

PERCEIVED STRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG STUDENTS

Rimsha^{a*}

^aDepartment of Humanities and Social Sciences, GIFT University, Gujranwala, Pakistan

*Correspondence to: Rimsha, MS Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, GIFT University, Gujranwala, Pakistan. E-mail: 181520060@gift.edu.pk, ORCID: 0009-0001-4015-9476

KEYWORDS

Perceived Stress, Psychological Well-Being, Gender, Age, Department

CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Rimsha. (2024). Perceived stress and psychological well-being among students. Pakistan Journal of Positive Psychology, 1(1), 15-21.

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between perceived stress and psychological well-being among students. The study was based on cross sectional survey design. A sample of 200 students was collected from three departments of GIFT University, Gujranwala. Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) and Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff et al., 2010) were used for data collection. Psychometric properties were computed and alpha reliability analysis was conducted. Pearson Correlation was used for investigating relationship between variables. Independent t test and one-way ANOVA were used to examine demographic differences. Results indicated significant negative relationship between perceived stress and psychological well-being among students. Gender, age and department related differences in perceived stress and psychological well-being among students were also investigated. It was found that female students were higher on perceived stress whereas male students were higher on psychological well-being. Students with age range of 18 to 20 years were higher on perceived stress whereas students with age range of 21 to 22 years were higher on psychological well-being. Results were non-significant in department related differences in perceived stress and psychological well-being among students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Studies on the relationship between stress and various illnesses, such as cancer, mental disorders, heart disease, substance misuse, chronic diseases, etc., as well as an individual's overall health state, are crucial. Given that stress is a cross-cultural symptom for a wide range of health issues, a global awareness of stress in various sociodemographic, cultural, and social groups may be able to avert stress-related issues and serious health difficulties. High rate of mental illness demonstrates how crucial it is to take stressors into account. Important factors include the prevalence of mental illnesses are unemployment, economic status, age, and living area (Dedovic et al., 2009). The cultural variables, especially the social support, are crucial to understanding how the people experience stress and how they manage with it (Kim et al., 2008). These variations demonstrate how the effects of stress varies and are seen in different countries (Cao et al., 2016). Therefore, assessing how people interpret stressful events in their life is essential for quantifying psychological stress in global health and illness. This study is especially important for comprehending, treating, and avoiding a wide range of international health issues. Thoughts about how erratic and unmanageable life is, how often annoying things get in the way, how much life is changing, and self-assurance in one's ability to overcome obstacles are all examples of perceived stress. It does not assess the types or frequency of stressful events that a person has experienced; rather, it reflects how tough they feel about their life generally and how well they can handle stress. Individuals may go through similar

negative life events, but they may assess the impact or seriousness of those experiences differently due to factors including personality, coping strategies, and support systems. This is how an individual's assessment of their surroundings and how it interacts with them is reflected in their perceived stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress that is felt is not real. It's not as complicated as it sounds, but it is, too. Body's response to change that necessitates an action is stress. The environment, body, or thoughts can all contribute to these changes, which might be mental, emotional, or physical (Alwhaibi et al., 2023). Stress can be caused by a variety of factors, including significant life changes and disruptions, a lack of control over significant issues, doing too much or not enough work, and more.

These are all grounded in actuality. Real stress is what we experience when we have too much work to complete and are unable to stay on top of our assignments. Stress as perceived varies. The real concerns are less important than how we feel about our lack of control and predictability. The definition of perceived stress is when we start to believe that terrible things will always happen and our thoughts start to spin out of control. The issue is that both its impact and its nature are bad. The same physical, mental, and emotional issues that arise from worrying about the enormous burden we previously discussed also arise when we spend hours daydreaming about what may have been (Alwhaibi et al., 2023). The problem of perceived stress is severe. Tension, headaches, exhaustion, an upset stomach, anxiety, impatience, and rage, depression, eating disorders, substance misuse, and sleep disturbances are some of the symptoms that it might induce. Thus, it's critical to recognize stress and manage it (Harutyunyan et al., 2020). The term "psychological well-being" describes both intra- and inter-individual good functioning, which might include one's feeling of mastery and personal development as well as one's relatedness to others and oneself. Affective assessments of well-being are reflected in subjective well-being. Recent years have seen a significant increase in interest in the idea of well-being in both the scientific and popular literature. As a result, according to Adler and Fleurbaey (2016), well-being is often listed as a national goal for government policy globally. However, the definition of well-being can vary greatly based on one's personal and professional viewpoint. For example, economic capability and prosperity—that is, the increase in both personal and societal economic wealth—may be used by economists to define well-being. Researchers in population health may concentrate on problems (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013).

