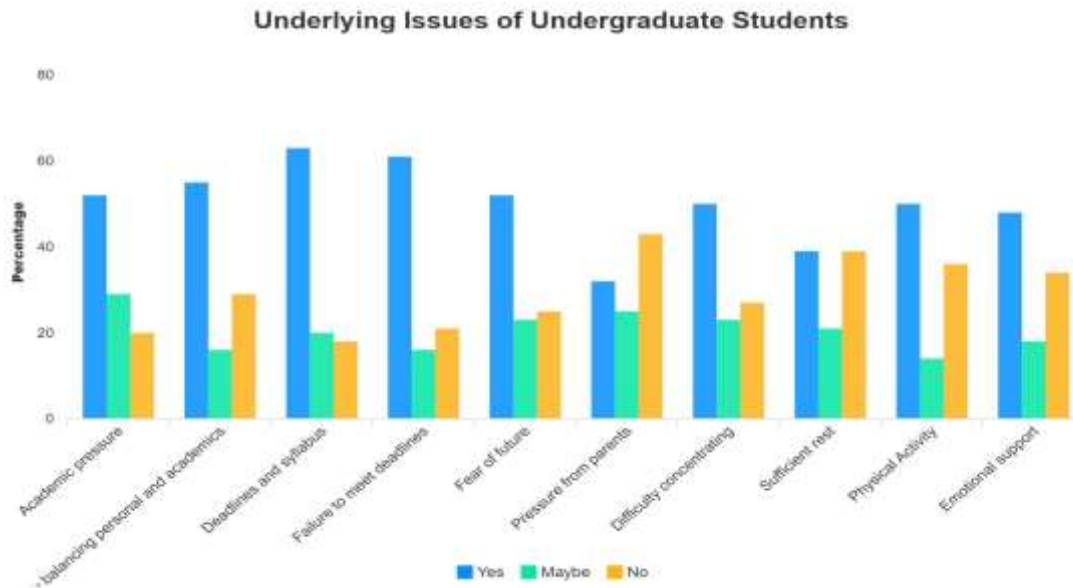
Findings and Discussion:

The study reveals that undergraduate students face medium levels of academic stress. The sources of academic stress for the students were academic workload (28.3%), academic pressure (24.5%), and syllabus stress (17%). The students who had no stress constituted 13.2%.

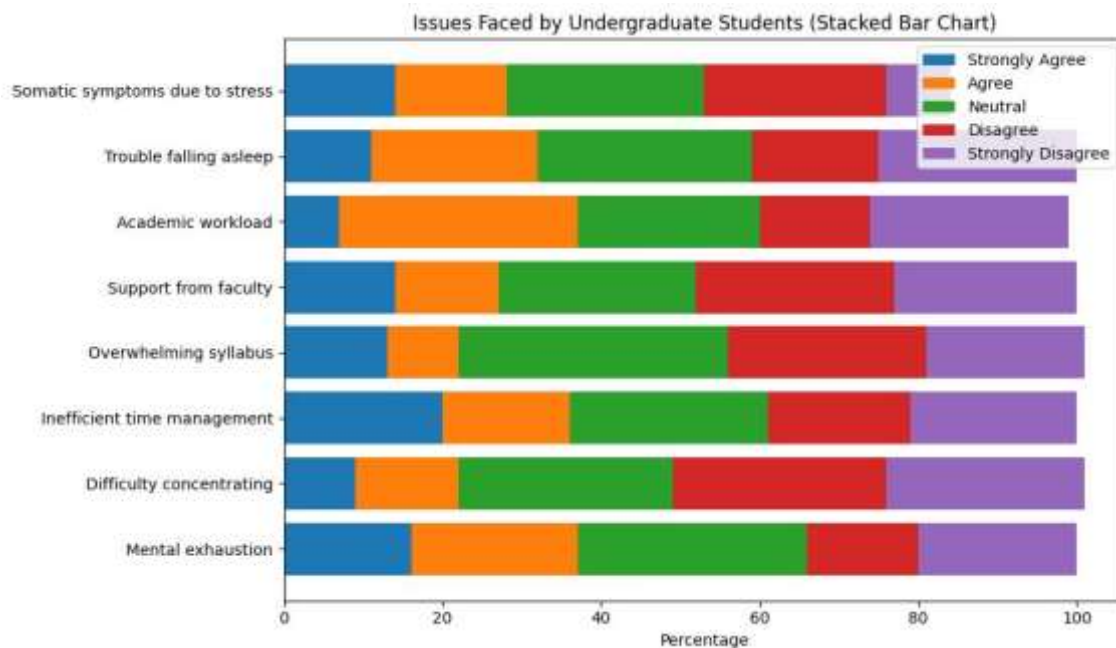
There were mostly medium responses. The common problems faced by the respondents were inability to concentrate, feeling mentally tired, and concerns about the future.

