

## Examining the Impact of Stress on College Students: A Comprehensive Study

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### Abstract

Stress occurs when the combination of internal and external pressures surpasses an individual's ability to cope. For many young adults, college is considered one of the best times of their lives. However, these pivotal years can also be marred by depression, anxiety, and stress. Students often face numerous stressors that challenge their coping abilities: adapting to a new environment, managing a heavy workload, making new friends, becoming more independent, and dealing with a variety of other issues. A closer examination reveals that college students encounter multiple daily challenges, which can diminish the overall experience of college life. These challenges contribute to stress, which, if not properly managed, can escalate and negatively impact academic performance, emotional health, and social well-being. This paper explores the sources and effects of stress on college students. The findings aim to help students manage stress and provide insights into coping strategies that can improve their ability to handle life's pressures.

**Key words:** College students, Stress, Stressors

### INTRODUCTION

College life is a uniquely stimulating and memorable experience for adolescents. During this period, students thrive in a vibrant environment, enjoying the company of friends and participating in a variety of academic and extracurricular activities. These experiences enrich, nurture, and prepare them for adulthood. As they transition to adulthood, college students face critical developmental challenges and are often seen as future leaders of society. It is crucial for them to develop effective stress management skills to maintain a healthy life once they enter the professional world. Adolescence, the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, is marked by rapid physical changes and mental growth. During this time, students may encounter difficulties as their mental development may not keep pace with physical changes or societal expectations, leading to adaptation issues. These challenges can result in psychological problems and, in some cases, deviant behaviours. Adolescence is a critical period where young people undergo self-organization and may experience role confusion. Their stress primarily stems from academic pressures, interpersonal relationships, life changes, and career exploration. Such stress can lead to psychological, physical, and behavioural issues. This study investigates the sources and effects of stress on college students.

### Objectives

1. To evaluate the stress levels experienced by college students.
2. To identify the sources and consequences of stress.
3. To provide recommendations for managing and reducing stress.

## 1. LITERATURE SURVEY

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe stress as a mental or physical response that arises from one's cognitive assessment of a situation, influenced by the interaction with their surroundings. Stress manifests when a stressor is present.

According to Feng (1992) and Volpe (2000), a stressor is any factor that challenges an individual's ability to adapt or that stimulates their body or mind. Stress can originate from environmental, psychological, biological, or social factors. The impact of stress on an individual can be either positive or negative, depending on the intensity and duration of the stress, the person's personality, their cognitive evaluation of the stress, and the level of social support they receive.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a questionnaire survey method for data collection, structured into three sections. The first section gathered demographic information, the second addressed academic, social, family, emotional, and financial stressors, and the final section focused on positive and negative stress coping strategies. The participants were college students enrolled in two prominent colleges in, Kanpur. The sample included degree students aged 18-21, studying in various streams such as Arts, Commerce, and Science. Participants were informed about the questionnaire and the importance of the scale in their respective classrooms, and confidentiality was assured. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and all were completed in the presence of the investigators. Convenience sampling was employed for data collection. The data analysis was conducted using various statistical tools including ANOVA, F-test, correlation analysis, weighted average, and percentage method.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Basic data analysis

Items	Numbers	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	123	61.5
Female	77	38.5
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0
<b>Grade</b>		
First year	86	43.0
Second year	47	23.5
Third year	67	33.5
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0
<b>College</b>		
A	114	57.0
B	86	43.0
<b>Total</b>	200	100.0

In the selected sample, 61.5% of participants were male, while 38.5% were female. The survey collected demographic information on gender, course and year of study, accommodation, and other relevant factors. It was revealed that 88% of the participants lived in their own homes during their studies, with the remaining participants residing in hostels.

### Survey Data Analysis

The analysis identified several primary causes of stress among students, including academic, social, familial, emotional, and financial factors.

#### Academic Factors

A significant portion of female students (85.71%) reported academic problems as their main source of stress. In comparison, 78.04% of male students, primarily in their third year of study, identified academic issues as their primary stressor. The pressures from high expectations set by teachers (67%), parents (83%), and themselves (52%) contribute significantly to the stress experienced by college students.

#### Social Factors

Stress formation is influenced by the social environment. Stress can arise not only in complex and competitive settings but also in monotonous and unstimulating ones. Data shows that a small percentage of males (26.73%) and females (11.5%) view social factors as a source of stress. The findings indicate that social stress is not a significant concern for the majority of participants, especially among females.

#### Family Factors

Statistical analysis reveals that "lack of support from parents" is identified as the most significant family-related stressor, with 68% of participants indicating this. Among males, 52% consider it the primary cause of stress.

#### Emotional Factors

Key emotional stressors include lack of self-confidence, feelings of loneliness and anxiety, and having no one to confide in. Emotional stress is a major concern for students, with many (132 students, or 66%) citing difficulties in managing romantic relationships as a significant source of stress.

#### Financial Factors

Prominent financial stressors include the lack of financial support from family for studies, parental control over expenditures, and insufficient funds for personal mobile and internet expenses. Only 23.5% of males and 32% of females reported having a stable financial background, with their families able to support their educational pursuits.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The study identifies key sources of stress that directly impact students' stress levels, though these causes can vary depending on individual psychology.

In conclusion, the findings suggest essential elements for a stress management program tailored to college students' needs. Considering the negative effects of stress on health and academic performance, college administrators should integrate stress management training into orientation activities. A more effective approach might involve stress management workshops designed specifically for the unique stressors faced by college students. While eliminating stress entirely in a college setting is not feasible, we can and should better equip students to handle it.

#### Suggestions for College Administration:

1. **Early Identification and Support:** Implement mechanisms to promptly identify students experiencing stress and ensure they receive appropriate support.

2. **Career Development Integration:** Embed career development programs into the formal curriculum to better prepare students for future career challenges.
3. **Curriculum on Stress Management:** Develop and integrate a curriculum focused on stress management and coping strategies to equip students with essential skills.
4. **Attention to Learning Stress:** Monitor and address the stress levels associated with academic learning to support students' overall well-being.

#### **Suggestions for Students:**

1. **Enhance Stress Management Skills:** Improve your ability to manage stress and actively seek support when needed.
2. **Utilize Family Support:** Leverage family support to help manage stress and express emotions in a healthy manner.
3. **Emotional Management and Positivity:** Cultivate effective emotional management strategies and foster a positive outlook on life.
4. **Engage in Campus Activities:** Participate in campus activities to build connections and reduce stress through engagement and involvement.

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