The nature of happiness and a good life is the subject of numerous philosophical and psychological theories, but epidemiologists are likely to be interested in learning more about the relationship between this experiential state and both objective and subjective health outcomes as well as different socio-demographic predictors. It has long been acknowledged that there is a substantial correlation between psychological distress, which manifests as anxiety, sorrow, irritability, self-consciousness, and emotional fragility, and physical illness, decreased life quality and length, and greater use of health services (Lahey, 2009). Ryff (1995) proposed a hypothesis called the Six-factor Model of Psychological Well-Being, which identifies six aspects that affect a person's psychological well-being, satisfaction, and happiness. Good interpersonal relationships, autonomy, self-mastery, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and personal development are all components of psychological well-being. The way to psychological well-being is to arrive at a state of equilibrium that is impacted by both positive and negative life experiences. These components include environmental mastery, good interpersonal interactions, self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, and a life purpose (Ryff, 2024).

Students' mental health concerns is one of the major issue in academia (Castillo & Schwartz, 2013). It should be observed that men often report lower levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts than do women (Dusser et al., 2009). Physical problems can occasionally be linked to this poor psychological health. It could also be connected to the more general definition of "stress," which encompasses all forms of hardship in life, including emotional distress. Every kid handles stress in a unique way. According to a French survey, 79% of students said they were under stress (Vandentorren et al., 2005). Regarding the relationship between stress and gender, findings support the strong correlation that has been shown in earlier research. According to Fornés-Vives et al. (2012), female students are often shown to be more stressed than male students. Nonetheless, Koochaki et al. (2011) showed no statistically significant variations based on gender, and in contrast, two research discovered that male students had greater levels of stress compared to female students (Acharya, 2003). Regardless of the stress element under investigation, we were unable to detect any correlation between the age variable and stress. While some research (Koochaki et al., 2011) reveal a negative correlation between perceived stress and age, this finding

is consistent with other studies (Fornés–Vives et al., 2012). In the current study gender, age and department related differences were investigated but there are lack of previous research available on that differences with reference to perceived stress and well-being.

II. METHOD

Participants

Cross-Sectional survey design was used. Present research comprised of 200 students of GIFT University, Gujranwala with age range over 18 to 22 years. Data was collected from psychology, political science and Islamic studies departments of GIFT University. Purposive sampling strategy was used to gather the data from the students. A written informed consent was taken before data collection from students. Employed students and students of other universities were excluded from the sample.

Measures

Following measurement scales used for data collection. [1] Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) was used to measure perceived stress among students. It comprised of 10 items. It is a 5-point Likert rating scale with response options 0 for “never” to 4 for “very often”. Higher scores on the scale indicate higher level of perceived stress and lower scores on the scale indicate lower level of perceived stress among students. It is a reliable and valid measure (Baik et al., 2019). [2] Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff et al., 2010; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was used to measure psychological well-being among students. It comprised of 18 items. It is a 7-point Likert rating scale with response options 1 for “strongly agree” to 7 for “strongly disagree”. Higher scores on the scale indicate higher level of psychological well-being and lower scores on the scale indicate lower level of psychological well-being among students. It is a reliable and valid measure (Li, 2014).