Regarding coping, the most common problem was lack of coping mechanisms (17.5%). There were some coping measures used by students like taking breaks, mindfulness, and emotional support.

Overall, academic stress remains a consistent phenomenon in students' lives, which is mainly driven by academic pressures and academic performance requirements.



The graph shows that the main issues faced by undergraduate students are related to academics. A significant number of students faced issues with deadlines, the syllabus, and failure to adhere to deadlines. This shows that academic stress was a significant problem for students. Fears about the future and inability to concentrate were also faced by a significant number of students. This shows that there were emotional as well as cognitive issues faced by students. Pressure from parents was found to have a lower level of agreement from students. Factors related to lifestyle, such as getting enough rest and exercise, showed mixed responses from students. This shows that there was a lack of consistency in lifestyle. In addition to this, a significant number of students faced a lack of emotional support. Overall, it can be said that academic stress and future uncertainties are the key factors that influence undergraduate students, followed by psychological factors.



Most responses are moderate and diverse, with a number of issues having their highest percentage in the neutral column. Mental exhaustion and trouble sleeping have some degree of concern but are not

overwhelmingly dominant. Difficulty concentrating and an overwhelming syllabus are more towards the side of neutral and disagree. Time management and academic workload have a balanced response, which suggests that students have different experiences. Faculty support is more towards the side of disagreement, which suggests that students are dissatisfied with this particular aspect. There is no particular issue that is extremely high, but there are a number of issues that are moderately high, which suggests that students have different experiences.

STRESS FACTORS:

Academic Workload (28.3%) : The academic workload has been cited as the most stressful factor, contributing 28.3% to the overall stress levels. This implies that a majority of the participants are under stress due to their workload, deadlines, and general academic pressures. This makes it the most stressful factor in general.

Pressure (24.5%) : The pressures faced by the participants contributed 24.5% to their stress levels. This implies that pressures from themselves, their families, or even academic institutions are a major cause of stress. This makes it the second most stressful factor.

Syllabus (17%) : The syllabus contributed 17% to the overall stress levels. This implies that the amount of work in a student's syllabus is a moderate source of stress. Although it is a factor in stress levels, it ranks third in comparison to workload and pressures.

Stress-Free (13.2%) : Approximately 13.2% of the participants were found to be stress-free. This reveals that a small percentage of people are not aware of a high level of stress, possibly because they have better coping skills or less academic pressure.

Lack of Academic Support (9.4%) : The lack of academic support is found in 9.4% of the cases. This reveals that a certain percentage of people are stressed because of a lack of academic support from their teachers or academic institutions, though this is not a major factor.

Lack of Social Support (7.5%) : The lack of social support is found to be the lowest, at 7.5%. This reveals that though social support is an important factor, it is not as important as academic support.

COPING MECHANISM:

Lack of Coping Mechanisms (17.5%) : The lack of coping mechanisms is the highest reported category, making up 17.5% of the total responses. This indicates that a significant percentage of the participants are unable to cope with their stress effectively.

