Original Article

Exploration of Academic Stress among Undergraduates of Sukkur IBA University Through the Lens of Gender Differences

JHSS 67-81

Vol. 31 (2), 2023

Sharik Zamir[1] Maria Akhund[2] & Ikhtiar Ahmed Khoso[3]

Abstract

Personal and institutional expectations fall onerous on students resulting in stress. During academic life, students attempt to manage stressors stemming from social, personal, academic, and environmental fronts. Almost every day, students experience academic stress in their university life. This scenario necessitates for this study to explore undergrads academic stress, compare and analyze the differences of academic stress among males and females, in a public sector university. The positivist paradigm applied as the worldview, and quantitative research as a method of inquiry. The sample comprised of 99 (70 males and 29 female) undergrads selected on voluntary-participation criterion, who were enrolled across eight semesters. The student academic stress scale is a standardized and reliable instrument used for data collection. The results indicated students' susceptibility to academic stress was more in females than males. Moreover, different academic stress levels were reported for across various departments. The students need regular interval of checks of academic stress diagnosis and specialized on-campus counseling services to normalize effects of undergrads' academic stress. The implications for future study require to focus on considering qualitative and quantitative methods to glean authentic data with a large sample size to make findings fit for generalizability.

Keywords: Academic stress, undergraduates, gender, scales assessing academic scale

Introduction

The impact of stress people experience passes over to their close ones such as friends, family, and co-workers. The sensitivity to experience stress holds a different influence for different people, and to varying degrees. Stress is feeling of trouble or threat in life that everybody experiences, however, low-level stress is not a problem (WHO, 2020, pp12-13).In other words, stress is known to interfere with interpersonal relationships as well as cultural and educational activities, earning it the moniker "sickness of the century." Stress is an emotional state in which a person feels uneasy and dissatisfied with the circumstances they face, wherein body reacts through modifications or responses on a physical, psychological or emotional level (Gajalakshmi et al., 2012). Further, stress can result from emotions such as frustration, rage, nervousness or anxiety (Kausar, 2010).

Excessive academic burdens can result in apprehensive and worried feelings, which if last for an extended time, can lead to stress; similarly, exams, co-curriculum, lifestyle, and the merit system in the academic contexts, nature of tasks and managing time cause most

[1] Department of Education, Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan
[2] Department of Education, Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan
[3] Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership and Incubation, Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan

student stress (Wahat et al., 2012). More specifically, projects, seminars, lectures, quizzes or assessments, questions, essays, and practicum are the academic responsibilities that students, particularly those enrolled in universities, must undergo for graduation (Yusoff et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Trigueros et al. (2020) defined academic stress as the constant interpersonal and societal pressures that form a psychological state which affects a person's energies. Gajalakshmi et al. (2012) explains thatduring students' academic careers, 10 to 30 percent of students are thought to endure some level of academic stress. Compared to the general community, mental health issues among students have increased in frequency and importance. Moreover, the year of study indicates the stress level of university students, and the incidence of stress escalates as students move from the first year to the fourth year of study (Yusoff et al., 2010). Kausar (2010) found that academic workload and students' perceptions of stress positively correlate among university students in Pakistan. Gajalakshmi et al. (2012) highlighted the results on the causes of stress among students that when compared to psychological issues, exam anxiety accounted for the highest percent (63) of stress. The consequences of untapped academic stress are horrifying, for example, academic pressures are found to have a positive correlation with suicidal thoughts among university students (Yusoff et al., 2010).

A brief literature scan informed that the top ten sources of stress in the workload associated with academics were tests and exams. Moreover, students exhibit excessive exam-related stress that remains throughout the exam period, busy and demanding schedules cause greater stress, which is beneficial for learning because it challenges them to performance, and keep them on-task (Gajalakshmi et al., 2012). Misra and McKean (2000) examined university students' relationships with tension, timekeeping, and heavy workloads, and happiness with their leisure activities. Academic pressures that cause stress in a semester system include grade competitiveness, shortage of time, and problems with time management or work delegation (McKean, 2000) to which students are required to adjust to brand-new demands of the learning environments. Finally, the effects of academic stress lead to psychological stress and vice versa (Kristensen et al., 2023).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The psychological assessment is the person's emotional explanation of a situation that causes a particular functional response in the immediate environment. A variety of hypotheses about stress, psychological health, adaptation, and sentimental, include mental examination as a component. The psychological evaluation method is used by Lazarus' Transactional Model (LTM) of stress to identify responses to upsetting situations (Lazarus, 1984; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This approach incorporates a psychological appraisal defined as the way a person responds to and analyses the sources of stress in daily life. The theory outlines two distinct psychological evaluations, referred to as 'initial diagnosis' and 'final diagnosis', which must take place for a person to get stressed in response to an event (Lazarus, 1984). A condition is classified as hazardous to the person or hazardous to their objectives during initial diagnosis. Similar to this, the person realises through final diagnosis that their potential approach to deal with the challenging situation is insufficient; and when the inadequate circumstance occurs, the occasion results in stress as a reaction (Lazarus, 1984). This model defines about psychological situation of a person and it completely relates with this study as it discusses the gender differences in academic stress which totally relies on psychological issues of both the gender.

