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Investigating the Stressors among University Students in China

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Abstract

This research investigated the impact of stressors on stress levels among students in Shandong Province, China. Utilizing online and self-administered surveys, data was gathered from 384 respondents and was analyzed using SPSS. The findings revealed a positive correlation between relationships, personal factors, environmental factors, and students' stress levels. The study's theoretical implications, identification of research gaps in the literature, and culturally inclusive framework were highlighted. Moreover, the research suggested that Chinese painting therapy could promote mental peace, reduce stress levels, and enhance students' professional growth. By shedding light on stressors such as relationships, personal factors, and environmental factors, the study illustrated their influence on student stress levels. Given the increasing prevalence of stressors affecting students, the study recommended the implementation of Chinese painting experience classes in universities, which could alleviate stress and promote physical well-being. Furthermore, the research underscored the need for more studies examining how stressors contribute to heightened stress levels among students, emphasizing the significance of understanding the experiences of Chinese students in this context.

Keywords: environment, painting, stressors, stress levels

Introduction

The emergence of depression among college students can be notably influenced by academic stress. This category of stress encompasses the pressures associated with exams, assignments, educational environments, performance evaluations, and other academic demands (Zhang et al., [2022](#)). Stress, as Kültz ([2020](#)) defines it, represents a multifaceted interaction of biological and psychological tensions. It occurs when individuals, whether human or animal, encounter difficulties in effectively coping with emotional or physical threats, whether real or perceived

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In the modern era, often characterized as the millennial age, students are perceived as especially vulnerable in a rapidly changing society. Despite living in an era where education is widely available, disparities in academic achievement among students persist. These variations can be linked to the academic stress that students face, which arises from personal ambitions for success as well as external pressures from parents and educators (Yumnam, [2022](#)).

College students grapple with substantial levels of stress, necessitating the development of adaptive coping strategies that evolve over time. These stressors encompass internal and external pressures, including the pursuit of excellence, financial constraints, apprehensions about the future, societal challenges, and potential opportunities. Consequently, insufficient coping mechanisms can lead to anxiety, alcohol-related problems, depression, and various other mental health issues among college students (Choi, [2020](#)).

The weight of academic stress isn't solely borne by students but also impacts parents significantly. In our fast-paced contemporary world, students encounter relentless competition at every step of their academic path. Academic stress arises when the academic demands surpass an individual's coping capabilities. Interestingly, despite the widespread recognition of student stress, there exists a noticeable dearth of research aimed at identifying the specific factors that influence stress levels among university students, particularly within Chinese universities.

Problem Statement

Academic stress represents a widespread challenge transcending national borders, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities, necessitating a contextual understanding. It can be conceptualized as the culmination of a student's interactions with environmental stressors, their cognitive appraisal of these stressors, and their coping mechanisms in response to academic-related pressures, which may trigger psychological or physiological reactions (Laith & Vaillancourt, [2022](#)).

While academic stress is recognized as a prevalent issue and significant stressor among adolescents worldwide, research indicates that Chinese students experience higher levels of academic stress compared to their counterparts in Western societies (Cheung et al., [2020](#)). The impact of academic stress on the mental health of Chinese adolescents has emerged as a pressing public health concern in recent years, persisting as a serious

challenge affecting students' overall well-being. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to investigate academic stress and the factors influencing stress levels among Chinese students.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the relationship between relations and students' stress level in China?

RQ2: What is the relationship between personal factors and students' stress level in China?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between environmental factors and students' stress level in China?

Research Objectives

RO1: To determine the relationship between relations and students' stress level in China.

RO2: To determine the relationship between personal factors and students' stress level in China.

RO3: To determine the relationship between environmental factors and students' stress level in China.

Significance of Study

The current research study on student stress represents a significant and relevant area of inquiry with far-reaching implications for education, psychology, and public health. This research holds considerable importance for several reasons, as it profoundly impacts individuals, organizations, and society as a whole.