Procedure

The permission for this study was obtained from the Department of Psychology, GIFT University, Gujranwala. All information obtained, were handled confidentially and this was maintained at all times. Prior to the data collection, the subjects gave their written, informed permission. In addition, participants received guarantees of anonymity and were made aware that their participation in the interview was entirely optional and they might leave at any moment without providing an explanation. In order to collect the data, an informed consent was taken from the respondents from different departments of GIFT University, Gujranwala. After distributing the questionnaires, information was collected and every confusion regarding the questionnaires were made clear. In addition, participants received guarantees that the information they shared would remain private, were asked to answer truthfully, and were ultimately praised for their participation. Data analysis was done using SPSS (version-26) to ascertain the outcomes. The association between the variables was ascertained through the application of Pearson correlation. To look at demographic variables including gender, age, and department-related differences, the t-test and ANOVA analysis were employed.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Psychometric Properties of Scales

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	<i>r</i>
1. Perceived Stress Scale	19.68	4.57	06-29	.86	-.26*
2. Psychological Well-being Scale	58.80	8.92	35-86	.77	

* $p < .01$

Table 1 shows psychometric properties of scales. Results revealed that Perceived Stress Scale and Psychological Well-Being Scale both have acceptable level of alpha reliability coefficients ($\alpha < .70$). Pearson correlation show that perceived stress has significant negative relationship with psychological well-being $r(198) = -.26, p < .05$, among students.

Table 2: Gender and Age related Differences in Perceived Stress and Psychological Well-being among Students

Variables	Women		Men		<i>t</i> (198)	18-20 Years		21-22 Years		<i>t</i> (198)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Perceived Stress	20.06	4.78	19.11	4.35	3.81**	20.04	4.99	19.54	4.34	3.57**
Psychological Well-being	57.70	9.27	59.93	8.51	3.25**	62.81	8.90	58.60	7.32	2.29*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows that gender and age differences in perceived stress and psychological well-being among students. Results show women were higher on perceived stress $t(198) = 3.81$, $p < .01$, and men were higher on psychological well-being $t(198) = 3.25$, $p < .01$. Age differences revealed that students with age range of 18 to 20 years were higher on perceived stress $t(198) = 3.57$, $p < .01$, whereas students with age range of 21 to 22 years were higher on psychological well-being $t(198) = 2.29$, $p < .05$.

Table 3: Differences among Departments in Perceived Stress and Psychological Well-being among Students

Variables	Psychology		Political Science		Islamic Studies		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Perceived Stress	19.55	5.05	20.00	4.183	18.22	3.12	.57	.63
Psychological Well-Being	59.27	8.99	58.77	9.02	54.40	6.12	2.29	.08

Table 3 shows departmental related differences in perceived stress and psychological well-being among students. Results were non-significant in perceived stress $F(2,197) = .44$, $p > .05$, and psychological well-being $F(2,197) = .13$, $p > .05$.

IV.DISCUSSION

In this study, it was assumed that there would be significant relationship between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students. Findings through Pearson correlation on table-2 indicates that significant positive relationship existed between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students. The findings from the earlier research conducted by Sharma (2021) indicate a significant relationship exists between emotional intelligence and gratitude. This aligns with our current study results, reinforcing the notion that higher emotional intelligence is linked to higher levels of gratitude. The significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and gratitude among university students implies that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to exhibit higher levels of gratitude. Emotional intelligence, which involves understanding and managing one's emotions and effectively interacting with others, may contribute to a greater appreciation for positive aspects in life, fostering a sense of gratitude. This finding suggests that interventions or educational programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence could potentially have positive spill over effects on gratitude levels among university students. Developing emotional intelligence skills might contribute to a more positive and appreciative outlook on life, benefiting overall well-being and interpersonal relationships (Geng, 2018).