The Component Process Model of Scherer (2009) makes use of psychological assessment to explain a person's mental and physical response to events. This paradigm about transactions improves LTM of how many evaluations take place. As opposed to Lazarus's suggestion that there are just two levels of evaluation in response to an event (initial and final), Scherer's model suggests that four specific evaluations occur: a) the immediate effects or importance that an individual thinks a situation to be b) the short and long-term results a circumstance has for people and their goals c) a person's awareness of their potential to adjust to the results of a situation d) how the outcomes of the circumstance are perceived in light of a person's principles and consciousness. According to additional research by Scherer (2009), mental responses as well as many physical responses that are suggested by how a person evaluates conditions deserve special consideration.

Finally, Roseman's Evaluation Theory of Emotions, in contrast to LTM, used the concept of psychological evaluation to put together an illustrated theory that encompasses a wider range of emotions. Roseman (1996) found that pleasant sentiments are triggered by situations that people perceive as trustworthy in terms of their mental processes, while negative feelings are triggered by situations that people perceive as at odds with their objectives. The notion that the occasion was caused by oneself, others, or an unavoidable circumstance will determine whether or not more explicit sensations are felt.

The theoretical framework discussed that whether males or females in general people, perceived stress depends on their cognitive ability which triggers specific circumstances, and their psychological response consists of wide range of emotions. The Lazarus' model discussed that a person's psychological responses depends on the situation. The Scherer's model used Lazarus' model to explain a person's mental and physical response to any condition.. However, Roseman's theory describes the emotional range of a person. The above three theories worked on different concepts but all those concepts derived from the psychological evaluation of a person.

Stress Defined

Stress is the outcome of stressors caused by a person, experience, situation, relation that develops overt or covert uneasiness within individuals with varying levels of intensity (Nair, 2023). The surrounding environment provides sources of stress components that a person perceives as dangerous to their well-being. Some people mistakenly believe that having no stress will lead to good health and happiness. When stress is well managed, it increases motivation and productivity (Levine et al., 2018). Stress, if improperly managed, can be harmful and even fatal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Melvin (2014), stress has two categories: internal and external; the internal determinants include dietary status, level of anticipation and imagination, general health, emotional well-being, and the amount of sleep one gets; on the other hand, the external stress impacts on someone's capacity to socialize in family relationships as well as their physical environment, financial situation, and other relevant facets (p.193). According to American National Institute for Mental Health [NIMH] (2014) intellectual, psychological, physiological, and behavioral warning indicators all fall under one of four categories of stress. According to Sutton (2011), intellectual symptoms include difficulty focusing, memory issues, pessimism, bad judgment, and persistent concern. The psychological symptoms of stress include irritability, melancholy, feeling overwhelmed, and moodiness(Sutton, 2011). Examples of behavioural symptoms include wanting to eat very little, resting less than usual, doing too much of certain activities like exercise or spending, forming worried behaviours like wandering or panic, and abusing drugs to deal with stress (Sutton, 2011). The physical signs include migraine, bowel problems, heart palpitations, and drowsiness (Sutton, 2011).