First and foremost, the current study is critical for addressing and understanding the physical and mental health of student. By exploring efficient strategies to overcome the stress level, the research aims to increase the overall student well-being and endorse healthier lifestyles. Moreover, current research plays an essential role in alleviating and preventing stress-related activities among students. By finding coping mechanisms and interventions, it seeks to mitigate the adverse effects of stress and foster resilience. Secondly, stress among students can adversely affect performance, making it compulsory to identify determinants that impact the stress and develop strategies to enhance student performance.

This study aims to discover insights that can improve academic outcomes for students.

Furthermore, the results of the study serve as a foundation for encouraging a positive approach to student life, contributing to academic success and personal development. By elucidating factors that impact the stress of students and their well-being, this research study increases the overall outcomes and experiences of students.

Literature Review

Stress and Academic Stress

As per Yikealo et al. (2018), stress is a mental or physical response that arises from an individual's cognitive evaluation of stimuli and results from their interaction with the environment. The presence of stress is contingent upon the presence of a stressor. Liu (2023) further defined stressor as anything that tests an individual's ability to adapt or triggers a response in their body or mind. Stress can stem from various sources, including environmental, psychological, biological, and social factors.

Numerous studies, such as those conducted by Yang et al. (2021), have highlighted a strong correlation between stress and college students. Stress is viewed as an integral part of students' lives and can significantly impact their coping mechanisms in response to the demands of academic life. This is particularly true as academic tasks often entail challenging and stressful activities (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Adom et al. (2020) define academic stress as the anxiety and pressure stemming from educational pursuits. The pursuit of a degree and education itself often brings about substantial pressure, including the stress of managing coursework, time balancing, and engaging in extracurricular activities.

Academic stress among students has been extensively studied, with researchers identifying various stressors such as excessive assignments, competition with peers, experiencing failures, financial constraints, strained relationships with classmates or instructors, and family issues or challenges at home. At the institutional level, stressors include overcrowded lecture halls, the pressure of meeting semester system requirements, and insufficient resources to support academic work (Ameen & Sheriff, 2023).

Lutfianawati et al. (2021) suggest that when individuals face these challenges, they may become disorganized, disoriented, and less capable of

coping, leading to stress-related health issues. The pressure to excel in exams or tests, along with time constraints, creates a highly stressful academic environment. This stress can impact social relationships both within and outside the university, as noted by Mishra (2022), due to conflicts arising from the social aspect of one's life. Muliani et al. (2020) also highlight that studies indicate undergraduate students often have to manage the potential adverse effects of stress on their academic performance.

Factors Influencing Students

Student academic performance can indeed be influenced by a multitude of factors. Eisen et al. (2008) define sources of stress as any situation or event that poses a threat to individuals' daily functioning, necessitating adjustments. Similarly, Phinney and Haas (2003) highlight specific sources of stress among students, including financial difficulties, domestic responsibilities, job-related responsibilities while in school, and a demanding academic workload. These stressors collectively contribute to the challenges students face in maintaining their academic performance.

Relationship abuse encompasses oppressive and coercive behaviors aimed at exerting power and control over a current or former intimate partner. This abuse can manifest in emotional, financial, sexual, or physical forms and may involve threats, isolation, and intimidation. Abuse tends to escalate over time. Additionally, relationship issues can arise from various sources, such as changes in relationships, conflicts with roommates, collaboration with unfamiliar individuals, interactions with strangers, and family-related problems (Quin, 2017).

Students often experience stress due to these issues, leading them to spend a significant amount of time thinking about solutions, which can result in distraction or divided attention from their academic work. While relationships may initially seem straightforward, they can ultimately cause a considerable amount of stress, particularly in the lives of students (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020).

Personal factors can indeed lead to significant levels of stress and play a crucial role in various aspects of a student's life. These factors can vary widely from person to person, resulting in different perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Slimmen et al., 2022). They can manifest in numerous ways that ultimately impact student performance and increase stress levels.