Findings through Pearson correlation on table-2 indicates that significant positive relationship exists between emotional intelligence and forgiveness among university students. The findings of a prior study by Wilks et al. (2014) show a significant relationship between forgiveness and emotional intelligence among college students. This supports and validates the results of our current study, which aligns with its findings. Higher emotional intelligence is positively correlated with a better capacity for forgiveness, according to the positive and substantial association between the two variables among college students. The development of empathy, understanding, and emotional regulation—all essential elements of forgiveness—may be aided by emotional intelligence, which includes the capacity to recognize and control emotions. Students with higher emotional intelligence may be more adept at navigating interpersonal conflicts, empathizing with others' perspectives, and letting go of negative emotions associated with transgressions. This finding suggests that interventions or educational efforts targeting the development of emotional intelligence skills could potentially contribute to the promotion of forgiveness

among university students. Enhancing emotional intelligence may empower individuals to cultivate more positive and harmonious relationships, positively impacting their overall psychological well-being (Costa et al., 2013).

Findings revealed no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence, gratitude and forgiveness among university students (i.e., table-3). The absence of non-significant gender differences in emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness suggests that, on average, men and women in the studied population exhibit similar levels of these psychological constructs. This finding implies that gender does not play a significant role in determining variations in emotional intelligence, gratitude, or forgiveness among university students in this context. Therefore, any potential intervention or educational programs aimed at enhancing these psychological attributes may be applicable and effective across both men and women student populations. It emphasizes the need for inclusive approaches that consider individual differences rather than relying on gender-specific strategies in interventions targeting emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness (Khan & Singh, 2013). Furthermore, non-significant differences were found between students from public and private sector universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness. The absence of significant differences between students from public and private sector universities in terms of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness suggests that, on average, individuals from both types of institutions exhibit similar levels of these psychological attributes. This finding has implications for understanding the universality of emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness across different educational settings. It implies that the type of institute (public or private) may not be a determining factor in variations related to these psychological constructs. Consequently, interventions or educational programs aimed at fostering emotional intelligence, gratitude, and forgiveness could be universally applicable and effective across students from diverse educational backgrounds. It emphasizes the importance of addressing these aspects in a holistic manner, considering individual differences rather than focusing solely on institutional distinctions (Ahsan et al., 2023).

V. CONCLUSION

Findings revealed negative relationship between perceived stress and psychological well-being among students. Gender, age and department related differences in perceived stress and psychological well-being among students were also investigated. On the basis of current findings of study researchers and policy makers should devise policies to make better psychological well-being of students at university level. The sample size of the current study was small. So it is recommended that in future research sample size should be large for getting better understanding of phenomenon. The drawbacks of cross-sectional research apply to our investigation. Furthermore, we were unable to gather participants from more than one university or obtain a thorough mental health history from everyone due to our restricted funding.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

The author received no funding from any organizations.

VI. REFERENCES

- Adler, M. D., & Fleurbaey, M. (Eds.). (2016). *The Oxford handbook of well-being and public policy*. Oxford University Press.
- Alwhaibi, M., Alotaibi, A., & Alsaadi, B. (2023, June). Perceived stress among healthcare students and its association with anxiety and depression: a cross-sectional study in Saudi Arabia. *Healthcare*, 11(11), 1625.
- Baik, S. H., Fox, R. S., Mills, S. D., Roesch, S. C., Sadler, G. R., Klonoff, E. A., & Malcarne, V. L. (2019). Reliability and validity of the Perceived Stress Scale-10 in Hispanic Americans with English or Spanish language preference. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 24(5), 628-639. doi: 10.1177/1359105316684938.