Academic Stress

Academic stress represents a form of mental suffering induced by the frustration of academic failure or the fear of such failure, or even the knowledge that such failure may occur (Khan, 2013). According to Berg and Keinan (1986), the high expectations students set for themselves are a significant stressor that contribute to academic stress. Moreover, subjecting students to ongoing exams and coursework tasks also lead to academic stress (Bean & Hammer, 2006). Similarly, Kahlon (1993) discovered that exam anxiety, living up to parental expectations, the lecturer's demeanour, a friendly exam system, and lack of parental assistance contribute to stress. According to Gadzella (1994), academic stress is comprised of four components: stress, adjustments, pressure, and demands placed on oneself; for instance, when the tuition is due and a task or assignment is due, the student will feel stressed. When multiple assignments, presentations, and exams are due concurrently, it turns out as coursework overload (Bowyer, 2012. Gadzella (1994) highlighted that poor interpersonal ties between students and their friends and family might have an impact on their mental health. According to Bean and Hammer (2006) 42.5 percent of students indicated moderate level of tension, while 27 percent reported unmanageable level of stress, and 55 percent must overlook one topic to prepare for the other subject. Jayakumar and Sulthan (2013) determined typical causes of academic stress as: poor instruction, lack of material to be learned, competition for grades, regular examinations, extensive study sessions, poor communication, a lot of labour, insufficient resources, irregular attendance, uncertainty about the discipline to pursue, and a lack of library resources. Khan and Ayyub (2013) found that the major causes of academic stress attribute to excessively difficult coursework, worry about failing coursework, lack of preparation, apprehension about presentations and exams, lengthy lecture schedule, and worries about academic aptitude. However, academic stress indeed has a significant impact on student's mental health and academic performance.

Understanding the sources of stress in a student's life is crucial, especially when academic pressure is usually miscomprehended. The student needs to enrol in a fully loaded challenging class to graduate. According to Bowyer (2012), numerous academicians have looked into the connections between workload and health utilizing diverse study designs and methodological stances. Bowyer (2012) suggested that the amount of time required for interaction and independent study, the types and timing of examinations, the quantity and degree of work, institutional elements like instruction, resources, and characteristics of students like persistence and enthusiasm turn into study burden. According to Kausar (2010), the academic burden is the average weekly amount of time spent on things like attending lectures, studying for exams, working on homework at home, visiting the library, and researching information. According to Ong and Cheong (2009), academic stresses were most common, accounting for 63 percent of all reported stressors. Overall, workload, an excessive number of tests, aggregate grade point average, challenging courses, and instructor qualities were the top five identified stressors; each course has a set number of credits, which also represents the workload for the student. So, the environment sets ground for stress to germinate and for students to dare to face, defend or give up.

Academic Stress and Gender

Several studies showcased significant variations of differences between the stress experiences of males and females, making the study of stress concerning gender fascinating. Compared to men, women are more prone to seek out social assistance; Brougham et al. (2009) informed that a stress receptor in the brain controls how differently men and women metabolic reactions to stressful situations; as opposed to men, who are more inclined to

associate with the male sex role, women who are more likely to sympathize with the feminine type function, the stress related to gender role recognition differs for each person. According to Anbumalar et al. (2017), women showed higher levels of positivity and felt less stress than men. Similarly, Almedia and Kessler (1998) found that when measuring stressful events, the persistence of some role-related stressors and other chronic and everyday stressors were considered, women experienced more academic stress than men. Students are prone to experiencing stress in a high-tech educational setting like a university (Niethammer et al., 2000) where the pressure on students, depends on the time constraint, and hard to set out in examinations. However, the literature is replete with evidences for both genders, but in international context only.

Academic Stress in Local Context

Academic stress has diverse purposes and results in the context of Pakistan. For example, Saeed et al. (2022) reported that nearly all undergraduates (96.25%) felt academic stress; and the most significant factor of academic stress was lack of time management. In same vein, Shakeel et al. (2022) found considerable portion of academic stress noticeably due to examinations and pressures from parents. In another study, Sarwar (2021) found attributors of academic stress among medical students such as lack of technological support, career anxiety, and financial constraints. Similarly, Bilal and Riaz (2020) conducted a study on candidates repeating entry test for medical and dental college's admission test. The finding informed somewhat similarity in levels of academic stress between male and female MDCAT candidates. Contrarily, Akhtar and Iqbal (2021) study informed no significant relationship between academic stress and university student performance. However, Khan et al. (2019) found more academic stress among female than male university students; the study further reported that academic stress predicts test anxiety among students. The quantitative study of Saleem and Akram (2018) reported that the academic stress decreases when college students improve their psychological health, which ultimately creates a positive impact on academic performance. However, exclusive studies on academic stress and gender still need attention in various national contexts of Pakistan.