Examples of such personal factors include changes in living environment (Nabaseruka, [2010](#)), financial difficulties Mofatteh ([2021](#)), health problems Asif et al. ([2020](#)), and heavy workload (Cheung et al., [2020](#)). The combined effect of these factors contributes significantly to heightened stress levels among students.

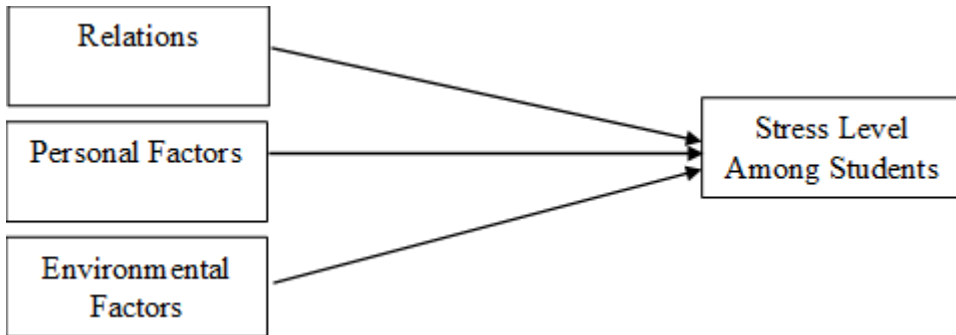
College students' academic stress encompasses various factors within the academic environment, including coursework, group projects, organizational commitments, as well as attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to academic demands (Choi, [2020](#)). In a study by Watson and Watson ([2016](#)), the researchers investigated how emotional intelligence and coping self-efficacy influenced college students' academic stress. They discovered that coping self-efficacy and emotional intelligence were notable predictors of academic stress, with emotional intelligence playing a significant moderating role in the relationship between coping self-efficacy and academic stress.

Selvam et al. ([2023](#)) pointed out that the transition from a college to a university environment can lead to an increase in perceived stress levels among students. This shift significantly alters the structure of students' learning environments and impacts their daily academic and non-academic activities. Such situations, characterized by high ambiguity and low controllability, are often seen as stressful life events (von Keyserlingk et al., [2022](#)). However, the campus has also implemented measures to help alleviate student stress, such as encouraging faculty to offer optional finals and allowing students to take certain courses on a pass/no pass basis to fulfill academic requirements.

Research Framework

The base of any research plan is the framework which is the focal point of all the study (Ennis, [1999](#)). The interrelated set of concepts which gives a course to the study is called the research framework. In this current research study, the independent variables are stressors which include relations, personal factors and environmental factors, while dependent variable is stress level among students.

Figure 1
Research Framework



Research Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant effect of relations on level of stress among university students in China.

H2: There is a significant effect of personal factors on level of stress among university students in China.

H3: There is a significant effect of environmental factors on level of stress among university students in China.

Research Methodology

The researcher gathered information for this study from students of Chinese universities, including Qufu Normal University, Shandong University of Art and Design, University of Jinan and Linyi University in Shandong Province, China, who are the proposed audiences.

The participants of the research study were students. The data was acquired using a self-administered questionnaire. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to determine the sample quantity for the research. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970), 384 questionnaires were suitable for this research study completed by students.

The survey was conducted using a self-administrated questionnaire to collect data from participants, ensuring impartiality among participants. In the following section, the researcher explored the variables stressors (relations, personal factors and environmental factors) and stress levels among students. Every new question introduced to the instrument asks for feedback from all responses. A Likert scale of five points with the values

ranging from 1 for strongly disagreeing to 5 for strongly agreeing, was used to collect the designated respondent opinions for all the variables.