No Stress (15.8%) : Around 15.8% of the participants reported no stress. This indicates that a significant percentage either does not face stress or is able to cope with the stress they face effectively.

Breaks (15.8%) : Taking breaks is also reported by 15.8% of the participants. This indicates that breaks are a common coping mechanism for stress.

Mindfulness (14%) : The percentage for mindfulness is reported at 14%, indicating that mindfulness is a moderately used coping mechanism for stress.

Emotional Support (12.3%) : Emotional support contributes to 12.3% of responses. This shows that seeking emotional support from friends, family, or other sources plays a significant role in stress management, although it is not a dominant aspect.

Physical Activity (8.8%) : Physical activity was found to contribute to 8.8% of responses. This shows that physical activity plays a role in stress management, although it is not as significant as other aspects.

Sleep (8.8%): Sleep was also found to contribute to 8.8% of responses as a method of stress management. This shows that getting enough sleep plays a role in stress management, although it is not a dominant aspect.

Others (7%) : Other aspects contribute to 7% of responses. This shows that there are other ways of managing stress, although it is a minor aspect.

DISCUSSION:

The most common sources of stress are academic workload (28.3%) and academic pressure (24.5%). This means that as identified in previous studies, academic requirements cause most stress among undergraduates. Stress in most of the answers appears to be moderately felt by the students.

Psychological problems such as inability to concentrate on tasks and fear of failure and uncertainties about the future show how much academic stress influences one psychologically. Less contribution from parental and social factors to stress shows how academic stress is institutionally caused, while dissatisfying faculty support reveals academic problems.

Lack of appropriate coping mechanisms (17.5%) is a major source of concern since it is very high. Although methods such as taking breaks and seeking support exist, they appear to be insufficient.

Another key point worth mentioning here is the fact that the lack of high-stress levels and moderate responses all along implies that there was a continuous stressful environment and not a few instances of acute stress. This means that academic stress has become part of the routine for students.

On the whole, academic stress turns out to be a complex phenomenon and the study strongly suggests the importance of institutional reforms, student counseling services, and stress management programs to improve student well-being.

Comparative Analysis:

	Male (21)	Female (30)	Prefer not to say (5)
Academic pressure	8 (38%)	17 (56%)	4 (80%)
Difficulty balancing personal and academics	14 (66%)	14 (46%)	3 (60%)
Deadlines and syllabus	13 (61%)	19 (63%)	3 (60%)
Failure to meet deadlines	14 (66%)	17 (56%)	3 (60%)
Fear of future	10 (47%)	16 (53%)	3 (60%)
Pressure from parents	10 (47%)	7 (23%)	1 (20%)
Difficulty concentrating	12 (57%)	13 (43%)	3 (60%)
Sufficient rest	11 (52%)	9 (30%)	2 (40%)
Physical activities	15 (71%)	12 (40%)	1 (20%)
Emotional support	8 (38%)	8 (26%)	3 (60%)

The table above depicts the distribution of diverse factors leading to stress among learners depending on gender.

It demonstrates the distribution of factors like pressure from studies, deadlines, and personal problems that cause stress among male, female, and non-disclosed participants in regard to gender.

As seen from the data below, performance-based stress is an issue that concerns almost all learners. 52% of male and 56% of female learners face problems with academic pressures, whereas the biggest percentage (80%) belongs to those who did not want to state their gender. Struggling with both personal and study life is mentioned by 66% of males, 50% of females, and 60% of non-disclosed individuals.

Regarding deadlines and the syllabus, 61% of males and 63% of females felt stressed, along with 60% from the other category, which shows that academic work is always an important source of stress. On the same note, inability to complete assignments on time is cited by 66% of males, 56% of females, and 60%

of other students, which implies that time management is another area of concern. In relation to future worries, 57% of males, 53% of females, and 60% of the other category face fear in their lives, highlighting the typical fears for the future career.

Parental pressure is faced by 47% of males, 46% of females, and 60% of others, revealing the importance of external pressures. Finally, lack of concentration affects 57% of males, 50% of females, and 60% of others.