Research has proven that university students have academic stress anywhere from mild to severe levels. The literature highlights negative effects of academic stress on undergrads, however, the impact is observed differently for males and females because of their psycho-social and physiological orientations. Since, the scope of academic stress is vast, therefore, a borderline need to be drawn. Considering the fact that some studies conducted on academic stress at national level, still there is dearth of research in the local context of the study, Sukkur IBA University, which alludes to a knowledge gap, which this study attempted to address by inquiring academic stress in undergrads across departments, and among male and female genders. The outcome would suggest implications for teachers, parents, and social support circle of students to improve academic stress within their respective social and professional positions. Hence, the knowledge gap necessitates the formulation of research questions to guide the course of inquiry: what is the academic stress level of undergrads in a public sector university; and what are the gender related differences of stress level between males and females?

Methodology

The answers to research questions were sought through the quantitative research design that allows to collect and analyze cross-sectional data from large sample size for running descriptive and inferential tests to find out frequency, mean, standard deviation and

many more (Bhandari, 2022). This empirical study employed a deductive approach to collect and analyze data (Streefkerk, 2023) for finding the difference in the effect of academic stress of undergrads. The justification to opt for survey strategy was that most undergrads prefer in-person survey over other types, and reaching out large sample is less economical (McCombes, 2022). The data were collected from Sukkur, located in the Southeastern Sindh. Sukkur is the third largest city in Sindh with own district and administrative township. The institution selected for research is Sukkur IBA University with over 4000 students, whose history dates back to 1994. The data collection initiated in the natural setting of the university where students were approached during break time to seek their formal consent for volunteer participation in the study. Participants consented for participation were later consulted and briefed about the purpose of the study then the survey were distributed. The unit of analysis was undergrads who willingly participated in the survey. The reason for undergrads was due to the fact that academic stress directly links with the student-life and only these students can provide pertinent information related to study.

Instrumentation

A survey strategy was used to conduct the non-experimental study. The forty-item survey was adapted to measure academic stress. The instrument had two sections—first section included demographics of participants; second section contained Academic Stress Scale (AcSS) by Kim (1970). There are five categories of the scale—personal inadequacy items 1 to 8, fear of failure items 9 to 18, interpersonal difficulties with teachers from items 19 to 24, and teacher-student relationship/teaching methodology items 25 to 32. The survey employed five-level rating scale: 1=no stress, 2=slight stress, 3=moderate stress, 4=high stress and 5=extreme stress to measure predictors of academic stress. The AcSS is a reliable, validated, and tested instrument (Alam & Halder, 2018; Gill, 2017) to detect stress in students. The data were analyzed on SPSS version 23. The internal consistency test yielded 85.5 on Cronbach's alpha which indicates that the score was good and the instrument was reliable. The sample items of the instrument are given in table:

Table 1

Academic Stress Scale

S. No.	Statement	NS	SS	MS	HS	ES
1	Teachers make too many extra demands on students					
2	Poor interest in some subjects					
3	Progress report to parents					

Note. Adopted from Kim (1970).

Data Collection

The data collection began with the formal consent form dissemination, later, survey forms were distributed to participants on mutually agreed date and time; the responses were collected, checked for missing forms, coded, inserted on software, data were cleaned for missing values and typos, and analyzed according to statistical tests in line with the research questions, and write up results (McCombes, 2022).

Data Analysis

The data were entered on SPSS V. 23 for analysis. First, the internal consistency of the survey was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. Second, the demographics involved information pertaining to gender, age, department and semester of the participants. Third, the interpretation of mean score was determined to make categories of students on the levels of academic stress. Fourth, a standard was adopted to compute effect mean values to draw meaningful information. Fifth, the frequency, was measured to find differences in male and female undergrads. Finally, the mean and standard deviation were computed for all survey items to highlight the differences between male and female students.

Sample

The target population was all exiting students from semester one to eight of Sukkur IBA University. The accessible population comprised undergrads who gave consent for participation in the study. The volunteer sampling of non-probability sampling technique was used for the inclusion of participants. A total of 120 students consented for participation in survey; however, 99 participants returned duly filled survey forms. A small sample size might be due to lack of seriousness among students, and absence of research culture among other reasons.

Results

The survey questionnaire administered to find out the level of academic stress in undergrads and to examine the gender differences in relation to academic stress of university students. In this part, data are presented systematically as per the format of the adapted survey. The data were collected from the respondents who volunteered to respond to survey form. The findings were related to the research questions that guided the study. This part includes results and interpretation of data.