Table 1
Variables and Authors

Sr. No	Variable	Items	Source
01	Relations	7	Husky et al. (2021)
02	Personal Factors	6	Sharma and Kaur (2011)
03	Environmental Factors	7	Kuang-Tsan and Fu-Yuan (2017)
04	Stress level among Students	6	Yikealo et al. (2018)

Data analysis of the study was conducted using the "Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS)" to describe the descriptive analysis and to find the general understanding of respondents. SPSS is a widely recognized software program that provides researchers with a range of tools for statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

The responses of a total of 384 respondents were examined. The results indicate that 34.2% of them had bachelor degrees, 28.1% had graduate degrees, 24.5% had master's degrees, and 13.2% had doctorates. The information was gathered from China Qufu Normal University, Shandong University of Art and Design, University of Jinan and Linyi University. Responses came from 24.0% of respondents through Oufu Normal University, 28.4% from Shandong University of Art and Design, 32.4% from University of Jinan and 15.2% from Linyi University. In total, there were 384 responders, and 215 of them, or 55.98%, were between the ages of 18 and 23. 108 participants (28.12% of all respondents) were between the age of 24 to 28, 38 (9.89%) respondents were between the age group of 29-33, and 23 (5.98%) respondents were over the age of 34. Regarding gender distribution, 63% of respondents were female, while 37% were male in current research study.

The descriptive analysis is accomplished in order to define the main features of the data set. Study conducted by Sekaran and Bougie (2010) stated that descriptive analysis is principally describe via standard

deviation, mean, and variance in order to find an overall review of how the respondents answered the questionnaire.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
R	384	1.00	3.8492	.57465
PF	384	1.00	3.6687	.68466
EF	384	1.00	3.5737	.56678
SLS	384	1.00	3.6842	.69633

The degree to which a test correlates with a substituted fraction of a related dimension is known as convergent validity (Hair et al., [2014](#)). The average values utilized in recent research are displayed in the table. Every value therefore, agreed with the 0.50 AVE, proving that the estimating model used for the present study is accurate. While each quality met the AVE's relying a boost value of 0.50, it nevertheless demonstrated adequate simultaneously convergence validity for the measurement designs used in the present study.

Table 3

Convergent Validity

Variable	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
R	0.863	0.768	0.565
PF	0.764	0.709	0.455
EF	0.756	0.743	0.577
SLS	0.871	0.771	0.571

According to Hair et al. ([2014](#)), the current study has a 0.95 t-esteem at a significant level of 0.05. Additionally, it makes sense that the ranges of coefficients have values among "-1" and "+1". Therefore, correlation coefficient values close to "+1" indicate a more solid relationship, whereas correlation coefficient values close to "-1" indicate an insufficient or inadequate intimacy. The precise p-esteem, t-worth, and path coefficients amongst components from the present study are displayed in table. It is dependent on path valuations whether the hypothesis is rejected or accepted. The SPSS algorithms explain endogenous variable. As a result, and as shown by the results of the current review, all hypotheses are upheld at a significance level of 0.05.

Table 4
Regression Analysis

Variables	Beta	<i>t</i> -statistics	Sig.	Result
Relations	.271	2.849	.005	Accepted
Personal Factors	.301	2.527	.013	Accepted
Environmental Factors	.233	2.243	.027	Accepted

Conclusion and Future Recommendations

The present research focusses on determining the influence of stressors on stress level among university students, with a focus on high prevalence of stress among university students in China. The main coping factors were relations, personal factors and environmental factors. According to Choi (2020), these factors significantly contribute to the students' stress levels alongside other factors such as, living environment, financial difficulties, health problems, workload, language barriers, bad living habits, fears, future worriers, school environment and lower grades. Continued exposure to these stressors may eventually lead to stress-related conditions such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, mental health issues and intra and interpersonal conflicts. The results of this study suggest components required for a stress-management programme specific to the needs of university students. University students' orientation activities should incorporate stress management training and specific coping strategies. Also, students should be informed of the resources available to help them regarding management of these stressors. Stress reduction programmes could foster coping behaviors that are useful on a daily basis as well as implement preventive measures to reduce chronic stress effect (Lutfianawati et al., 2021).

To wholly understand the influencing factors that increase the stress level among the students, future studies should explore the influence of social support systems and students' methods of adapting to the severity of stressors and their reactions to stressors. This study was conducted in Shandong Province of China, further studies should include all universities of China. Moreover, future studies could examine gender differences regarding stressors among students.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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