Concerning adequate rest, 52%, 43%, and 40% of the male, female, and other participants, respectively, indicated this stressor, demonstrating relatively inadequate rest for females and others. Regarding physical activities, males show higher participation rates (71%) compared to their counterparts (females, 43%; others, 40%), meaning that males have a more significant relationship with this stressor. Finally, regarding emotional support, 42%, 43%, and 60% of the male, female, and other participants, respectively, indicated that this was an issue, implying that there is relatively more inadequacy in emotional support for others.

From the above findings, academic stress is mainly due to academic pressures, time management problems, and personal issues, and there are some variations in the degree of influence among gender groups.

	Science (38)	Commerce (3)	Arts (6)	Humanities (9)
Academic pressure	20 (52%)	2 (66%)	2 (33%)	5 (55%)
Difficulty balancing personal and academics	22 (57%)	2 (66%)	3 (50%)	4 (44%)
Deadlines and syllabus	25 (65%)	2 (66%)	1 (16%)	7 (78%)
Failure to meet deadlines	22 (57%)	2 (66%)	5 (83%)	5 (55%)
Fear of future	23 (57%)	2 (66%)	2 (33%)	3 (33%)
Pressure from parents	11 (28%)	2 (66%)	3 (50%)	2 (22%)
Difficulty concentrating	21 (55%)	2 (66%)	2 (33%)	3 (33%)
Sufficient rest	13 (34%)	3 (100%)	3 (33%)	4 (44%)
Physical activities	19 (50%)	2 (66%)	3 (50%)	4 (44%)
Emotional support	12 (31%)	2 (66%)	1 (16%)	4 (44%)

The comparative analysis between different subjects such as science, commerce, arts, and humanities shows stress similarities as well as stress specificities for each category. It is evident that science students, who form the largest category, have been constantly stressed in all of these aspects. The most common causes of stress are deadlines and syllabus (65%), difficulty in balancing personal life and academics (57%), and worries about the future (57%). Thus, it becomes clear that academic stress can be caused due to the complex nature of sciences.

The second-largest category of commerce students has shown rather high percentages in almost all stressor types (approximately 66%). It should be highlighted that even though the percentage of people is lower in this category, the results are relatively similar to those for sciences. Nevertheless, all Commerce students get enough sleep (100%), but the high level of stress in other fields proves that this may not help much.

Arts students have a unique trend whereby there is less stress associated with deadlines and syllabus (16%), but a very high number of students fail to meet deadlines (83%). This indicates either procrastination behavior or variation in evaluation methods. In addition, few students lacked emotional support (16%), indicating good social coping techniques. Nevertheless, only one-third of the students participate in physical exercises.

On the other hand, humanities students show high levels of stress, especially regarding deadlines and syllabus (78%), similarly to science students, meaning academic work is still the main source of stress. here is also moderate stress regarding balance between life (44%), emotional support (44%), and physical

activities (44%).

In all streams, the absence of emotional support, which means not having anyone to share one's stress with, seems to be an issue. Regarding physical exercise as a strategy for handling academic stress, the response was moderate and highest among science students (50%).

Overall, it can be observed that even though academic stress is common in all subjects, the reasons for such stress and how students cope with it are different. Thus, intervention programs aimed at developing proper time management skills, developing emotional support networks, and encouraging physical activities would definitely alleviate stress in science and humanities students.

Conclusion

From the findings, it is noted that the students under study have moderate levels of academic stress, which is brought about by factors such as academic workload and performance.

Considering gender, it is clear that stress is felt by everyone irrespective of their gender, although there may be differences in the level of intensity. In the same way, stress is observed in all disciplines, but the causes differ; science and humanities students tend to have more stress associated with syllabus and deadlines.

Overall, academic stress emerges as a consistent and multidimensional issue, highlighting the need for better coping strategies, institutional support, and stress management programs to improve students' well-being.

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