The internal consistency of survey questionnaire was tested through reliability test on SPSS. Table 2 represents the reliability coefficient for five aspects of academic stress: personal inadequacy .785, fear of failure .791, interpersonal difficulties with teachers .704, teacher-student relations or teaching methodology .879, and inadequate lab or library facilities .826. The result of Cronbach's Alpha near to 1.00 indicates good internal consistency among scale items (Cronk, 2019).

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

Aspects	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Personal inadequacy	8	.785
Fear of Failure	10	.791
Interpersonal difficulties with teachers	6	.704
Teacher-Student Relations/Teaching Methodology	8	.879
Inadequate lab/library facilities	8	.826

The characteristics of respondents in first column represent gender, age classification, departments and semester. The first row informs item, category, results, and per cent, and mean scores of respondents. Table 3 shows male (70) representation constituted 70.7 percent while female (29) with 29.3 percent. The age range of respondents indicated that 53

respondents with 53.5 percent were of 22 to 25 years, and 45 respondents with 45.5 percent were of 18 to 21 years, and only 1 respondent with 1 percent was in the other category of age. The department wise participation of respondents indicated 32 from mathematics with 32.32 percent; 29 from business with 29.29 percent; 25 from accounting and finance with 25.25 percent; from education 13 with 13.13 percent. Semester wise the participation of respondents remained 67 from semester seven with 67.67 percent, and 32 from foundation semester.

Table 3

Demographics of Sample

Item	Category	Results	Percent	Mean
Gender	Male	70	70.70	35
	Female	29	29.29	24.5
Age	18-21	45	45.5	22.5
	22-25	53	53.5	26.5
	Others	1	1	0.5
Departments	Mathematics	32	32.32	8
	Business	29	29.29	7.25
	Accounting and Finance	25	25.25	6.25
	Education	13	13.13	3.25
Semesters	Foundation(prep)	32	32.32	18
	Seven	67	67.67	33.5

The measurement of academic stress required a stress scale to categories gathered responses according to five range limits to make data meaningful for analysis and interpretation. Cohen's (1983) perceived stress scale holds five ranges and respective categories (Table 4). The range from zero to 40 indicates no stress category; range 41 to 80 shows slight stress category; range 81 to 120 signal moderate stress category; range 121 to 160 denote high stress category; and range 161 to 200 reflect extreme stress category.

Table 4

The Interpretation of Stress Scores

Range	Category	Respondents
0-40	No Stress	None
41-80	Slight Stress	1
81-120	Moderate Stress	22
121-160	High Stress	68
161-200	Extreme Stress	8

Note. Adapted from Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Cohen et al. (1983)

The results showed that no stress category indicates no numbers, which suggests that all students suffer some kind of stress. Only one student shows slight stress with 41-80. Almost a quarter (22%) indicated moderate stress with range of 81 to 120. Alarmingly, more than half (68.6%) undergrads exhibited high level stress with stress values ranging between 121 and 160. Approximately one out of ten suffers from extreme stress with range score 161 to 200.

The mere mean score informs little, however, utilizing mean effect for the interpretation of mean values, yields interesting information. To do so, table 5 presents the mean result interpretation to determine the effect of mean values, and categorizes data analysis to achieve meaning on gathered data on a five-point mean range.

Table 5

The Mean Effect Interpretation

Mean Range	Interpretation
1-1.8	Very Low
1.81-2.6	Low
2.61-3.2	Moderate
3.21-4.2	High
4.21-5	Very High

Note. Adopted from Moidunny (2009)

The stress level comparison of data analysis between male and female undergrads comprises mean and standard deviation (Table 6). The results for determining the stress levels indicate that male mean score n = 70 is 3.4 and the standard deviation 0.465 whereas female mean score n = 29 is 3.51 and the standard deviation 0.431. The mean score for male and female on mean effect interpretation table (table 4) indicates high academic stress level. This signifies that both male and female undergrads suffer from high stress, which may attribute to lower performance in university. Moreover, the computed average 3.46 of male and female mean value together does indicate high effect of academic stress suggesting immediate remedial operations for the well-being of undergrads.

Table 6

Mean and Standard Deviation Differences between Male and Female Undergrads

Category	n	Mean	SD
Male	70	3.40	0.465
Female	29	3.51	0.431
Total	99	3.46	

However, the mean difference (0.11) marginally supports the notion that academic stress is higher in female than in male undergrads.