- Beddington, J., Cooper, C. L., Field, J., Goswami, U., Huppert, F. A., & Jenkins, R. (2008). The mental wealth of nations. *Nature*, 455(7216), 1057–1060.
- Cao, C., Zhu, C., & Meng, Q. (2016). An exploratory study of inter-relationships of acculturative stressors among Chinese students from six European union (EU) countries. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 55, 8–19. doi: 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.08.003
- Castillo, L. G., & Schwartz, S. J. (2013). Introduction to the special issue on college student mental health. *Journal Clinical Psychology*, 69, 291–297. doi: 10.1002/jclp.21972
- Ciarrochi, J., Heaven, P. C. L., & Davies, F. (2007). The impact of hope, self-esteem, and attributional style on adolescents' school grades and emotional well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 1161–1178.
- Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 386–396.
- Dedovic, K., Wadiwalla, M., Engert, V., & Pruessner, J. C. (2009). The role of sex and gender socialization in stress reactivity. *Developmental Psychology*, 45, 45–55. doi: 10.1037/a0014433
- Dusser, I., Romo, L., & Leboyer, M. (2009). Construction and evaluation of a stress management group for patients with bipolar disorder. *Journal of Thé Comport Cognition*, 19, 56–60. doi: 10.1016/j.jtcc.2009.08.002
- Fornés-Vives, J., García-Banda, G., Frías-Navarro, D., Hermoso-Rodríguez, E., & Santos-Abaunza, P. (2012). Stress and neuroticism in Spanish nursing students: a two-wave longitudinal study. *Research in Nursing Health*, 35, 589–597. doi: 10.1002/nur.21506
- Harutyunyan, A., Musheghyan, L., & Hayrumyan, V. (2020). Gender differences in perceived stress level among undergraduate students in Armenia. *European Journal of Public Health*, 30(Supplement_5), ckaa166-1028.
- Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Phelan, J. C., & Link, B. G. (2013). Stigma as a fundamental cause of population health inequalities. *American journal of public health*, 103(5), 813–821.
- Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2008). Culture and social support. *American Psychologist*, 63, 518–526. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X
- Koochaki, G. M., Charkazi, A., Hasanzadeh, A., Saedani, M., Qorbani, M., & Marjani, A. (2011). Prevalence of stress among Iranian medical students: a questionnaire survey. *East Mediterranean Health Journal*, 17, 593–598.
- Lahey, B. B. (2009). Public health significance of neuroticism. *American Psychologist*, 64, 241–256.
- Lara, R., Vázquez, M. L., Ogallar, A., & Godoy-Izquierdo, D. (2020). Optimism and social support moderate the indirect relationship between self-efficacy and happiness through mental health in the elderly. *Health Psychology Open*, 7(2), 2055102920947905.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, coping and adaptation*. New York: Springer.
- Li, R. H. (2014). Reliability and validity of a shorter Chinese version for Ryff's psychological well-being scale. *Health Education Journal*, 73(4), 446–452.
- Moreira-Choez, J. S., Lamus de Rodríguez, T. M., Espinoza-Solís, E. J., & Castro-Castillo, G. J. (2024). Comparative analysis of psychological well-being and emotional education in graduate students. *F1000Research*, 12, 1403.
- Ryff, C. D. (2024). The privilege of well-being in an increasingly unequal society. *Current directions in psychological science*, 33(5), 300–307.
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(4), 719–727.
- Ryff, C. D., Almeida, D. M., Ayanian, J. S., Carr, D. S., Cleary, P. D., Coe, C., ... Williams, D. (2010). National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS II), 2004–2006: *Documentation of psychosocial constructs and composite variables in MIDUS II Project 1*. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.
- Sridevi, S., & Govind, D. K. (2018). Perceived stress and psychological well-being among college students. *Research Guru: Online Journal of Multidisciplinary Subjects*, 12(2), 815–820.
- Vandentorren, S., Verret, C., Vignonde, M., & Maurice-Tison, S. (2005). Besoins d'information en santé des étudiants au service inter-universitaire de médecine préventive de Bordeaux. *Santé Publique*, 17, 47–56.
- Weigold, I. K., Weigold, A., Dykema, S. A., Drakeford, N. M., & Ethridge, E. T. (2024). Personal Growth Initiative: Relation to Coping Styles, Strategies, and Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 25(6), 1–22.

Zaheer, Z. O. B. I. A., & Khan, M. A. (2022). Perceived stress, resilience and psychological well-being among university students: The role of optimism as a mediator. *Asian Social Studies and Applied Research*, 3(1), 55-67.