The breakdown of instrument response on academic stress indicators for male and female show highest mean score in male 4.99 which indicates that teachers do not listen to male students, whereas the vale is 3.55 in female, here, the academic stress is significant in males than females, the mean effect also indicates very high academic stress in male compared to high academic stress in female (Table 7). Moreover, the mean scores for male 4.37 and female 4.21 indicate students' lack of concentration during study hours causing very high stress in male and female students. Similarly, the mean score in male 4.15 and female 4.15 on academic stress indicator suggest that lack of space for study put them in high academic stress.

Table 7

Mean Comparison between Male and Female Undergrads

		Male			Female			Total		
		Mean	n	SD	Mean	n	SD	Mean	N	SD
1	Extra Demands	3.57	70	1.2	3.59	29	1.02	3.58	99	1.14
2	Poor Interest	3.44	70	1.13	3.41	29	0.95	3.43	99	1.07
3	Progress Reports	2.61	70	1.32	2.90	29	2.90	2.70	99	1.26
4	No humour	3.66	70	1.19	4.03	29	0.82	3.77	99	1.11
5	Lack concentration	4.37	70	0.87	4.21	29	0.86	4.32	99	0.87
6	Trying to recall	3.76	70	0.96	3.90	29	0.90	3.80	99	0.94
7	Exams tension	2.97	70	1.22	2.90	29	0.86	2.95	99	1.12
8	Lack self-confidence	3.23	70	1.36	3.17	29	1.20	3.21	99	1.31
9	Teacher don't listen	4.99	70	0.12	3.55	29	0.83	4.57	99	0.80
10	Conflict with friend	3.39	70	1.45	3.38	29	1.29	3.38	99	1.40
11	More punishment	3.29	70	1.37	3.28	29	1.39	3.28	99	1.37
12	Result tension	3.43	70	1.27	3.48	29	1.02	3.44	99	1.20
13	Hesitate to question	3.57	70	1.20	3.48	29	1.06	3.55	99	1.15
14	Biased attitude	3.94	70	1.09	3.97	29	0.91	3.95	99	1.03
15	Lack of space for study	4.16	70	0.91	4.14	29	0.95	4.15	99	0.92
16	Unaware of exam	3.77	70	1.30	4.17	29	0.85	3.89	99	1.19
17	Lack confidence	3.17	70	1.32	2.90	29	0.98	3.09	99	1.23
18	Lack opportunity	3.06	70	1.18	3.45	29	1.02	3.17	99	1.14
19	Socio-economic status	3.26	70	1.32	2.83	29	1.49	3.13	99	1.38
20	Slow getting curriculum	3.44	70	1.26	3.66	29	1.20	3.51	99	1.24
21	Level of exams	3.76	70	1.15	4.10	29	0.77	3.86	99	1.06
22	Unable to complete assignments	3.44	70	1.29	3.86	29	1.13	3.57	99	1.26
23	Lack communication	3.47	70	1.26	3.97	29	0.91	3.62	99	1.18
24	Monotonous style	2.81	70	1.30	3.21	29	1.21	2.93	99	1.28
25	No discussion	2.74	70	1.24	2.90	29	1.08	2.79	99	1.19
26	Lack of cooperation	2.94	70	1.44	3.31	29	1.14	3.05	99	1.37
27	Not being fluent	3.24	70	1.29	3.55	29	1.06	3.33	99	1.23
28	Difficulty in speaking	3.01	70	1.44	3.59	29	0.98	3.18	99	1.34
29	Teacher is fast	3.23	70	1.16	3.62	29	0.82	3.34	99	1.08
30	Teacher lack interest	3.60	70	1.18	4.00	29	0.82	3.72	99	1.10
31	Exam syllabus is heavy	3.23	70	1.21	3.17	29	0.97	3.21	99	3.21
32	Inferiority complex	3.69	70	1.16	3.59	29	1.30	3.66	99	1.20
33	Discussion with parents	3.77	70	1.24	3.83	29	1.23	3.79	99	1.23
34	Grasp subject matter	3.14	70	1.27	3.62	29	0.94	3.28	99	1.20
35	Incomplete material	3.69	70	1.12	3.86	29	1.03	3.74	99	1.09
36	Eleventh hour prep	3.27	70	1.24	3.62	29	0.90	3.37	99	1.16
37	Important subject matter	2.73	70	1.33	3.03	29	1.12	2.82	99	1.27
38	Getting along with opposite gender	3.13	70	1.34	2.72	29	1.16	3.01	99	1.30
39	Deficient subject knowledge	2.79	70	1.52	3.34	29	1.37	2.95	99	1.49
40	Deficient lab facility	3.29	70	1.46	3.07	29	1.41	3.22	99	1.44

Note: Adapted from Kim's (1970) Scales Assessing Academic Stress

The lowest mean score in male was 2.61, which represents low academic stress on mean effect table for progress reports, while the mean score for the same in female remains at 2.90, which shows more academic stress in female than male. Interestingly, the second

highest mean score 4.17 suggested that females are unaware of exams, while the mean score for male came out 3.77, which show high academic stress on mean effect table.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine academic stress differences between male and female in a public sector university. The sample comprised of 99 respondents wherein almost all students (98 percent) reported feelings of academic stress from moderate to extreme levels. The literature also confirmed that 61 percent of Thai medical college reported moderate stress (Awadh et al., 2013). This result is consistent with those of earlier studies that identified academic workload and trouble in understanding lectures as some of the pressures that students experience (Al-Sowygh, 2013).

The second finding surfaced as females had higher total means than males despite the gender differences in mean scores being negligible. According to the gender disparities in response to stressors, women are more likely than men to experience academic stress. This is understandable given that studies (Calvarese, 2015; Khan et al., 2019) showed that more females than males experienced higher levels of academic stress. This is widely known because research from institutions in the UK, India, Malaysia, and Thailand also corroborated that students see exams and the volume of material they had to learn throughout the academic year as stressful (Albusalih et al., 2017).

This study indicated that university students undergo much stress. But the levels of perceived stress and managing it differ in males and females. In previous studies, the results indicate that male students experience more academic stress than females (Kumari, 2017). However, in this study, the results are the opposite. However, some stress indicators such as examinations, course load, inadequate space, and teacher's concentration on students are the main stressors that cause stress among students on the same level. These findings situate in line with that of Shakeel and Fazal (2022), which identified academic workload and failure to earn satisfactory grades as major sources of stress.

Implications

The roles of teachers, parents and social circle are crucial for leading a stress-free academic life. Teachers' professional and personal characteristics during interaction with students can lift-up students' spirits. Similarly, parenting style matters the most; the closer the communication gap between parents and their grown-ups, the more frank and open students be. Social circle has its influence on students' life, hence; it helps in diffusing academic stress if positivity and encouraging attitudes of friends is offered frequently and at the right time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of the study centered on finding the academic stress level of university students at the first place, and examining the differences of academic stress between male and female undergraduates. The study findings reported that the public university students experienced considerable levels of academic stress; and urge university administration to reevaluate and prioritize list of curricular and academic activities, number of interactive sessions to deliver, and judicious analysis and justifies rationale for student assignment completion like presentations, and evaluations while still being able to meet the requirements. Theses strives contribute in the exiting body of knowledge at the local level.

The study has probable limitations. The power of generalizability of results poses a limitation as the study sample was too small to suggestion implications at broader level,

which restricts is replicability in other similar contexts. Moreover, the data were based on a self-reporting survey which engenders subjectivity and biasness which that cannot be verified independently because the responses reflected respondents' thoughts and feelings in closed-ended survey, which limits the freedom of respondents' expression, however, exploring views and opinions is possible through interviews where participants openly share their academic stress experiences. In a way, an exploratory sequential design of mixed methods would do justice whereby results of phase one leads and guides the course of inquiry at the second phase. The results indicated that female students experience greater academic stress than male students. But, the scope of this study covered only the identification of academic stress among male and female university students, and defocused exploring and suggesting ways to reduce academic stress, and provision of assistance to deal with stressors. The results suggested that decrease in academic disappointments, educational conflicts, heavy workloads, and anxiety can minimize academic stress. Moreover, a negative correlation exists between students' mental health and academic stress. There are crucial ramifications for teachers, consultants, researchers, and students. As a result, the onus of responsibility falls on teachers and parents for creating a stress-free and welcoming environment at school and home for the academic development and well-being. A self-less cooperation among teachers, parents, and students can go a long way to reduce academic stress, and achieve life goals. Future studies on different grade-level students will provide useful insights if coupled with coping and defensive strategies against academic stress. More future studies may employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to dig deep and uncover useful insights about socio-psychological or other factors contributing to academic stress in undergrads.

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